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A

Aftermath: The Trope of the Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing

by

Sara Claire Raymond

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

2001

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Abstract

Aftermath: The Trope of the Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing

by

Sara Claire Raymond

Adviser: Professor Meena Alexander

The dissertation considers a specific rhetorical gesture, a permutation of prosopopoeia, which I am calling the trope of the posthumous voice. I trace the appearance of this trope in the work of the following writers: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, and Sylvia Plath. By the phrase, "the trope of the posthumous voice," I indicate the gesture of a narrator speaking from the space of her imagined death, that is, from a position of posthumousness. The narrator states explicitly or suggests implicitly that she speaks entirely after her death has occurred. Her work is not found posthumously but rather, rhetorically speaking, produced posthumously. The trope of the posthumous voice is different from classical prosopopoeia in that, in the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing, the dead body is the feminine narrator's own body, a corpse through which she presents her words. In this trope, the death mask is the mask of the self. It subverts prosopopoeia, making use of the classical rhetorical gesture to shape a specifically post-traumatic language that depends upon the stance of a split self. Exploring this trope, I expand de Man's notion of the fiction of address to mean the fiction of having an address, in the sense of having a home. Home is always a fiction for the dispossessed speaker, and the figured-dead speaker is radically dispossessed, having no body or home. The trope of the posthumous voice is a gesture of resistance. It trades the narrator's implied body for her voice, revealing the instability of the patriarchal assumption that woman's embodiedness is mute. This trope subversively gains power and sanctity for the abject speaker, the speaker figured dead. Here, death represents violation. The figured-dead body, a feigned death mask, separates the speaker's speech from her body. This separation serves the woman writer by deferring to a space beyond the text the act of speaking from a woman's body.

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Thanks are due to my committee. This dissertation is dedicated to Lon E. Ussery.

The Trope of the Posthumous Voice in Women's Writing

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*Introduction****How A Dead Woman Speaks:
The Trope of the Posthumous Voice***

How can a dead woman speak?

Why does she have to be dead

in order to be able to speak?

— Mieke Bal¹

On first reading Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's slender novella, *Mathilda*,² I was struck by a feeling of *déjà vu*. This uncanny feeling of return did not originate from outside of the text, as would have been the case had the topic itself been the source of the novella's odd hold on me. Rather this weight of foreknowledge is structured into the work itself. *Mathilda* stages within its narrative a site of *déjà vu*. The narrator punctures her story with the moment of her death, a departure which repeats itself twice, for *Mathilda* opens and closes with the scene of its eponymous narrator's death. Her dying enframes the text so that no part of the text comes before or after her expiring. The entire drama is enfolded within the unfolding scene of her death. The novella begins with the heroine so near to death that, as she tells her tale, she inhabits the marginal space between the living and the dead. She pointedly asserts that not until she is already dead can her text properly be read. *Mathilda*'s disappearing body, always on the edge of vanishing, becomes, then, both the drama and the theatre of *Mathilda*. The moment of her body's vanishing, *Mathilda* insists, will be the moment in which her text becomes legible. The daughter's body focuses the father's incestuous desire in the same way that it focuses the sweep of death across the topography of the novella.

¹*Death and Dissymmetry* 133.

²Unless otherwise noted, all references to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Mathilda* indicate the edition found in *The Mary Shelley Reader* 173-246.

My reading of *Mathilda* led to my developing the notion of a specific trope in women's writing, a trope like prosopopoeia, which places language into the mouths of the dead, but different from classical prosopopoeia in that, in what I am calling the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing, the dead body is the feminine narrator's own body, a corpse through which she presents her words. This trope is related to but not the same as prosopopoeia. In classical rhetoric prosopopoeia refers to the Greek *prosopon*, literally making a mask. Such mask making can take several forms. Jon Whitman explains, in *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique*, the role of prosopopoeia within classical rhetoric:

Prosopopoein means to compose by means of *prosopa*, and the technique includes the fashioning of conversations between ourselves and others, as well as the giving of speeches to the dead, to cities or to abstractions.

(*Allegory* 269)

Prosopopoeia, then, includes the gesture of using the face of a dead person to cover, as it were, one's own words, or to take up one's own words. The trope of the posthumous voice alters and expands this classical rhetorical technique through a deft shifting of the phantasmagoric body of the narrator. In this trope, the narrator who speaks already inhabits a dead body, a corpse that simultaneously penetrates and retreats from the text. The language of the narrator is spoken through the mask of her face, a face cast as posthumous. In this way, the uncanny presence of a woman who speaks is both borrowed and altered by the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. Here, by the uncanny image of a woman who speaks, I mean the double image produced by the patriarchal assumption that a woman's body stands at a remove from language. The narrator, by using her own troped dead body to mask her voice, gives place to her subversive language which then speaks through that mask, a death-mask.

While Susan Gubar has recently written on Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus" as an example of prosopopoeia,³ my concept of the trope of the posthumous voice is different from that of classical prosopopoeia. When Gubar writes that "Lady Lazarus" depicts a woman speaking after death, she in fact refers to a woman who has come back to life (205). Plath's Lady Lazarus, like the biblical Lazarus, is dramatized precisely for her ability to undo death. She speaks after death because from death she has returned to life. Here Plath's narrator does not speak using the trope of the posthumous voice, for the speaker of Plath's "Lady Lazarus" addresses us after she has returned to life. Indeed, her dramatic return to life is the entire point of the poem. The resurrected lady describes her own revivification:

Soon, soon the flesh
The grave cave ate will be
At home on me

And I a smiling woman.
I am only thirty.

(lines 16 - 20)⁴

The poem's drama inheres in the woman's ability to bring her own body back to life and to speak through that resurrected body. Moreover, her body re-enters life according to the calendar of lived years: alive again, Lady Lazarus resumes her status as a woman of childbearing, fertile age. Gubar's theorizing of prosopopoeia in Plath's "Lady Lazarus," then, does not necessarily broaden or alter our understanding of the uses of classical

³Susan Gubar, "Prosopopoeia and Holocaust Poetry in English: Sylvia Plath and Her Contemporaries" 191 - 215.

⁴ *The Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath* 244. This dissertation will use the abbreviation *CP Plath*.

prosopopoeia. By contrast, my notion of the trope of the posthumous voice concerns narrators who pretend to speak from the place of death, who speak, that is, while they are dead. Since the rhetorical tool of prosopopoeia functions by creating a mask which covers the speaker's face and allows the speaker's language to come through that mask, this death mask is traditionally the image of another person. Plath's "Lady Lazarus" in part relies upon our image of the biblical Lazarus. In the trope of the posthumous voice, however, the death mask is the mask of the self. In other words, this trope subverts prosopopoeia, making use of the classical rhetorical gesture to shape a specifically post-traumatic language that depends upon the stance of a split self. The trope of the posthumous voice stages a simultaneous erasure of and insistence on speaking of the history of the self, a history of a trauma metaphorically expressed as a history of death.

The trope of the posthumous voice, then, uses a given patriarchal technique of rhetoric, prosopopoeia, and turns it on its head. It creates from the traumatized self a death mask. One notices the use of this trope in some of the work of Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, and Sylvia Plath. For example, Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is metaleptically spoken by the heroine Cathy from the posthumous point of view, while Dickinson frequently places her poems' narrators not before the grave but in the grave. Likewise, Bishop uses the symbol of the death-moth to metonymize the feminine voice in an early surrealist poem, and Plath creates heroines whose power inheres in their ability, from the place of the grave, to alter the lives of the living. None of these writers use this trope in all their work. I do not assert that its appearance characterizes the entire oeuvre of any of them. Rather it appears often enough to present among these five writers an intertextual pattern, a trope echoed from Shelley to Plath.

In the dissertation I develop the critical concept of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. By this phrase, I simply mean the textual structuring gesture that presents a narrator who is already dead before she begins to narrate her novel or her

lyric. The trope of the posthumous voice in a work of literature is a rhetorical manoeuvre, an innovation within rhetoric. It is not strictly comparable to the accident of posthumous publication, although there may be slippages between the work of a writer who employs the trope of the posthumous voice and certain life choices of that author tending to produce a posthumously published oeuvre. I link the women writers to be considered in the following pages primarily through the thread of the trope of the posthumous voice, a gesture which pretends to present the speech of the dead.

The gesture of feigning death, a self protective gesture that covers confession, gains the eloquence of contrapuntal tension when that gesture is translated into inscription, for writing is also a self-revelatory act. The trope of the posthumous voice at once implies and displaces a history of trauma and as such resists the silencing force of the patriarchal gaze. An implicit assumption of my work, then, is woman's greater familiarity with the experience of bodily violation, an historical, not an essentialist, placement or claim. This claim does not turn on the biographies of the women writers here analyzed. Instead, the trope of the posthumous voice implies a post-traumatic stance, the stance of having come through a trauma that is accurately metonymized by death. In other words, only a trauma that, in some emotional sense, erases the self will convincingly translate into the metaphor of the death of the self. The trope of the posthumous voice, I argue, confronts the aftermath of violence by at once suggesting and concealing a confession of trauma. Since no one actually speaks from beyond the grave, the trauma metonymized by death is hidden. The trope of the posthumous voice works to reinstate the boundaries around the speaker, after the speaker has suffered some penetration of boundaries. The implied dead body of the narrator enacts a figurative *noli me tangere*, keeping at bay the narrator's listeners even as the tale of her death draws the reader to the space of her disappearance.

To feign death is perhaps a gesture of someone powerless, someone threatened, but to speak convincingly from the symbolic place of the dead, a narrator must enact a self-

transformation. The language of her text must simultaneously place the narrator beyond any hypothetical grasp of the audience while fixing the narrator's body as a sacrifice which underwrites the text. The trope of the posthumous voice, then, is a gesture of resistance. This gesture, which trades the narrator's implied body for her voice, reveals the instability of the patriarchal assumption that woman's embodiedness is mute. The central problem of why the woman's body must be hidden within the linguistic text rises as if in *bas relief* when the female narrator's body is hidden by a textual burial of her corpse, a burial which she herself enacts. The interdiction of woman's body from the space of linguistic authority is followed as proscription and rejected through irony in the trope of the posthumous. The act of resistance, here, is that of the trickster, a woman's ironic gesture of pretending to be dead in body while demonstrating a rich fertility of voice.

The Platonic gesture of following through an assumption to its logical conclusion, as a way of testing the basic soundness of that assumption, is exemplified by the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing.⁵ The interdicted status of woman-as-author, or of woman-as-speaker, is profoundly, though indirectly, questioned by the trope of killing off *a priori* the woman narrator before the text which this dead woman speaks. The woman who writes as if her feminine narrator's body has vanished does not express a valorization of death but rather expresses, through the sustained metaphors of bodily death and burial, the profound extent to which the speaker has been deprived of a chance to speak as an embodied narrator. The curve of this constant slippage between the author, as symbolic marker outside the text, and the dead narrator describes a double use of the authorial function, for the writer employing the trope of the posthumous voice enfolds her

⁵For example, in Plato's *Euthyphro*, Socrates succeeds in unravelling Euthyphro's assumption that "what is pleasing to the gods is pious" by extrapolating from the quality of being pleasing to the gods the revelation that the gods do not always agree on what pleases them (*Euthyphro* 7).

own mortality into her feigned posthumous text. That is, in this trope the implied author does not stand outside the text as a mortal figure. Instead, her body uncannily intrudes into the narrative, tracing a fabular history of a trauma embedded, or hidden, in the text. The feminine narrator's elided body, then, transfigures into a sort of metaphysical peep-show: her body is always disappearing in a text where the narrator is from the beginning dead and buried. Her body inevitably haunts the place of its vanishing, its echo persists. The gaze of the text troped posthumous, then, turns towards the dead and buried form of the narrator, the site of her hidden body a theatre for the performance of meaning.

Why hide in order to perform? Here is the central question to ask about the trope of the posthumous voice. When Dickinson describes a "Soul – alone –" (poem 399) or when Cathy, in *Wuthering Heights*, disappears into her seven-month long confinement, a particular type of narrator is posited: a narrator whose powerful language only finds its audience after her body has been removed from view.⁶ Although this ploy of separating the implied body from the feminine voice gains for the speaker a reverent audience, an audience which does not *a priori* read her language as abjected because it is connected to a woman's body, the tactic also risks losing altogether any possible audience.

If Dickinson's approach to publishing, or not publishing, seemed to risk this fate of remaining audienceless, Brontë's heroine, Cathy, exemplifies that risk in textual form. Cathy, furious at the loss of power she suffers upon marrying, retreats to an aphasia which is not broken until she assumes the trope of the posthumous voice and addresses Heathcliff as if from the grave. After her death, Cathy is the sole focus and obsession of the landlords, Heathcliff and Edgar: her death overrides their lives, as if, posthumously, she

⁶Unless otherwise noted, I adopt the convention of citing Dickinson's poems parenthetically by poem number, referring to the revised number sequence in R. W. Franklin's three volume *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. I will parenthetically refer to Franklin's edition of Dickinson's poems as *Poems ED*.

All references to Emily Brontë's novel cite the Norton edition of *Wuthering Heights* edited by Richard Dunn and William Sale.

were writing over their lives. But this posthumous power can never be assured, since it both depends upon and aims towards the gap that opens within the self after trauma. Just as the trope of the posthumous voice writes from the place of aftermath, it also addresses in its audience a corresponding gap, a willingness to suspend disbelief in accepting that the dead can meaningfully speak, a tendency to allow the formal aesthetic precedence over the literal truth.

The vacancy left by Cathy's death forms a hollow within Heathcliff's and Edgar's lives, making them a captive audience for the posthumous performances that are her hauntings. Mary Shelley's character Mathilda waits almost a century and a half to find that audience which might hear the trauma inscribed in *Mathilda*. There is a patience, then, to this trope, a decision to risk the loss of all audiences on the chance of gaining a just or proper audience. To write as if from the place of death is to flirt with illegibility: for who can credibly listen to the speech of the dead? Mieke Bal asks, "How can a dead woman speak? Why does she have to be dead in order to speak?" framing the paradox of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. A dead woman cannot speak. If she does speak, she cannot be heard. Nevertheless, as Bal points out, sometimes a woman has to be dead in order to speak. To approach this paradox, Bal considers the metaphorical language of the body as it is inscribed into Biblical text. In this dissertation, I will consider the same paradoxical question posed by Bal – why does a woman have to be dead in order to speak – but I will read that question through the lens of women's writing that uses the trope of posthumousness, women's writing that elides the body to forefront the voice. While, as a metaphor, the trope of the posthumous voice presents a legible, post-traumatic message, an inscription of aftermath, at the margin or edge of this extended metaphor, demarcating the dangerous territory of illegibility, runs the chaotic premise that the dead can speak, that is, that the order of things can be overturned.

*First Chapter****The Relationship of Trauma to Narrative:
Reconfiguring the Post-Traumatic Narrative***

To locate persuasively the speaker of one's words in the metaphorical topos of the grave implies that one has come close enough to death, not necessarily physically but rather psychically, to have gained a voice that effectively imitates a mood of having come through the underworld. The narrative of historical trauma and the trope of the posthumous speaker are cousins inasmuch as the trope of the posthumous voice necessarily turns on the fact of an implied trauma: a death of the speaking self which precedes the creation of the text. The consideration, then, of how theories of trauma and speech interact offers a basis for understanding the trope of the posthumous voice. What sorts of speech are understood to arise out of psychic injury? Cathy Caruth, in her book *Unclaimed Experience*, sets up a relationship between trauma and language. She traces ways in which trauma threatens to silence the victim of violence. She locates a typology of recurring speech patterns engendered by traumatic experience.

Building from Caruth's ideas, I will argue that a leave taking from memory, the amnesia that Caruth proposes as codifying all traumatic experience, may not be based upon a violated person's literal amnesia but may instead be based upon the gap between a victim's memory and the linguistic code of the audience who hears or reads about that memory. After trauma, an intransigent untranslatability comes into play, where the words describing violation losing their force unless they are placed into a metaphorical map, even though the very act of cartographing the map effectively erases the original place of the injury. That is, the creation of a metaphoric of trauma may work against the literal description of a particular trauma. However, this work of metaphor preserves intact the feeling of the original trauma. My justification for applying psychological theorems to literary strategies inheres in my assumption that literature mirrors to some inexact but also

inalienable degree the content of the real, or the history of the real, pressing through the semiotic, shaping the symbolic. For example, Walter Benjamin, in his essay "On the Mimetic Faculty," argues that:

This [mimetic] faculty has a history, however, in both the phylogenetic and the ontogenetic sense. [. . .] It is not improbable that the rapidity of writing and reading heightens the fusion of the semiotic and the mimetic in the sphere of language. [. . .] Language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior. (334)

In other words, Benjamin argues that literature, to some degree, accurately imitates being or history.

Indeed, Caruth begins her book by quoting a work of literature, Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, as it describes its hero Tancred in the act of committing murder, a reference as well to Freud's use of the same passage in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The passage from *Jerusalem Delivered* presented by Caruth reads:

Though chilled with horror,
with a second blow
He struck it, and decided to look.
(*Unclaimed Experience* 1)

However, in Ralph Nash's translation, the same passage reads:

The split bark issues blood and stains the earth about it crimson
He is completely horrified, and yet redoubles the blow.
(*Jerusalem Delivered* 289)

Adding only the context of Tasso's vivid description of Clorinda's physical suffering, that is, the blood which issues from her arboreal body so copiously as to stain the earth about her roots, radically complicates Caruth's interpretation of Tancred's blows. Tasso's

passage in fact asks for sympathy for Clorinda, the victim, rather than for Tancred, the warrior.

As Caruth establishes the narrative of her critical work, Tancred's violence is followed by pleasure, for immediately following the epigraph in which Tancred murders Clorinda, *Unclaimed Experience* references Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1). By this juxtaposition, Caruth implies a relationship between violence and pleasure, connoting violence as something beyond pleasure. Beyond pleasure may mean either outside the realm of pleasure, as in the sentence, "I am beyond the city," or it may imply an intensity of pleasure, as in Courtney Love's statement from her song "Doll Parts", "I fake it so true, I am beyond fake" (Hole, *Live Through This*). In either case, the opening structure of Caruth's chapter links acts of violence to a penetration of boundaries. The violent image of Tancred striking blows metaleptically becomes the boundary violation implied by the word, "beyond," in the title of Freud's work. Caruth then connects the violent blows struck in her chapter's epigraph to trauma suffered by "certain individuals," implicitly linking trauma to that state of being beyond, or out of bounds, which enforces namelessness (2). Caruth, then, puts these anonymous "certain individuals" metonymically in the place of Clorinda, the bloodied and traumatized victim of Tancred's violence.

It is important to note that Tasso's epic is itself the story of boundary violations: of western crusaders invading the east, both the Islamic and the Christian east. Tasso's young hero first kills his beloved while he believes she is an enemy knight, and then he kills her again after she has been transmogrified into a tree. The woman is doubly shorn of human qualities, first because she has been interpreted as an enemy knight (the crusades were carried out against Moslems whom the Christians routinely depicted as inhuman), and then, more straight forwardly, because she is turned into a tree (*Jerusalem Delivered* 289). Astonishingly, Caruth follows Freud in interpreting the events of Clorinda's first and second deaths as events primarily traumatic for the man who kills Clorinda. Both Caruth

and Freud interpret Tancred, Tasso's hero, as a victim of traumatic re-enactment, a victim who repeats acts which replay the one central and horrible event in his life (*Unclaimed Experience 2; Beyond the Pleasure Principle 24*). Freud, Caruth explains, calls such patterned re-enactments "traumatic neurosis" (*Unclaimed Experience 2*). However, while Freud focuses only upon the experience of Tancred, Caruth argues that the voice which speaks Clorinda's words in fact comes out of the impaled tree, into which Clorinda's body has been changed. Caruth writes:

For what seems to me particularly striking in the example of Tasso is not just the unconscious act of the infliction of the injury and its inadvertent and unwished for repetition, but the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound. (2)

Caruth concerns herself with this voice, reading the post-traumatic voice as a sort of disembodied *maria* arising from the experience of trauma. The paradox is that neither Freud nor Caruth, so sensitive to the sufferings of the murderer Tancred, are able to notice that the voice which speaks from Tasso's ghostly tree is unmistakably Clorinda's own voice, and that this voice, once it stops crying and starts speaking, accuses Tancred mercilessly.

My reading of Tasso's epic, significantly, shifts the interpretive ground still further away from Caruth's Freudian reading. I argue that the trauma of Clorinda's death, in *Jerusalem Delivered*, is experienced by Clorinda herself, rather than by Tancred. Clorinda is the victim of the trauma: her body is the body twice impaled. Clorinda, apparently incapable of truly dying, is murdered and then stabbed in her reincarnation as a tree. She experiences the trauma of repeated violation, a re-enactment indeed. Both Freud and Caruth miss the obvious fact that the only physically wounded person in the Tancred/Clorinda pairing is Clorinda. The voice that rises out of the wound in the tree is Clorinda's voice, not the disembodied voice of trauma. Quite specifically, it is the voice of the traumatized body, which is a woman's. Caruth, ironically, argues that the voice which

cries out from the wound in the tree "witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know" (3). I contend that Tancred's inability to "fully know" the truth which Clorinda's voice reveals is not at all based upon his suffering some sort of traumatic amnesia. On the contrary, Tancred cannot fully know the traumatic truth which Clorinda's voice witnesses because it is Clorinda, and not Tancred, who has been twice-killed. Tancred cannot fully know the truth of Clorinda's suffering because it is Clorinda's body which suffers and Tancred's body which violates. Of course the crusading knight does not fully know the truth Clorinda's voice tells, for her voice tells the tale of her repeated violation at his hands.

Caruth states that her book will explore the relationship in the aftermath of trauma between knowing and not knowing. She refers to Tancred's inability to know Clorinda's suffering, an ignorance which is dramatically supplemented when Clorinda's ghostly voice speaks to him through the mouth that his sword punctures into a tree. Sadly, Caruth brushes aside the crucial difference in perspective between Tancred, the one who strikes the blows, and Clorinda, the one who receives the mortal blows. Tancred's ignorance of his beloved's suffering turns upon his misreading of her and not upon some hypothesized traumatic amnesia plaguing the young man. At Tancred's hands, Clorinda's humanity is twice-killed: her ability to speak, her voice as witness, is twice silenced. Tancred's inability to know what it is like to be murdered is not, as Caruth argues, based upon a divided consciousness in which the victim of violence must forget what happened to him. Rather, Tancred is the murderer who is granted speech, while Clorinda is the murdered one who is denied speech. Clorinda's initial silence is caused by externally enforced abjection; it is the silence attendant upon Tancred's sword's blows

Perhaps Caruth does not focus upon Clorinda's point of view in *Jerusalem Delivered* because of Caruth's own working definition of trauma. Trauma, Caruth asserts, although originally a term referring to physical wounds, since the Greek word *trauma* means an injury inflicted on the body, now primarily designates a spiritual wound, an

injury inflicted upon the mind (*Unclaimed Experience* 3, 4). In fact "trauma," both according to a current dictionary definition, as well as according to modern medical usage, can either mean an injury inflicted on the body or an injury inflicted on the mind/soul.¹ Caruth seems especially desirous of evading the physical reality of some forms of trauma. Someone who is raped, for example, is not simply stripped of peace-of-mind, but also most often sustains injury inflicted on the body, or, at the very least, suffers an abrogation of the boundaries of the body. The parable of Tancred and Clorinda works as a parable of one man's traumatic re-enactment only if one is willing to believe that Tancred and Clorinda are the same person: that is, if one erroneously reads Clorinda as the body receiving the actual traumatic event and Tancred as the mind perceiving the body's suffering. However, the old parable positing man-as-mind, woman-as-body has obvious ideological flaws.

The most accurate and direct interpretation of Tasso's epic is to read Tancred as the traumatizer, the murderer, and to read Clorinda as the traumatized, the murdered. There is no textual reason to assume that Tancred and Clorinda function primarily and only as each others' doubles. Indeed, after murdering Clorinda a second time, Tancred goes on with other crusaderly heroics, not at all diminished by the loss of his better half. Instead, the parable of Clorinda's suffering at the hands of her lover dramatically presents Clorinda's unwillingness to die silently. It is the parable of the tenacity of her voice. Clorinda alone in Tasso's epic speaks for the many killed and maimed in the Crusades. The narrative of traumatic re-enactment, as illustrated in this episode from *Jerusalem Delivered*, concerns the repetitions of Clorinda's tenacious voice. Even after she has lost her mind, and her human form, Clorinda, like Ovid's Myrrha, remains alive, imprisoned in an abjected body,

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary defines "trauma" as "A wound, or external bodily injury in general; also the condition caused by this" ("Trauma," def. 1).

literally rooted to the spot of her desecration (See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book X). Yet, she is still speaking.

It is Clorinda, not Tancred, who cannot simply die and forget her wound. It is Clorinda, not Tancred, who undergoes metempsychosis, becoming other than human. Most importantly, it is Clorinda's voice which speaks because of the wound. Her story bears witness to the suffering caused by the crusaders. Clorinda's voice and story are not Tancred's. Indeed, Clorinda speaks in a manner that Tancred cannot comprehend precisely because he is her murderer. It may be a mistake, then, to follow Freud and Caruth in focusing analysis of the repetition compulsion on Tancred. The repetition compulsion, Caruth argues, describes the aftermath of trauma, citing as an example of a post-traumatic repetition compulsion Tancred's experience of killing his beloved twice (*Unclaimed Experience* 63). Caruth argues that Tancred suffers from a sort of post-traumatic forgetfulness. She contends that trauma is an event which is temporally disjunctive, arguing that trauma cannot be comprehended by the conscious self. Trauma, Caruth writes:

Is (always) experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known, and is not available to consciousness until it imposes itself in the repetitive actions of the survivor. The way (trauma) is precisely not known in the first instance returns to haunt the survivor later on. (8)

However, the reason Tancred cannot know the experience of being injured as Clorinda has been injured is because he is not the injured party, an understanding strikingly absent from Caruth's Freudian reading of Tasso's hero. What haunts Tancred is not the memory of being violated himself. He is haunted by the need to silence the woman whom he has already murdered, lest she accuse him further. There is, then, no mnemonic disjunction or amnesia within Tancred: the amnesia inheres in the readers, here Caruth and Freud, who cannot confront the simple fact of Clorinda's being twice-murdered, twice-impaled, by Tancred. In contrast to Freud's and Caruth's reading of the relationship between trauma

and traumatic re-enactment, then, I argue that the violated victim very well may not repeat any action afterwards, instead others will repeatedly turn away from the scene of violation she presents if she attempts to tell her tale. It takes, then, a canny rhetorician to write legibly the story of trauma and trauma's aftermath.

Clorinda's experience of violation is not an event that she mysteriously revisits but rather an event which she eloquently denounces (*Jerusalem Delivered* 290). If an encrypted trauma may trigger a compulsion to symbolically repeat the painful experience, it is then critical to note the interiority, or the symbolic quality of that repetition. In other words, from the point of view of the victim of a violation, the trauma may seem to repeat itself because new events are interpreted along the grid of the earlier trauma. However, the only active examples of repetition compulsion furnished by Freud and by Caruth are not examples of people repeatedly victimized, but rather instances of a man who cannot help but repeat actions which violate others. This is a crucial distinction, for it suggests that a trauma encrypted at the core of a text, or for that matter at the core of a history, does not necessarily drive the narrative of the text, but rather engages and shapes the allegorical and metaphorical, the self-interpretative and self-revelatory, aspects of the text.

As indicated above, Caruth's formulation of trauma is definitionally not physical. Trauma, she argues, both resides in the mind and is a prodigal of the mind. Post-traumatic memory, according to Caruth, returns to be taken up again, traumatic re-enactment bringing to the psyche a fundamental truth which Caruth argues is otherwise unavailable. However, while, as Caruth contends, post-traumatic narrative may be a writing which is productive of "a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding," I believe it is essential to recast her definition of trauma as the "textual itinerary of insistently recurring words or figures" (*Unclaimed Experience* 5). We must rewrite this understanding of what is trauma from the perspective of Clorinda, from the perspective of the victim of trauma, rather than from the perspective of Tancred, the murderer. For it is Clorinda's post-

traumatic speech, the voice from the stabbed tree, which both grips and resists the reader of Tasso's epic.

It is, then, Clorinda's textual itinerary which must be considered if we are to arrive at a working theory of post-traumatic utterance. The repetitive motif of being cast as an outsider, as an enemy, and as inhuman, is Clorinda's history. Clorinda is killed first because she is a woman who dresses as a man, then because she appears not to be Christian (although she was born to an Ethiopian Orthodox queen). Then she is killed again because she is a tree that talks, eloquently denouncing the entire project of the Crusades. Tancred cannot understand Clorinda's post-traumatic speech because it is literally not his own speech: hers is the speech of alterity, of the other, hers is the speech of the outcast denied human dignity. Clorinda specifically speaks as someone who has been forcibly changed through penetration and violation. Her fate within *Jerusalem Delivered* is not only not chosen by Clorinda herself, but in fact is forced upon her by the repeated violent actions of Tancred.

If, then, there is a caesura between a traumatic event and the traumatic neurosis it causes, surely this gap should be considered from Clorinda's perspective. The trauma, if analyzed from Clorinda's perspective, is revealed to be the problem of someone else's repeated violent actions: Tancred's repeated killings. These repeated injuries result in her enforced passivity, her state of literally being trapped in the earth, rooted as a tree. Traumatic neurosis, then, is inextricably bound up with Clorinda's burial-in-life: transmogrified into a tree she is buried, rooted. This enforced passivity allows her to be re-injured, not only in her psyche, but also in her body. The first trauma causes her to become fixed in a passive stance, that of the tree, a stance from which she can only defend herself through language. Clorinda's voice emerges from the liminal spaces between life and death, between the human and the inhuman. Clorinda's arboreal voice which cries

without narrative at first seems incomprehensible, illegible. When she clearly her murderer, her voice is interpreted as uncanny, even demonic.

Why is Clorinda's first cry from the body of the tree unreadable? Caruth describes a loss of the knowledge of what happened as the central emblem of traumatic memory, arguing that traumatic neurosis consists of an ineluctable impulse to commit acts which seem to have no rational cause but which express the repetitive thoughts of the trauma survivor. I argue, however, that post-traumatic utterance, like Clorinda's cry through the wound in the tree, does not bespeak an amnesia on the part of the victim of trauma, but rather reveals the untranslatability between the topography of violation and that of legitimate discourse. Clorinda's cry through the wound in the tree becomes clear and elegant only when she begins to speak for all those killed by crusaders, that is, only when she begins to speak as a witness for the general injustice of the Crusades. When she makes of her suffering a metaphor, linking her suffering with all the other dead, her language crosses back into legible text. There is then, no amnesia within Clorinda's own post-traumatic narrative, but rather there is an amnesiac gap between her narrative and Caruth's Freudian comprehension of her narrative. This gap charges the irreconcilable distinction between the power of verbal authority and the abjection of experiencing violation, here metonymized as murder.

Indeed, Freud's errant disciple, Sandor Ferenczi, argues in his *Clinical Diary* that traumatic neurosis is not defined by repetitive acts but instead is a constellation of thinking patterns, tending towards erasure of the self. Ferenczi, writing of the psychic numbing, like death, that results from extreme physical and psychological trauma summarizes the victim's response as follows:

So I do not feel the pain inflicted upon me at all, because I do not exist. On the other hand, I do feel the pleasure-gratification of the attacker, which I am still able to perceive. (Ferenczi 104)

Ferenczi would locate a symptom of traumatic neurosis, for example, in Caruth's and Freud's immediately turning from Clorinda's abjected perspective to instead seek the subjective view point of Tancred. Ferenczi argues that the effect of trauma is precisely this paradoxical identification with the assaulter. In order to survive an assault which breaks down the physical boundaries of the self, argues Ferenczi, the psyche erases those boundaries altogether, seeking the perspective of the powerful assaulter. The itinerary of post-traumatic re-enactments, according to Ferenczi, traces a departure from the wounded self towards assuming the point of view of the wounding other (Ferenczi 104). Here, the story of how one was once destroyed becomes the story of how one destroys oneself.

Clorinda's trauma narrative, then, describes the effort to preserve herself, even on the boundary of death and life, the boundary of the human and the inhuman, without becoming violent herself. Clorinda rejects the speech of her attacker, framing her story in the haunting speech of the tree, a speech which gains the power of the supernatural. Clorinda translates her arboreal cry into a language, which terrifies Tancred with its strength. The staking out of the symbolic territory of death, then, as a space within which the abjected body is erased, paradoxically preserves the voice of the traumatized victim from pure abjection. Clorinda does not so much speak through the wound in the tree as through the gap between her post-traumatic, figured-posthumous knowledge and Tancred's, and for that matter our, expectations of an abjected woman. That is, we expect that after being impaled, symbolically raped, Clorinda will no longer be able to speak. Clorinda's cry does not, as Caruth argues, rise through the injury Tancred's sword marks onto her body. Her articulate knowledge of suffering, of history, emanates through the gap between Tancred's anticipation of the silence of a wounded tree, metonymically a wounded woman, and the real capacity of the woman to speak.

When I describe a "gap" between Clorinda's arboreal, troped posthumous voice, that is, the voice with which she speaks after Tancred kills her, and Tancred's

interpretation of the voice crying from the tree, do I simply signal an interpretive gap, between the speaker and the reader? Perhaps there is also a structural gap in play here, a gap between Clorinda's cry at the moment of being stabbed and her eloquent denunciation of Tancred which she voices after she has been stabbed. Indeed, the troped-posthumous narrator speaks from the gap between the moment of abjection and the annihilation of the self following abjection. For example, when Emily Dickinson describes the courtly kindness of death, in the poem "Because I Could not Stop for Death," the victim, the one who dies, speaks through a temporal gap, rather than through a wound (poem 479). Rather than having assumed the perspective of death himself, the poem's voice plays between the gratification death himself must feel upon completing the abduction of the "I" and the sorrow of that feminine "I" who is killed in the process of the poem. A third self, a witness, however, is significantly incorporated into Dickinson's poem. The poem names this third self "Immortality" (4). This atemporal, anterior creature, Immortality, speaks neither as the attacker, nor as the attacked, but rather as another character, who appears in Dickinson's death poem as "Immortality" and "Eternity." "Eternity" establishes a mark, a graphic sign, towards which the horses' heads turn. Immortality is a space which can occupy a carriage but wears no clothes and cannot ever participate in the courtship of victim and victimizer.

In Dickinson's poem, then, Eternity acts as a protection against death the silencer and abductor, and as such shapes a third voice, neither victim nor assailant, but rather a bodiless observer of struggle. Bodiless, this observer speaks from a gap. Immortality not only rides in the carriage but also the gaze of the journey indicated by the turn of the horses' heads looks towards Eternity, which gazes back:

The carriage held but just ourselves
and Immortality

[.....]

I first surmised the horses' heads
turned toward Eternity (lines 2-3, 23 -24)

In as much as the speech of this figure of the witness, Eternity, depends upon a critical distance between the victim and the witness, this third voice speaks from a place of homelessness, a gesture which distances the narrative from the site of the trauma. If the only site left for the narrator's topos is the ground of homelessness, an interdicted ground, then the post-traumatic narrative becomes a performance of homelessness.

The troped posthumous voice, then, articulates death as exile. Caruth theorizes that trauma functions in narrative as a sort of leave-taking, a point of departure (*Unclaimed Experience* 23). The leave-taking figured by death as a trope signifies the rhetorical posture of posthumousness as a post-traumatic gesture. If traumatic events are necessarily narrated as journeys within which one leaves one's mnemonic homeland, indeed leaves one's sense of having a home, and enters a landscape relentlessly uncanny, then hiding the trauma that ruptured one's sense of home can be understood as a way of attempting to preserve a sense of home after the occurrence of great trauma. The trope of the posthumous voice preserves the secret of a trauma, since death acts as a metaphor representing some other trauma. The metaphor of posthumousness also dramatizes a departure, since the dead always, as it were, leave home. This very leave-taking which traumatizes, by rendering homeless, is also that which saves, by escaping the body – one's own body – which is the site of the violation.

Nevertheless, Caruth's notion of traumatic memory as a leave-taking from the narrative of one's own history is perhaps incomplete. Instead, leave-taking may function as the narrative of a narrowly survived trauma. The narrative of leave-taking, then,

performs the itinerary of survival under threat, rather than simply post-traumatic re-enactment. The trope of the posthumous voice writes down a way in which, through speech, the narrator escapes the annihilation of her self. The trope of the posthumous voice turns on a resistance to becoming in oneself, in one's own body, the fixed site of an invasion. By absenting the body of the speaker from the post-traumatic confession, the trope of the posthumous voice accepts homelessness as that site of radical departure which at once denotes trauma and also preserves an intact, if aloof, mode of address.

The kind of homelessness implied by the trope of the posthumous voice is a bodilessness. To erase one's body is the ultimate gesture of leaving home. But homelessness is itself a wound, a trauma. Thus, the trope of the posthumous voice irresistibly encircles the space of the wound, resisting the trauma of violation or penetration by accepting the self-inflicted pain of homelessness. This rupture, then, underwrites the trope of the posthumous voice. In order to survive, the victim who tells the story has at some point turned away from her own body, as the site of injury, and consequently turned away from her home. I argue that, because of this necessary turning from home in order to survive the trauma which occurs at home, the trauma itself becomes the new site of home, the place to which the mind of the victim returns, like its own ghost, seeking some way back. Tales of the homelessness, tropes of burial, or the writing of graves as uncanny houses, are therefore post-traumatic narratives. The trope of the posthumous voice as a variant of *prosopopoeia* gives these scenes voice.

The autobiographical tale of one's own death, one's loss of self, would seem to be not only an uncanny but also an illegitimate story to tell. How can the reader give credence to a dead speaker? Paul de Man argues that all autobiography addresses its own illegitimacy through an implied *prosopopoeia*: *prosopopoeia* paradoxically restores the legitimacy of the autobiographical text. In "Autobiography as De-Facement," he states that:

The dominant figure of the epitaphic or autobiographical discourse is as we saw the prosopopoeia, the fiction of the voice from beyond the grave.

(The Rhetoric of Romanticism 77)

He contends that the "fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave" reintroduces the prosopopoeia in the "fiction of address" (78). The solution which prosopopoeia provides to the problem of autobiography is one in which the voice of the figuratively dead speaker restores the losses of the living. However, with regards to the trope of the posthumous voice, which is different from prosopopoeia, I expand de Man's notion of the fiction of address to mean the fiction of having an address, in the sense of having a home. Home is always a fiction for the dispossessed speaker, and the figured-dead speaker is radically dispossessed, having no body or home. Deprived of a legitimate site of speaking, or writing, the woman writer using the trope of the posthumous voice develops from this sort of fiction of address, as a play on both senses of the word, a fictive home.

Just as the trope of the posthumous voice implies a state of loss, the narrator's bodilessness figuring into text an absence, this trope also implies a paradox: a mysterious or unknowable event. Caruth argues that at the heart of trauma is an unknowable event, an event whose effects only can be written about without fully knowing their cause. She argues that what the traumatized individual cannot process, cannot take in, is that he survived an encounter with a violation so extreme as to have threatened his existence (*Unclaimed Experience* 62). By contrast, my concept of the formulation of the post-traumatic voice is based upon the notion of an injured body re-configured through a self-reflective rhetoric similar to prosopopoeia. The speaker does not insist that she has survived her encounter with annihilation; on the contrary, she admits the opposite. Borrowing Paul de Man's notion of autobiography as defacement, then, I suggest that the trope of the posthumous voice is the particular art of autobiography as effacement, a

rhetoric in which the speaker's permission to speak of herself is deeply bound up with and implicated in the counter stroke of the speaker's body's vanishing.

De Man argues that prosopopoeia, used in classical rhetoric to personify not only the dead but also cities and other abstractions, reconfigures the speech of the dead when used in "epitaphic or autobiographical discourse" (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 77). Developing from de Man, my argument is simply that Shelley, Brontë, Dickinson, Bishop and Plath, in the works this dissertation interprets, draw upon the epitaphic force of language. The trope of the posthumous voice, however, skews prosopopoeia so that the epitaph is written by the self for the self, a rhetorical gesture which posits that the dead self can speak in the place of the living self. The troped dead self, then, becomes an icon of memory, over-writing and over-riding the living self. The epitaph of the self, or self-elegy, in the trope of the posthumous voice, works differently, then, from de Man's notion of autobiography as de-facement, for the trope of the posthumous voice grants place to the speech of the dead woman because the speech of the living woman has been revoked. The causality, then, reverses.

The woman writer who creates a troped posthumous narrator elides the dead body of the speaker while simultaneously highlighting the suffering implicit in that body's erasure. The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing is, then, an highly stylized rhetoric making use of the post-traumatic topos of homelessness as a place for narrative, and making bodilessness into an inhabitation for the uncanny positing of the speech of the dead. Far from an inarticulate cry from a wound, as Caruth describes Clorinda's voice, the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing is rather comparable to Clorinda's haunting, eloquent speech which comes after she cries from the new wound (*Unclaimed Experience* 2). The trope of the posthumous voice, then, is a rhetoric of aftermath, not at all a voice speaking through a wound but a voice speaking after a wound has ceased to matter.

Although, playing on de Man's notion of autobiography as defacement, I argue that the trope of the posthumous voice is a sort of autobiography as effacement, I do not mean to imply that this trope effects a true self-erasure. Rather, its effects are theatrical, purposeful. The erasure of the contours of a woman's body through her own words, which this trope accomplishes, stands in antithesis to the traditional feminine gesture of self-effacement. For what is effaced by the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing is not the woman's self, her voice, but rather the vitiating male vision of the female body. This spectral image is erased by being named *a priori* a spectre.

The rhetorical gesture of placing the narrator's voice in the mouth of the dead erases the space of the body. In normative, or non-trope-posthumous writing, the narrative voice keeps close to the boundaries of an implied speaking body through a sort of talismanic, recurrent circling back to the central site of the narrator's imagined body. The trope of the posthumous voice asserts a vacancy where that source of empirical data, the body, usually operates. To cut the voice away from the body, as has implicitly occurred when the speaker of a text claims the status of being dead, doubles the narrator's presence within the text, splitting the narrator into an erased body and an highlighted, ghostly voice. While Maurice Blanchot argues that any text enacts a symbolic death of the author, the text guided by the trope of the posthumous voice presents a radically altered relationship to death. Here, the burden of death is balanced upon the narrator of the text. Blanchot writes that: "The writer is one who writes in order to be able to die and he is one whose power to write comes from an anticipated relation with death" (*The Space of Literature* 93). Blanchot further argues that any text rehearses, performs at its margins, the author's death (131). Blanchot's notion that the author's text describes the contours of the author's mortality, the text continuing just where the author ceases, is turned on its head by the trope of the posthumous voice, for this trope describes the contours of its narrator's already accomplished disappearance. Here, the author, as an implied figure, is displaced and the

narrator becomes guardian and arbiter of mortality, and of the body, as they are inscribed into text.

Critical to my understanding of the troped posthumous voice in women's writing, then, is an understanding of that uncanny double, the narrator who erases her author. Asking "How do the dead speak?" Mieke Bal reads that question from the perspective of woman's traditional silence. She states that "naming is the speech act of fatherhood par excellence" and that "each deviation from this rule is significant."² From this basis, Bal implies that a narrator writing from the space of death is a feminine linguistic gesture because the living woman is not allowed to speak. The radical division between the speaking self and the bodily self, a division imposed by the metaphor of death, is a woman's issue. The vanishing, anonymous self implied when a narrator writes from the space of death is, then, a quintessentially feminine linguistic gesture. The woman writer who un-names herself through the definitive gesture of assuming her speaker's posthumousness, then, subverts the primary linguistic act of paternity. Here, the feminine voice inhabits of necessity the realm of the uncanny, if one understands the uncanny to be a state of doubleness, the narrator speaking through the extended metaphor of her own posthumous double, that is her dead self as her double.

The trope of the posthumous voice with its uncanny topos of the grave removes the possibility of coming home, erasing the stability of home and of name in a single stroke of metaphor. *Heimlich*, or homey, like the *unheimlich*, or the uncanny, are linked to femininity via the topography of spaces culturally marked feminine: the home, the womb, the mother-tongue. The trope of the posthumous voice, then, inscribes a feminine

² *Death and Dissymmetry* 166. Bal contends that the interdiction against woman's access to proper language, ie. proper naming, causes another sort of speaking, a symbolic text of the body: "Reducing them to the status of daughter, not allowing them to grow into full subjectivity, is reducing them to the resources of body language" (166).

linguistic gesture. Writing without a name, that is, without patrimony, is a feminine approach to textual production. However, in the trope of the posthumous voice, this anonymity is inscribed into the erasure of the topos of the feminine, that is, inscribed into the disappearance of home, of mother-tongue, and, indeed, the disappearance of birth which death articulates. The trope of the posthumous voice, then, demarcates the liminal status of woman's writing within a patriarchal culture, claiming as a boundless territory those very margins that posthumousness indicates. The trope of the posthumous voice uses the inexhaustible name of anonymous as a symbol that plays the trump cards of eternity, of immortality.

The notion of an *écriture féminine*, a concept developed primarily by Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, then, also relates to the concept of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing.³ In Kristeva, the notion of an *écriture féminine* turns around the concept of the semiotic *chora*, the unindividuated flux of intended utterance before, or beneath, the cutting of the semiotic which occurs when symbolic language is produced. Kristeva argues that the *chora* functions differently from the Lacanian signifying function, or the paternal metaphor. She codifies this difference in gendered terms. Kristeva contends that poetic language is revolutionary because it absconds from this function of producing a deferred name:

This semiotization of the symbolic thus represents the flow of jouissance into language. (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 79)

Instead, Kristeva argues, poetic language presses through a maternal, material *chora*, a pre-linguistic state which does not depend upon the violence required to create symbols.

³See Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Persuasive arguments have been made that some cohesive notion of an *écriture féminine* has been developed through the work of these writers. See, Toril Moi's essay "Feminist, Female, Feminine" in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moor, eds., *The Feminist Reader* 104 - 117.

If the paternal metaphor is an act of dismemberment, articulating an alienation, by contrast the chora is typified by Kristeva as that unindividuated flux of the materiality in language. Kristeva considers the physicality of language, its sound and rhythmic press. She writes that:

The very practice of art necessitates reinvesting the maternal chora so that it transgresses the symbolic order; all its paths into, indeed valorizations of, presymbolic semiotic stases not only require the ensured maintenance of this signification but also serve signification even when they dislocate it. The text signifies the un-signifying: it assumes within a signifying practice this functioning of the semiotic which ignores meaning and operates before meaning or despite meaning. (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 65)

The use of the French *relève*, here translated as "assume," indicates to us the difficulty of the argument that an *écriture féminine* describes the type of feminine writing which occurs when women writers' use the trope of the posthumous voice. *Relève* indicates in fact a lifting, and a departure from one level to another, while to assume, or to take up, indicates a masking. To *relève* is to reveal as in a *bas relief*, to lift up the separation of signifier and signified which delineates verbal meaning. Assume, by contrast, implies an act of covering over or hiding one thing with another's mask. The semiotic *chora* only becomes an aspect of poetry when it is transformed into the symbolic, when it cuts itself by rising from itself.

Kristeva's *chora* relates to the Platonic *khora*. Plato's *khora* (χώρα) is the substratum which passively receives all language and all images (*Timaeus* 51b). This *khora* is explicitly described as a place, a space, which receives language. Socrates describes the *khora* in explicitly feminine, maternal terms. The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing re-inscribes this Platonic *khora*, a place without qualities, with elegiac, formal characteristics. Socrates connotes the *khora* with the womb, a space to be

written upon, filled up. The woman writer using the trope of the posthumous voice returns to this feminine, wordless, space and reformulates it as a place rich with linguistic capacity. Although the trope of the posthumous voice rewrites the womb as the tomb, using the grave in the earth, or what Plath calls "the grave cave" (*CP Plath* 244), this trope also inflects the maternal space. The no man's land of death, and of the maternal Platonic *khora*, becomes the same space in the trope of the posthumous voice. For if Plato's maternal cave is the place upon which images are cast but which itself produces no language, then the trope of the posthumous voice subverts that very image of this empty cave. That is, the trope of the posthumous voice reclaims the space of the feminine, the place-all-place which is the topos of the *khora*, as a cave already productive of language. In this sense, the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing works counter to the notion of an *écriture féminine*, for it rejects the very notion of the passivity of a maternal, all-receiving *khora* upon which the concept of an *écriture féminine* depends.

There is another difficulty in making this Kristevan notion of a feminine writing fit the woman authored texts which use the trope of the posthumous voice. Such a trope exists entirely within the terrain of the symbolic, working at the body's vanishing point, eschewing the physicality of language. By rejecting the body as a topos for utterance, women writers using the trope of the posthumous voice complicate the notion that *écriture féminine* is a writing of heightened bodily awareness. Instead, the voice troped posthumous presents the rhetorical trick of speaking without a body. Except in gothic writing, the woman who speaks pretending that she has already been buried necessarily speaks apart from her body. Her language stands without reference to a speaking body. The implication of the trope of the posthumous voice, then, is that one solution to the problem of masculine readership is to get rid of the female body in the text. The text becomes the place where the female body is shed. The relevant idea to grasp here is that the woman writer contends with her body as a theatre which her writing must either fill up or

leave. In the trope of the posthumous voice, this departure has the effect of drawing interest towards that disappeared body, focusing the text on its departure. The absent body at once governs and dismisses, at once rules and recedes from the text troped posthumous.

Walter Gets Lost

A loss, then, appears in the trope of the posthumous voice: the underlying drama of the narrator's disappearing or absent body. The post-traumatic aspect of the text is revealed by this absent body. Another way of reading post-traumatic writing is suggested by the paradigm of the lost map. If bodilessness is one way to describe the state of the narrator who speaks after death, she can also be described as a person without a home, inasmuch as bodilessness enacts a privation of home. The loss of home clearly haunts not only Mary Shelley's orphaned Mathilda, but also Emily Brontë's married and pregnant Cathy, as well as Dickinson's buried figures and Bishop's lost travellers. A map which can no longer be followed to find one's way home could describe the trope of the posthumous voice. Such a map is also central to Walter Benjamin's "A Berlin Chronicle."⁴ As in the trope of the posthumous voice, where the lost life becomes the kept lyric, Benjamin's encrypted description of the city he lost becomes the essay he keeps. While I am not arguing that Benjamin's essay is an example of the trope of the posthumous voice, his work illuminates a crucial aspect of that trope: its description of a state of homelessness. Benjamin's work is more explicitly theoretical than that of the writers upon whom this dissertation focuses. His loss was that of exile, a loss which "A Berlin Chronicle" attempts to master. The troped posthumous narrator similarly relies upon the paradox of mastery arising in the precise place of greatest loss, giving these dead speakers a power they lacked while alive.

In "A Berlin Chronicle" the narrator first exposes his childhood inability to find his way through his home city, Berlin, only to demonstrate through the confession of this

⁴ "A Berlin Chronicle," *Reflections* 3-60.

early impotence his current potency. That is, the narrator describes being lost in his home city by returning verbally to those buried spaces and finding again the former lost way, effectively reversing the old impotence. First, Benjamin describes the way that being lost in a city becomes a method by which one masters that city, a mastery which eludes one who was never lost:

Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance, nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city as one loses oneself in a forest, that calls for quite a different schooling.

("A Berlin Chronicle" 8)

The accident of losing one's way becomes a through-way, leading to discovery of one's true location. In this essay haunted by the traumatic subtext of Benjamin's having entirely lost Berlin through the fascistic machinations of his home country, the dominant trope is that of mastering loss through the reconfiguration of one's relationship to the lost object. This reconfiguration inheres precisely in language. Thus it is that Benjamin tells us about losing his way in the city in an essay which celebrates his verbal mastery over that city. Similarly, he tells of writing out the story of his life in the form of a diagram and then of losing that diagram. Here, the act of mapping becomes an internal gesture, at once privative and preserving of the space, familial or civic, which has been lost before the mapping began:

With compelling force, I was struck by the idea of drawing a diagram of my life, and knew at the same moment exactly how it was to be done. With a very simple question I interrogated my past life and the answers were inscribed on a sheet of paper...A year or two later, when I lost this sheet I was inconsolable. (31)

While earlier in the essay Benjamin writes of the wish to draw a map of his life, at this point midway through the essay, he reveals that he has already drawn and then lost that

map. The language of the essay itself, then, through its recurrent trope of regaining what was physically lost by verbally describing the process of losing it, constructs the labyrinth of the narrator's history, that very map which he claims to have lost.

Benjamin's trauma here is the loss of access to a city, the disappearance, as it were, of a useful map to that city. His essay uses what I argue is a post-traumatic gesture of eliding a physical loss by metaphorically circling in language the after-effects of that loss. It avoids verbal description of the physical trauma itself. The loss in this way is confronted through articulation of its aftermath. In "A Berlin Chronicle" this privation means avoiding a description of the original diagram, or map. The physical object irrevocably lost stands as metonymy for the great suffering imposed on Benjamin by Hitler's Germany. However, the trope that Benjamin's essay uses, that of mapping the after-effects of a trauma while avoiding mention of the actual trauma, instances an approach to the telling of trauma which also appears in the trope of the posthumous voice. Benjamin's essay is related to the posthumous voice for it assumes an irrevocable physical damage, the loss of the map of one's life, while the essay also insists on the power of the narrator's language to reconfigure absence as presence, deprivation as gift.

"A Berlin Chronicle" does not fit the mould I am suggesting for the trope of the posthumous voice in part because the narrator's disempowerment does not go that far. However, "A Berlin Chronicle" does evoke a moulage of the feminine mask. For Benjamin's map of a lost city, a paradigmatic form of post-traumatic writing, circles around images of the female prostitute, tracing this female body as cipher and site of the abjection which the essay's narrator at once obsessively tends towards and avoids. The female prostitute plays a central role in his essay; she embodies silence, muteness, and an abjected death which the narrator flees. Her syphilitic, dangerous, female body, tracing the boundary of death, is the ultimate burial site in "A Berlin Chronicle." It is the city's tell, the

city buried beneath the city. Her buried language threatens the stability of Benjamin's eloquent verbal map.

Erasing Damages: Tropes of Bodily Effacement

Written around the prostitute's fatal body, Benjamin's essay seems to offer her as propitiatory sacrifice, to those who would again take his city away. The essay, in part, is her elegy. In women's writing, the trope of the posthumous voice, the gesture of offering up the figure of a dead woman in whose mouth language is placed while simultaneously effacing and hiding the very body of that speaker, performs an autobiographical elegy. It elegizes the self. In "A Berlin Chronicle," the prostitute's body is placed to mark off boundaries: between childhood and adulthood, between wealth and poverty, finally, between life and death. Troped posthumous narrators similarly place themselves, as bodies, on the narrowest of boundaries, in that liminal space where the disappearance of the speaker has not quite been achieved but rests at its very vanishing point. The prostitute in Benjamin's essay disappears only to resurface at the essay's close, albeit in the form of another prostitute.

The disappearance of the narrator's body which occurs in the trope of the posthumous voice is like the vanishing of "A Berlin Chronicle's" prostitute because it describes a vanishing body which reappears. In the trope of the posthumous voice, in particular in Emily Dickinson's poetry, the abjecting trauma which precedes the text is effaced by an altering of the image of bodily death into the trope of the renunciation of the body. The buried body of the posthumous narrator traces a disappearance. However, that dead body also places a gap at the heart of the text. The text tends towards that absent body, never uncovering it but also never dissipating the memory of it. The question of how language can occur in the aftermath of radical self-dispossession is, then, placed within the gap effected between memory and legible text, a gap which widens in the aftermath of traumatic experience. Here, death, as a rhetorical marker, shapes

metonymically a topos where loss is both replicated and negated. In language troped posthumous the gap within the speaking subject becomes the subject. Language, the engraving on the memorial stone, marks the site of trauma, memorializing a buried but, as it were, linguistically restive body.

The troped posthumous narrator, then, stands at a remove from the trauma through which she has passed. She speaks a translated tongue, translated through the effacement of her body, a loss of self which she has survived in the form of language. The troped posthumous speaker's body becomes text, the abject body translated into a text which stands apart from the body. Here, I am using translation as a metaphor: as one shifts, say, French into English, so also one may shift a remembrance of trauma into the visible emblems which encode and cover the trauma. My use of this metaphor turns upon my understanding of a certain buried stratum in language *per se*. That is, the dredging of text from one language to another also reveals the impossibilities, or limits, of speech in the original language. If translation enacts a shift between languages, the act of recreating in legible language the unspeakable text of the traumatized interiority of the self, then, is also a mode of translation. The trope of the posthumous voice translates trauma into the extended metaphor of bodily death. This refusal to confess the experience of trauma designates the text troped posthumous as a site of resistance. The troped posthumous speaker is unapproachable but, within her narrative, is always being approached. Here, death is the moment when the body gets erased but also highlighted.

Paradoxically, in the trope of the posthumous voice, the moment of demise is the precise instant during which the body is granted fullest attention. At the moment of death, the body exacts its debt, refusing to be ignored. The allure of death as a rhetorical marker, then, arises in this simultaneous hiding and revealing of the body that occurs at the moment when death is staged. Death, then, in the trope of the posthumous voice becomes in itself a topos, an ironic empirical site which the speaker visits and confesses to in much the same

spirit that Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* confesses she is "too weak" to resist the desire to write (*Mathilda* 176). Writing, here, becomes an illicit partner to death, both of which function as rhetorical sites, *topoi* that the woman writer implies she has been too weak to resist inhabiting. This self-avowed weakness paradoxically covers the strength of the rhetoric, its forceful communication of certain states of suffering. In texts troped posthumous, the speaker's traumatized body performs an expiation, allowing the figured-dead woman's voice to speak from the *topos* of authority. In exchange for her feminine body, she presents a text inscribing not the living body but the vanishing body as linguistic trace.

If a dead woman would seem to be a silenced woman, the trope of the posthumous voice argues otherwise. A ruse marking the limits of masculine hegemony within language, the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing vitiates the distance between woman as mute body, or here, dead body, and woman's voice. It is clearly a risky kind of rhetoric, always in danger of falling into the grotesque or the unbelievable, but sometimes winning through to an uncanny eloquence which provides women writers a chance to speak without either pretending to be men or pretending to be concerned with only the *topoi* of hearth and home. The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing, of course, also reflects violence against women's bodies, since a dead body implies a history of violence of some sort, even if only the violence of illness. However, this trope does not accept violence. Instead, it complains against violence by exemplifying the logical conclusion of patriarchal domination of women's bodies: the feminine corpse as ideal speaker.

While I do not argue that women writers' use of this trope is a paradigmatically feminine approach to writing, I am presenting in this dissertation instances of major women authors who have used the trope of posthumousness in some of their work. The use of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing is the exception rather than the rule. I am not, then, in any sense arguing whether the trope of the posthumous voice is

or is not an *écriture féminine*. Instead, the trope of the posthumous voice is a rhetoric expressive of post-traumatic thought. The narrator who is evoked as already dead during the telling of her story reveals an encrypted history of trauma. The narrator who speaks through her own dead body uses a rhetoric which signifies a traumatic event embedded and not ever clearly revealed within the narrative. The trauma that the narrator refuses to directly confess is suggested through the symbol of death.

From the delineation of the trope of the already dead narrator telling about death the reader cannot necessarily divine the specific traumatic experience which death symbolizes in that work. I should add that is not my contention that a trauma encrypted in the narrative troped posthumous belongs properly to the author. On the contrary, it belongs to the narrator. The trope of the posthumous voice at once implies and displaces a history of trauma. That borderland, at the edge of prosopopoeia, wherein the narrator makes her own effaced face the death mask through which she speaks, is a particular type of post-traumatic speech in which what has happened to produce the figurative "death" cannot be told and is instead confessed through the extended metaphor of speaking after death. I suggest, however, that there may be a connection between the culturally abjected place of woman's body and the familiarity of some women writers with what death might be like: its powerlessness, its bodily abjection.

When Hercules' wife, Deineira, gives him the poisonous cloak of Nessus it is a figure or metaphor which will erase his powerful masculine body. She erases and silences the powerful, living body of Hercules by making manifest a trope, that is a cloak, from her own humiliation, her own symbolic death, after her husband injures her by falling in love with another woman. When she hands him the cloak of Nessus, then, she acts as the rhetorically dead woman presenting a metaphor to the living man. Although, in "Autobiography as De-Facement," de Man defines the terror evoked by prosopopoeia as the fear that the speech of the dead might silence the living, this remains a threat explicitly

unfulfilled in the text of his essay (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 80). However, this threat is implicitly realized when de Man, at the essay's close, recounts Deimeira's handing the cloak of Nessus to Hercules (81). De Man warns us that even Hercules, that strongest of patriarchal bodies, that powerful masculine trope, can be silenced if a dead woman speaks. The prosopopoeia most threatening, then, is that of a dead woman's voice: how much more threatening if a living woman uses her own troped posthumous voice to speak.

I began by writing about the uncanny effect of Mary Shelley's novella *Mathilda*. *Mathilda* will return repeatedly in this dissertation, for I am reading Mary Shelley's slender and posthumously published novella as the matrix of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. Mathilda's role, as the abject daughter, is to haunt the texts of all the other daughters who have escaped her primary and profound abjection. In other words, the trope of the posthumous voice, a rhetorician's elegant response to writing after trauma, does not abandon the haunting and always uncompleted voice of the victim in the moment of trauma. Instead, it subversively produces writing that trumps the masculine gaze that sometimes abjects women's bodies. In these troped posthumous letters, dead letters to the world which refused to hear the woman's living voice speak, Mathilda and her double, Beatrice Cenci, stand at the boundary, each character suggesting a way to respond to the silence imposed upon daughters.

*Second Chapter***"A Poem in Which I Am to Figure:"¹
*Lethean Crossings on Chiassi's Shore***

Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* initiates my consideration of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. *Mathilda*, completed in February 1820 but not published until 1957, is the ultimate posthumous gesture, a story whose telling is deferred for one-hundred-forty years.² That *Mathilda* was published posthumously, of course, does not actually bear upon the work of the trope of the posthumous voice within the text. Nevertheless, the intersection between the novella's painfully post-traumatic subject – what to do after your father tries to rape you – and the intricate rhetorical ploy of speaking posthumously shapes a road map. The cross-road, on that map, takes place between a woman writing in the aftermath of trauma and the masculine readership's refusal to read that frangible language. Mary Shelley's novella, of all the work I will consider in the following chapters, is the least clear example of the trope of the posthumous voice: *Mathilda*, the narrator, plays very much at the boundary between death and life. By contrast, in some of the poems by Dickinson and Plath which I will consider later, the narrators speak squarely from the place of the dead. Nevertheless, it is through the border territory of the dying *Mathilda*'s recumbent gaze that we begin to apprehend the intricacy of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. Feigning the speech of the dead simultaneously incorporates the woman's abjected body and resists that body's abjection.

Just as Dickinson shifts from "narrow hands" to "paradise," Shelley, in *Mathilda*, alters the abjected body – that of the daughter whose own father has shamed her – into a

¹*Mathilda* 233.

²The first published version of Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* was edited by Elizabeth Nitchie and published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1959.

sublime recalcitrance (*Poems ED* poem 466). *Mathilda's* authority appears in the liminal space that opens across her barren moor home after she has turned from life and assumed the point of view of the buried. Refusing to accept her father's assault, *Mathilda* writes a new language predicated upon the erasure of her abrogated body. *Mathilda*, as heroine and as narrator, then, haunts my own text. Her disappearing body traces the vanishing point where abjection and sublimity intersect, that is, the place where the abject body cedes to the vanished body, whose only trace is the corpus of the letter she has left to Woodville. This borderline, between the body lost and the text saved, is the very space towards which I am here reading. Perhaps, then, *Mathilda* demands complicity. When she appears in the pages to follow, read her as an icon, an emblem, a sign saying: here is an injury. When she appears, it is always to erase herself, to bury the injury by occluding the injured body and then insisting that only the metaphysical, textual realm of language engages a persistent meaning. Her story is winnowed down until nothing is left but the telling of it.

While Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was writing her novella, *Mathilda*, her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, translated Canto 28, lines 1-51 from Dante's *Purgatorio* (see Richard Holmes' biographical study, *Shelley: the Pursuit* 611, 620). After Percy Bysshe's death, Mary Shelley, editor of her husband's posthumous work, published under the title "Mathilda Gathering Flowers" precisely this fragment (Holmes 611). Linguistic moments of crossing between the two writers are an expectable outcome of their having eloped and stayed together, sharing their work of reading and writing. The intertextual relationship between the writings they produced during their marriage is extensive. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley published *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* in 1818. Percy Bysshe wrote *Prometheus Unbound* in 1819, and published it in 1820. Mary Shelley translated *The Relation of the Death of the Family of the Cenci*,

indeed translating the text at Shelley's behest, while Percy Bysshe wrote the play *The Cenci* during 1819 (*Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: an Introduction* 47). Betty T. Bennett comments that:

The Shelleys' most harmonious communication appears to have been through their writing. After Clara's death, Percy Bysshe Shelley began to dramatize *The Cenci*. The Shelleys collaborated on this project in several ways. Mary Shelley translated into English *Relazione della morte della famiglia Cenci sequita in Roma il di II Maggio 1599*, the original Italian manuscript from which Percy Bysshe Shelley worked, for intended publication with Percy Bysshe Shelley's tragedy [. . .]. Following William's death, Percy Bysshe Shelley continued working on *The Cenci*, Mary Shelley began her own story of incest: *Matilda*, the story of a father's annihilating incestuous love for his daughter.

(*Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: an Introduction* 47-48)

Strikingly, Bennett refers to this annihilating incest without stating precisely whom the violence annihilates. It is my argument that Mary Shelley subverts the history of the Cenci, rewriting it so that the daughter rather than the father becomes the primary victim. Mary Shelley cleans up Beatrice Cenci's public image in the person of Mathilda, a character clearly innocent of intrigue.

During this year, Mary Shelley also began but did not complete a translation of Alfieri's *Myrrha*, a play whose obvious thematic resonance with Shelley's *Cenci* mirrors her novella *Mathilda*'s reference to the ancient Greek myth upon which Alfieri's play is based (*Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: an Introduction* 50). Shelley, himself fluent in Italian, did not need his wife to translate the manuscript of *The Relation of the Death of the Family of the Cenci* but rather must have had some other motivation for encouraging her to embark on a translation project which pained her. Her completed translation of the manuscript is

studded with blanks which she explains signify passages too painful to translate. In her presentation of *The Relation of the Death of the Family of the Cenci*, Mrs. Shelley remarks of the numerous passages which she has deleted: "The details here are horrible and unfit for publication" (Ingpen 160).³ These omitted details would seem to have to do with Beatrice's rape at the hands of her father, for the sentence preceding the gap reads:

Francesco [. . .] often endeavored by force and threats to debauch his daughter Beatrice who was now grown up and exceedingly beautiful.

(Ingpen 159)

The sentence following the gap of omitted text reads:

Beatrice, finding it impossible to continue to live in so miserable a manner sent a well written supplication to the Pope, imploring him to exercise his authority in withdrawing her from the violence and cruelty of her father.

(Ingpen 160)

It seems clear, then, that Mary Shelley finds the details of the incestuous rape literally illegible – in the sense of being unreadable and unwritable. Arguably Mary Shelley's response to incestuous rape, a response of eliding the details of the incestuous assault, shapes her writing of *Mathilda*, a story of incest in which no physical assault is inscribed. In *Mathilda*, the horrible details are pushed into suicide notes and deathbed confessions, illegible texts except in the intermediary, marginal space between death and life. Her husband's request that she translate material that grieved her may have led to the way in which Mary Shelley brought *Mathilda* to its final dramatic form, with its pointed elision of

³Mary Shelley's translation appears in context of Percy Shelley's complete works. I have used the Julian edition of Percy Shelley's poems only in the instances when the text does not appear in the Norton edition. Please see footnote 4 of this chapter for an explanation of this decision. The Julian edition I refer to in parenthetical references as Ingpen, signifying its editor. For Mary Shelley's translation of *The Relation of the Death of the Family of the Cenci* see also that version edited by Betty T. Bennett in *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, vol. 10.

physical details. One can trace, then, a relationship between Mary Shelley and her husband, as it is played out through texts. Later in this chapter, I will consider the metaphors of the role of Harriet Shelley's suicide in Mary Shelley's textual production, arguing that Harriet Shelley also participates in this intertextual discourse, along with the husband and wife. The ongoing and elastic metaphor of intertextuality contains her suicide precisely because it is obliquely referenced by Mary Shelley in *Mathilda*, a novella detailing a young girl's suicide.

If Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley were producing interrelated works around the time of Percy Bysshe Shelley's miraculous year, there's nothing uncanny about a close couple writing essentially to each other and through each other. The Shelleys clearly valued intertextual production as a way of participating in the broader discourses of literature. For example, "The Triumph of Life" dramatizes a conversation between the young poet and Rousseau and *Prometheus Unbound* attempts to answer and correct its Aeschylean predecessor. The uncanny resonance between the work of Percy Bysshe Shelley's miraculous year and his wife's work of that same time is implied by the embedded and encrypted nature of the references to each other's writing within each other's writing. Rather than explicitly referring to their connection and their shared history, the Shelleys elide such confessions, referring to each other by referring to texts they had read or translated together. The Shelleys, as writers, create a coded discourse, the allegories of which tend to exclude public revelation even as these very texts engage classical, hence public, allusions. These classical allusions often obfuscate rather than elucidate the couple's private discourse. Each of their references to classical mythologies and dominant literary texts, then, needs to be read through a second prism, that is, through the role played by the mythologies and texts which appear in the other Shelley's writing. As I have explained, the classical rhetorical gesture of prosopopoeia influences the trope of the posthumous voice. Inasmuch as Mary Shelley develops this

trope of the posthumous narrator in *Mathilda*, a consideration of her work's triangulated interaction with her husband's literary production and with classical literature suggests how her writing was influenced by classical sources.

If the allusions in the work of Percy Bysshe's miraculous year, and those in Mary's work of that same year, are followed with a plumb line, a conversation emerges. As noted, Percy Bysshe was in that year translating Dante. In Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* the incestuous father forbids his daughter, Mathilda, to read Dante. This interdiction against reading Dante figures centrally in *Mathilda's* drama, for it marks the moment that the daughter begins to cross from innocent child (innocent in the sense of one who doesn't know) to sexual victim. Once Mathilda's father has discovered his sexual desire for his daughter, but before he reveals this desire to her, he asks Mathilda to read the open *Purgatorio* which her dying mother had been reading sixteen years earlier. The father then abruptly admonishes Mathilda not to read, crying "No, that must not be: you must not read Dante!" (*Mathilda* 195). The dramatic development of the novella finds its crux in the punctum of the father's response to the daughter reading Dante, perhaps reading the very passage from *Purgatorio* in which Mathilda gathers flowers, this passage also translated by Percy Bysshe. The incestuous father's decision to stop his daughter from reading Dante rather than, as it superficially seems to do, protecting her from taking up her mother's place, in fact prevents her from reading the text into which she is written. Mathilda is the character in *Purgatorio* who has come through sin. Compared to Beatrice, she has suffered what Beatrice has not suffered. In this scene in Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*, then, the father prevents the daughter from understanding the danger she is in, and prevents her responding with a timely escape. It is striking that such a crucial scene refers implicitly to Percy Bysshe's translation of the Mathilda passage in Dante. Perhaps Mary Shelley means to imply that Percy, like Woodville, is a necessary witness to the epistle that becomes *Mathilda*.

Mary Shelley's knowledge of Dante's *Purgatorio* was thorough and personal. She returned to reading it to console herself after her son's death (*Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: an Introduction* 47). It is striking, then, that the heroine of her novella should be named after the heroine in a passage from *Purgatorio* which Percy Bysshe Shelley had translated. Mary Shelley did not need her husband to lead her through Dante. In choosing the name Mathilda she therefore does not rely upon but rather signifies her husband's work. Mathilda is a woman in purgatory who helps to lead the pilgrim to Beatrice (*Purgatorio* 282-291). Her beauty and innocence are shadowed by the questions of why she is in purgatory and why she might have wished to drink from Lethe, which erases the memory of sins. If Beatrice is innocent purity given face and voice, we may say that Mathilda is purity which has come through something, which knows something. In his translation, Percy Bysshe Shelley turns Dante's vision of Mathilda's innocence into an image suggestive of desire, emphasizing the liminal status of Mathilda's purity. He describes her as an approachable woman:

A solitary woman! and she went
 Singing and gathering flower after flower
 With which her way was painted and bespent.

'Bright lady, who, if looks had ever power
 To bear true witness of the heart within,
 Dost bask within the beams of love, come lower

Towards this bank. I prithee let me win
 This much of thee, to come, that I may hear
 Thy song.' (*Poetical Works* 727)⁴

He focuses upon the seductive aspects of the flower-gatherer: her beauty which he admits may or may not signify inner goodness, and her solitariness, suggestive of a vulnerability to approach. Mathilda, in Dante, sings a song which the pilgrim wishes to understand, but Shelley emphasizes the speaker's desire to sensually hear the song (*Purgatorio* lines 42-48). This slight tilting of emphasis from intellectual understanding to sensual hearing, as well as the topographical suggestion that the woman come "lower" instead of simply more near to the speaker, portray a Mathilda of the borderline, an inhabitant of earthly paradise in the Augustinian sense, in which lush flowers and beautiful women are associated inextricably with sin.

⁴In referring to Percy Bysshe Shelley's poems, I am using two texts. Whenever possible, I refer to the Norton edition of *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. This edition I signify with the abbreviation *SPP*. When the poem is not available in the Norton edition, I refer to the *Oxford Shelley, Poetical Works*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson, corrected by G.M. Matthews. This edition I signify as *SPW*. Although Donald Reiman and Neil Freistat have issued the first volume of an authoritative edition of Shelley's work, this first volume does not contain the poems which I am reading in this dissertation. I am therefore following Reiman's and Freistat's argument as stated in the Editorial Overview to the first volume of *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley (CPPBS)*: "Soon after the first volume of Roger's long-awaited Oxford English Text edition of *The Complete Poetical Works of PBS* appeared (1972), its texts were discovered to be chiefly reprints (with some added errors) of the texts in Thomas Hutchinson's Oxford Standard Authors edition (1904)...Shelley scholars and critics, thus, have continued to lack a trustworthy complete scholarly edition and have recently relied on *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (1977), the selective Norton Critical Edition edited by Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers" (*CPPBS* xxvii-xxviii). Given the absence of one authoritative edition of Percy Bysshe Shelley's work, then, I follow the suggestion of Reiman and Freistat, and use the Norton edition when the text is available in it. Otherwise I use Hutchinson as corrected by Matthews. If the text is not available in either the Norton edition nor the Hutchinson, then I refer to the Julian edition, edited by Roger Ingpen. When referring to this Julian edition, I use the last name of its editor. Obviously, were the Reiman and Freistat new edition of Shelley's works complete, I would refer only to that edition. However, it is not yet complete.

If Dante's Mathilda represents the active life of the soul, then her go-between status is hardly surprising. It seems to be both Mary Shelley's and her husband's particular angle, however, to suggest a possible history of sin or disgrace behind Mathilda's virgin modesty, similar to the last vestiges of the sins of the saved which Dante writes are washed away in the river Lethe (*Purgatorio* 282). Percy Bysshe Shelley's fascination with the possibility of innocence in the apparently damned is elegantly explored through the character of Beatrice Cenci in his play *The Cenci*. That Dante's paradigm of virginity, Beatrice, and history's infamous father-rape victim and parricide, Beatrice Cenci, have the same name works allegorically throughout *The Cenci*. By contrast, Mary Shelley's novella *Mathilda* presents a more complicated grappling with the state of the soul of a girl who has experienced but not committed sin. While Shelley's Beatrice Cenci is responsible for her rapist's/father's death, Mary Shelley's Mathilda bears on herself only the perceived sin of engendering her father's desire for her body. Mathilda does not revenge herself on her father. Indeed, in classic torture-victim pattern she idealizes her rapist father, apologizing to him and eulogizing him even as she effectively commits suicide in despair over what he has done to her.⁵ Mary Shelley was surely aware that her husband's use of the name Beatrice in *The Cenci* complicates and makes poignant the moral status of the girl who kills her father after he rapes her. Mary Shelley's decision to name her heroine after a character from Dante who may stand for innocence regained after sin is then a resonant choice. Persistently in her novella, Shelley presents her heroine as unable to escape the sin committed against her. Mary Shelley's portrait of a daughter who, as the result of incest,

⁵ Judith Lewis Herman notes: "The paradox observed repeatedly in abused children [that] they cling tenaciously to the very parent who mistreats them." (*Trauma and Recovery* 107).

becomes suicidal conflicts with her husband's interpretation of Beatrice Cenci as a noble young woman fighting off the evil which is embodied in her father.⁶

It is Mathilda's unending sense of personal guilt in the face of her father's outrageous actions which has led the argument to be made, mistakenly, that Mathilda was seduced, that is, that she somehow desired to be assaulted.⁷ Far from being an indication that she desired the assault, the fact that Mathilda shoulders her father's guilt after he attempts to rape her shows that she is unable to admit the degree to which her father has betrayed her. In other words, Mathilda's continued protestations of love for her father after he has tried to rape her, and her haunting, fatal sense of herself as the guilty party in the event, both turn upon the figure of the waters of Lethe alluded to by the heroine's name, Mathilda who picks flowers by the river Lethe, which in turn alludes to Percy's translation "Mathilda Gathering Flowers." Mary Shelley's Mathilda has indeed swallowed the waters of Lethe, unable to swallow the bare facts of her father's violent and grotesque betrayal of her. She continues to feel guilty, as if she caused her father to assault her, because what she specifically has dis-remembered, or drunk the Lethean waters to forget, is her father's guilt in attempting incest upon her.

Mathilda topologizes her own body as a site and source of evil, both the container of poison and the cause of the poison she is forced to contain. She takes upon herself, upon her body, the poison. Mathilda, expounding upon her sense of her personal guilt

⁶Notably, Mary Shelley shares a decisive linguistic echo with Percy Bysshe's *Cenci*, when she writes that Mathilda is tortured "as if by a whip of scorpions," (*Mathilda* 202), thus reversing her husband's comparison of the children tortured by their father to "scorpions ringed by fire" (*Shelley's Poetry and Prose* 243). The scorpions which torture Mathilda come from Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Cenci*, her text responding to his.

⁷See Terence Harpold's "Did You Get *Mathilda* from Papa?"

after her father assaults her, designates her body the site of her guilt, effectively cutting off her voice from her body. She uses the metaphor of a poisoned body to describe the condition of her soul, especially interpreting this poisoned body as something unfit for social discourse. She writes:

Unlawful and detestable passion had poured its poison into my ears and changed all my blood so that it was no longer the kindly stream that supports life but a cold fountain of bitterness corrupted in its very source. It must be the excess of madness that could make me imagine that I could ever be aught but one alone; struck off from humanity; bearing no affinity to man or woman; a wretch on whom Nature had set her ban. (*Mathilda* 229)

Mathilda similarly experiences her body as a contaminated container, a space which must both be set apart from socially acceptable bodies and must also rigidly contain the poison of paternal semiotic which has been poured into her. She states that she must keep within herself this poison and, by keeping her secret, multiply the poison's effect within herself:

I was on earth the sole depository of my own secret. I must shrink back before the eye of man lest he should read my father's guilt in my glazed eyes: I must keep silent lest my faltering voice should betray unimagined horrors. Over the deep grave of my secret I must heap an impenetrable heap of false smiles and words: cunning frauds, treacherous laughter and a mixture of all light deceits would form a mist to blind others and be as the poisonous simoon to me. (216)

Not only does Mathilda see her body as set apart and poisoned, but also she believes that others see her this way. That is, she believes her physiognomy reveals her incest secret, for she says:

I believed myself to be polluted by the unnatural love I had inspired, and that I was a creature cursed and set apart by nature. I thought that like another Cain, I had a

mark set on my forehead to show mankind that there was a barrier between me and them...a gloomy mark to tell the world that there was within my soul that which no silence could render sufficiently obscure. (238)

Finally, she interprets her own body as monstrous. That is, Mathilda not only accepts the blame and guilt for her father's actions, but also believes that such guilt emanates from her body. The implication of her imagined bodily deformity is that her voice becomes an unacceptable voice. Her speech, then, is interdicted. She says of her own body and voice that:

So horrible to my own thoughts did this form, this voice, and all this wretched self appear; for had it not been the source of guilt that wants a name? (*Mathilda* 239)

In other words, Mathilda antithesizes Beatrice Cenci, inasmuch as Mary Shelley's heroine takes her father's guilt upon herself, rather than striking back against her father, in self-defense.

I am quoting at such length to emphasize the way that Mathilda interprets her father's incestuous aggression as an act which causes her bodily deformity. It is her sense of having a ruined body and therefore a ruined physical voice which renders Mathilda silent. In Mathilda's interpretation of the aftermath of the incestuous assault, what has been damaged by her father is her body and her ability to speak. Problematically, since she never blames her father for the crime of incestuous assault, she remains locked in her belief that she has an horrible voice. Her decision to postpone the revelation of her text, that is, to contain her voice until after her body has been vitiated through death, must be interpreted through the lens of her belief that her body is deformed by the markings of incest.

It is precisely at those moments when Mathilda most clearly remembers her father's sins against her that she most deeply blames herself for causing his sexual desire for her. She cannot bear remembering what he has done to her, without deflecting blame onto

herself. She thus considers herself a depository, containing in the territory of her own body her father's symbolic semen. Every time Mathilda approaches remembering her father's lust, she drinks again from the waters of Lethe and forgets his evil. After these forgetful draughts, she is left with only herself, and therefore locates the sin within herself. She must repeatedly forget the sins committed against her if she is to retain her position as the liminal guardian of innocence, the go-between, the active life of the soul. *Mathilda* is the story of a young girl's apparent suicide, a novella whose goal is the death of its heroine. It goes without saying that only the dead may drink from the waters of Lethe, only the dead may be allowed to forget their sins. Lethe, then, is the critical trope and topos of *Mathilda*.

Mathilda raises evocatively the question of whose sins are forgotten when the waters of Lethe are consumed. Dante's *Purgatorio* contends that the saved forget their own sins as those sins are gradually washed away through Lethe, the river of forgetting (*Purgatorio* 282). Mary Shelley's heroine instead forgets the sins of her father by assuming them to be her own sins. In other words, she makes of her body a Lethe which contains and, through her death, disposes of the sins of her father so that he can be saved by her, or at least remembered fondly by her. Indeed, her last thoughts as she is dying are that she will rejoin her father (*Mathilda* 246). While this desire to rejoin her father could be read as proof that she wanted him to assault her, I find the opposite interpretation stronger. Mathilda's final re-envisioning of her father as someone purified of his sins unmistakably engages the trope of the river of Lethe as a cleansing river, here making of Mathilda's own body that cleansing river. In other words, Mathilda's desire is to rejoin her father only after she, enacting through self immolation the trope of the river of Lethe, has drained away through her sacrificed body her father's sins. She does not desire a father who desires her,

rather, she longs for a father who has been purified of his desire to rape her. She is willing to erase her body in order to erase his lust for it.

If *Mathilda* is a post-traumatic novella, it is not surprising that it is a story about forgetting. Cathy Caruth has theorized the inextricable relationship between trauma and forgetting, even arguing that a definition of trauma is the forgetting of the traumatic event afterwards (*Unclaimed Experience* 57). Caruth presents the idea of a trauma-induced leave-taking from memory, which she argues is a definitive characteristic of trauma (58). According to Caruth, one's memory specifically cannot contain traumata beyond a certain intensity (111). Differing and developing from Caruth, I read *Mathilda* according to the assumption that there is a typical correlation between severe psychological trauma and a consequent wish to erase the traumatic event. In other words, rather than assuming Caruth's claim that trauma is marked by a leave-taking from memory as an epistemological truth, I argue that the commonplace topography of trauma involves a turning away from any literal telling about the trauma. The symbolic telling of the trauma, although it elides literal confession, does not involve forgetting. A symbolic confession through elision of the literal is thereby achieved. In other words, the trauma is relegated to the place of illegitimate speech and then reconfigured as metaphor. Perhaps post-traumatic amnesia, then, is not an epistemological truth but rather a trope which the post-traumatic text takes up in order to be legible. Concerning such encrypted trauma, it is crucial to see that the topography the speaker creates around the mental place of the trauma is a metaphoric map that outlines a symbolic space of the violation while refusing to enter into that space.

The uncanny forgetfulness which haunts and shapes the text of *Mathilda* could then be called post-traumatic. This forgetfulness is strikingly present in the last lines of Mathilda's father's letter to his daughter. Having attempted to sexually assault her, the father expresses his remorse to Mathilda in a letter which blames his sexual desire for his

daughter on her resemblance to her dead mother, his late wife. Mathilda's father writes to her:

If, after this life, I am permitted to see you again, if pain can purify the heart, mine will be pure: if remorse may expiate guilt, I shall be guiltless.

(Mathilda 208)

These lines, harbingers of the father's shocking forgetfulness of his own crime, are followed by an harrowing scene. After having attempted to persuade his daughter to enter into a sexual relationship with him, the father goes to the door of the room into which his daughter has fled. Mathilda has locked the door to protect herself against her father. The father stands before the door, perhaps here a symbol of the hymen, and contemplates a spectral image of his daughter's vulnerable, sleeping body. He behaves as if he had already been absolved from his crime against his daughter and were indeed her best protector against harm at the hands of other men, outrageously writing for her a nasty little prayer. He writes:

I have been at the door of your chamber. O Spirits of the Good [. . .] Bless my Child! Protect her from the selfish among her fellow creatures: protect her from the agonies of passion. *(Mathilda 210)*

The irony of this prayer could not be greater, for the father who attempts to rape his daughter has surely reached the apex of selfish behavior. The agony of passion from which Mathilda will suffer, and which will cause her despair and ultimate suicide, is not caused by her own desire but rather by the passion of her father's desire for her.

Of course, one could argue that the father is praying that his daughter be protected from himself, but his invasive presence before the door which she has locked against him hardly supports that view. In any event, the forgetfulness dramatically present in the father's letter of apology to his daughter initiates the daughter's own fatal forgetfulness concerning the nature of her relationship with her father. The father's capacity to forget

within the space of a few lines, or a few minutes, that it is his selfishness and his passion which have already destroyed his daughter predicts Mathilda's inability to remember the facts of her relationship with her father. Shelley's novella, then, explores the young girl's obsessive forgetting. She repeatedly conjures up loving images of her father, manufactured in opposition to the facts of his betrayal of her. For example, she writes of her father "He was about to die! My blood froze at the thought: a sickening feeling of horror came over me" and "Oh father, accept the pure heart of your unhappy daughter!" (*Mathilda* 212). The daughter's wish that her father purify himself of his sexual desire for her, as well as her insistence on her own pure heart, emphasize Mary Shelley's radical revision of the Myrrha myth. Mary Shelley makes clear that Mathilda, her modern day Myrrha, wishes for a real father, a father who protects her and does not desire her sexually.

Her wish that her father might not die and that she might be reunited with him as his daughter, after his passion for her has been purified away, indicates an insistent forgetfulness of the nature of the man whom the novella never names but clearly portrays as a selfish man, hardly capable of change. The novella begins with a portrait of the father as a man too passionately attached to fulfilling his desires, whatsoever they are:

His passions found a deep soil wherein they might strike their roots and flourish either as flowers or weeds as was their nature. His careless extravagance which made him squander immense sums of money to satisfy passing whims, which from their apparent energy he dignified with the name of passions. (*Mathilda* 177)

This passage indicates that his sexual passion for his daughter may well have been a product of his old habitual selfishness, and therefore have little to do with the girl herself. Significantly, the father remains un-named in this novella which describes incest as a "guilt that wants a name" (*Mathilda* 239). It is important, then, to understand that, while the words of the character Mathilda ignore the evidence of the father's guilt, showing a filial

devotion based exclusively on forgetting the evidence of her story, the text of the novella offers us extensive evidence that the father is at fault in desiring his daughter. The novella's events form an anti-strophe that, in implicating and blaming the father, unravels Mathilda's professed devotion to him.

The water of Lethe, by the banks of which Dante's Mathilda picks flowers, enters Shelley's novella as the waters of the ocean. These are the waters within which Mathilda's father drowns himself and these waters transmogrify into the dry but engulfing heath where Mathilda goes to commit suicide. The topography of the heath, undulant and expansive like the ocean, does not immediately offer Mathilda the Lethean forgetfulness alluded to by the heroine's name. Instead, it is Mathilda's own suffering, the tears which she so frequently weeps, and, finally, the heroine's willingness to be buried in the heath "as waters cover over the sea" that provide the allegorical parallel to the allusion of Shelley's heroine's name (*Mathilda* 246). The ability of the daughter, Mathilda, to forget her father's crime against her and to say, as she is dying, "Oedipus is about to die," as if she had been the perpetrator rather than victim of assault emblemizes her radical amnesia (*Mathilda* 176). The heath which buries the daughter acts in *Mathilda* as Lethe, for it covers the place where Mathilda believes the sin of incest has located itself: her body.

If the water of Lethe functions in Dante to cleanse the saved of their venial sins, in *Mathilda*, the victim's forgetfulness after surviving horrible trauma cleanses the father by dirtying the daughter. *Mathilda* is about the psychic cost of forcing oneself to forgive incest. Implicitly, then, Mary Shelley's novella speaks to Percy Bysshe Shelley's play, *The Cenci*, which describes the suffering of an incestuously assaulted daughter who emphatically does not forgive and forget. Mary Shelley, I argue, writes the character Mathilda's willful forgetfulness of her father's guilt over and against Beatrice Cenci's unremitting memory of incest. In this way, Shelley shapes a text which must be considered in light of *The Cenci*. Mary Shelley's novella forces the reader to consider the nature of the

difficulties of post-traumatic speaking, for Mathilda is unable to tell her story until she is dead. In Percy Bysshe's play, by contrast, the raped daughter Beatrice never for an instant forgets or mitigates her father's guilt of raping her. Her problem is not with speaking, or with memory, but rather with being heard and being believed. The raped daughter's act of parricide which centers *The Cenci* may or may not impugn her, may or may not make her guilty of a crime worse than her father's, but Beatrice Cenci certainly never impugns herself in the sense that she never blames herself for her father's raping her (*SPP* 263). In this way, she is the perfect opposite of Mathilda, honest and brutal where Mathilda is forgiving and forgetful.

Not only is Mary Shelley's novella an uncanny double to Percy Bysshe's play, but also *Mathilda* follows the contours of an uncanny text through its structure which is replete with repetitions and doublings. The father claims to assault the daughter only because she is so much like her mother, implying that Mathilda and Diana, mother and daughter, are doubles (*Mathilda* 209). Similarly, the father returns to the house where he loved his wife so that he may rid himself of his desire for his daughter, only to find the desire for his daughter becomes intensified in that house into which is inscribed the uncanny trajectory of a return to origins (*Mathilda* 210). Moreover, there is the implicit doubling in incestuous desire: the father, in desiring his own daughter, is surely desiring himself, this image more like him than any other. His desire to commit incest is also a repetition compulsion, indicative of the father's desire to return to the early love when his wife was young as his daughter is now. Incest itself is structurally uncanny.

Linked by the literary trope of father-daughter incest, there is, then, an extensive intertextual relationship between Mary Shelley's novella and the following texts: her husband's translation of Dante, and his play *The Cenci*. This relationship enframes the text of *Mathilda* within the uncanny structure of a textual response to another, uncited, text. *Mathilda* revises Percy Bysshe's play and translation. *Mathilda* does not, however,

explicitly mention these texts as doubles, does not claim to rewrite them, but rather writes itself implicitly alongside the husband's texts. *Mathilda*, then, adumbrates the gaps in masculine notions of feminine self-sacrifice and purity. *Mathilda* objects to the purified image of Beatrice in Dante and also objects to the courageous and doomed Beatrice in Shelley's play, presenting in their stead the slow, methodical suicide of a daughter who has suffered sin but not committed sin.

House-Keeping on Lethe's Banks

Mathilda, in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's novella, though not presented as an unusual girl initially, gradually becomes uncanny through her actions. While, as a child, *Mathilda* was dreamy, and made-up stories to amuse herself, the text of *Mathilda* presents these imaginative games as innocent forms of play (*Mathilda* 184). However, once her father declares his desire for her, *Mathilda* becomes uncanny, unnatural. As she says of herself, she becomes "a wretch on whom Nature has set her ban" (*Mathilda* 229). She enters a series of uncanny topoi. She moves to an isolated moor where she keeps house alone. This house on the moor is the epitome of the uncanny, as Freud describes it with relation to the feminine act of house-keeping. Freud writes that a house-wife who keeps a warm and friendly house is a: "careful housewife who knows how to make a pleasing *heimlichkeit* (domesticity) out of the smallest means," thus inscribing the achievement of banishing the uncanny, the *unheimlich*, into the realm of the feminine, that is, making its banishment woman's responsibility ("The Uncanny" 124). Keeping out the uncanny is part of being a good house-keeper, according to Freud. It is the good woman who banishes the spectre of bad house-keeping, *unheimlich* house-keeping. Unfortunately, *Mathilda*, keeping house on small means, is an *unheimlich* house-keeper. *Mathilda*'s incest trauma has its roots in the household she and her father set up together. It is in this idyllic household, where *Mathilda* is portrayed as a housewife of incomparable loveliness and charm, that the father's passion for his daughter begins. *Mathilda*'s house-keeping skills

are retroactively revealed to have been uncanny from the start: not only does she keep an uncanny house alone on the moor, a house uncanny because she has moved into it specifically to find a place for her death, but also her earlier house-keeping efforts, which she remembers as a joyful time with her father, had beneath them the doomed outcome of engendering her father's lust for her. I am not arguing that Mathilda actually caused her father's desire for her. Rather, I am arguing that her best efforts to be his house-keeper were based upon the house-of-cards of her father's incestuous lust for her.

Freud particularly places on women the burden of inviting in or keeping out the uncanny from the home. This alignment of the uncanny with the feminine is seen in his elaborate use of the house of prostitution as a marker within the repetition compulsion. Attempting to illustrate the repetition compulsion, Freud describes himself mistakenly returning over and over again to the red light district. Describing his walk, Freud writes:

I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more only to arrive by another detour at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny.

("The Uncanny" 138)

This uncanny feeling is, according to the parable of Freud's essay, the feeling of being pulled into a feminine realm. I am not arguing that the uncanny is feminine. On the contrary, my purpose is to demonstrate the rhetorical feints by which Freud constructs his concept of the uncanny as that which is feminine but not controlled by masculine need and desire. Of course, one might ask what could be more controlled by masculine need and

desire than a house of prostitution and the body of a prostitute. However, Freud's circular walk is not about himself going to the house of prostitution, but rather it is about the house of prostitution finding him. This delicate inversion of the usual run of things causes the scene to be uncanny.

Mathilda's uncanny houses, both the illusory happy one where she and her father live together before she knows that he has sexual longings for her, and also the unhappy one, on the moor, where she goes to hide herself until she can manage to die, provide the topography of the novella. However, these uncanny houses also shape the plot of *Mathilda*, for the otherwise static novella delineates a journey from uncanny house to uncanny house. Even Mathilda's very first household, that in which her birth caused her mother's death, has an uncanny feel because of the coupling of birth and death, the mother's dying to give her daughter life. Mathilda's household with her cold aunt, in the final account her luckiest house, also evokes the haunting image of a lone child in a large house isolated from the world. *Mathilda*, then, is structured through the action of its eponymous heroine moving from house to house and inhabiting them all in an uncanny fashion. Mathilda is the woman who fails to banish the *unheimlich*, the woman who does not achieve domestic grace but instead invites death into the house.

However, just like Freud's prostitutes who are perceived by the male speaker to be inviting him in, Mathilda is not so much inviting death into her house as metaphorizing the sort of death of the self which suffering incest has caused her. What makes the return to the prostitutes, typologized misleadingly by Freud as a realm of feminine power, *unheimlich* is the topographical subversion of the usual power structure which Freud's story presents. Usually, the man walks with intent to solicit to the house of prostitution where the prostitute has no choice but to accept him. In Freud's tale, the man cannot help but return to the body of the prostitute: he seems to return to her body against his will. Far from arguing that Freud is exploring any actual instance of female power in this brief

allegory of the repetition compulsion, I instead argue that Freud is exploring an instance of personal guilt. Just as the murderer always returns to the scene of the crime, the John always returns to the prostitute, repeatedly telling himself that it is she who draws him, when in reality it is he who forces her. The uncanny aspect of Freud's thrice returning to a quarter of whose character he could not long remain in doubt, results from a literally etymologically *unheimlich* movement, that of revealing, or un-secreting, guilt. As the guilt of a man who seeks prostitutes surfaces in his own consciousness, an anti-strophe is enacted by the covering fantasy that the prostitutes draw him to them, that his presence excites the prostitutes. The guilt of the one who violates is transformed into a fantasy of the uncanny power of the one who is violated.

Mathilda, the sexually desired daughter, is ineluctably compared to the prostitute, however much the father's rhetoric of love might attempt to obfuscate this parallel. The father repeatedly compares Mathilda to goddesses and to love personified, as a way of obfuscating the violence of his own incestuous lust (*Mathilda* 190, 207, 211). The daughter, Mathilda, becomes an uncanny character because of her father's repetition compulsion, just as Freud's strange women/prostitutes are rendered part of the uncanny tableau of masculine desire. The father's desire to see, in the person of his daughter, his dead wife, that is, the father's desire to return, with his daughter as his wife, to the home he had before his wife/her mother died, inscribes into the narrative of Mathilda's brief life the father's repetition compulsion. It is the father who replicates his old habit, of giving in to his desire, when he confesses to his daughter his sexual lust for her. The same father who abandoned his child and travelled for fifteen years, similarly, yields to his wish to confess to this daughter his sexual desire for her, just as, fifteen years prior, he succumbed to his wish to abandon her. The father's wish to have his daughter as he once had his wife suppresses the daughter's narrative, superimposing the father's wishes across the girl's

textual itinerary. In *Mathilda*, the eponymous heroine enacts with her life the uncanny role of the violated daughter and also claims through the confession of her writing that her apparently uncanny fate is in fact inflicted on her through her father's acting out of his desire. Like Freud's prostitutes, Mathilda is not uncanny herself, but rather is the victim of illicit desire.

It is Mathilda's father, and not Mathilda, who repeatedly ruptures social and cultural boundaries, first by travelling in countries where he does not understand the customs and may not be welcome, and finally by trying to convince his daughter to become his lover. The father's wanderings are specifically described as acts of invasion, of penetration. The novella tells us:

He had passed the sixteen years of absence among nations nearly unknown to Europe; he had wandered through Persia, Arabia, and the north of India, and had penetrated among the habitations of the natives with a freedom permitted to few Europeans. (187)

Given the father's subsequent treatment of his daughter, one has to wonder whether these "penetrations" were in fact "permitted" at all, or if they were rather forced upon the natives by the father's zealous expression of his own freedom, a freedom, apparently, to penetrate where and whom he wished. If Mathilda herself can be said to suffer from a repetition compulsion, it is that of repeatedly employing a mode of interpreting her own history. Her compulsion is to return in memory not to the assault she suffered at her father's hands but rather to the gentle memories of the time prior to the assault. She compulsively returns in memory to the highly idealized image she had constructed of her father before the assault. This clearly inaccurate image of the father, and the daughter's repeated mnemonic returns to it, construct the narrative that lends *Mathilda* its uncanny quality. Mathilda, after her father has attempted to rape her, says to an idealized, imaginary father:

My father, to be happy both now and when again we meet, I must fly from
all this life...in solitude only shall I be myself; in solitude I shall be thine.

(*Mathilda* 218)

This refracted nostalgia is chilling. The reader marvels that a daughter so assaulted by her father could wish to be with her father in the next life. The fear which Beatrice Cenci expresses when she contemplates her death, a terror that her father who raped her in life will meet her in the afterlife and continue to rape her, contrasts sharply with Mathilda's desire to meet her rapist/father in the afterlife. Continuing my argument that Mary Shelley had in mind her husband's play while she was writing *Mathilda*, Mathilda's loving comments about her father may be read all the more clearly as evidentiary of an uncanny repetition compulsion. Mary Shelley reveals that Mathilda is trying is to negate the traumatic knowledge of her father's desire by obsessively revisiting the site of an imaginary good father. Of course, Mathilda can never be a good house-keeper for her father because she cannot, in the narrative of *Mathilda*, be anything in relation to her father but the victim of his incestuous attention.

Mathilda is an uncanny house-keeper, then, not because she is, as she thinks herself to be, unnatural, but rather because she keeps house for her father, who wants to rape her, while repeatedly telling herself that he loves her and means her no harm. Her situation is unreal, in that her perception of a safe home is an illusion. The fissure between Mathilda's internal house-keeping narrative, that make-believe story she tells herself when she says that her father is good, and the narrative of the text of *Mathilda*, which portrays the same father as a child rapist so vicious he doesn't even get a name, tears the novella *Mathilda* into two parts: the text which discourses with Dante and the narrative which makes its telos its own erasure. This uncanny division is revealed primarily through the daughter's efforts to commit suicide, at which she finally succeeds. Her effort to kill off her body is an attempt to eradicate the presumed site of the father's desire so as to preserve

in her mind a purified image of her father, as if he had not desired her. The narrator's effort to erase her body, in Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*, is paralleled by the narrative's effort to erase its own tracks. The drama of the story is staged off-stage in conversations and hypothesizing actions, and the frequent allusions to dominant male authors' works serve to destabilize the authority of the text itself. When Shelley describes Mathilda through Wordsworth's language, quoting "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways," she supplants her own character with Wordsworth's Lucy (*Mathilda* 183). Rhetorically poised on the boundary of death, Mathilda's posthumous confession is also written on the margins of authority.

Reading What Has Been Erased

The text of Mathilda's confession presents a topos like that of the inhospitable uncanny houses in which Mathilda stays: it is a text that refuses to be inhabited by a reader and an author. It rejects its author by rhetorically blurring the boundary between the author and the narrator, and then by writing the novella from the position of the narrator's death. Similarly, it rejects its reader by insisting that only Woodville should read the text, so that all we who are not Woodville read *Mathilda* as interlopers. The novella implies that the only reason Mathilda's confession can be read is because of the happenstance of her meeting Woodville. The character of the male poet, Woodville, is ultimately responsible for bringing Mathilda's text to the public readership, just as he is responsible for providing Mathilda with what she feels is a listening ear, a reader who will read her confession. Our ability to read the text of *Mathilda*, together with the narrator's assertion that she is writing the text only for him, reveal that Woodville publishes the text. Despite the imperfections that have been noted in Woodville's character, structurally speaking, he is the mechanism through which Mathilda's tale is told.

If it is no new insight to suggest Woodville may be modelled on Percy Bysshe Shelley, might Mary Shelley, then, have considered her husband a conduit, someone who

would take her words to a wider public audience? We are accustomed to reading backwards through history with our knowledge that, in the end, it was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley who made sure her husband's poems reached the widest possible audience after his death, but there is no reason to think the devotion to each other's work would not have been mutual. Perhaps Percy and Mary's involvement with each other's work was reciprocal. For example, Kelvin Everest asserts that Shelley would have been "overjoyed" by his wife's posthumous rise to prominence (Everest 343). The figure of Woodville, then, may incorporate the idea of a husband's ability to save a violated daughter's voice or language. The extremely ambiguous answer to whether Woodville saves or fails to save Mathilda — he does not prevent her killing herself, but he does save her manuscript and publish it — gestures towards the complexity Mary Shelley perceived in the situation of an abjected daughter trying to purify herself of her abjection. The daughter Mathilda does not succeed in purifying herself of her father's sins against her. Indeed, she explicitly states that "I must shrink back before the eyes of man lest he should read my father's guilt in my glazed eyes" (*Mathilda* 216). However, the text of her confession of her experience stands metonymically as a purified body. The text of her confession stands as an aspect of Mathilda which has escaped the taint of rape. That text, rhetorically, is read only through the mediation of Woodville.

Drowning in the Serpentine

Between Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley there is shared not only a complex interweaving of texts read and texts written, but also a personal history. The couple who shared a reading diary also had in their memory the history of Shelley's first wife, Harriet. Though the character Mathilda may not have been strictly modelled on Harriet, in writing about the suicide of a very young woman, Mary Shelley cannot but have been reminded of Shelley's former wife. The question of whether Mathilda commits suicide, *per se*, can be debated. She states that she "dare not" kill herself (*Mathilda* 216).

My reading is that Mathilda exposes herself in such a way as to bring on her death, thus purposefully killing herself, an effective suicide. Mary Shelley also remembers Harriet in the young girl, Elinor. The relationship between the characters Woodville and Mathilda is formulated according to the assumption that Woodville's mourning for his dead wife, Elinor, prevents his loving Mathilda romantically. Mary Shelley in her text gives back to Harriet Shelley the love of her errant husband, for Woodville's devotion to his lost beloved shapes his interaction with Mathilda, especially his refusal to consider her a romantic partner.

Other symbolic ties link the scene of Harriet's death to *Mathilda*. The river Lethe, by the banks of which Dante's Mathilda picks flowers, parallels the water of the Serpentine in which Harriet drowned herself. Similarly, the text of *Mathilda*, like the Shelleys' marriage, is anchored by, or built across, a young woman's suicide. In the way that *Mathilda* is built around the hidden but omnipresent figure of Mathilda's dead body, the Shelleys' marriage rose around the spectral image of Harriet's dead body. Both Shelleys' grief and horror over the suicide of Harriet, then, finds emplacement in the writing of *Mathilda*, for the figure of a very young woman's dead body is the dominant controlling metaphor of the entire text. Every major event in *Mathilda* points towards the spectre of Mathilda's self-killed body. We are told as the novella opens that Mathilda is hours from her death and that, quite specifically, the manuscript will not be read by anyone until its narrator/heroine is dead. We read Mathilda's story first and foremost with the image of her dead body superimposed across the landscape of her confession.

Not quite a deathbed confession, the novella does not safely locate its heroine either in death or life. It is not a letter written by a living woman discovered years after her death. Yet *Mathilda* also does not locate its heroine in life, either. The text is rhetorically placed on the narrowest of margins between life and death, begun and finished in the brief hours when the narrator's death is taking place. The novella rhetorically gains a topos, a space,

for that death, making of that death a place from which to inaugurate text. The novella thus opens from the uncanny vista of the viewpoint of the newly dead. It begins with a mid-winter's eerily early sunset:

It is only four o'clock; but it is winter and the sun has already set: there are no clouds in the clear frosty sky to reflect its slant beams [. . .]. I live in a lone cottage on a solitary wide heath: no voice of life reaches me. [. . .] The frost has been of a long continuance. (175)

It is quite unclear whether the speaker is about to die, for she still says "I live," or whether she has just died, for she also says, "no voice of life reaches me." Strictly speaking, the narrator is able to produce language but not to receive it, able to talk but not to hear. Her mode of speaking, then, is similar to that of prosopopoeia, which only speaks and cannot listen. The slant of the sun and the slant of the land depicted in the scene suggest the view of someone lying on the ground, again obfuscating the question of whether the speaker is newly in the ground or writing from a sickbed. Mathilda writes her confession as she is dying, but it is important to note the slippage between descriptions of her as a woman newly dead and a woman about to die. The novella maintains itself imagistically and rhetorically on this uncanny edge, this space of a woman speaking neither from the place of the living nor from the placelessness of the dead. In this way, *Mathilda* makes death itself a place, an uncanny topos whose primary characteristic is emptiness.

Mathilda has practiced death. Describing her feigned suicide, which is the way that she escapes to her house on the heath, Mathilda writes:

I left my guardian's house and I was never heard of again: it was believed from the letters that I left and other circumstances that I planned that I had destroyed myself...soon all trace and memory of me was lost. (216)

This extraordinary gesture of self-elision is almost more shocking than suicide, because it insists the very young woman construct and maintain a life entirely liminal, a life hidden

and hedged in the margins topographically and also socially. The usual markers of life, of being among the living, then, do not apply to Mathilda. She hides herself on the heath by feigning her own suicide, so that no one will look for her. This initial act of feigning death establishes the trope of posthumousness which is the rhetorical strategy of *Mathilda*. If we allow that *Mathilda* may be read as part of an encrypted conversation with Percy Bysshe Shelley, then the gesture that appears in *Mathilda* is one of a fully presented self-erasure. Mathilda presents herself in process of erasing herself, she delineates and records her suicide, giving scant overt explanation as to why a young woman who has gone to such lengths to hide herself should, posthumously, wish to become *unheimlich* – uncovered, unsecret, uncanny, her history revealed in a strange confession.

Why should Mathilda wish her text to be written and read at all? In her essay, "Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*," Tilottama Rajan persuasively asks whether Mary Shelley intended *Mathilda* to reach any audience. Indeed, Rajan develops the extremely useful category of the *textual abject*, a term by which she locates, within codified literary production, the text of *Mathilda* ("Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*" 51). Rajan's insight turns on her discernment that an author's intention for a text may only partly be read in the author's historical, recorded actions concerning the body of the completed text. Instead, as Rajan contends, the gestures within the text itself more fully reveal the author's wishes regarding the audience, or lack thereof, which the text eventually will command ("Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*" 47). Perhaps *Mathilda* was written to Mary Shelley's father, as has been suggested since she sent it him to publish (*Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: an Introduction* 48). However, I have tried to show that *Mathilda* is also a part of the complex intertextual conversation between Mary Shelley and her husband. If the text of *Mathilda* targets no general audience, it certainly addresses itself to Percy Bysshe Shelley.

The Liminality of the Textual Abject⁸

A Consideration of the intertextual relationship between Mary Shelley and her husband returns us to the question of translation. Translation inhabits the topos of liminality. While being translated, a text inhabits a no-man's land between its author's mother-tongue and the translator's target language. Once translated, the text stands subtly mutilated, some parts of it necessarily lost in translation. A critical and central aspect of Mary and Percy's intertextual conversation was the process of translating other texts. The translating of works and the work of translating forms a conversation between the Shelleys. As pointed out earlier, Percy Bysshe encouraged his wife to translate Alfieri's *Myrrha*, as well as to translate *The Relation of the Death of the Cenci Family*. Mary Shelley was unable to complete an attempted translation of *Myrrha*. Strikingly, Mary Shelley's father, Percy Bysshe's hero, as well as the fictional father of Mathilda, both reject *Myrrha* as disgusting. Indeed, in Mary Shelley's novella, Mathilda's father's disgust at the mention of the play *Myrrha* signals his own incestuous desire for his daughter (*Mathilda* 192). Yet, it was Percy Bysshe who encouraged and persuaded Mary to begin the translation of *Myrrha*. The couple, then, used the act of translating other texts to knit together their own writing, and perhaps their own relationship.

In 1818 Mary Shelley had published a novel called *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* while Percy Bysshe Shelley's play *Prometheus Unbound* was completed in the next year. Both works allude to, indeed Shelley's play specifically responds to, the ancient Greek play, Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. Arguably, then, the works are types of translations, along the lines of Robert Lowell's *Imitations*, deeply engaging the ancient Greek language in the creation of their new, English-language texts. Mary Shelley's 1839 preface to her late husband's play makes this explicit:

⁸Here, I am referring to Tilottama Rajan's concept of the textual abject, an idea she develops in her essay on "Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*."

In the beginning [of *Prometheus Unbound*] he [Percy Bysshe Shelley] seems mostly the Greek scholar, imitating Aeschylus in English. Presently he finds his freedom and that is appropriate to the transition from Prometheus on the rock to the happiness won for life. (*SPW* 272)

Further, Percy Bysshe's own preface to the work reads in part: "Had I framed my story on this model, I should have done no more than have attempted to restore the lost drama of Aeschylus," indicating the extent to which his play is rooted in an initial code of translation, an attempt to bring out of silence a lost Greek text (*SPW* 206). I am not arguing that either Shelley was essentially a translator. Rather, I am elucidating the degree to which their writing was influenced by their habit of translating foreign language texts as a mode of and medium for conversation with each other.

The influence of earlier writers on the content of the Shelleys' writing, then, is not my primary focus here, but rather I am interested in their interaction with each other through foreign language texts. By establishing an approach to creating new literature that engaged on a regular basis the translating of canonical, foreign language texts, the Shelleys participate in a mode of intertextual writing that inflects their interaction with each other's writing. For example, not only do both Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley draw upon the character of Mathilda in Dante's *Purgatorio*, their allusive writings gesture towards each other. My object here is not so much to trace how Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's image of Dante's character Mathilda, as expressed in her novella *Mathilda*, differs from Percy Bysshe Shelley's elided lover in "The Question." Instead, I wish to draw attention to the liminality of completed works which retain the modal process of the act of translating. That is, while the uncanniness of the act of translation itself, so clearly signalled by Freud in the opening pages of "The Uncanny," is usually expunged in a finished translation, the densely intertextual writing of the Shelleys remain boundary texts of a sort, texts which when read together do not cease to participate in the mode of

translation even though the work is polished and complete. They translate, as it were, between each others' work. Since it is far more common to read Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley in light of her husband rather than *vice versa*, perhaps it is not surprising that two of her novels written while her husband was alive, *Frankenstein* and *Mathilda*, are often interpreted as instances of the textual abject, uncanny and liminal works, translations never quite completed.

Tracing a pattern of translation in some of the Shelleys' most esteemed literary creations I am not, of course, contending that everything one Shelley wrote is necessarily interrelated with something the other Shelley wrote. Nevertheless, the writings often address the same questions of literary inheritance. Percy Bysshe states that his aim in writing *Prometheus Unbound* is to correct Aeschylus, not merely to show homage. Similarly, *Mathilda* entirely turns on its head the assumption in the ancient myth of Myrrha that the daughter seduced her father (see Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book X). A strong intertextual link between the myth of Myrrha and Mary Shelley's novella, *Mathilda*, inheres in the fact that Mary Shelley, at her husband's behest, began translating Alfieri's *Myrrha* just as she was beginning work on *Fields of Fancy*, which became *Mathilda*. Mary Shelley left off finishing the draft of *Fields of Fancy*, but soon took up the same topic in *Mathilda*. In that sense, *Mathilda* completes the uncompleted *Fields of Fancy*. *Fields of Fancy* furthermore is itself a reworking of Mary Wollstonecraft's unfinished *Cave of Fancy* (*Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: an Introduction* 51). Here, the dead mother acts as a vanishing point in Mary Shelley's writerly conversation with Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Mathilda, then, responds to the ancient myth of Myrrha and to the man who is writing *The Cenci*. *Mathilda* is doubly translated because it begins not only with the work of translating the play *Myrrha*, and translating *The Relation of the Death of the Family of the Cenci*, but, more significantly, because it is answers Percy Bysshe Shelley's request

that she translate these texts with a pointed refusal to merely translate the texts. Instead, she takes it upon herself to rewrite the original texts which she has also translated. Just as he insists on correcting Aeschylus, she insists on correcting the ancient myth of Myrrha. Her response to his request that she translate *The Relation of the Death of the Family of the Cenci* is the production of the text of *Mathilda*. *Mathilda* answers publicly the ancient Greek myth Myrrha and answers privately her husband's radicalism and paternalism. That is, *Mathilda* emulates Percy Bysshe Shelley's own radicalism by standing on its head the meaning of the Greek myth of Myrrha. If her husband subverts *Prometheus Bound*, writing *Prometheus Unbound*, Mary subverts the myth of Myrrha by writing *Mathilda*. However, her novella also implicitly indicts the paternalistic system within which a wife relies on her husband to guide her literary endeavors by suggesting topics for her. What gesture more strongly indicts paternalism than a narrative detailing a daughter's suicide after escaping her incestuous father?

When we reconsider the lyric "The Question" in relation to the novella *Mathilda*, a few critical points of contrast and comparison arise. As noted, both works allude back to Dante's *Purgatorio*, through the character of Mathilda. However, while Mary Shelley's novella highlights the name Mathilda and follows in fairly few other ways the text of Dante's *Purgatorio*, Percy Bysshe's poem does not mention any name for the woman but does follow in detail one aspect of Dante's text: that of the flowers being gathered. Richard Holmes states that: "'The Question" grew out of Shelley's translation of Dante's *Purgatorio* Canto 28, lines 1-51" (Holmes 611). In Percy Bysshe Shelley's lyric the flower gatherer is the one who speaks and observes, not the one observed, and the flower gatherer has no clear gender. Instead the emphasis is placed upon the flowers, with a nearly hallucinatory intensity of vision. Indeed, the poem may be an hallucination of sorts, beginning with the lines "I dreamed that as I wandered by the way/ Bare winter suddenly was changed to spring" (SPW 614). The poem thus presents itself as something which

takes place in the topography of the mind, the flowers are "visionary flowers," not corporeal, rooted things ("The Question" line 33). The speaker is lured, in his visionary trance, to a bank to gather flowers. The river in this poem flows into the river Lethe. Let us assume, then, that the topos of "The Question" is that of the aftermath of Lethe's forgetfulness. In other words, in this lyric the river, which is not named and which may only exist in the imagination of the speaker, yields Lethean forgetfulness. Rather than simply standing within the text as a symbol, the river Lethe shapes the text into an amnesiac's search for specificity, making the text as a whole a metaphor for loss.

The speaker counters forgetfulness with the poet's best art, catalogue and metaphor: the flowers are listed by name exhaustively and then likened to "imprisoned children of the Hours" (line 37). The scene becomes one in which the dangerous forgetfulness caused by Lethe can ultimately only be solved by the poet's finding the right recipient of his nosegay of visionary flowers, that is, his proper reader. Forgetfulness becomes, in Shelley's re-working of Dante, a two edged sword. Not merely a way to cleanse away the memory of evil, Lethe allows the poet to be a poet, to gather "visionary flowers." But Lethe may also draw him away from the proper recipient of those flowers, the silent woman left on the bank of bare winter. This other who is lost when the poet, by gathering flowers, imitates Mathilda, is likely Percy Shelley's figure for Mathilda.

The figure of Mathilda in "The Question," then, is an allusively uncanny figure, a woman split apart. If it is Mathilda who gathers the flowers in *Purgatorio*, it is, in "The Question" an anonymous, lost woman who stands by the way at the very point of departure from which the poet's reverie began. The poet's inability to find Mathilda, or even to name her, and the haunting close of the lyric – "Oh! To whom?" – brings the poem to a place more barren than that of bare winter which began the poem. The elegiac tone evoked by the poem suggests that the poem may be set in Shelley's childhood home terrain of Sussex by the river Arun. The poem's elegiac mood darkens the enthralling

pleasure of reverie that the poem also evokes. While the river Arun is not the river Lethe, one notes a resonance between returning to the place of one's childhood (and in Shelley's case, because he was landed gentry, this is also returning to his family land), and the knowledge-erasing properties of the river Lethe. In other words, since sins are typically committed by adults and not by children, to return symbolically to the river of one's childhood may itself be a gesture like that of going to the river Lethe. The river Arun, then, may be Percy Shelley's Lethe.

In any event, the poet who gathers visionary flowers leaves behind on the banks of Lethe a person, most likely a woman, who is not named. The anonymous woman is desired. It is her body and then the absence of her body that control the poem. The purported purpose of gathering the nosegay is that the poet might present it: that is, might return to the place where he began and give the nosegay to the person with whom he began his walk. The woman's disappearance, and her anonymity, ruptures the text of the lyric. Suddenly, the lyric is not a lovely story about gathering imaginary flowers to warm against winter's chill, but instead becomes an enactment of abandonment and erasure. The poet is ultimately abandoned by the woman whom he left waiting for him on the banks of Lethe. The rupture of the lyric text is precisely contiguous with the outlines of this missing woman's body.

The Holy Name of Father Was Become a Curse to Me

As we have seen, the text of *Mathilda* also traces the disappearance of a woman's body. Perhaps the novella traces the vanishing of the addressee of "The Question." Both *Mathilda* and "The Question," find their point of origin, or, as Percy Shelley writes, the "spot whence I had come," in the first fifty-one lines of Canto 28 in Dante's *Purgatorio* ("The Question" line 39). Both texts reach back to that scene from Dante as their source. However, unlike "The Question," which tears only at the end of the poem, the entire narrative of *Mathilda* is the story of a rupture. *Mathilda* takes the point of view of a young

woman experiencing self-erasure after violation. While I have thus far focused on the manner in which Mathilda erases herself, escaping from society and then exposing and starving herself, it is also clear that Mathilda's father erases her by his refusal to treat her as anything other than an aspect of his desire, a body to penetrate. Similarly, Woodville effectively erases Mathilda by denying her himself as an audience to her story, an audience she so desperately craves that she chooses to trade her life for the chance to have her story published.

Mathilda assumes that Woodville cannot possibly separate the sins committed against her from her own moral status. She therefore decides against telling him her horror story while she is still alive. She remarks:

Woodville had told me that there was in my countenance an expression as if I belonged to another world; so he had seen that sign; and there it lay a gloomy mark to tell the world that there was that within my soul that no silence could render sufficiently obscure. (*Mathilda* 238)

Her assumption that Woodville might see her as abject and corrupted by her father's lust may well have been correct. By refusing to tell her tale during her life, Mathilda protects herself from being viewed as a polluted person. Strikingly, a few critical readings of *Mathilda* support the rationale behind the fictional heroine's reticence, inasmuch as it has been contended that Mathilda caused or at least enjoyed her father's attempt to rape her.⁹ In other words, Mathilda's assumption that to confess her anguish would bring her more censure than relief is uncannily proven correct in the one-hundred-forty year aftermath of the completion of *Mathilda*, that reflects the novella's unpublishable status. The elliptical

⁹ For example, Mary Chapman argues that the incestuously assaulted Gothic heroine, even in instances of father-daughter incest, usually desires her assault (*Masochistic Pleasures of the Gothic* 187). See also "Have you got *Mathilda* from Papa?" by Terence Harpold.

narrative gestures that characterize the formation and deployment of the trope of the posthumous voice in *Mathilda* and give the novella its uncanny character may arise from the author's recognition of the rhetorical complexity necessary to convey a tale of a woman's humiliation and degradation without abjecting the narrator. The rhetorical shifts which are the drama of *Mathilda* pull the status of the embodied object from the heroine onto the text, the corpus, itself, resulting in this uncanny text being quite accurately named the "textual object" ("Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*" 46).

An Innocent Death

The drama of *Mathilda* rarely manifests as external action, but instead is contained in speeches and letters. Not an epistolary novel and not a play, the novella draws heavily on both these textually performative genres to create a topography within which words as representations of occluded actions are emphasized to the near exclusion of other representational tropes. *Mathilda* does not use many individual metaphors. It is, however, possible to read the body of the text as itself a metaphor standing for the missing body of the dead Mathilda. The gesture of eliding the presence of a woman narrator's body in favor of presenting her words as text divorced from her body is structured in *Mathilda* through the narrator's suicide. The narrator says quite clearly of her written testimony that: "In life I dared not; in death I unveil the mystery" (176). The death of Mathilda becomes a topos, the visiting of which alone can unveil the mystery. The novella structures itself along a bifurcation, a divide. On the one side is Mathilda's living, present body. That is the side alluded to by the text but never dwelt on by the narrative that relentlessly sweeps past Mathilda's body, always striving towards the moment of her death. Mathilda's body is the topos abjected by her father's incestuous sexual desire. On the other side is Mathilda's language: the text itself. The heroine explicitly clarifies that we cannot read the text until her body is absent.

That Mary Shelley gives her heroine an allusive name, and then turns her story rather sharply away from echoing the fate of Dante's Mathilda, suggests that Shelley has chosen for her narrator a sort of *nom-du-plume*. This narrator may therefore be burying with her body her identity, leaving behind her only the text of her confession. *Mathilda* assumes that the absent body of the violated woman allows the language of that same woman to be read without condemning her to abjection. In her determination to confess only posthumously, the narrator interdicts and indicts the entire territory of life, saying: "In life I dared not" (176). Mathilda wishes to be erased from life, expressing great joy when she achieves a disappearance: "soon all trace and memory of me were gone" (219). There is a dramatic reiteration in *Mathilda* of Mathilda's wish to erase all memory of her existence from the Book of Life, a desire which indicates that she believes her father's sin inhabits her body and her self so thoroughly that her entire identity must be washed away in Lethe's waters. Of course, this also alludes to the statement in Revelations that only the saved "are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (*King James Bible*, Revelations 21.27). Rather than letting the memory of being violated by her father be washed away by Lethe, Mathilda lets the memory of herself be washed away by Lethe.

This defense, of unveiling her mystery posthumously, offers a complicated safety. While her death may remove from the reader's mind the spectre of the narrator's abject body, it may also call to mind an image of a woman abjected by death. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley must have learned very well from the reception of her father's publication, after her mother's death, of *Memoirs of the Author of the Rights of Woman*, that death itself does not protect a woman from censure. On the other hand, a heroine/narrator who sacrifices herself, dying in order to demonstrate her full agreement with those who would consider her polluted, offers a strongly appeasing gesture to her audience. It is the symbolic willingness to be dead, the willingness to enter the topos of death, as it is linked to the trope of the posthumous voice, which makes that rhetoric a two-

edged sword in women's writing. The trope of the posthumous voice offers in one gesture a double message. On the one hand, the trope indicates that the woman writer seems to agree with her male readers that she should be dead, because only then will her body cease to threaten them. On the other hand, the rhetorical gesture of using the trope of the posthumous voice is a feint, performing the illusion of death without in fact killing the woman who is writing. This trope protects the space of the woman's linguistic production from hegemonic, paternal encroachment.

Mathilda dies from the after-effects of gathering flowers. "This night hurried on the last scene of my tragedy," she says, alluding to the night she spent gathering flowers (*Mathilda* 242). In this reverie she explicitly imagines herself like Mathilda in Paradise in Dante's *Purgatorio*. Her actions repeat the passage in *Purgatorio*, which Percy Bysshe translated, the act of gathering flowers. For Mathilda, the act of gathering flowers, visionary or otherwise, results in her exposure to the elements and directly kills her. By contrast, the poet in "The Question" survives the completion of his nose-gay, but may have caused the disappearance, or even death, of the beloved whom he left in order to gather the flowers. Mathilda's name brings the trope of Lethe, a mechanism for forgetting, crucially into play in Mary Shelley's novella. In a sense, then, the river Lethe runs through the landscape of *Mathilda*. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's encrypted dialogue with the paternal language that Dante's and Percy Bysshe Shelley's texts represent makes clear that she recognizes a danger to women who wish to gather the visionary flowers of language. However, even though her encounter with these masculine hegemonic writers may prove lethal to Mathilda, it does not, as it were, prove fatal. Mathilda's body's death marks the beginning of her writing, the birth of her text.

*Third Chapter**A Rhetoric of Translation: The Entranced Edge*

Turning from a consideration of Mary Wollstonecraft and Percy Bysshe Shelley as translators, the following chapter explores the relationship between translation as a linguistic gesture and the formal parameters of post-traumatic narrative. I will connect the form of translation, of crossing from one language into another, with that formal aspect of post-traumatic narratives which is their rhetorical stance of having come through. To translate, between texts, languages, categories, is to enter a state of liminality, of trance. The border territory between languages reveals a problem of language, or of signification, while at the same time demanding an entranced trust in the reconcilability of words to the objects or ideas they signify. In considering a relationship between the rhetorical gesture of writing as if the speaker were already dead and the act of translation it is important to recognize how the act of crossing, whether of crossing over into death or across into another language, creates a space of liminality and uncertainty. The breaking of codes which occurs when one language is transformed into another language, or when a living speaker enters the category of the dead, is the result of an abrogation, a trespass, of sorts. Indeed, while the Greek term for translation, *metaphor*, implies a translation in the sense of a carrying across, or a carrying over, the Latinate word, *traduce*, suggests a decided leading away (*μεταφωρω*: "to carry to another place;" *traduco*: "to expose to ridicule"). A translated text has not only departed from its origin, crossing over into another language, but also a translated text has been led away from itself, trespassing its own boundaries. This double aspect of translation, as both a moment of being led astray and a moment of

crossing over into a desired new territory, is also critical to the gesture of writing in the guise of posthumousness.

The trope of the posthumous voice is figurative writing at its edge, a writing whose topos is both erased and limitless. In this trope the trance of the translator becomes the mode that gives place to the dead self: here, the self written into text is fully traced, completed, by death. The graphic aspect of the text, the written artifact, holds absolute sway when the text presents itself as if it were spoken by an already dead narrator. Here, the narrator's body figures a disappearance, and the text becomes the only body that the reader reads. In the following chapter, I will show that the trope of the posthumous voice is formally akin to translation, inasmuch as this trope transposes, or crosses, the narrator's and author's deaths. I will also contend that the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing enacts a subversion of woman's patriarchally dictated alliance with the mute body. This trope presents instead an aesthetic based on classical rhetoric which inscribes the feminine narrator as an author whose power inheres in her ability to command the border territory where the body begins its vanishing but still traces itself as text.

The trope of the posthumous voice is a type of translation because it places together the fragmented pieces of interior knowledge, the epistemological aftermath of trauma. Of the translator's project, Walter Benjamin writes:

Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match each other in the smallest details: in the same way, a translation must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language.

("Task of the Translator" 78)

That is, the translator places words together in a target language, which is usually the translator's mother tongue, so that the words will signify analogously to the way that the words in the original text signified. The writer using the trope of the posthumous voice is

also a translator: she takes the unspeakable text of trauma, Dickinson's "element of blank" (poem 650 line 1) and then places the fragmented pieces of that knowledge together, reassembling as aftermath a textual self. The original text, the text being translated, is uncanny because it is written in a language other than the translator's mother tongue, or target language, and yet this original text is also a place of origin. Origin, as the mnemonic site of home, when altered, becomes uncanny. In the same way, the text of trauma's aftermath is both uncanny and originary. In the trope of the posthumous voice, it is the text of trauma, figured as the death of the self, which is the original story. The shattered fragments of a traumatic knowledge are then reassembled in the mother tongue: here, the mother tongue, or target language, depends on the writer's facility with metaphor. The original text is the traumatic memory itself. The symbolic space of death, then, serves as a textual marker for the original injury, the trauma metonymized by death. A symbolic death of the self, the space of death in the text also serves as a rhetorical boundary, highlighting the skill of the writer who assembles lyric or narrative text from a shattered tale.

Translation of course can be quite an utilitarian act, transferring basic information, like a recipe or a set of directions, from one language to another. It can also be an esoteric struggle to remake in another language the untranslatable poetry of an original text. The process of translating text inevitably calls into play the trope of the border, the rhetoric of liminality. As the poet Mebdh McGuckian suggests in "Clotho," translation brings up the visceral aspect of language, the way that any spoken language is a sort of "moan." Of Clotho, McGuckian writes:

Mistress of tone, her moan

Comes clear-cut from another world,

As if translating. (McGuckian 65)

The strangeness of speech, then, rises to the forefront of language when texts are translated. The homey, *heimlich*, speech of one's native tongue, or mother tongue, comes

to seem strange and estranged when one attempts to translate into that language. Freud implicitly recognizes the uncanny force that translation brings to language when he bases the first part of his essay "The Uncanny" on a comparison of different languages and their words for "uncanny" (121-123). Freud emphasizes implicitly the worldly and word-ly aspect of the concept called the uncanny. His smorgasbord of languages' names for the uncanny establishes translation as the paradigmatic linguistic uncanny terrain (122). The structure of Freud's essay suggests that what is most uncanny of all is the word, "uncanny," and what is uncanny about the word is its capacity to reveal the strangeness of language itself through permutating translations of uncanny.

The uncanny draws a boundary around home and safety, around ordinariness. In this sense, the uncanny in literature marks a symbolic boundary, placing to one side the unspeakable text and the illegible space of death. Jacques Derrida asserts that the writer dies into his text, making the text itself a boundary line, a border of the author's life (*The Ear of the Other* 16). However, when the narrator rather than the author dies into her text this boundary line changes so that the narrator herself becomes the boundary line around her text. The trope of the posthumous voice, then, makes of the narrator's erased body a boundary line, a vanishing point. What role can this narrator's body play in the troped posthumous text? Perhaps the narrator's buried body protects the narrator's voice, acting as a sort of membrane and remembrance, a boundary traced as memory around the narrator's confession of a trauma symbolized as death.

In "Living On: Borderlines," Derrida explores Maurice Blanchot's *Death Sentence*, a two-part novel, as a way to discuss translation and the narrator's relationship to death. Derrida renames the gap between the two parts of Blanchot's novel, both of which focus upon posthumous female heroines, a hymen, suggesting a "mad hypothesis of a hymen existing between the two women" ("Living On: Borderlines" 167). It is useful, here, to ask why Derrida chooses to assign to this gap between twinned texts a feminine nature and a

virginal aspect. Perhaps Derrida assigns to the gap between the two texts the name, "hymen," because he reads absence and aporia as particularly feminine, the most feminine form of speech, the most demure speech, being no speech at all. However, inasmuch as Derrida's own text, "Living On: Borderlines," performs the function of an hymen, a boundary across which the reader and the text written by Blanchot interact but do not touch each other, the semiotic function of this hymen changes into something more complex than a mere gap. The hymen that Derrida argues connects the dead heroines of *Death Sentence* is analogous to the structure of criticism itself, which binds itself to the text it criticizes. In the trope of the posthumous voice, then, the presentation of and indeed dramatization of a gap within a speaker divided by a trauma renamed death enact a form of self-censorship. In this way, the trope of the posthumous voice effectively tricks a male readership into accepting what may otherwise have been rejected as a subversive female-authored text.

Trading on the marginal way that woman's death placates the male readership, Blanchot's *Death Sentence* is built from the stories of the deaths of two women. It presents the feminine always and only in the guise of the double, a sort of apotheosis of uncanniness. Blanchot's novel and Derrida's critical response to that novel describe a male perception of female speech. Blanchot's and Derrida's texts act as mirrors, reflecting some challenges faced by woman-authored, woman-narrated texts, as read by a patriarchal readership. Derrida's striking word choice in naming a textual gap an hymen indeed suggests a patriarchal bias, gazing at the woman's body as primarily a sexual boundary to be either crossed or preserved from rupture. The hymen as metaphor also suggests the penetrable but never torn boundary between mirror images: between mirror images there is a sort of endless virginity, neither side able to penetrate through the other. *Death Sentence's* two women, then, mirror each other in their efforts to textualize their bodies' experiences of dying. After the first woman dies, the narrator tells us that she has revived:

I myself see nothing important in the fact that this young woman was dead, and returned to life at my bidding, but I see an astounding miracle in her fortitude, in her energy, which was great enough to make death powerless as long as she wanted. (*Death Sentence* 30)

Then the text breaks off and regains itself in a consideration of the next woman's body. The next woman is named Nathalie, or birth, and she seems to represent a rebirth of the first woman, for her body is marked by scars, as if she had come through a bodily trauma:

That day, something happened. I remember that she showed me her hand and said, "Look at this scar." On the back of her hand there was a rather large, diagonal swelling. (35)

Death becomes a mirror placed between the two women's stories. Here, the unruptured boundary between mirror images forms a topos within which the two women try and fail to pronounce their own sentences. Their language is sentenced to the death of being outside sentences.

Death, in *Death Sentence*, sets up a mirror, an immaculate space between two women. This boundary is then assigned the quality of muteness by the male critic. By contrast, the mirror of the critic's own text extends its volubility across the implied boundary between the text and the footnote. The footnotes of Derrida's "Living On: Borderlines," in volume at least, equal the space of the essay's "real" text. In "Living On: Borderlines" Derrida establishes a masculine doubled text to match the feminine doubled text of Blanchot's novel. The implication of Blanchot's contrapuntal rhetoric suggests that, within the woman herself, a dead body of which the living speaker tells, there persists a boundary of muteness, a lack of authorial capacity. By contrast, the shape of Derrida's essay, with its doubled space of male authorship, demarcates a boundary of excessive volubility: not a mute and vulnerable hymen but a bridge of verbal excess, a bridge joining footnotes and major text, margin and center, in a show of dominance.

The mirror of "Living On: Borderlines" does not reflect how women writers actually write, but rather how a woman author is often read. The women characters in Blanchot's *Death Sentence* seem to have power over that text because they double each other, each woman rhetorically enabling the other woman to survive the annihilating gaze of the male lover who occupies both halves of the text. The hymen that Derrida proposes, then, is not merely the recognition of a gap dividing texts along its boundary line; his "mad hypothesis of the hymen between the two women" also inadvertently reveals a way for the women to step outside the constricting male narrative gaze. By speaking from the space of the double, they gain authorial status. "Each woman lives off and dies of the other, preserves the other and loses the other," Derrida contends (167). The textual hymen, then, the gap within *Death Sentence*, is a space of transfiguration. In this sense, the trope of the gap enacts a permanent narratorial virginity. The narrator writing across the caesura of death, always the case when the narrator uses the trope of the posthumous voice, writes as a double to herself: she is both the dead corpse and the living voice which tells the tale. The woman writer employing the trope of the posthumous voice writes a feminine narrator bifurcated and doubled by death. Without placing the feminine body in explicit visibility, the trope mobilizes a feminine narrator who is protected by herself as a double figure.

Blanchot's novel, then, acts as a template for some ramifications of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. His novel is not an example of this trope, but rather it suggests the masculine perception of the trope. For even when they approach death, the women in Blanchot's *Death Sentence* are nevertheless viewed by their common lover as useful bodies, not writers of sentences. Both J., who dies and then returns to life, and Nathalie, who intends to kill herself, are dramatized peculiarly and particularly as bodies capable of, literally capacious for, death. The women exist within the space of the text primarily as bodies: dying bodies, dead bodies, or bodies on a borderline between life and death. The role of death as a bodily enterprise, then, is assigned to these women,

written onto them by the death sentence that the male narrator signifies. The death sentence inscribes not one sentence but all the many sentences comprising the text that the male narrator governs. The death sentence is spoken and written by the male narrator but enacted by the female characters. It is possible to argue that J., by never completing her death, by always remaining at the borderline of death, focuses within her textual body a literal stopping of death. However, in *Death Sentence*, her reticence is not a linguistic but a figurative gesture. The power of the sentence as language, rather than as stopping, is retained entirely by the male narrator. The body of the woman marks the physical space of death about which and around which the male narrator structures his sentences.

The hymen perceived by Derrida as that blank space joining and separating the two women of Blanchot's diptych text, however, suggests a subversive topos of speech for the two women, a way for the mute, dead, or almost dead, bodies of the women to sneak into the production of written sentences. Rather than merely repeating the cryptic phrase, "a rose," as does the female character, J., it is also within J.'s position to speak through the gap joining her to Nathalie, that is, through the silence which the male narrator temporarily loses (*Death Sentence* 33). The birth and re-birth which Nathalie's name represents suggests the possibility of a posthumous birth of J.'s narrative voice, this trope of the rose. The hymen, or the gap between the women, then, affords each woman a possibility of speaking, because it opens the possibility of a double feminine narrator, a narrator at once living and dead. It is this uncanny quality of doubleness that bisects and limits the male narrator's gaze and therefore makes Blanchot's novel so useful in illuminating the trope of the posthumous voice as it appears in women's writing.

The uncanny effect of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's works, *Frankenstein* and *Matilda*, of some of Dickinson's lyrics, and of Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, all turn on the rhetorical use of a double implicit within the narrator's speech. Also, Shelley's Victor Frankenstein is not only doubled by his monster, his story is communicated textually

through the medium of his rhetorical double, Robert Walton. Similarly, Mathilda, doubled with the Lucy Gray of Wordsworth's Lucy poems through the references to Wordsworth in *Mathilda*, is doubled with her mother through her father's sexual desire for both the women's bodies. Further, Mathilda has a double of sorts in Woodville the poet into whose hands Mathilda grants her posthumous confession. Coyly, Mathilda eschews the burden of authorship and offers that role to her foil, Woodville: "I leave for your eyes only this confession," she writes to him (*Mathilda* 245). In other words, while Mathilda rejects her place as the teller of her own tale by dying before her tale, or rather dying into her tale, she ensures that her words will be translated into the public venue by the illustrious poet, Woodville. Similarly, Frankenstein's story is told only by Robert Walton. We never hear anything directly from Victor Frankenstein or from his monster. Instead the monster's tale is thrice translated: we read the monster's confession as it was read by Mrs. Saville, written by Robert Walton who heard it from Victor Frankenstein. Further, the monster himself has learned the language in which he talks by eavesdropping on an Arabian woman being taught English. The monster's language is learned only through translation. As such, his tale is always already translated. He can only speak with that uncanny tongue whose original form remains hidden, a double or an other inevitably implied behind the presented text.

Unlike most speakers of most any language, the monster has no mother tongue, just as the monster has no mother. The monster speaks and knows only a language in translation. The speakers in *Death Sentence* consigned to speak an always already translated language are the two women who forever are in the process of dying and yet cannot die in Blanchot's novel. The women are not narrators, they do not write a death sentence, or any sentence, in the text of *Death Sentence*, rather, they bear the male narrator's sentences on their dying bodies. I compare these women, J. and Nathalie, to Frankenstein's monster because they all three speak from the point of view of revenance,

of having crossed over into death and of having crossed over into the space of the abject. The monster and these two women speak a language denuded of power-in-the-world: they are irrevocably locked into a rhetoric of translation. They must ceaselessly translate in order to speak at all. Frankenstein's monster and the women in *Death Sentence* have no access to direct narratorial function. Their revenant condition, then, is a metaphor expressive of their rhetorical position. The linguistic pattern of the monster and of the dead women determines their death-in-life condition, rather than the other way round.

Indeed, Victor Frankenstein and the male narrator of *Death Sentence* have in common an obsession with the body as effigy, the body dismembered in order to be remembered. Frankenstein collects pieces of dead bodies to create an entire creature stitched together from various dismantled corpses. Derrida describes the male narrator's desire, in *Death Sentence*, to preserve the women in a state in which the women are physically present, in the form of the death mask, and mentally absent, because they are dead. Of the narrator of *Death Sentence*, Derrida asks:

Should we say that he gave her the idea of or the desire for the death mask as he had wished to embalm the other woman, in order to preserve both of them, to keep them alive-and-dead, living on? (173)

The desire of Victor Frankenstein to preserve what has already been buried mirrors the desire of *Death Sentence*'s hero to preserve what should already have been buried. This desire finds its focus in the bodies of the two women of *Death Sentence*: Nathalie, who prepares for suicide by having molds made of her body, and J., who actually dies but is then preserved either in the fantasy of the male gaze, or through her own uncanny, Ligeia-like willfulness, in a borderline state in which her body is dead but her soul/spirit refuses to leave her body. It is never clear whether J. herself desired to be a revenant or whether the narrator, her former lover, desired her in that state. Similarly, Nathalie hovers near death, planning to offer her male lover a sculpture of herself before she kills herself. In

these texts dominated by the bodies of the dead women, the male narrator silences the women by turning their bodies into effigies. This desire to silence women successfully, which Derrida highlights by calling the space between the stories of the two women in *Death Sentence* a hymen, suggests a source of the power of the trope of the dead-woman-speaking. This trope answers the male desire for a silent woman with the double-edged sword of a dead woman who talks.

The dead woman who is still speaking, though purely as a rhetorical ploy, presents a voice separated from the abjected feminine body. The trope of the posthumous voice, entirely an act of rhetoric, borders and unites the dead and abjected woman's body with the surviving and sublime voice of the feminine narrator. Separated from the culturally abjected position of woman's body, the trope of the posthumous voice then gains ascendancy through irony, deflecting the male gaze. Neither J. nor Nathalie are easily contained within their dead bodies in *Death Sentence*. The already dead and the always dying women influence and shape the text as if against the will of the narrator. They slip outside the bounds of his desire and elude his control. The hymen posited by Derrida as a border between the mirror texts of *Death Sentence* creates a doubled woman, making Nathalie and J. like one body. This same trope of the double, not of a doubled narrative but of an implied double narrator (dead body, living voice), occurs in the trope of the posthumous voice.

The double, or uncanny, aspect of the trope of the posthumous voice instates a symbiosis. Here, the text's language contains a narrator's presence while the physical place of the narrator who claims to be already dead when she tells her tale stands outside of the text. Disembodied, she marks an empty space. As text, the language of the dead speaker is necessarily at a remove from any possible imagined or figured topos of the speaker's body. The speaker's body, because it is dead, no longer presents the figurative possibility of producing a semiotic rhythm. I am here using the word semiotic according to

Tilottama Rajan's interpretation of the Kristevan *semiotike*. In "Language, Music and the Body," Rajan argues that the Kristevan *semiotike* functions rather precisely like Nietzsche's Dionysian principle as that which gives force but not form to aesthetic movement. Rajan reads an echoing of Nietzsche in Kristeva's development of the notion of the *chora* (151). Unlike the onomatopoeic semiotic flow with its strong connections to the speaking body, the body of the narrator who claims to be already dead when she writes has body only through the speech which she traces. However, this implied woman's body is given within the text as an impossible topos, for the narrator claims that her death precedes her speaking. It is a given of the text using the trope of the posthumous voice that the narrator's body is out of reach.

The body of the posthumously postured narrator cedes entirely to the textual corpus that she speaks. The semiotic within such a text, then, indicates no body but the textual body. The text becomes a body double for the woman feigning her own death; the text fronts for her, covers her tracks. Derrida implies a bodily metaphor for the semiotic flow when he writes in "Living On: Borderlines" that "blood circulates through...the stories," that is, blood circulates in both, twinned stories of *Death Sentence* (171). The uncanny union that Derrida perceives between the two neither dead nor alive women of *Death Sentence* is a union which he argues is structured across a hymen not merely because the diptych form introduces a border into the interior of the text, but also because the language of the texts is a presence shared by the two barely living bodies of the women. That is, inasmuch as the vanishing of the bodies of the women of *Death Sentence* is the plot of Blanchot's novel, the sub-plot of that novel is the way in which the language of the text becomes paradoxically the life-blood of the two women. The hymen of Derrida's "mad hypothesis" refers implicitly to the problem of the semiotic within a language denuded of blood by narratorial death.

The question haunting such troped posthumous writing then becomes what is the force quickening the semantic structures of the text. The aporia between the dead body of the woman who speaks and the troped posthumous voice, while not what I would call a hymen, is a space through which the force of the semiotic gains strength, a gap through which a charge crosses. The trope of an uncannily doubled narrator, the woman both buried and speaking, then, draws on the energy of a liminal space, that gap always present within the language. The doubled, or split, character of the speaker who pretends to speak from the point of view of the dead is joined to the corpus of the text she narrates. In the trope of the posthumous voice the border of authorial death, which Derrida argues surrounds any text, and which is also the rupture at the edge of the text, enfolds back into the text. In this trope, then, the boundary of the text resists becoming the space of death, for the already dead speaker is speaking anyway. The meaning of death, as an implicit edge to text, here is subverted. For the narrator has effectively become her own double, and her death takes the rhetorical place of the always already implied death of the author. The rupture between the author and her narrative, in the trope of the posthumous voice, has already been staged within the text. That is, its violence is behind us rather than before us as we read. This situation is the obverse of Derrida's proposition that the author dies into his text (*The Ear of the Other* 15). In texts troped posthumous, the speaker speaks from a topos on the other side of that rupture which attends writing. Rather than dying at the border of the text, as Derrida proposes is usually the case, the trope of the posthumous voice implies that the author may die independently of, or apart from, the text. In the trope of the posthumous voice, then, the feminine voice enacts a site of inviolability by manufacturing a topos which comes always after the place of rupture and trauma. The death occurs off-stage and the narrator's death takes precedence over that of the implied author.

The ruptured hymen, a symbol *par excellence* of trauma, violation, and of crossing over, transmogrifies, in the context of the trope of the posthumous voice, into a space of conjunction between the woman, as abjected body, and the double of that silenced, feminine body, her disembodied voice. This trope shapes a mask which can speak eloquently because its only function is to speak. Leaving behind Derrida's metaphor of the hymen between the two women, let us postulate the shape of a reconfigured border described in the text troped posthumous. Here, the space between the implied body of the feminine narrator and the language of her text functions as a barrier. This shield allows the woman writer to write a feminine narrator while still protecting the feminine body of that narrator from the male gaze. The assumption behind such a rhetorical gesture is that the male readership is very often harmful to the woman writer. The danger faced by the narrator's fictional body is explored in Blanchot's novel: the two women in *Death Sentence* cede their dying bodies to the male narrator's gaze because that is what he demands.

Where does a woman narrator's speech, begin, then, after implementing the metaphor of her death as the point of departure for her text? Assia Djébar's essay, "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound," in *Women of Algiers in their Apartments*, theorizes a rhetoric of the wound, as a figure, noting connections between the abjection of the body and the speech that masks that abjection, a speech that is the presentation of the self as a mask. While Djébar does not consider death *per se*, her delineation of modes of speech after enforced silence, as well as after violation, bear upon my consideration of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing, inasmuch as the trope of posthumousness metaphorizes speech in the aftermath of violation, and the silence violence inflicts. Djébar writes from the perspective of a colonized culture. Westerners, perhaps ignorantly, often refer to traditional Moslem culture as a regime extremely repressive to women, more so even than Judeo-Christian culture. However, my inclusion of Djébar's work in my own readings of Western literatures is based on the assumption that while the details of

repression of women differ from place to place the ideas behind the repression are similar enough.

In Djébar's essay, the wound that is speech and the speech that is a mask are not only mirror images of the struggle to speak in the aftermath of violation but also are joined by that other membrane, the scar. The scar that follows violence against the body is perhaps a more apt metaphor for the gap between the troped dead body of the abjected woman and the living voice of the woman narrator. Unlike the hymen, the scar shows a pattern, tells an history. Similarly, the scar covers the wound with a shield much the way that the rhetoric of *prosopopoeia* covers the living speaker with the conjured image of a dead face. It may be argued, then, that the trope of the posthumous voice describes not boundary as a hymen, but rather the border which is a scar.

The scar, not a ruptured hymen, but a wound sealed, reveals a violence experienced and passed through. Djébar writes of the traditional "yes" call of the Moslem bride, a false yes engendered when the bride's head is beaten against a wall until she moans in pain (145). The ruptured hymen of the bride, the *telos* of the wedding ceremony, is paralleled by this enforced word: not a declaration about the wound, but a cry caused by the wounding itself. The wound within the mask of troped posthumous utterance by contrast structures the voice of the living through the mouth of the dead, a mask-making that engages an always-after-the-wound narrative stance. The living woman who has suffered such extreme trauma that she speaks as if knowingly of death borrows the mask of death, but, unlike in *prosopopoeia*, the death-mask she borrows is still modelled on her own face. In the same way that the bride whom Djébar describes as being beaten into false utterance achieves articulate speech only afterward, as a woman lamenting, so also the narrator who is cast as already dead when she speaks uses the specular site of her own mutilated body to articulate the history of that body's textually composed erasure.

The trope of the posthumous voice, then, enacts a recuperation of the dead, by splitting the voice of the wound from the voice of the mask, or scar. In "Living On: Border Lines," Derrida argues that:

Survival and revenance, living on and returning from the dead: living on goes beyond both living and dying, supplementing each with sudden surge and a certain reprieve. (108)

He implies that the text and the author trade off the space of death while the work is being written. However, when the author adumbrated behind the anonymous narrator has already assumed the place of death, that is the place of the anonymity implicit in the trope of the posthumous voice, this "supplementing" ceases to occur. The narrator troped posthumous is written as an immortal of sorts. The supplement of reading, of being read, becomes her body's scar, or, if you will, her text becomes her mask.

Paradoxically the trope of the posthumous voice bears the annihilated or abjected self into the narrator's mask that gazes. In this trope, the continuation of dying plays out as a bodilessness, a bodilessness paradoxically achieved through the abjection of the body:

This enduring, lasting, going on, stresses or insists on the 'on' of a living on that bears the entire enigma of this supplementary logic. (109)

This "supplementary logic," for Derrida, is the way that the death of the author ensures the text. That is, the absence of the author guarantees the ability of the text to be read, to describe itself against the boundary of the author's death. The enigma of the trope of the posthumous voice, however, is that in this trope it is the death of the narrator, not the author, which ensures the text's legibility. This narrator's stance in the text troped posthumous performs a boundary, a bodilessness descriptive of a border. In the rhetorical gesture of feigning posthumous speech, then, the question of the legitimacy of the text may shift back and forth, now to be read as the speech of the dead, now to be read as a ruse or trick a living speaker employs.

Strictly speaking, the words a dead woman writes cannot be read because a dead woman cannot write. The narrative of a dead woman describing death must remain at the limit of legibility, for it necessarily remains at the limit of believability. Only by a ruse or a trick can the language of the dead be thrown back across the gap within the uncannily doubled woman narrator. Using the trope of the posthumous voice, the narrator assumes the topos of the dead, the abjected body of the corpse, and from this lowest place builds an utterance of uncanny power, specifically by subverting the definition of illegitimate, or illegible, speech. Of the illegitimate or illegible text, Derrida writes:

the unreadable is not the opposite of the readable but rather the ridge that also gives it momentum, movement, sets it in motion. (117)

The trope of posthumous speech forms a border or a boundary to legible speech, since the speech of the dead is always illegitimate, that is, out of bounds, and illegible, in the sense of being incredible. How can you read what the dead have written? The trope of the posthumous voice poses this riddle by poising its rhetoric on the edge of legibility. The utterance of those who assume the place of the dead is unreadable, or it is legible only within its own uncanny frame. Considering the function of an enclosed space of legibility whose extrapolated text becomes illegible, Djébar writes of the enclosed, feminine room of the harem and of the difficulty of bringing across the boundary line of that room's exit the language spoken within the room (*Women of Algiers in their Apartments* 137). This language spoken within the women's apartment, a language only between women, in a sense is completely illegitimate, because it is kept out of public hearing. The words spoken within the harem cloister, however, become illegible only when that topos is abrogated. Djébar writes of the impossibility, when, in following Delacroix's gaze, we see the women, that is, of reading the women, of comprehending the meaning of their expressions (137). The language of the border, the boundary, is the language which seems illegible

because it stands as if behind a mask. The trope of the posthumous voice, also speaking from behind a mask, gains legibility by dramatizing the place of the scar or mask.

In Djébar's essay, the severed sound of the women of Algiers in their apartments is also the sound broken off by the crossing of a boundary. This transgression or trespass is the gaze of the French painter (143). The vision of the women, a forbidden vision, enacts a trespass which silences the women. This is the quintessential motion of post-traumatic speech, this sequence of interdiction, transgression, wound. Djébar complicates the image of severed sound by suggesting that the women in their apartment may have already been violated by having first been put in the harem. The gestures of post-traumatic speech reflect the violation which opens the wound of the voice, the very violation which closes down the possibility of direct speech. The cry from the wound is not speech; it is illegible (*Unclaimed Experience* 2). The women's severed sound, painted by Delacroix and adumbrated by Djébar, is a conversation broken off, a conversation which incorporated and healed the severed language of the deflowered bride.

There is a clear distinction, then, between the Kristevan *semiotike*, the cacophonous cry from the wound, and the articulated aftermath of trauma, that is the intricate, subtle language of the women's apartment. Similarly, the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing is not prior to or beneath the topography of the symbolic order, of speech associated with the patriarchy. Lacan argues that all language is language in what he terms the "Name-of-the-Father." He writes that: "It is a signification that is evoked only by what we call a metaphor, in particular the paternal metaphor, the signifying function that conditions paternity, what religion has taught us to refer to as the Name-of-the-Father" (*Écrits* 199). My contention is that the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing participates in the symbolic order to the fullest degree, in fact quite

nearly editing out the chaotic, semiotic element of speech, trumping patriarchy by claiming the space of the symbolic.

The voice from the wound may express a trauma, but, for the implication of that rape or that violation to become legible, the cry alters into trope. That is why the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing is the work of aftermath. The severed sound of the wounded bride, her yes a wound itself, like the severed sound of the violated harem, is not the language of the trope of the posthumous voice. Instead, the trope of the posthumous voice is the language that comes after the crying wound or the silencing blow: it is the language, intricate, private and privative, developed in the women's apartment between the women. In Djébar's essay, the women of Algiers in their apartments have been violated by the painter's gaze and have been silenced by that penetration. However much their speech may have been enclosed and unheard within the apartment, it still went on, lived on. Before the invasion, the woman's voices continued speaking and singing to each other in their apartment (144). Only a violation, then, succeeds in severing sound, holding the women as if rapt within the frame of the trespasser's gaze.

Djébar writes of an entire literature, a tradition of women's songs and stories. To some degree she suggests that this tradition is based on a wound, the wound of the deflowered bride. She also writes of the thick, womb-like casing of language spoken only between women, a traditional liniment to the wound. This act of possessing both the silenced or abjected cry which never gains a form, and also the clandestine singing within the harem, can partly be resolved by considering the question of audience. Djébar writes that Delacroix, the painter, together with the audience of his painting, trespasses into the private space of the feminine, the harem. But she also implies that a challenge of women's writing is to translate this private feminine language of the harem into the language of a chosen audience, without that translation becoming itself a mode of traumatic invasion. The painter parallels the writer, and when the writer is a woman writing about her own

history, she is presented with the great challenge of describing that feminine text without invading it. When she translates from the language of the wound, she must not inflict a second death. Derrida also discusses the interconnection between the act of trespassing and the act of translation, writing that "Trepas" is etymologically related to translate. Derrida explains:

(trans + passus) trespassing is to be related to all the trans that are at work here. ("Living On Borderlines" 144)

Djebar's own trespass into the territory of the women painted by Delacroix, then, becomes a translation in which she recuperates the space of the apartment, a violated space which also gives place to the language of the tale of violation.

Women's linguistic performance, then, when heard or read by men may seem to be the cry from the wound, produced through violence. However, within the never-published, never made public, sphere of women's discourse, other eloquent songs persist, created and performed by women for each other. These songs are not from any crying wound, but rather articulate aftermath, survival. Djebar's goal, then, in trespassing the space of the women in the painting, in entering the apartments of the women in Algiers, is to translate a text that communicates their violation while producing a text that, by remaining a figurative rather than a narrative communication, does not replicate that rape by depiction. The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing makes a similar gesture, translating the text of invasion into a figurative mode that tells about a violation of the self without replicating that violation by confessing it, confession inevitably being a gesture that opens the self to invasion.

Djebar's theorizing of just how a language of richness and complexity, such as that shared between the women in the harem, can be translated to be heard by the father, brother, or husband, in short, the reading public, applies to situations outside of the Algerian revolution. Her thinking applies to women whose sound has been severed by

means other than those she delineates in traditional Arabic culture and in colonization. The inarticulate cry from the wound, the apogee or emblem of which is the moan of the bride whose head is beaten against a wall until she says "yes," turns into a figure of speech when the figured speech of that bride evades the text of her abjection by trespassing into and transforming the scene of her own violation. She rebuilds the site of her subjectivity by figuratively describing the text of this verbal deflowering, a deflowering of her relationship with her own speech. In the same way, the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing is a trope of austerity and of last resort, bringing into public discourse an interior language of abundance, which through figured absences adumbrates a post-traumatic knowledge.

The cry from the wound of the bride whose head is beaten against the wall metonymizes the cry of any women whose linguistic space has been abrogated. The wound in language, then, is not a place but the absence of place, an enforced homelessness. The cry from the wound is an unformed, inarticulate sound, incapable of the elegance of rhetoric. The high rhetoric of the trope of the posthumous voice, then, remains distant from that cry which Caruth argues is the voice of the obsessively revisited site of trauma. The wound only gives immediate voice to injury. Clorinda, imprisoned in the tree, cries out inarticulately when Tancred stabs her for a second time, killing her again. However, it is Clorinda's speech after Tancred ceased stabbing her which is the post-traumatic narrative. Her speech is elegant, poignant and powerful enough to make Tancred run away. The change of her voice from groan to articulation is described as follows:

A muffled sorrowing groan that becoming distinguished into words then said "Alas too much have you wronged me Tancred; now let this much suffice. From the body that was along with me you have already cast me forth: do you wish, cruel man after death to assault your enemies in their

graves?" [. . .]And his heart within him is in such manner overcome with various passions that it congeals and quakes (*Jerusalem Delivered* 289).

Here, Clorinda's language is highly articulate and subverts the entire program of Tasso's epic. She subverts the entire premise of *Jerusalem Delivered*, arguing that the Crusades are cruel and barbaric. She tells of the suffering of the killed and tortured on both sides of the conflict. Clorinda's posthumous voice, spoken after rather than out of the wound in the tree she has become, is so clear and eloquent as to almost drive Tancred mad with guilt. In Canto XIII, Tancred runs out of the woods and collapses in terror and shock after hearing Clorinda's voice speaking out of the body of the tree he has just been stabbing with his sword. Her voice accuses him of killing her twice (*Jerusalem Delivered* 299). Her monologue is the only place in Tasso's epic which challenges, clearly and directly, the ethos of war, by considering the suffering of the victims of war. What I wish to make clear, then, is that the trope of the posthumous voice is not the voice of a crying wound but rather is the articulated aftermath of violation, a complex rhetoric comparable to Clorinda's uncanny, eloquent lyric, the lyric which subverts Tasso's epic and terrifies her attacker, finally, into retreat.

If the post-traumatic trope of the posthumous voice is not a cry from a wound, it inhabits the place of homelessness which is the place of aftermath, specifically the aftermath of a metonymically "fatal" wound. I enquote fatal because the metaphor of fatality within the trope of the posthumous voice must necessarily mean something other than having experienced physical death. The wound, the absolute rupture of a legible history of the self, presents the problem of displacement, of having no authorial topos. This homelessness, a post-traumatic topos, remains the point of departure for the woman writer narrating her text from the perspective of the dead. The rhetoric of the metaphor of death, or the use of death as a metaphor, presupposes an absence of ownership of the landscape within which the text takes its place. In the text troped posthumous the topos that

the woman narrator claims is subterranean, a burial site. The trope of the posthumous voice, by doubling back the text's quality of finitude, consecrates a type of language which is a *living on*, a rhetoric whose dead speaker can no longer be killed. Much as Blanchot's *Death Sentence* is built on the structural premise of two dead women's bodies, two effigies, the structure of the trope of the posthumous voice is that of the uncannily powerful double.

If the mother tongue is the topos of power the home place in language where the self can most easily speak, the trope of posthumousness disavows any home or mother tongue, having been bereft of home and mother tongue. Indeed, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Mathilda* blames her experience of paternal rape partly on her state of being motherless. *Mathilda's* father explains his incestuous desire for her by claiming to have seen no difference between his living daughter and his dead wife: "I dared say to myself 'Diana died to give her birth, Diana's spirit was transferred into her frame, she ought to be as Diana to me.'" (*Mathilda* 210). *Mathilda's* agency is quite directly erased by her status as a motherless child: because her mother is dead the father indulges his incestuous passion for his daughter.

If there is no home, no mother tongue, or no mother, for a narrator, then that speaker must constantly engage the remote and uncanny aspect of language, her language always written at the edge of legibility. Even though the uncanny and, as it were, incomprehensible element of language is encountered to some degree in any text, this uncanniness of words themselves is forefronted in the motherless texts written through the trope of the posthumous voice. Consider the examples of Dickinson's frequent use of the indeterminate pronoun "it" as a centering device for her poems, as well as her repetitive use of dashes to take the place of narrative explanation, indeed of linguistic integument. The frequent appearance of the pronoun "it" in her oeuvre not only insists on the privacy of her poetry, but also indicates the poet's distance from the language within which she operates.

Names and narratives are not her mother tongue. Her mother tongue is the uncanny absence of a mother tongue, an orphan status expressed by the repetitive use of the dash, a gesture standing in for words.

How is Dickinson's alienation from her own language different from the common situation of writers? Arguing that all texts participate in a state of being lost, of being incomprehensible, Derrida contends that:

One never writes either in one's own language or in a foreign language.

[. . .] Hence the triumph as the triumph of translation.

("Living On: Borderlines" 101,102)

However, Derrida's argument pointedly excludes the more radically privative position of lacking, in the first place, "one's own language." "Living On: Borderlines," obsessed as it is with questions of authorial vanishings, fails to consider the case of women authors whose rights to "own language" or to have "one's own language" have already been taken from them. Derrida's essay, written partly about Percy Bysshe Shelley, does not take into account the motherless and troped posthumous language which Percy Bysshe's wife was creating before his composition of "The Triumph of Life." Women writers using the trope of the posthumous voice metaphorically describe their own position as authors who have *a priori* been deprived of a linguistic home, a mother tongue.

The narrator without a mother tongue, the rhetorician who has no body or place from which to address the reader, is twice erased. The lack of topological ownership as well as the lack of, as it were, nourishing maternal semiotic flux, together create a rhetoric of distance. Far from employing a Kristevan feminine *semiotike*, women writers using the trope of the posthumous voice close down the very fluidity of language implied by the Kristevan formulation. The translation which is the trope of speaking from the place of the dead is not enacted by an author who already possesses patriarchal power, a power to move between languages. Instead, the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing

is a movement in the direction away from the aporia of traumatic experience towards a language which is always strange and uncanny, because it is entirely enacted within the place of metaphor. Like Kleist's marionettes, it does not touch down. There is no mother tongue for the narrator speaking without a body or a home. Metaphor, then, the liminal space of crossing, becomes the topos of such a text. The metaphor of the dead speaking, however, unlike the trope of the marionettes' dance in Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre," constantly refers back to the dead and buried body beneath the text. The trope of the posthumous voice claims the topos of crossing, of restiveness and of homelessness as its own.

The homelessness which centers texts that are written as if from place of the dead forms a type of translation analogous to that performed by the exile, whose mother tongue has disinherited her. Marina Tsvetaeva, the Russian poet, quoted here in translation, writes of exile as precisely a process of erasure:

It's all the same to me, captive
 lion what faces I move through
 bristling, or what human crowd will
 cast me out as it must

into myself, into my separate internal
 world, [. . .]

.....

And I won't be seduced by the thought of
 my native language, its milky call.

("Homesickness" lines 9-14, 17-18)

Tsvetaeva earned her living in exile as a translator. In the trope of the posthumous voice the feminine narrator's stance is complicated not only through the silencing force of a male

audience but also by a loss of the "milky call" of the mother tongue, the feminine discourse of plenitude that Djebbar argues exists within the space of the harem.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's character Mathilda is a daughter suffering not only from her father's sexual desire for her but also from the absence of her mother. Shelley wrote *Mathilda* using the draft of her own mother's unfinished text, Wollstonecraft's *The Cave of Fancy*, as a starting point. Significantly, Shelley could not complete her first effort to resurrect her mother's fragment. Perhaps that is because when the daughter in *Fields of Fancy*, Shelley's draft for what became *Mathilda*, tells her mother that she has been raped, the older woman does not listen or understand. Mathilda's suicide narrative is born through both the father's sexual desire for Mathilda and the dead mother's inherent inability to protect, or hear, her daughter.

The nymph who suffers paternal rape in *Fields of Fancy* is transformed into the daughter in *Mathilda* who is incestuously assaulted. Similarly, *Fields of Fancy's* Diotima, whose inability to hear the tale of rape that the nymph confesses breaks off that text, is transformed into *Mathilda's* Diana. Diana is the mother whose death leaves her incapable of protecting her daughter from incestuous attentions. The older woman's inability to hear and protect the younger woman generates the emergence of the trope of the posthumous voice, for Mathilda speaks after her death; her speech was interdicted during her life. In a similar fashion, Sylvia Plath's poem "Edge" describes a maternal presence completely unconcerned about and unprotective of the sacrificed daughter (*CP Plath 272*). The daughter's dead body graphically addresses and complains against the mother's unwillingness to protect the daughter's living body.

Plath's poem describes a young woman's suicide or untimely death. In the poem, the moon closes out the dialogue after the young woman is silenced. The moon seems to represent a maternal presence, an older woman, but not a comforting one. After describing the daughter's death, the poem closes:

The moon has nothing to be sad about

Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.

(lines 17 - 19)

Along similar lines, Elizabeth Bishop, an orphaned daughter, refused to allow her poems to be included in anthologies of women poets, claiming that she felt no special affinity with other women writers. At least this position of Bishop's is reported by Maxine Kumin in her introduction to *Anne Sexton: The Complete Poems* (xxxiii). Bishop seems to have felt herself cut off from the conversation of women, much as she was indeed disallowed conversation with her mother. The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing then develops at odds with the notion of semiotic plenitude in women's writing that Kristeva and Cixous theorize as *écriture féminine*.¹ By contrast, one must consider the trope of the posthumous voice part of a rhetoric of refusal, as it were, an orphan's refusal to accept false parents.

The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing refuses to align the woman writer, who writes using a feminine narrator, with the victimized body. In other words, the trope of the posthumous voice separates the woman's voice from the site of the violated body, using the dead, buried, or occulted body as a rhetorical shield. The trope enforces boundaries for death as a rhetorical stance and marks a boundary, a border. The speaker of a text written from the rhetorical position of the dead inhabits a body which can no longer be meaningfully assaulted. This mode of signification, then, is intimately connected with the aftermath of trauma, or "great pain," as Dickinson calls it, because it presents

¹ Pierrette Daly argues nicely for the inclusion of both Cixous and Kristeva as key thinkers in the development of the rather broad notion of *une écriture féminine*, despite the differences in their approach to writing as women and to reading women's writing (*Heroic Tropes* 147).

narratorial absence within the text (poem 372 line 1). The solution of absenting the self from the place of violence, from the place where one has already been violated, even when that place is one's own body, presents the paradoxical challenge of this particular form of rhetoric. The rhetorical achievement of both absenting the self, as a figure, from the topos where violation has occurred, while still presenting the text of the memory and knowledge of that violation, then, is the trick of the trope of the posthumous voice.

Here, I will return to Derrida's reading of two dead or deathless women but return to them only to articulate yet another shadow presence in the borderland. I refer here to the feminine figures in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Triumph of Life," the other work read by Derrida in "Living On: Borderlines." Derrida's essay is written across a textual divide, a boundary, for its text moves back and forth across the footnotes which equal the essay in breadth and scope. "Living On: Borderlines" presents itself as an analysis of Blanchot's *Death Sentence*, and yet considers Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Triumph of Life" as extensively as it does the Blanchot novel, both analyses running across this divide of footnotes. This doubled text not only mirrors Blanchot's two posthumous women narrators, but also reflects the divided narrator in "The Triumph of Life" (SPP 455). The poem is suspended as on a high tension wire between the male narrator who speaks, and the feminine figure who repeatedly erases the male narrator's mind, threatening to erase his speech permanently, to silence him. The appearance of the posthumous feminine voice in Shelley's "The Triumph of Life" adumbrates the male speaker's struggle to articulate "what is Life" (line 544). That is, the womanly "shape all light" repeatedly wipes away the trace of linguistic thought from the poem's speaker's mind (line 352). Her erasure of his memory, and his struggle to regain memory, and to speak, make up the subterranean drama of the poem, a drama played out beneath the male speaker's discourse with Rousseau. The feminine shape all light erases the male speaker's memory, which

temporarily takes away his language, emplaces in his aphasia her own form. His struggle to speak and to speak of life is specifically cast against her uncanny image.

Shelley was writing "The Triumph of Life" in the last months of his life (*SPP* 453). His drafting of the unfinished poem, then, came after Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's writing of *Valperga*, a novel structured around two women characters, one of whom functionally speaks for the other (*Valperga* 14). This double structure, which grants the dead woman's body narrative or lyric force through the double image of another woman's voice, evokes the structure of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. In the trope of the posthumous voice, the death mask of the speaker's own body covers the speaker as if she were speaking through her own estranged voice. In "The Triumph of Life," there are two prominent pairs of feminine doubles who structure the poem: the old moon and the young moon, and the benevolent and then threatening feminine forms of "light's severe excess" (see lines 79-84, line 424). The young moon arrives in the body of the old moon, and in that obvious sense has a dual aspect. The feminine shape of "light's severe excess" begins as an illuminating vision but ultimately stamps out the seer's thoughts, making his "brain as sand" (line 405). This feminine "shape all light," then, has the dual aspect of becoming threatening after initially appearing to be benign (line 352). Each pairing, then, has a benign and a sinister aspect. The double image of the young moon bearing the ghost of her dead mother, like the double image of the shape all light that ultimately erases light, bring the feminine voice into Shelley's poem only to cancel it. This double elision of the feminine figure suggests that the male speaker of "The Triumph of Life" struggles against the fatal capacity of that which he delineates as feminine.

The young moon who appears through the ghost of the dead moon not only may imply an image of rebirth, but also articulates an uncanny and rather frightening revenance, the daughter taking the mother's place through the very form of the dead mother's body.

Similarly, the "shape all light" threatens the completion of the poem into which she is introduced (line 352). She enters through the trance of the male poet and proceeds to

[. . .] blot

The thoughts of him who gazed

.....

As if the gazer's mind was strewn beneath

Her feet like embers; and she, thought by thought,

Trampled its fires into the dust of death.

("The Triumph of Life" lines 383-388)

While it is arguable that this feminine shape of light adds something to speaker's vision, it is inarguable that she takes away from him his capacity to describe and remember his vision. She may make his trance deeper, but the poem does not present this intensification of trance as an altogether good thing. Instead, she threatens the speaker by focusing his trance upon herself. The series of mental erasures, or deepening levels of trance, reached within "The Triumph of Life," culminating in the moment when the speaker's brain is wiped clean of its former traces, his brain becoming as sand, suggests a capacity of the womanly "shape all light" to erase the language of the male poet (line 352). The erasures which this feminine shape causes in the male speaker's mind are followed by "a new vision" ("The Triumph of Life" 412). Significantly, the new vision occurs simultaneously to the vanishing of the feminine form itself (lines 411-412). The new vision succeeds in pushing the powerful feminine shape all light back into the place of the dead, the shape becoming the "ghost of a forgotten form of sleep" ("The Triumph of Life" line 428). In other words, the triumph of life is also cast as a triumph of the masculine lyric speaker over the feminine shape. The double threat of the revenant new moon that ushers the car into the poem is a threat vanquished by the closing trance of the poem, a trance that culminates in the masculine speaker's resuming his speech by crying out to another man,

"Then, what is Life," (line 544). The eradication of the feminine shape of light that forms the dramatic core of the poem effectively engenders the ruptured ending of the poem.

I began this chapter arguing that translation is itself a kind of trance. Derrida, in "Living On: Borderlines," implies that Shelley's poem inhabits a liminal space, a trance, for Derrida places his critique of that poem along the margins, the liminal space of the footnote. Moreover, the speaker of "The Triumph of Life" clearly establishes his voice as that of the entranced visionary. He begins his poem in a "strange trance" and proceeds to describe trances within that trance, a sort of *mis-en-abyme* of liminality, crossing through modalities of perception (line 29). Derrida claims that it was not his "intention to discuss 'The Triumph of Life'" (*Between the Blinds* 258). Nevertheless, "Living On: Borderlines" devotes as much attention to Shelley's poem as to Blanchot's novel. It is as if Derrida had been taken in by Shelley's poem, entranced. The trance, then, infuses not only the poem itself, but also its readers, causing them to write about that which they claim they had previously decided not to write about.

The trance of translation manifests itself in Derrida's essay through his inability to subordinate the language of the footnote. His essay remains, structurally, a site of translation in progress. Shelley's "The Triumph of Life," and also Blanchot's *Death Sentence*, similarly present a rhetoric of uncompleted translations. The trances which structure "The Triumph of Life" are broken off by the question, "what is Life?", and so the text retains a status of always still being in process of translation: the trance is never replaced by another lyric mode. In saying that Shelley's poem remains as if it were in process of translation, I simply mean that the telos of the poem – to present a parade of the triumph of life in contrast to the medieval image of the parade of the triumph of death – is never completed. In that sense, then, the poem never reaches its target but remains in process of waking its speaker from a trance and making sense of the trance. The dying women in *Death Sentence* similarly are never silenced, never buried, but rather continue to

communicate as it were through each other, through the dividing line of the dyptich novel. Like the mode of Shelley's poem, the mode of Blanchot's novel depends upon the successful presentation of a trance.

These three male-authored and male-narrated texts, which might be said to epitomize the theorization of writing in the margins or of exploiting the edge of the text, cast in relief the structure of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. Just as the figure of light in "The Triumph of Life" haunts the text of the poem after she has been erased from it, the figure of the woman's body haunts the text troped posthumous in women's writing. The feminine narrator who speaks from the point of view of the dead has disowned a female body, but the spectral image of that feminine shape haunts the text. That spectral image keeps the text in a trance of translation, the unresolved translation from the dead to the living. This rhetorical gesture in which the feminine narrator is herself the dead figure masking her voice, brings forward through a dramatized self elision the history of woman's silenced speech. It is a rhetoric that breaks silence precisely by mapping the formal parameters of the space of an enforced muteness, parameters coinciding with the woman's body as buried object. When Mary Shelley's Mathilda appears to her incestuous father as a figure of light, or when Plath's Lady Lazarus rises as a flame from her pyre, the female body reinstates itself, as persistent light, against the very texts which establish their legibility through erasure of a woman's body.

*Fourth Chapter****The Posthumous Name in Wuthering Heights***

You would intimate that her spirit guards
the fortunes of *Wuthering Heights*, even
when her body is gone? Is that it?

– Heathcliff¹

In their reading of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar place Brontë in the Miltonic tradition. They argue that her novel fleshes out Milton's vision of hell, giving human faces and names to the fallen angels (*The Madwoman in the Attic* 253). Although this argument aligns Brontë's writing with that of Mary Shelley, which *The Madwoman in the Attic* also reads as a gloss on Milton, it unsatisfactorily insists upon Milton himself as the link between the two women writers. Milton, however, did not create hell and did not originate the story of the Fall, as a perusal of the Book of Revelations indicates. Perhaps Milton does not so much haunt the text of *Wuthering Heights* as function for Gilbert and Gubar as a proper symbol of the patriarchal order, a code in subversion of which Cathy writes her posthumous life. Instead of looking for the ghost of a literary father within *Wuthering Heights*, then, I propose to trace the outline of a woman's erased body within the novel's text. Not Milton but rather Cathy's twice-desired, confined, and then buried body haunts Brontë's novel. While Cathy's character contains elements of Lucifer, the vulnerability of her body, its capacity to become pregnant, to

¹ Emily Jane Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* 10. Unless otherwise specified, all *Wuthering Heights* citations refer to this edition of the text.

become sick, and to die, all suggest that Brontë writes for Cathy a gendered damnation. Brontë does not so much give flesh to Milton's hell as relocate the space of hell from the "I myself" of a fallen soul to a woman's body: Cathy's body which dies with childbed's taint but hardly reappears as a saint (Milton 170). Patricia Yaeger and Regina Barreca have considered the place of the feminine text in *Wuthering Heights*.² However, what I am referring to is the spectre of Cathy Earnshaw Linton's body as it vanishes from the novel but continues to control the novel. My reading specifically concerns the work of her body's pregnancy and the way that her body destabilizes the social order of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Grange* while ultimately legitimizing, through her daughter, Cathy's posthumous claim to a name and to land ownership.

A richer understanding of Brontë's poetics of damnation and redemption, then, arises from a reading of her novel as a character study, but a character study with an unusual emphasis on the name and body of the heroine, that is, an emphasis on the multiple inscriptions of that name. The character of Cathy overdetermines the novel, inscribing and re-inscribing her various names into every corner of its landscape. Catherine Earnshaw Linton, I will argue, inscribes *Wuthering Heights* as a ghostly, posthumous coda to her overwhelming failure, while alive, to control the intricate and oppressive system of marriage and patrimony that forms the subtext of *Wuthering Heights*. Rather than answering Milton, the novel turns abruptly from the possibilities of redemption afforded by finely structured patriarchal hells, such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Instead, Emily Brontë's novel describes the impossibilities of a young woman's life. Cathy's life and death are unredeemed. However, the text generated by the fugue-like shifting of her names evokes a redemption precisely through the language that describes damnation,

² See Patricia Yaeger, "Violence in the Sitting Room: *Wuthering Heights* and the Woman's Novel" and Regina Barreca, ed., *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature* 227-240.

redemption and damnation being terms that, as opposites, mutually suggest each other. To describe hell is to put a boundary around it. This boundary appears in three ways in *Wuthering Heights*: the boundary is the body, story, and confession of the heroine. The novel, then, presents Cathy's body as hell and also places a limit on Cathy's body, preventing hell from encroaching beyond her own tortured writing. Confinement, the months Cathy spends waiting for both her daughter's birth and her own death, is the leit-motif of Brontë's novel. While, in her essay "Diaries and Displacement in *Wuthering Heights*," Rebecca Steinitz has recently suggested that displacement is the theme of *Wuthering Heights*, I am arguing quite the opposite (411). The novel is not built on a series of displacements, but rather it presents a series of confinements: Cathy's confinements within the rooms of childhood, childbed, and burial. The novel is indeed written from the perspective of confinement, going so far as to place Lockwood in sickbed as he narrates the tale, giving him a mirroring confinement or a weak imitation of Cathy's harrowing pregnancy and death (*Wuthering Heights* 70). The text insists on trapping Cathy's body in this room of fatal, maternal confinement even as the text resists the endpoint of her completed burial. In the following chapter, then, I'll begin with that fatal confinement.

Inasmuch as Cathy's death works as the novel's fulcrum point, I begin by asking what killed the heroine, who, as a girl, was described as a "stout, hearty lass" (110). To discount the possibility of an hysterical "brain fever," which *Wuthering Heights* offers in explanation of Catherine Earnshaw Linton's untimely death, and instead to seek a symbolic cause of Cathy's death, is to enter more fully into the rigorously symbolic play of the novel. By rejecting the textually offered brain fever, I do not argue that one could prove its

errancy.³ Rather, by focusing on the clues and cues within the text indicating the presence of another reason for the stout, hearty Catherine Earnshaw's dying into and dying as the aphasiac Catherine Linton, I open consideration of the subterfugal role pregnancy plays within the plotting of the novel, particularly the way that Cathy's pregnancy enacts a contemporaneous drama beneath, or behind, the surface drama of Edgar Linton's and Heathcliff's battle. While the novel itself does not credit childbirth as the cause of its heroine's death, Catherine Linton, the married woman, dies almost immediately after giving birth to a premature baby girl. Prior to this birth and death, while Edgar and Heathcliff battle each other over who will keep owner's rights to Cathy, including the right to name her, Cathy keeps, within the boundaries of the muteness and inanition caused by her illness, the troped posthumous capacity to re-name herself. Her fatal pregnancy ultimately inscribes her own name onto her posthumous presence through the replication of that name, which is given to her daughter. Cathy's occluded body anchors the novel. That is, the novel's drama works up to and then looks back to the scene of her body immured in confinement, and then killed in childbed. I will read *Wuthering Heights* neither in search of Milton's ghost nor in search of Edgar's and Heathcliff's desires but rather for the encrypted code traced into the text by Cathy's dying and confined body. This troped posthumous novel is written from the perspective of the already dead and buried Cathy. Cathy's physical vanishing writes itself into and determines the course of this novel. Perhaps what Brontë presents is her sense of there being an insolvable conflict between woman's body as a symbolic site of muteness and a woman author's attempt to write from the place of that body.

³Unlike Susan Gorsky, who in her essay "I'll Cry Myself Sick" argues that Cathy's illness expresses a sort of Victorian hysteria, I am suggesting that Cathy's illness is an high-risk pregnancy, the sort of condition that calls for bed-rest even today. See Gorsky, "I'll Cry Myself Sick: Illness in *Wuthering Heights*," in Furst, *Literature and Medicine* 173 - 190.

Cathy's writing inscribed into the bed where Lockwood reads it twenty years later is a miscarried posthumous voice, an attempt to formulate herself as a name and as a writer. While Rebecca Steinitz comments upon the child's powerlessness, revealed in Cathy's diary, my argument is that the very apparent powerlessness of Cathy's diary, that is, its inability to effect change during Cathy's life is precisely what gives the diary its troped posthumous force ("Diaries and Displacement" 412). For Cathy's form of power in the novel is her ability to write over the lives of the characters left living after her, in just the same way that she writes over the printed words of male authors in her so-called diary.⁴ Her pregnant condition during the most crucial action of the novel's plot similarly creates a palimpsest, an inscription of Cathy's names into the space of her aphasia and aphanasis. As incorporative gestures, writing and pregnancy have similarities. However, for *Wuthering Heights*' Cathy, voice and motherhood are at odds with each other. The story inscribes Cathy's voice, and name, into the books in the bed that Lockwood discovers. However, the text of *Wuthering Heights* writes her body into her deathbed, where she gives birth.

Keeping its central protagonist bedridden, confined throughout the major dramatic action of the novel, *Wuthering Heights* establishes Cathy's use of the trope of the posthumous voice before the heroine actually dies, for, in her confinement she assumes the voice of the dead, addressing a specular Heathcliff from the place of her burial. Before her death, Cathy's writing and Cathy's speaking do not produce any results; in effect, she is

⁴Only Lockwood calls Cathy's writing in the books "a proper diary" (*Wuthering Heights* 16). Perhaps for Cathy herself the pleasure of the writing was not in the confessional aspect of keeping a diary but rather in the empowering aspect of writing over and on top of someone else's words, especially if those words may be interpreted as a patriarchal code meant to silence her. In allowing her reading of Cathy's writing to be governed by Lockwood's interlocular interpretation, Steinitz may miss out on the crucial function of that writing: not its girlish confessional tenor, but rather its ability to enforce Cathy's gaze across the landscape of *Wuthering Heights*, that place whose contested ownership forms the bulk of the novel's subtextual drama.

not heard. The situation worsens when her life-threatening pregnancy forces Cathy's voice back into her body, acting like a signet of her own name impressed into her body. This tropic doubling causes her death, even as it doubles the name, Cathy Linton, and gives that name and that presence a posthumous voice. Cathy's ability to shape the plot of the novel according to her own desires does not begin until after her death. Before her death, as a young woman, she is a relatively powerless actor in the narrative. Her words only subvert her desires, forcing Heathcliff into exile, and effectively ruining both their lives. After Cathy's death, her ghostly linguistic presence, enacted through the texts Lockwood reads as well as through Heathcliff's searching for the waif Cathy, control the shape of the narrative. When Cathy writes all her names into her childhood bed, she already writes from the posthumous perspective of the waif Cathy. This posthumous Cathy's buried body and haunting presence control the novel.

If the pregnancy is the subtextual crisis that kills Cathy, it also lies beneath the physical imprisonment that blurs together her illness and her entry into the status of wife and expectant mother. At first Cathy blames Heathcliff for killing her: she insists to Heathcliff, "You have killed me and thriven on it" (*Wuthering Heights* 125). Despite Cathy's blaming Heathcliff for killing her, it is Edgar Linton who impregnates Cathy (as the adult looks of the daughter, Catherine Linton Heathcliff, assure) and, given the exact correspondence between the time of Cathy's pregnancy and the time of her fatal illness, this pregnancy effectively kills her. Applying Lacan's notion of linguistic flux, which posits that the *nom du père* is the guard of symbolic discourse, we see that Edgar impregnates Cathy with his linguistic system, which is foreign to her and must therefore cause her death, in a toxemia-like fever, as if she had bodily rejected Edgar's linguistics, Edgar's semiotics. Language "in the name of the father," does not, according to Lacan, mean that the father himself, as source, as seed, as site of referent, has any content (*Écrits*

199). Instead, it is the very hollowness of the concept of father, like the hollowness of the signifier, that allows language to be written and spoken in the name of the father, an instigative force that engenders but is itself empty. Edgar's very vacuity enables him to father his language onto Cathy, to imprint onto her body and inscribe into her name his own body and his own name. The Lacanian symbolic order is described as a paternal metaphor precisely because the role of the patriarch has no meaning except through his ability to generate the deferral of meaning. The way in which meaning inheres in the gap between the signifier and the signified, argues Lacan, is parallel to the father's ability to merely inscribe himself, his semen and his name, into others. Edgar, as one dominant father in the text of *Wuthering Heights*, means nothing and does nothing other than father Cathy's daughter. Nevertheless, Edgar's status as patriarch of the Grange writes itself into Cathy, making her the sickly wife of the Grange.

As the sickly wife of a well-to-do landowner, Cathy's relationship to land itself shifts. Instead of being allied to the moor, she becomes allied to the enclosed spaces of her husband's grounds. Here again I differ from Steinitz in her reading of displacement as the dominant drama of *Wuthering Heights*. Instead, it is confinement, in sickbed and childbed, that locks Cathy in place and necessitates her deployment of what I am calling the trope of the posthumous voice, or the gesture of speaking as if from the place of burial. Entrapped in the Linton household, Cathy shifts the ground of her voice away from her body and to the graveyard, returning the site of her voice to the moor that is the source and place of her determinative capacity. At the beginning of Cathy's pregnancy, that is also the beginning of her fatal illness, Cathy confesses to that trickster/confessor, Ellen Dean, that her (Cathy's) health would return could she return to the moors. Cathy says:

Oh I am burning! I wish I were out of doors – I wish I were a girl again, half savage, and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed? Why does my blood rush into a hell of

tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills. (97)

In other words, if Edgar had been persuaded not to force Cathy into his language, if he had "left her quiet," she might have been better off. It seems she perceives her enforced initiation into Edgar's typology of speech, the speech of the landed British bourgeoisie, as the cause of her brain fever. Further, Cathy clearly equates her lack of sanity, and of health, with this marriage that has silenced her, and that has made any speaking difficult, made her "blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words." She feels that the only remedy for her condition of near aphasia, a nearly total loss of language, is returning to the topography within which she could speak: the moor. The moor, then, is the one place where Cathy can retain both her name and the ability to speak in her own name, not in the name of Linton. Edgar becomes the hollow, nevertheless powerful, father, whose confining landscape closes Cathy off from her moor.

Just as the enclosed grounds of the Grange metonymize the enclosed semiotic of Cathy's fatal aphasia, the uncanny landscape of the moor acts within the scope of the novel not only as metonymy for freedom, but also, and more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, it acts as the proper topography of Cathy's speech acts. The question of home, of where Cathy's home may be and with whom, becomes of paramount and finally of fatal consequence not because Cathy needs to find the proper place in which to keep house but because Cathy's uncanny quality, her very ability to merge herself into Heathcliff, and then, less successfully, into Edgar, means that she cannot keep house. Cathy's capacity to find home, to be at home, quite in contrast to Ellen Dean's housewifely skill, resides in her ability to create in others a knowledge of herself, to make, as it were, herself the home of the male beloved.

This uncanny homemaking skill, this trick of making her own body the man's home, relies upon her control of language, either written or performed. At Wuthering

Heights, this language is written in the books which Lockwood discovers. These books aren't diaries but rather published books full of printed words that Cathy effectively writes around, and over, and across. Her aim, then, appears to be the silencing of others rather than merely self-expression. It is only Lockwood who imposes the interpretation that the girl's writings are "diaries," and Steinitz oddly goes along with Lockwood's interpretation here (409). At Thrushcross Grange, deprived of books to write on, Cathy writes on herself. she writes on the text of her body. Here is the emblem of the trope of the posthumous voice: the body taken up as something to be written on, chosen because of its capacity to disappear into death and resurface as memory's trace. Cathy's body performs, then, through the text of a fatal pregnancy a self-immolation and self-recreation.

At Thrushcross Grange, Cathy becomes what she has perceived Isabella and Edgar could accept; she finds the language to pacify and enthrall the Lintons, apparently in order to give their money to Heathcliff (63). However, Heathcliff designates the boundary of Cathy's heath, which is to say the edge of her authentic speech, since the topos of her space of free speech is the heath. Heathcliff, in direct contrast to the Lacanian notion of the paternal metaphor, provides within the topos of his name a protected site that enables Cathy to speak. While Edgar kills Cathy by fathering his own name and language onto her, Heathcliff does not father any paternal name onto her but, quite the opposite, represents the boundary beyond which her authentic speech dissolves. Confined, locked away from the heath. Cathy becomes aphasiac. Her language loses power and then gets lost altogether when she is away from the heath.

The heath, then, is not at all a scene of displacement for Cathy, but rather it is the one homeplace towards which the novel tends. The metonymic function of the heath also governs *Wuthering Heights'* rooms as an uncanny double to Cathy's powers of speech, giving a liminal quality to the rooms that are neither wild nor tame. When Cathy's pregnancy has just begun, and is still unspoken, and when her final fatal illness also has

commenced, and is the novel's main concern, Cathy insists that the site of her own Wuthering Heights' bed could restore her. To Ellen Dean, Cathy says,

Oh! If I were but in my own bed in the old house! And the wind sounding in the firs by the lattice. Do let me feel it, – it comes straight down the moors. Do let me have one breath! (96)

Significantly, it is not the bed or the room which could restore Cathy's voice, but rather the wind off the moor. This wind is the aspect of breath to which Cathy craves access. The trope of breath as spirit, that the moors' winds enact in the novel, also acts as Cathy's breath, her capacity to speak. Kept away from the wind off the moors, Cathy cannot speak forcefully. The moors' winds act as a metonymic source of Cathy's speech, a force perhaps as powerful as the language spoken in the *nom du père* which she must speak to her husband at Thrushcross Grange. Inasmuch as Heathcliff merges with the moors, or the heath, he acts as an opening of space into which Cathy's language may expand, or find place. The bed to which she yearns to return is precisely the bed wherein Lockwood discovers her books, and most significantly, her writing in those books. The bed at home, then, becomes not so much a site of the safety of childhood, since Cathy's childhood was not very safe, but rather happens to be a site of Cathy's inscriptions. Cathy's capacity to write is tied to the moor, to the wind or breath off the moor. The bed is home only because it is proximate to the moor. In this bed, Cathy inscribes her own permutating names, the names which metonymize her struggle against speaking in the name of the father. By contrast, the grave on the moor that Cathy inhabits is the scene from which she haunts Heathcliff, effectively driving out both her father's and Edgar Linton's paternal claims to their homes, replacing their ownership with that of her daughter who bears her name. It is this troped-posthumous writing which effects Cathy's real power in the novel.

Cathy's wish to return to the childhood bed then is a wish to return to the scene of her own authority: a language written by Cathy against the language of textual and real

fathers. The books in Cathy's childhood bed, the bed at *Wuthering Heights*, are texts originally written and published by men, but Cathy has entirely written over them. As Lockwoods tells us:

Catherine's library was select and its state of dilapidation proved it to have been well used, though not altogether for legitimate purpose; scarcely one chapter had escaped a pen and ink commentary, covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left. (16)

Cathy writes on top of and over top of these male authors. She does not so much write, as Steinitz suggests, in the margins, but rather Cathy claims the books for her own purposes (414). She writes her own words, using the male-authored books as if they were full of blank pages. She not only pits herself against the authors, but also Cathy, ironically, is interpreted by Lockwood antithetically to her purposes. For, Lockwood states that Cathy's writing in the books has not been "legitimate," meaning to ally her writing with progeny born out of wedlock. However, Cathy's use of the books has been quite specifically legitimate: she uses the books to write in, what could be a more etymologically legitimate use of the texts? Cathy has erased language in the name of the father by creating a palimpsest occluding masculine language with her own words. To this scene of a female authority that negates male authority, Cathy wishes to return, convinced that only a return to the topos of her own writing will give her back her former bodily strength.

The childhood bed to which Cathy yearns to return, in which she believes her strength would be recovered, acts as a room itself (Miller *Fiction and Repetition* 45). That is, rather than merely being contained within a room, the bed acts as a room within a room, a protected space within which a female authority can be secretly enacted (*Wuthering Heights* 15). Lockwood describes the bed as "a singular sort of old fashioned couch, very conveniently designed to obviate the necessity for every member of the family having a room to himself. In fact, it formed a little closet, and the ledge of a window, which it

enclosed, served as a table" (16). The bed of Cathy's childhood, then, is actually a room unto itself. The privacy of the bed may be read as a cloister, a space within which Cathy is spared the sort of sexual congress that ultimately results in the pregnancy that kills her. The bed is also, however, because it opens to a window, a conduit to the moor. Indeed, Cathy remembers the wind from the moor first as that which blows through the window, through the open casement, into the bed which is a room at Wuthering Heights (96). The childhood bed at Wuthering Heights, then, is the metonymic membrane between the moor, the breath of the moor, and the site of Cathy's authority, the breath of her speech. The wind from the moor blows directly into the secret, private space of the bed, and that cloistered space is the container of Cathy's writing. The writing contained in the books and on the bed bear witness to the child's trauma and seek to preserve the threatened child's name. The writing seeks to remedy the girl's powerlessness. The dying woman, Mrs. Edgar Linton, remembers her childhood ability to defend herself through language as a strength fostered and maintained by the breath of the moor.

The transition from the language of Cathy's own writing to that of Edgar Linton parallels her moving from the moor to the Grange. In both cases, it seems Cathy did not predict the implications of losing her own language, that is, of losing the ground of the moor. Cathy overestimates her capacity to maintain a space of personal liberty and privacy of thought within Edgar's domestic space. Having argued to Ellen Dean that she will marry Edgar Linton in order to give money to Heathcliff, Cathy winds up offering to Heathcliff only Isabella Linton, a caricature of the type of femininity produced by well-to-do households (83). Catherine tells Nelly, "if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power," to which the canny Nelly replies, "With your husband's money, Miss Catherine? You'll find him not so pliable as you calculate upon" (64). Heathcliff has no money and no paternal name. Heathcliff is both his first and last

name and also the name of Earnshaw's dead son. So Cathy cannot speak in Heathcliff's name within the paternal social order of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*.

Having no paternal inheritance, Heathcliff is, in a sense, free of the trappings of the patriarchy. Heathcliff is the non-fathering spirit of the moor, and he acts within the trope of Catherine's destabilized name as the principle source of her speech, thus subverting the Lacanian notion that only the paternal metaphor produces language in the symbolic order. Heathcliff's presence in the novel, however, also acquiesces to the dominant cultural requirement that a woman not speak or write out of her own power. Heathcliff acts, as it were, as Cathy's cover, entering into the symbiosis between Cathy and her moor and thus legitimizing and disrupting that uncanny connection between a woman and her home topography, her motherland.

Cathy's loss of access to the moor, to its winds, are figured not as displacements but rather as confinements, and this series of confinements moves her into ever narrower strictures, ultimately silencing her within the room of childbed in *Thrushcross Grange*. When Cathy first arrives, as Linton's bride, to *Thrushcross Grange*, she manages tolerably well. While one hardly believes Nelly Dean's and Isabella's assertions of Cathy's great happiness in those first few months of matrimony, there is no textual evidence of Cathy immediately weakening. The early signs of her losing power within the household of her marriage are meta-linguistic. For example, she is unable to persuade Linton to accept the return of Heathcliff as a joyful occasion. When she tells Edgar Linton, "for my sake, you must be friends now," and asks if she may bring Heathcliff indoors, her husband answers, "Here? Into the parlor?" (*Wuthering Heights* 73). The failure of Cathy's speech to enact what it requests becomes precipitously marked as she reaches her final decline: she is unable to persuade Isabella not to fancy Heathcliff, she is unable to persuade Linton to allow Heathcliff to visit the house, she is unable to persuade Nelly Dean that she (Cathy) is truly unwell and in immediate need of care (94). The failure of Cathy's language to enact

the desires it voices predicts the complete failure of her language that marks her final illness. The aphasia that begins to enclose her once she crosses the threshold into Thrushcross Grange becomes absolute silence during her maternity. The trope of pregnancy, as the wordless creation of flesh out of flesh, acts to seal Cathy in speechlessness, in complete aphasia. Not only is Cathy literally embedded by the pregnancy-induced need for bed rest, but also she is buried by her pregnancy, dying in childbed. Cathy's ability to speak effectively begins to diminish once she marries and becomes mistress of Thrushcross Grange. After Cathy has crossed the threshold of Thrushcross Grange, the pregnancy ushers the Linton name across the threshold of Cathy into Cathy's interior self, a chiasmas that proves fatal to her.

Mieke Bal, arguing that various schools of interpretation epitomize maternity as the apotheosis of muteness, or aphasia, locates a common point in speech-act theory and psychoanalytic theory. Of maternity, Bal writes:

Both speech-act theory and psychoanalysis have a materialist conception of knowledge, of the domain of the real the discourse aims to represent. Knowledge is not about reality, about a distinct, separate entity called 'the real,' but it is contiguous to, it touches, the real. The referent of language is not a preexisting thing, but an act, a modification of the real. In this sense, the model of the ideal act would be maternity and of the ideal speech act, the miracle. (*Death and Dissymmetry* 133)

The maternal act, then, is the opposite of the speech act. Since the zenith of speech acts is the cabalistic power to alter reality simply by asking or decreeing, the antithesis to such power of language is the maternal metaphor, a gesture which alters reality through muteness. As Cathy's voice loses efficacy, by implication because she is removed from the necessary breath/wind of the moors, she moves farther from the speech act which had been hers when she negated the cruelty of Joseph and Hindley by repeatedly inscribing her

name. It was not the place of the bed that gave her the power to write. Instead the bed's adjacency to the moor bequeaths this strength. As Cathy's pregnancy advances, she moves closer to the oppressed domain within which accepting the imprint of Edgar's name, bearing his child, is her only form of speech. Maternity seals her in confinement, and the moor is the antithesis of confinement. Lest it seem I am taking a negative view of maternity, I am reading maternity through the cultural lenses of psychoanalysis, of speech-act theory, and, more specifically here, of Emily Brontë's novel. In the novel, *Wuthering Heights*, maternity enacts a silencing of its heroine, Catherine Earnshaw Linton. Catherine Earnshaw, the unmarried girl, was able to inscribe her name into a chamber within which she was also able to tap the moor's breath as sustenance for her speech. By contrast, Catherine Earnshaw Linton, the married woman, loses the capacity to inscribe her name into any space. Subsequently, as a pregnant, married woman, she finally loses her capacity to speak altogether.

Catherine's multiple names, which inscribe the walls of the bed, also mark the bed as her own private space of thought. Lockwood is invaded by Catherine's presence because he has entered the space she once created as her own, for herself, and out of which she is now locked until Heathcliff on the night of his death lets her back in. The pregnancy that roots Catherine to a room in a house in which she is so much a stranger that she cannot recognize her own face in the glass also undoes her powers of speech so that even her most eloquent testimonial of her desire to leave that room goes unheeded. Cathy's pregnancy, then, becomes a silent room, an alterity to the room of names she inscribed for herself at *Wuthering Heights*. Of her reflection in the mirror of that aphasiac room, Catherine says, "It's behind there still. And it stirred. Who is it?" to which the redoubtable Nelly replies, giving the game away, "There is nobody there. It was yourself, Mrs. Linton, you knew it a while since" (96). In other words, Mrs. Edgar Linton has become nobody and knows she has suffered that fate but cannot verbally communicate her

knowledge. During the same conversation, she eloquently argues that she ought to be allowed to return to Wuthering Heights to regain her strength, and is flatly denied her request, as if she hadn't spoken at all. The room within which Cathy lives during her seven month pregnancy, and the room in which she dies giving birth, then, acts as a foil to her room at Wuthering Heights. The room at Wuthering Heights contains her writing, while the room at Thrushcross Grange contains her aphasia.

These two rooms, then, parallel the strength and erosion of Cathy's speech, just as her girlhood's heartiness and ability to survive contrast to her womanly frailty and death. However, neither enclosure is Cathy's place of authority. Instead, the moor and her grave on the moor provide the topoi from which Cathy posthumously authors Heathcliff's fate, and through him the fates of Hindley and Linton and Isabella. Contrary to Steinitz' argument that Cathy's home is her girlhood room, it seems clear that Cathy's home, in the sense of her locus of control, is the moor. Similarly, Cathy's girlhood writing in her "diary" is not a scene of power. Instead, Cathy's powerful authority is her posthumous claim on Heathcliff, through which she effects a claim on the lives of the other main characters in the novel. Posthumously, Cathy damns Hindley, punishes Edgar, and makes her daughter and her namesake a true mistress of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. The younger Cathy's superior education, exemplified in the scene of her teaching her second husband to read, suggests that this new Catherine Earnshaw will control her surroundings in ways that her mother could not (239).

The temporal contiguity of Cathy's pregnancy and her illness indicate the pressure of the pregnancy's force within the novel. That the time-lines of the pregnancy and the illness are identical is revealed through careful parsing. When Heathcliff returns from his self-imposed exile, Catherine and Edgar have been married about half a year, and it is September. As Ellen Dean remembers,

On a mellow evening in September, I was coming from the garden [. . .]
when I heard a voice behind me say, 'Nelly, is that you?' (71-72)

The voice, of course, is that of Heathcliff, returned from some unknown beyond. The time that elapses between Heathcliff's arrival and the beginning of Cathy's fatal illness is at least a couple months, enough so that Heathcliff gradually develops the habit of visiting Thrushcross Grange. Once Cathy's illness begins, the time-line becomes ever more clear. Cathy loses the verbal battle between herself, Heathcliff, and Edgar, then she falls ill, and two months later begins a bedridden pregnancy. Again, Nelly the narrator communicates the time-line, correlating the revelation of Cathy's pregnancy with the month of March:

Two months the fugitives remained absent; in those two months, Mrs. Linton encountered and conquered the worst shock of what was denominated a brain fever. [. . .] The first time she left her chamber was at the commencement of the following March. (103)

It is Nelly who reveals Cathy's pregnancy, saying:

we cherished the hope that in a little while Mr. Linton's heart would be gladdened, and his lands secured from a stranger's grip, by the birth of an heir. (105)

Cathy's seven-month child is delivered sometime towards the end of spring, for, following Cathy's internment, the weather turns cold again, following three weeks of warmth. Ellen Dean notes the continued absence of the lush music of summer foliage on the last day of Cathy's life, saying instead that the stream could be heard through the open window:

It was a sweet substitute for the yet absent murmur of the summer foliage which drowned that music about the Grange when the trees were in leaf. At Wuthering Heights, it always sounded on quiet days, following a great thaw or a season of steady rain. (121)

Subsequently, Nelly Dean notes that immediately following Cathy's burial the nascent warm weather ends:

That Friday made the last of our fine days, for a month. On the morrow, one could hardly imagine there had been three weeks of summer. (130)

In other words, one can fairly accurately align the beginning of Cathy's pregnancy with the beginning of her long and fatal illness, locating the conception around November, for the seventh month child arrives in May, and locating the catastrophic breakdown in November. Cathy's seizure follows Heathcliff's early autumn return by a couple months. The illness is exactly temporally contiguous with the pregnancy. Both illness and pregnancy are marked by the slippage of Cathy's language from having power over Edgar and Heathcliff to having little and then no power over them. Then her powers of speech vanish, and she enters a state of aphasia. The pregnancy occurs at the same time as and follows the same time-line as Cathy's developing aphasia.

At the double onset of her illness and her pregnancy, Cathy herself recognizes the connection between the fact that breath, speech, and identity have been taken from her and the fact that, pregnant with Edgar's heir, she has been marked internally by the Linton name, has taken into herself the heir to Edgar Linton. This is why she insists that only the wind off the moors can restore her to health. Indeed by mentioning the wind off the moor she gathers her power and, for one of the last times in the novel, acts. Cathy, after failing to recognize herself in the mirror glass, asserts to Nelly Dean, "I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills. Open the window again wide, fasten it open! Quick, why don't you move?" (98). When Nelly won't open the window Cathy identifies the wind off the moor with life and with her own power to speak and to act, saying "You won't give me a chance of life, you mean. However, I'm not helpless yet, I'll open it myself"(98). This gesture of displacing a smothering interior with the wind, or breath, or spirit, that comes off the moor arises from Cathy's powerful speech. It is not

Cathy who is displaced, but she who displaces. She defines the moor as life and then defines herself as capable of acting and therefore of living. The language creates the action. This last gesture of power demonstrates the interaction between the moor and Cathy's language that weaves the text of the novel.

By mentioning the wind off the moor, Cathy gathers her power and acts, opening the window to her life's breath. Upon insisting Ellen Dean allow her to open the window and breathe the air of the moors, Cathy's strength becomes so fierce that she overpowers Ellen Dean. Ellen Dean, trying to get the window shut, cannot fight Cathy. Nelly says, "I soon found her delirious strength much surpassed mine" (98). Ellen Dean reads Cathy's strength as uncanny, associating it with illness and insanity. Significantly, however, when Cathy becomes uncanny, she becomes again able to effect her future merely by speaking out loud what her future will be. That is, not only does the open window give Cathy the strength to speak, her speech becomes the powerfully uncanny language of the troped posthumous voice. Cathy describes her own posthumous homecoming, a journey "by Gimmerton Kirk" and thereby predicts her subsequent haunting of Heathcliff. Even before she is dead, Cathy's speech claims the uncanny power of the ghost:

But Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. I'll not lie there by myself; they may bury me twelve foot deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest until you are with me.

(98)

It can be argued that Heathcliff is never truly haunted by Cathy, that instead he goes mad from remembering her, but such arguments split hairs since memory itself acts as possession. Heathcliff, true to Cathy's prediction, indeed does try over and over to lead the posthumous Cathy home, as evinced both by Lockwood's dream and by Heathcliff's posture in death, both events occurring before the window of Cathy's childhood bed. Similarly, Cathy recognizes the inevitability of her own encroaching death in this speech in

which she delineates her uncanny homecoming. Months before her actual death, Cathy already claims the uncanny power of the ghost.

In this speech marking the beginning stages of her final illness and the earliest phases of her pregnancy, Cathy regains the old forcefulness of her girlhood language, but only by shifting the topos of her authority (her speech) to Gimmerton Kirk, the graveyard. She regains the power to talk only by symbolically ceding her life. She then enters her seven month pregnancy divested of any empowered mode of speaking, save that of the posthumous voice which she has already predicted when she situated her powerful language in Gimmerton Kirk, in the graveyard. The pregnancy enacts a crossing, usurping her body until it dies, while her language, her command that Heathcliff bring her home through death, gradually works on Heathcliff. After her death, he does indeed focus great energy on trying to find ways to bring her home, carrying out her troped posthumous command. However, he confuses her home with his home, misunderstanding that her command is that he join her permanently on the moor, as they are in their gravesites at the end of the novel.

The fissure between Cathy's power as a posthumous speaker, when she is a waif, and Cathy's vulnerability and powerlessness as the wife and mother of Thrushcross Grange almost tears in half Brontë's novel. If the novel holds, the body of its heroine does not. Bearing Linton's heir is fatal to Cathy. Recognizing that fatality at the beginning of her pregnancy, Cathy uses the uncanny language of the trope of the posthumous voice before she is actually dead. By imagining herself already dead, she establishes as a secure topos the graveyard, within which the paternal metaphor will no longer control her language. The uncanny voice of Cathy's illness differs somewhat from her girlhood voice. The child Cathy, though headstrong, or even cruel, is not portrayed as uncanny. Only the writing inside the bed and on the books inside the bed indicates, retroactively, a posthumously operative voice. It is the crossing from *Wuthering Heights* to *Thrushcross Grange* that

works to render Cathy, and her writing in the bed, uncanny. At the onset of her final illness Cathy describes her sense of self-estrangement as a sort of rupture of childhood, saying:

Supposing at twelve years old, I had been wrenched from the Heights, and every early association, and my all in all, as Heathcliff was at that time, and been converted at a stroke into Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange, the wife of a stranger; an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world. (97)

Specifically she sees herself as a child prematurely torn from the virginity of childhood. Significantly, the alienation from herself occurs not when she arrives in her husband's house as "the lady of Thrushcross Grange," but rather at the onset of her pregnancy with his child. Mieke Bal describes indexical differentiations within the Book of Judges between unmarried virgins, who are their fathers' property, married mothers, who are their husbands' property, and married childless women, who inhabit a transitional zone, neither virgin nor mother, but quasi-virgin, neither husband's nor father's, wholly, yet.⁶ Cathy, who never wholly belonged to her father, did not wholly belong to Edgar Linton until she became pregnant with his heir, and it is that completed possession which kills the "stout, hearty lass."

Writing Virginity

Without Edgar Linton, then, Cathy's fate in the hegemony of paternally controlled estates might have turned out differently. Before her husband, Cathy's first, as it were, significant other, is Heathcliff. Cathy describes Heathcliff as being one with herself, saying "I *am* Heathcliff, he is always, always in my mind" (64). However, inasmuch as Cathy's pregnancy works to inscribe the name Linton into her being, just as her marriage

⁶ "The childless widow who became the exemplary virgin [. . .] embodie[d] the transition between virgin and wife" (*Death and Dissymmetry* 75).

inscribes the name Linton onto her headstone, this pregnancy displaces Heathcliff. Before marrying Linton, and bearing his child, Cathy confesses that, though she may not marry Heathcliff, he will always be hers; in a sense, he will always be her. Cathy seems to understand the societal uses of a husband, how women may gain money through marriage, without understanding what it will mean to enter into a society which grants women money only through marriage (63). Her relationship with Heathcliff, then, is radically different from her marriage, and this difference specifically shows itself linguistically. These relationships effect and affect Cathy's capacity to speak. Cathy, having doubled herself, or having allowed herself to be doubled, with Heathcliff, maintains within their relationship the capacity to speak and to act and also to blur the distinction between speaking and acting so as to gain a sort of cabalistic power through her language.

It is the state of being mentally filled with Heathcliff, who acts in the novel as the representative *par excellence* of externality, exiled as he is from family, nation, and society, that, prior to her marriage, has ensured Cathy's ability to speak outside the bounds of feminine propriety. Once she becomes pregnant with Linton's child, Cathy loses the power of her language. She loses the ability to speak and thereby effect change. Becoming pregnant, she has internalized the seed of a language spoken through the paternal metaphor. In *Wuthering Heights*, slippage from the symbolic physical descriptions of character and scene to the meta-symbolic function of physical type, of flesh and of landscape, is arguably the dominant *modus operandus* for furthering plot and for illuminating character. It is no stretch, then, to read Cathy's fatal pregnancy as another symbolic physical state within *Wuthering Heights*, even as the pregnancy acts logistically within the plot.

It is useful to consider the issue of Cathy's dramatic placement between the two men, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, for further clues concerning the nature of her posthumous voice. From the first discovery of Cathy's writing, Cathy's voice is inscribed

within masculine confines. Mr. Lockwood discovers the writing by invading a room Heathcliff had theretofore kept inviolate (15). Indeed, as I have pointed out earlier, Lockwood's interpretation of Cathy's writing as a diary amounts to a masculine appropriation of Cathy's writing, enforcing a genre on her writing, her text, when that text surely could more accurately be described by Rajan's phrase, the "textual abject" ("Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*" 48-49). Mr. Lockwood forces his presence upon Heathcliff in a gesture of masculine dominance, arriving uninvited to Heathcliff's home and then forcing entry into a room clearly marked off by Heathcliff as a private space. The invasive tactics Lockwood employs are covered over by his constant referencing of Heathcliff's violent rebuttals to Lockwood's invasions. It is, however, Lockwood's actions which are the more violent, despite their veneer of decorum. Heathcliff only reacts defensively. Lockwood and Heathcliff, then, re-establish the old conflict between different modalities of manhood which Linton and Heathcliff had decades earlier fought. Cathy's body is the site of a feminine space enframed within, and arguably destroyed by, the opposing modes of masculine power fought out between Lockwood, Linton, and Heathcliff. It may also be that inasmuch as Heathcliff is Cathy, his constant suffering of the invasion of other men, from Earnshaw senior to Lockwood, reinforces the subversive feminine aspect of Heathcliff's character.

Spending the night as an unwelcome guest in Heathcliff's house, Lockwood enters the penetralia of both the physical house and of Heathcliff's psyche. The room in which Lockwood sleeps contains the bed in which Cathy and Heathcliff slept and also contains Cathy's names. This room metonymically functions as the site that elides Cathy's mature sexuality, her motherhood. Simultaneously this room is a symbolic marker of that motherhood, since it contains her prescient inscriptions of her daughter's name (15). The site of the childhood bed, then, is the site of the absence of fatal adult sexuality, yet also one of the names written onto that bed indicates elliptically the mode of Cathy's death, a

death caused by adult sexual experience. Though the question of whether Cathy and Heathcliff ever approach sexual intimacy seems fairly clearly answered in the negative, their relationship is repeatedly posited as one in which gender boundaries are elided in order that a borderless intimacy be maintained. The site of the bed they share as children is a blank space within which the fatal outcome of Cathy's enforced entry into the adult sexuality productive of pregnancy is written.

The topography of the room containing the bed where Cathy and Heathcliff shared their childhood is a landscape of enclosure and erasure, ensuring a stable identity to neither Heathcliff nor Cathy. The room is a series of diminishing spaces, of confinements. It is the place into which Lockwood is ushered secretly, so that the shrinking of dimension that follows a removal from legitimate public access occurs immediately once Lockwood crosses the threshold into the bedroom (*Wuthering Heights* 15). Further, the bed itself is constructed as a closet which is entirely sealed off from the room. That the closet opens into a window to the heath, far from increasing the openness of the topography of the closet, actually works to more decisively separate the space of the closet from that of the room. The window offers the closet an entrance discrete from the door of the room, separate from the house. Finally, the books themselves, in which Lockwood discovers Cathy's writing, are doubly enclosed and encoded spaces. Within the closet they further safeguard Cathy's privacy. The books themselves cast the illusion of being public texts. Once opened, they are revealed to be private writings, not only a select library, but also a library partly erased, or further selected, in process of being read and written over by Cathy (16). Cathy's gesture of writing over the printed texts of the books not only insists on the primacy of her own voice, but also it occludes the masculine authors of those books. The room and the bed, then, are ciphers because they enact a vanishing point of comprehension. By entering the site where Cathy's powerful, asexual child-self coexists, metonymically, with her powerless, aphasiac adult self, the third Cathy, the ghost, does

not clarify questions we might have about her life as a child or as an adult. Rather the appearance of this ghost ruptures our chance to contemplate the writing in the bed and in the books.

The image of Cathy haunting the moor as a changeling who appears to be a child and the fact that the changeling tries to enter her own childhood room suggest that Cathy's childhood itself may have always already been implicated in the fatality of her womanhood. Rebecca Steinitz argues simply that Cathy's ghost wishes to come home ("Diaries and Displacement" 410). It seems quite clear, however, that given the traumatic nature of Cathy's childhood this ghostly return cannot be an attempt at a simple, heartwarming homecoming. Instead, the ghost's childlike appearance must be read as an engagement of Cathy's ghostly, troped posthumous self with a new invader reminiscent of an old. Lockwood's penetration of Heathcliff's secret space also penetrates Cathy's secret space. The bleeding flesh of the ghostly little girl Cathy suggests a trauma prior to the grown Cathy's childbed mortality, as if an hidden wound had predicted that death just as Cathy's childhood writing predicted her daughter's name. The troped posthumous aspect of Cathy's writing the script of *Wuthering Heights*, then, is a trope of recurrence: an embedded, encrypted trauma rewrites itself as a public death and a public haunting.

Decades after her death, Lockwood, entering Cathy's secret and protected space, discovers not only Cathy's name but also that of her daughter. The name of Cathy's daughter was not written by the girl herself but by Cathy, as a child, imagining a marriage to Heathcliff. The marriage which procures the name towards which the entire novel narrows, the name "Catherine Heathcliff," is in fact a defunct marriage, barren and marked by death and ineffectual cruelty. This situation metonymizes Cathy's attempt to achieve the name she wrote as a child through the self-erasing act of giving birth to her daughter. Though the proscriptive power of Cathy's childhood writing is fulfilled, (the name "Catherine Heathcliff" does become the name of Catherine's daughter), the force of the

gesture is diminished in the course of its altering from Cathy's writing to Cathy's pregnant body. By the time Catherine Heathcliff is produced as a character, the posthumous position of Cathy's texts have been sublimated, buried into a cozy sentimental garden (244). It has been commented that *Wuthering Heights* loses strength and force once it turns from considering Cathy and Heathcliff to considering their children, shifting from Cathy's spoken and written voice to her progeny (*The Madwoman in the Attic* 303). This transition way from Cathy occurs precisely along the boundary line of Cathy's virginity.

Cathy's crossing from a writer to one who is written about occurs along the axis of her entry into adult sexuality, her loss of virginity. The writings Mr. Lockwood discovers in her childhood bed have been preserved by Heathcliff. As a symbolic edifice of her childhood fusion with the landscape, Heathcliff provides the room in which Cathy's posthumous voice can be read and heard. In essence, Heathcliff preserves the room of Cathy's virginity that doubles as the room of her authority. This preservation signifies the buried problem of the motive of the text of *Wuthering Heights*. Cathy's sexuality, from childhood fusion with Heathcliff, to adolescent game-playing with Edgar, to adult loss of Heathcliff followed by death through bearing Edgar's name, follows the shape of a fugue with relation to her use of language, her inscription of the text of *Wuthering Heights*. Cathy's ability to speak, and to write, and to have a stable name, is directly proportionate to her successful evasion of adult sexual experience. Cathy's childhood writings turn out to be her only writings because her voice depends upon virginity, which she loses upon marrying and, as it were, more evidently loses upon becoming pregnant. In *Wuthering Heights*, the loss of female virginity is the loss of female voice. Cathy simultaneously attains motherhood and death, a doubled gesture that seals her in aphasia, her body literally silenced through the attainment of that primary marker of womanhood, the bearing of a child. Metonymically, death through childbirth represents the completed loss of virginity, while the triumph of Cathy's posthumous voice, her ability to write the story of *Wuthering*

Heights from her grave, represents the repeal of the loss of virginity, a paradoxical return to intactness through death's elision of her damaged body.

When Mr. Lockwood retires into Cathy's and Heathcliff's childhood lair, he invades their relationship by reading Cathy's names and by reading her make-shift journals. The names she proposed for herself, all written before she leaves the enclave of childhood's bed, fragment along familial lines. The only name which could be considered generated by Cathy, rather than passively received, is the name of Catherine Heathcliff. This name signifies not a passive acceptance of Heathcliff's paternity, but rather the creation of a last name, a paternity applied equally to herself and to Heathcliff, for, "Heathcliff," the name, bears no paternity, since it is not a surname. Lacan's notion of language in *le nom du père* is of language built around a gap. Heathcliff's fatherlessness, then, is the erasure of an absence. This double erasure partly allows Heathcliff to assume the full generative power of creating a name, his own surname which is simply his name: "Heathcliff – Mr. Heathcliff." Cathy shares in this power until she is married and removed from the room of her three names. Language in the name of the father, according to Lacan, is language which participates in the symbolic order (*Écrits* 198). The paternal metaphor, then, indicates a site always already impossible to reach, a point not of origin, but of the illusion of origin. The father stands not as the root of spoken or written thought but as the hollowed core. That Heathcliff lacks a known biological father exempts him, and, by proxy, Cathy, from speech in the name of a father. However, Heathcliff's lack of a known biological father also enslaves him more fully to Mr. Earnshaw, for Heathcliff belongs to Earnshaw only through the symbolic act of his having been named by Earnshaw. Of Cathy's three names, "Heathcliff," "Earnshaw" and "Linton," only "Heathcliff" offers a double, and therefore uncanny, negation of self within the symbolic order. On the other hand, the name Heathcliff cannot entirely evade the paternal metaphor.

Heathcliff is created entirely in the name of the father, not having been biologically created by Earnshaw but rather captured and brought home in order to belong to the father, to be named by the father. Bearing the name of an already dead son, Heathcliff never is granted the patriarch's name, Earnshaw, but also never is allowed to remove himself entirely from the realm of *Wuthering Heights*. That is, Heathcliff can never escape language in the name of the father, but he cannot fully enter into that patriarchal landscape and language because he is not granted the patriarch's name. Heathcliff, then, remains unspeakable in the discourse of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Grange*. This outlaw quality enables him to offer Cathy a mode of speaking outside the name of the father even though he cannot provide her a place to live outside the law of the father. Heathcliff acts as a mirror that observes and records the effects of the encroachment of the law of the father onto Cathy, but he cannot protect her from the fatal aphasia she inherits upon entering into the paternal language because his name also is given by the father. Heathcliff cannot protect her ability to speak while she is alive. Named for an already dead son, Heathcliff remains suspended between a capacity, as the son already dead, to resist the patriarchy of Earnshaw, and an incapacity, as the outsider granted admittance in name only, to speak at all. Named for an already dead son, Heathcliff is outside the letter of the law: Heathcliff, in a sense, is a dead letter that cannot be sent away because its only addressee is the name inscribed in stone above Mr. Earnshaw's ancestral door. Heathcliff is a dead son who can never father a family, or a name. This dead space, then, is Cathy's entry into language troped posthumous.

The heath and Heathcliff, spaces within which Cathy's voice can be heard, bear her troped posthumous voice into the novel. Neither the heath nor Heathcliff are the sought audience for Cathy's posthumous voice, for neither Heathcliff nor the heath represent the topos of the patriarch, which Cathy tries to subvert. Instead, Heathcliff and the moor are the medium for Cathy's troped posthumous voice. Heathcliff, with no father's name to

carry, but with an existence wholly indebted to the patriarch, offers only a partial escape from the name of Earnshaw. Similarly, the moor, which enframes and encloses the father and his houses, cannot offer a literal safe home to the child or waif Cathy. Just as the moor would be unable to feed or shelter the child Cathy, despite its being wider than her father's lands, so also Heathcliff, as a topos unmarked, a space outside the symbolic order, protects her troped posthumous commands but cannot protect her from her husband's demands while she is alive.

To consider more deeply Lacan's notion of language as a speech act done in the name of the father, it is useful to revisit the site of fatherhood found in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. Shakespeare's play, read along one bias, is a paean to fatherhood. The central motion of the play follows Titus Andronicus, the great general, as he gains vengeance for wrong-doings against his sons, costing himself his life in the process of avenging his sons. However, the great general also has a daughter. The daughter is raped by Titus Andronicus' enemies and, to keep the rapists' identities secret, the girl's hands are cut off and her tongue is cut out by her attackers. These mutilations succeed in silencing Lavinia's ability to speak or write words. The sole form of speech left to the ruined girl is that of a rarified symbolic modality. Lavinia, without hands or tongue, can communicate only through references, through a sort of technique of allusion *in extremis*, pointing to key places in Ovid's text, *Metamorphoses*, with her stumps. Titus Andronicus' daughter has been forced by her rapists to use a language most narrowly in the name of the father, for only by referencing a text written by a man about another rape (that of Philomel) can she communicate what has been done to her own body. Far from silencing her completely, the rapists only silence her ability to generate language herself. They leave her the ability to use language already produced by men. She uses her arms' stumps in a kind of gruesome method of allusion, referencing the text Ovid has already written. Ovid, a literary father,

allows Lavinia to speak. Only after she has been mutilated is she allowed to enter into allusive discourse with Ovid.

Lavinia, raped and deprived of her hands and her tongue, is made into the prototype of the good daughter, for she learns to speak only in the name of the father, only by referring to male-authored texts. While Lacan indeed argues that any language, any discourse, occurs inevitably in the "name of the father" and that all speech occurs within the symbolic order, this theory, argues Kristeva, scants the material elements of language (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 88). The raped daughter, Lavinia, ironically communicates without the physical trappings of language, without the elements of sound and figuration. Titus Andronicus' daughter is disrobed not of language *per se*, but of that aspect of communication which is the materiality of language that avoids the catachresis of language in the symbolic order. That Lavinia is also robbed of her maiden-head forces her, in the same way that her aphasia forces her, into her father's care, for, in *Titus Andronicus*, the father alone is given the right to preserve the injured girl.

Titus Andronicus kills his daughter rather than allow her to live out her life after the infamy of being raped. The "map of woe" that "thus dost talk in signs" is saved from the dangers of speaking after rape, or about rape, both by her rapists, who remove from her all possibilities of speech but that of the symbolic gesture, and by her father, who kills her (*Titus Andronicus* IV.i. lines 45 -53). Titus Andronicus makes clear that he does not kill Lavinia because she has been silenced, her tongue and hands cut out and cut off, but rather because she has been raped. Just before he kills his daughter, he says: "Die, die Lavinia and thy shame die with thee" (*Titus Andronicus*. V.ii. lines 46 -47). In one sense, Titus Andronicus' murder of his daughter after she has been raped is motivated by a cause similar to the rapists' mutilation of the girl's mouth. Both the father and the rapists act violently to covert through destruction the physical evidence of violence: the rape victim's body. Both father and rapists are concerned to silence the aftermath of rape.

The means by which Lavinia might speak specifically of her own experience is removed by the rapists. The rapists remove her capacity to tell of her experience of bodily rupture and invasion as she remembers it. However, the possibility of engaging in a discourse in the symbolic order, that is in language in the name of the father, has not been removed from Lavinia. In Lacan's analogy, woman's body acts as a sort of map, a site, that furnishes and allows the symbolic action or trajectory, that is metaphor, to enact figuration. As such, the female body is within bounds only so long as it stays within the symbolic order. Surviving rape, Lavinia is called a "map of woe," that phrase indicating her body's new status as an unsuitable medium for the paternal symbolic order (*Titus Andronicus*. III. ii. line 12). Rape is that which tears apart symbolization of the self and insists on a re-invention of the conceptualization of the self. Rape creates a border territory between the former unraped self and the self that survives. Lavinia crosses this boundary by translating from the paternal language of Ovid into the literally dismembered language of her own body. But this successful crossing, this ingenious translation, does not save Lavinia. On the contrary, Lavinia must be killed by her father not because her rapists haven't silenced her, but rather because they haven't silenced her enough. The "map of woe which thus dost speak in signs," despite being deprived of her tongue, her physical voice, still speaks by signs (*Titus Andronicus*. III.ii. line 12). The truth these signs tell about the patriarchal hegemony within which Lavinia lives and dies, is a punishable revelation.

Cathy's predicament, in the trying out of names, and then the trying out of fathers, is like that of Lavinia, for Cathy attempts to translate her own experience into language. Her punishment is also death. The law of the father is that which will kill the daughter if she attempts to make the translation, as Lavinia did, from a language in the name of the father into a language expressive of her own memory and knowledge, especially if that knowledge is of the abjection and violation of the daughter's body. Daughters who

experience physical violation and also attempt to write about it re-enact Lavinia's risky translation, re-enact, that is, the dangerous shift from language in the name of the father (or the texts of literary fathers) into a new and more radically symbolic language which replicates the text of the wounded, abrogated body in figuration. If we consider Lavinia's truncated figure the template for Dickinson's and Plath's terse lyrics, we can also see the force behind Brontë's development of Cathy's posthumous presence in this novel which otherwise thwarts the powerful girl's desires.

In keeping with Lavinia's metaphor of lost hands (not to mention lost tongues), let us note that the ghost of Cathy is attacked by Lockwood's application of serrated glass to her wrists. Lockwood, like Lavinia's attackers, very nearly cuts off the hands of the waif. The violence of this *Wuthering Heights*' scene is remarkable:

The intense horror of nightmare came over me, I tried to draw back my arm, but, the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, "Let me in, let me in!" As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro until the blood ran down and soaked the bed clothes: still it wailed, "Let me in!" (20)

The physical similarity of Lockwood's torture of Cathy's ghost to Lavinia's lopped-off hands and to Ovid's Philomel's lopped-off hands bears noting. While Cathy's ghost does not precisely lose its hands, the violence is enacted along the axis of the wrist, a boundary that rape, in the cases of Lavinia and Philomel, also crosses. The wrist, after the neck, is the place of the pulse, the place where the veins, if cut just right, can be fatally opened. The cutting off of hands emblemizes in *Titus Andronicus* and in *Wuthering Heights* the attempt to eradicate the woman's strength, of body and of mind, without quite ending her

life. The cutting off of Lavinia's hands, and the cutting of Cathy's wrists, represent a male attempt to silence the violated woman.

The violence that Lockwood does against Cathy's child-like ghost is, metaphorically at least, sexual violence. The blood that runs from her wrists down to the bed clothes, staining them red, symbolizes rather graphically a loss of virginity and replicates the extreme physical trauma attendant upon the rape of a young child. The narrative impact of Lockwood's effective rape of the child-ghost Cathy is that of finally causing her silence, of finally burying her beneath one fixed name, of no longer allowing her narrative the verbal play of exchanging Earnshaw for Heathcliff for Linton. For it is not until Lockwood enacts the symbolic rape of the waif Cathy that her ghost begins to find its place: within a year after Lockwood's assault, Heathcliff dies, which event effectively buries Cathy's ghost, too. The effect of Lockwood's violent desires towards the childlike ghost, Cathy, buries her, in the same way that child-rape buries the voice of a living child. That this scene is not a literal rape does not take away from its extreme violence, and its connotation of sexual violation.

Lockwood's violence is not the only sexually charged violence enacted against Cathy in the novel. The mangled, almost removed hands of the changeling assaulted by Lockwood call to mind the almost removed foot that Skulker bites off, and even the bruises round Cathy's neck after Heathcliff's last visit. Her pregnancy itself violates Cathy, causing her aphasia and ending her life. All smack not of accidental violence but of a rather purposeful if subterranean typology of violation. We are told that Skulker's tongue is purple and hanging six inches out of his mouth after he attacks Cathy. Not only does the dog's tongue transfigure into a gruesome phallus, a half-foot out and purple, but also the pun "dangling a half foot out" suggests the dog may have in his mouth half of Cathy's foot, symbolically half of her independence (38). Further, it is suggested that after Skulker's attack on Cathy she may never walk again. Thus, the dog's attack becomes a

symbolic presentation of Cathy's ruptured hymen, a loss of virginity, resulting in her loss of power, her "never (being) able to walk again" (39). These symbolic violations of Cathy are highly bound up with cultural markers of violent rape: the blood on the bed, the darkened, swollen male member, the strangulation marks. It is important to realize that these episodes of violation in no way indicate or suggest what might be Cathy's internal state during their occurrence or aftermath. In other words, Cathy's being attacked sexually does not mean she has in herself reached mature sexuality. The child status of the ghost called a "waif" surely indicates that she had not matured before her death.

Significantly, when Cathy is dying in childbed, she remembers her childhood with Heathcliff as a time of power, and specifically a time of a power sited in the topography of the moor where the female child does not have to be feminine. The hearty lass on the moor stands antithetically to the child "waif" who is assaulted by Lockwood, as he draws her wrists over and over the glass, evoking rape both by the allusion to Lavinia's and Philomel's loss of hands and also by staining the bedclothes with the small girl's blood. The waif is a weak child while the young Cathy was strong. Cathy's loss of speech, and finally her solution of speaking in a troped posthumous voice coincide with her experiencing escalating levels of sexual violation. The blood that covers the bed in Lockwood's nightmare is the final sexual violation of the rebellious Cathy.

The child-like appearance of the ghost Cathy suggests a two-fold crossing of borders. In the space of Lockwood's nightmare, Cathy crosses from childhood into womanhood, a transition marked and effected by sexual violation. Also within the space of this nightmare sequence, Cathy's voice crosses from that of the uncannily powerful posthumous voice to that of the humiliated, raped child, bled dry and silenced. The trick of the trope of the posthumous voice, then, is to allow the persistence of the speaker's voice even after that speaker has undergone the symbolic death engendered by extreme trauma. *Wuthering Heights* encrypts the power of Cathy's posthumous voice by dramatically

cutting off that voice at the beginning of the narrative, even though it is that very voice which, through the enfolded time-line of the novel, carries the text. Cathy's troped posthumous voice writes the story of *Wuthering Heights*, even though Lockwood destroys that voice at the beginning of the novel's text.

Shockingly, Lockwood interprets Cathy's ghost as the aggressor in this scene of violence. After Heathcliff enters the apparently haunted room, Lockwood complains, "If the little fiend had got in at the window, she probably would have strangled me!" (21). This shifting of blame from the man who tortures the girl to the girl who is tortured, reveals an impetus for the literary development of the trope of the posthumous voice among women writers. The trope of the posthumous voice alters the status of victimhood, changing an abjected victim into the uncannily persistent posthumous speaker. Significantly, during its experience of having its wrists scraped repeatedly across broken glass, the girl-child ghost continues to speak. Again, here is what Lockwood recounts of his violence and her tenacious resistance:

I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed clothes: still it wailed "Let me in!" and maintained its tenacious grip. (20)

The waif continues to speak even while she is tortured. She insists on her right to gain entry into the room that contains her writing, even within the patriarchal house. The waif Cathy attempts, on the strength of her speech alone, to regain this topos of the textual room. She resists being silenced by Lockwood's violence, even when he stacks all the books against the window, attempting to use the books of the literary fathers to hold at bay the lamenting voice of the outcast daughter.

The series of bodily violations that Cathy undergoes, first the attack of the Linton's dog, "his thick purple tongue hanging out half a foot," then the fatal pregnancy, then Lockwood's attack upon her ghost, serve to force her voice into ever tighter confinements.

Before her death Cathy already speaks of "her narrow new home out yonder," indicating her prediction of her own posthumous presence in others' lives (99). The ultimate power of her troped posthumous speech, however, its ability to cause subterranean changes within the patriarchal landscape, also paradoxically increases after each violent instance. In language troped posthumous, Cathy takes the moor and Heathcliff into her control. When the ghost Cathy finally takes Heathcliff to the graveyard, which is the only way for him to prove his love for her because she cannot "brave its ghosts" alone, the moor becomes legitimately Cathy's site and territory. She must ask Heathcliff to "venture" to her because, as Cathy confesses at the onset of her pregnancy, she "won't rest until (Heathcliff) is with her" (98). The space Heathcliff marks is the topos of language in the name of the dead, the dead son, and this ground is the only place where Cathy can speak powerfully. Cathy and Heathcliff merge to avoid the paternal metaphor, to speak through the trope of posthumousness. The moor becomes Cathy's when she and Heathcliff are both buried in the moor, their story containing the evidence of their ownership of the moor.

Cathy's posthumous voice subsumes the topos of the moor completely upon Heathcliff's burial beside her. When Heathcliff's burial returns possession of the moor to Cathy, her troped posthumous voice inscribes the complete text of *Wuthering Heights*. Cathy, then, is rendered as a space of negative desire, a space of a definitive lack of desire. She is even the site of a desire for lack, if you read the moor as representative of absence. The feminine space in the novel, Cathy, is a site, like the moor, enframed by the masculine mode of claiming landscape, or name, or body. The space of Cathy, however, enacts a transfiguring path, much as her narrated walk through the graveyard verbally transposes her living self and Heathcliff into the mode of the afterlife. Cathy says:

Its a rough journey, and a sad heart to travel it; and we must pass by Gimmerton Kirk to go that journey. But Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. (98)

In effect, Cathy's death alters the patriarchal trajectory of both Edgar and Hindley so that neither leaves a powerful son to carry his name. Her body, emptied after death, provides the space and map for the direction, or telos, of *Wuthering Heights*. As noted earlier, the novel suggests that in Hareton's marriage to Cathy's daughter, it is the girl who appears to have the upper-hand. Cathy's daughter, the fruit of her fatal pregnancy, of course, bears her mother's name.

The novel's take on Milton may indeed be read ironically through the inverted scene of Cathy's daughter planting flowers with Hareton. While Milton's Eve names the flowers, it is Cathy's daughter who teaches Hareton to read, reversing the primacy of Adam's hold on language. On the other hand, the irony of this scene doubles itself, for it serves to plant the daughter of the renegade Cathy back into a safely domestic role. Like Eve, this second Cathy is gentle with the flowers and at home with husbandry. While the first Cathy was aligned with the wilderness of the moor, the second Cathy returns to tend the hearth. The irony of the text, then, may inhere in its illumination of the impossibility of the woman writer writing legibly outside of the realm of the quotidian, the safely domestic. Even Cathy's wild and perhaps demonic presence, Brontë shows us, cannot effectively free her daughter, her namesake, from the quotidian description of flowers. Instead, the first Cathy's death becomes an absolute marker within the novel, a terrain coded both feminine and sublime, which, in its extremity of paradigm, cannot repeat itself.

*Fifth Chapter**Unfigured Speakers: Texts Written with the Left Hand*

It is a nothingness, as it were, but
an active and contagious nothingness.

— Robert Hertz¹

Robert Hertz, the French anthropologist writing before World War I, presents in his essay, "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand," a framework for the function of the abject or sinister in symbolic discourse. Hertz stands as both a seminal and occulted figure in the history of anthropology. Killed at the age of thirty-three in World War I, he did not live to write long treatises in the manner of, say, Claude Levi-Strauss. He was, then, not quite a father of anthropology in the *pater familias* pattern of producing oppressively long theories of culture. However, his three extant essays and especially "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand" have profoundly informed the development of anthropology². Hertz's own historical position, then, like the rhetoric of the trope of the posthumous voice, is liminal. He does not stand as a dominant, silencing paternalistic theorist even though his work is inscribed into the basic discourse of anthropology. Perhaps he stands as anthropology's sacrificial lamb, for he crosses over into the abject place of the slaughtered, as a sort of punctum to his writing on the rôle of death in symbolic discourse.

Although Hertz's death as a soldier was a real, not a textual, death, through it his writing becomes aligned to the work of women writers using the trope of the posthumous voice. I am not arguing that Hertz's work uses the trope of the posthumous voice, rather I

¹"The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity" 8.

²See Rodney Needham's introduction to *Right and Left*.

am pointing out the uncanny historical connection between his tragic fate, which prevented him from assuming the patriarch's mantle, and the way that his work unravels the patriarch's mantle. Hertz did not write using the trope of the posthumous voice; he did not write from the position of the abject. However, his work in "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand" suggests a way to read texts written from the margins, written from the place of what he would call the left hand. Hertz delineates the contiguity between the sacred and the profane, and in so doing reveals the way that abjection, which he reads as given to the left side of the body, is a socially constructed status. Rather than supporting essentialist connections between woman's body and the sinister, his work undoes these very assumptions, revealing them as cultural constructions.

In my reading of Hertz's "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand" I make use of his concept of the symbolic space wherein the sacred and profane intersect. I appropriate his analysis of the left hand. Here, I use the left hand as a symbolic, not a literal, term. Writing with the left hand means writing subversively, writing from the place of abject in order to undo one's abjection. Although women writers using the trope of the posthumous voice initiate their texts from the place of abjection, that is from the place of the sinister, the topos of the corpse, they write towards the place of the sacred, reversing abjection. I make use of Hertz's essay to enframe my theory of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing because "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand" pinpoints precisely the margin of power between the abject and sacred elements of a culture. It is this liminal space between the profaned corpse, that is, the interdicted body, and the sanctified spirit, that is, the language a culture canonizes, which forms the topos of the trope of the posthumous voice.

In "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand," Hertz describes the culturally assigned position of powerlessness and abjection given to the left hand (Hertz 9). He also, however, describes the subversive connection between the left hand, the left-side of the body, and the arena of the sacred. Hertz suggests an alliance between the speech of the

dead and that of woman. Hertz points out that, in culturally constructed terms, woman is placed with the left hand:

In general, man is sacred and woman is profane: excluded from religious ceremonies, she is admitted to them only for a function characteristic of her status, when a taboo is to be lifted, that is, to bring about an intended profanation. (9)

The texts emerging from women writers' and feminine narrators' refusal of the patriarchally designated site of women's linguistic production, I am calling left handed texts. A text written with the rhetoric of the left hand text powerfully subverts the speaker's post-traumatic abjection, for such writing makes good use of the landscape of rejection to provide a place for text. The space of rejection and abjection here becomes that of privacy and of power.

The trope of the posthumous voice enacts a refusal. By assuming the voice of the dead, the woman writer using this trope establishes a zone of aftermath wherein she reconfigures traumatic memory. The trope of the posthumous voice uses the space of death not only as a symbolic marker for trauma but also as a *de facto* erasure of abjection: the body buried and hidden in death no longer stands as abjected by violation. A lyric written by Emily Dickinson typifies this gesture of structuring of a linguistic space, a gesture which supervises, and then subordinates, the trauma it describes. "This is my letter to the World/ That never wrote to Me" speaks initially from the abjected point of view of a rejected correspondent (poem 519 lines 1 -2). This letter, however, creates a space apart from that of the abject typically designated to one who is rejected. Dickinson's speaker uses death to turn the tables of rejection. The speaker makes death into a place of crossing: after she has crossed over into death, she no longer seeks the world's reply but rather, superior to the world, disallows any reply to her letter. Delineating the world's refusal of her, she refuses the world. Similarly, Sylvia Plath's cycle of bee-keeping poems

designates a privileged, female space, apart from the male "blunt, clumsy stumblers" (*CP Plath* 219 line 41). These poems recast the father's house as a place that women reject, not as a place that rejects them. The architectural declensions of the hive, the cells and combs, structure a topos of the woman's fertile mind, a topos superior to the father's house as a setting for linguistic achievement. Likewise, Cathy's beloved moor, in *Wuthering Heights*, stands in contrast to her father's and husband's estates. The moor is shown to be more powerful than these patriarchal estates, for it is the moor that provides Cathy with breath, with language.

These women writers' texts are left handed not because they explicitly partake of the sinister but rather because they are written from the territory of the abject corpse towards the domain of the sacred relic, making of their language a sacred or set apart terrain. The woman authored texts which I am classifying under the aegis of the trope of the posthumous voice, then, neither blatantly reject nor fully accept an easy designation of proper or improper, femininely decorous, or out-of-bounds. The death of the feminine narrator, which precedes the text she speaks, creates an irreproachable distance within the text, protecting the narrator from being seen. Women writers using the trope of the posthumous voice write the ravelling of the self. Here, the ravelling of the self, however, is only an illusion, actually providing a space for the presentation of female utterance outside the boundaries of given cultural expectations for what women ought to say. These troped posthumous poems and novels begin from a place of abjection, that is, of the left hand: the death of the narrator before her narrative. However, the texts work towards a place of sacredness, developing the sacramental figure of the disembodied woman, a gesture of self-immolation whose sacredness paradoxically depends upon the abjected status of the victimized woman's body.

One meaning of posthumous is to be born after the death of the father. The trope of the posthumous voice rejects language in name of the father, assuming a vantage point

from which the father's deferred speech, that is, his symbolic act of fathering and naming his offspring, has, by the death of the father's progeny, been silenced. This parricide by deferral occurs in troped posthumous texts because the death of the child signifies a silencing of a dead father, by cutting off his name. The trope of the posthumous voice inscribes into the name of the father a double death, killing him once through the meaning of posthumousness (i.e. after the father) and killing him twice by killing off the narrator's name, the father's progeny.³ This double murder of the father traces a text that typifies Hertz's notion of the left hand as a symbolic site of danger. I develop from Hertz the argument that women writers use precisely this inaccurate designation, the space of the abject or the left hand, as a legitimizing topos, a textual space within which they may shed the name of the father and still be read. The writing daughter's abjected body here regains sanctification through her text's erasure of the abjecting father. Her abjection lifts into sacredness only as his name sinks into erasure. The erasure of paternity enacted by the death of a child also erases the pre-eminence of the name of the father as the governing principle of figurative language. The daughter's death in fact signifies the erasure of the father's name since the son might have passed along the father's name to his own son. Within troped posthumous texts, the assumption of the paternal metaphor, the assumption of a deferral of meaning, reaches its vanishing point.

Hertz's "Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand" establishes a symbolic and literal construction of the terms left/sinister and right/dexterous. These terms in turn correspond respectively to my notions of illegible or illegitimate writing versus legible or legitimate writing, legitimacy being that which is attained via the father's name and legibility being that which is attained through the law of paternity. Here, by the terms legible and legitimate text, I mean a language readable and visible in shared public space. To be born after the

³See *The Oxford English Dictionary*: "Of a child: born after the death of the father" ("Posthumous").

father, born posthumously, is not quite the same as being born a bastard, an illegitimate child. However, there are similarities, especially inasmuch as a dead father cannot contest paternity. The etymology of posthumousness, subversively, gives the power of naming to the mother. Likewise, the troped posthumous text subverts paternal control over the language of the text, allowing the text a latitude like the orphan's, a narrator's chance to name herself paradoxically by refusing a living name. The troped posthumous text, then, inherits from the father's death the power to speak publicly after one's paternally given name has been erased.

The left hand and the left side of the body, Hertz argues, provide a place for the abject. I am extrapolating, from Hertz's understanding of the codification of good and evil as right and left, an analogous categorization that draws a distinction between readable and unreadable, aligning the illegible or illegitimate text with the space of the left hand onto which Hertz maps culturally designated abjection. The coded specifications for legitimate writing are both met and subverted in women's writing troped posthumous. In this trope, the narrator confesses her abjection by killing herself before she begins to speak. But she subverts this abjection by preserving her voice. Hertz's delineation of the power generated by the left hand, the outcast, resonates with my understanding of the power demonstrated by the writer who claims the space of the outcast, that is the space of death, as the point of departure for her text. Here is the margin between the punctured, depleted body of the sacrifice and the sanctification which that sacrifice procures. The trope of the posthumous voice claims this liminal topos for its ground.

"The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand" implicitly associates the left hand with the culturally constructed feminine, describing the enforced uselessness of the left hand as a sign of being "well brought up" in much the same way that feminine silence and demureness indicate propriety, properness (Hertz 5). The female writer demonstrating her manners was spoofed by Elizabeth Bishop when she said of Anne Sexton and Virginia

Woolf that they were "of the *our beautiful old silver* school of female writing [they] have to make quite sure the reader isn't going to misplace them socially" (*One Art* 386-387). Presumably, Bishop was complaining against the powerlessness indoctrinated into well brought up women, their reliance upon possessions to assure their cultural power. However, Bishop perhaps should not have so lightly dismissed the power of the interdiction against women's forthright speech. Bishop herself proved the strength of the pressure on women writers to "make quite sure the reader isn't going to misplace them socially" when, among her posthumous papers, were discovered completed and highly successful poems articulating lesbian passion.⁴ Bishop did not publish during her lifetime those poems whose contents would have revealed her lesbian sexuality, an indication that, like Sexton and Woolf, Bishop had, as it were, some old silver to guard. She wanted to preserve her public reputation from any appearance of unusualness. The difficulty of a woman writer claiming a space for her body within a text that she writes is a difficulty haunting Shelley, Brontë, Dickinson, Bishop and Plath. Hertz's understanding that the left hand is forced into powerlessness mirrors constrictions placed upon the bodies of women in patriarchal culture: "It is not because the left hand is weak and powerless that it is neglected. The contrary is true. This hand is subjected to a veritable mutilation" (Hertz 6). The woman's body, like the left hand, is subject to mutilation.

The theatre of the female body can be precisely the site of a radical departure from language in the name of the father, a departure enacted by the trope of the posthumous voice. This trope in women's writing opens another play, that of the vanishing body. The disappearance of the speaking body, the site of language, however much that disappearance may be a rhetorical illusion, indicates by corollary the disappearance of the telos of the signifying function, telos here designating not only meaning and but also

⁴ See Laurie Goldensohn, "Elizabeth Bishop: An Unpublished, Untitled Poem." *American Poetry Review* (January-February 1988): 35-46.

audience. Emily Dickinson's lyric, "Departed to the Judgment" (poem 399), dramatizes this departure of audience:

Departed – to the Judgment –
 A Mighty Afternoon –
 Great Clouds – like Ushers – leaning –
 Creation – looking on –

The Flesh – Surrendered – Canceled –
 The Bodiless – begun –
 Two Worlds – like Audiences – disperse –
 And leave the Soul – alone –

The audience that disperses is not simply the reading public that Dickinson did not, during her lifetime, find for her poems. Rather, the lyric inscribes a parable of language written in the name of the daughter. Since the unmarried daughter, within a patriarchal culture, does not have her own name, a daughter who refuses to write language in the name of the father is effectively writing an unreadable text. However, Dickinson's lyric explores the paradoxical clarity of writing in this technically illegitimate way. The poem presents the paradox of a text produced by a departed writer and presented to a dispersed audience. This lyric encodes its lack of audience precisely so that it can be read by some other as yet unratified audience.

The power of this poem inheres not only in its ability to usher the "Soul" into the sanctified realm of the "Judgment," but also in the lyric's capacity to engage the attention both of the universe, those "Clouds like Ushers," and of the unspecified "Two Worlds." Dickinson's lyric shows how the signifying function, the paternal metaphor, can itself be eschewed within writing, if the illusion can be created, through rhetoric, that a text is produced which is neither written nor read and yet has its own theatre and its own variable,

if elusive, audiences. In this sense, she writes the pinnacle text of the left hand, performing a simultaneous confession of and absolution of abjection.

If Dickinson's sinister page is symbolized as the death which removes the speaker from the place of speech, the place of audience, this is an wholly disembodied death. The audiences depart before the soul appears to grant her performance, and so the soul remains unseen, disembodied. By contrast, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, while also gesturing towards an interest in the typology of speech performed posthumously, anchors posthumousness in a body: the body of the posthumous monster. Built of dead parts, the re-animated monster is posthumous from his birth, born, as it were, after himself, after the death of his own body parts. The monster's life occurs after the deaths of those from whom his body is made. The monster's father dies just as the telling of the tale of the monster's life begins. The father's death enframes that tale. This grotesquely embodied post-mortem narrative does not make use of the trope of the posthumous voice. Instead, it presents a critical challenge and problem of that trope. If the point of writing as if posthumously is to elide or to erase the woman's speaking body, as a mode of protecting that body from a father's gaze, then what is to be done with the dead body? How can a text hide a dead body? Mary Shelley, between writing *Frankenstein*, in 1816, and writing *Mathilda*, in 1819, develops a mechanism for textual burial, replacing the feminine abject with the metaphor of posthumous writing.

Monster into Metaphor: Frankenstein to Mathilda

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's famous novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, together with her editorial production in 1839 of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Posthumous Poems*, stands as perhaps her most widely recognized gift to the Romantic literary canon. The poetry of her late husband, which Mary Shelley edited and shepherded into publication, is a posthumous work, standing, as it were, for Percy Bysshe Shelley in his absence. Mary Shelley's work as an editor of her late husband's poetry gained for him

an audience he had lacked while alive (see *Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: An Introduction* 69). Her novel, *Frankenstein*, also depends upon a posthumous posture.⁵ The character upon whom and from whom all the major action of the novel devolves and evolves, Victor Frankenstein, signifies his story's climax with his death. The tale, in its dramatic entirety, is thus a posthumously told tale, narrated by a speaker whose death circumscribes the action of the narrative. Robert Walton, who hears Frankenstein's story and reports it to his sister, at first glance may seem to be the narrator of the story. His sister, whose initials, M.W.S., trope her as a double to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, may be the narrator of the entire story, since it is she who receives Walton's letters. The story of the monster, however, is told by Victor Frankenstein. Frankenstein recounts to Walton the words of the monster as well as the story of the creation of the monster. Victor Frankenstein tells the tale and Walton reports it to his sister who presumably publishes the story. The posthumous strategy of the novel's rhetoric, though embedded within its layers of epistles and second-hand reports, nevertheless, is the bedrock rhetorical structure upon which the tale of *Frankenstein* is based.

Frankenstein's confession in the frame of posthumous utterance is a rhetorical gesture. As noted, in *Unclaimed Experience* Cathy Caruth argues that the repetition complex, which haunts the victim of extreme trauma, is expressed in literature by a "voice released through the wound" (8). In Caruth's theory, this wound is always placed in the body of an abjected double (8). Extending Caruth's typology of post-traumatic writing to an analysis of *Frankenstein*, one could argue that the monster is the "wounded other," the traumatized double, whose traumatic reappearance in the life of the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, gives voice to Victor's "crying wound" (8). However, I argue that the voice crying through the wound is not the voice of the survivor of trauma but rather is the voice

⁵All references to *Frankenstein* cite the version appearing in Betty T. Bennett's *The Mary Shelley Reader* 11-167.

of the abjected victim of trauma, from whom language has been wrenched away. The monster's tale of suffering and exile is not Victor's secret story, but rather it is the story of the violated other whom Victor strives to silence.

Victor's confession, then, is duplicitous. Striving to unburden himself, Victor admits to the suffering of the monster, and yet Victor retains for himself the place of supremacy by claiming that he is the one who suffers most. After Victor Frankenstein confesses himself to Walton and then dies, it is Victor and not his monster who Walton venerates as a "noble mind," implying that Victor's suffering matters while the monster's anguish does not matter (*Frankenstein* 24). It is, however, the monster whose story is structured according to the trope of the posthumous voice, a rhetorical stance of posthumousness. For, it is the monster whose position throughout the novel is rhetorically that of the always already dead, marginalized, subject. Here, I am not referring to whether the monster dies after his creator dies, a question Mary Shelley's novel leaves open (*Frankenstein* 165). Instead, by suggesting that the monster is paradoxically dead from the beginning of his life, since he is built of dead bodies, I am drawing a parallel between the monster's posthumous position as a character and the trope of the posthumous voice as a narrator's device. The monster's trope is posthumous speech.

That the monster is an abjected victim of violence, despite his murderous acts, is inarguable. The monster's body is the abject in the text. Yet, it is the monster whose point of view is most intimately explored in the core of the novel's text. The monster is Victor Frankenstein's child, and also, inasmuch as the very manner of creating the monster is described with the markers of violation and abrogation of sacred boundaries, the monster is also the victim of violence at Victor Frankenstein's hands. Frankenstein describes his acts which create the monster as unholy penetrations of the earth:

Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate

lifeless clay, collected bones from charnel houses, and disturbed with profane fingers the tremendous secrets of the human frame. [. . .] I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughter house furnished many of my materials. (40-41)

The monster is created through violence, through violation. The monster's body comes into existence through the violence of his father. His father tears apart dead bodies and violates tombs in order to create the monster. To make his monster, Frankenstein "pursued nature to her hiding places" (41). Anne Mellor has quite persuasively described Frankenstein's creation of his monster as a violation of nature herself ("Possessing Nature" 227). Mellor goes so far as to claim that Frankenstein rapes nature, writing that "at every level Victor Frankenstein is engaged upon a rape of nature, a violent penetration and usurpation of the female's 'hiding places,' of the womb" (227). Mellor describes Frankenstein's obsession with the body of his creature as a sort of trance of sexual desire ("Possessing Nature" 227). This trance of desire vividly holds Frankenstein in thrall while he creates his monster. It is very like the trance of sexual desire that propels Mathilda's father into his incestuous attention to his daughter.

If, as Mellor claims, Frankenstein's monster is created through a rape of nature, then it must be noted that the monster's body, that is, the body parts of which he is built, have been subjected to this violation. These body parts are what Frankenstein opened graves to get. Mellor argues that the monster's appearance reflects the violence through which he was created. She writes:

An unnatural method of reproduction produces an unnatural being, in this case a freak of gigantic stature, watery eyes, a shriveled complexion. (228)

The monster's body, then, gives allegorical form to the internal, private horror of violation, specifically a violation at the hands of a father. Ultimately, of course, the

monster himself becomes violent, arguably more violent than Victor Frankenstein was in creating the monster. However, the sins of the monster's father are the deeper sins of the novel. The father's sins function throughout the text to drive the narrative forwards. The monster's acts of murder are clearly cast as responses to the violation and subsequent abandonment that the monster suffered at his father's hands. The monster's body is built of dismembered bodies that have been collected through the process of "pursuing nature to her hiding places," a process which Mellor argues amounts to a rape of nature.

The monster's uncanny trajectory through Frankenstein's sacred places, tearing apart Frankenstein's home and the bodies of his family and friends, is not simply a parable demonstrating the repetition compulsion which drives the narrative of Victor's life. On the contrary, just as Clorinda is separate from Tancred, the monster is a character radically separate from Victor. The monster's suffering is not meant to enlighten our understanding of Victor. The monster's spoken autobiography does not serve to illuminate our understanding of Victor Frankenstein, but rather communicates some crucial concerns of the novel: the novel's insistence on the sacredness of nature, and the novel's concern for the suffering of the abjected child. Victor Frankenstein's traumatic repetition, which is that he keeps seeing the monster whom he has created, is nothing in comparison to the horror of the monster's existence as a motherless and fatherless child, an exile from any possible home or family.

Mary Shelley underscores this point of imbalance between the monster's suffering and Victor Frankenstein's suffering by absolving Frankenstein's good name and character through his death while leaving the monster to suffer the liminal existence of death-in-life. The humiliation and isolation, which his father's sins inflict upon the monster, are given expression in his monstrous body. In Mary Shelley's novel, then, the Caruthian "crying wound" is the monster's tale, for the monster's very body is the walking wound. A metonymic embodiment of the trope of the posthumous voice, the monster is built of dead

bodies and therefore unable to assume the rhetorical posture of the living in any of his linguistic performances.

Significantly, the monster's one moment of ascendancy over Frankenstein, achieved through his superior physical strength, occurs in the farthest north. Not only is the frozen terrain in which Frankenstein dies a place too northerly to support human habitation, but also it is to this uninhabited far north that the monster escapes from human cruelties. The very topographical code of the concept of the "north" has been shown by Robert Hertz to signify the place of the abject, the interdict, the profane. "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand" argues that the terrain of the far north forms a topos symbolically allied with that of the abject terrain of the left hand (Hertz 20). The cold far north, like the left hand or the left side of the body, signifies a departure from safety. Frankenstein describes his creation of his monster as being done with profane fingers, but it is the monster's own text that inhabits the topos of the profane, the liminal arenas of, first, the uninhabited mountains and then the absolutely uninhabitable North Pole.

The monster's ability to force the telling of his tale indeed coincides precisely and necessarily with the narrative's arrival into the topography of the extreme north. The north, a place allied to the left hand, is the only place where that abjected speaker, the monster, can perform his own language, can make his true confession and tell his history. This monologue, like any autobiography, enacts a return to the topos of the speaker's home turf, the speaker's origins. The terrain of the monster's home is the border, that liminal space between villages and between houses. The monster's home is in the damp woods and the frozen moraines uninhabited by human beings. To this place uninhabitable by human beings, the monster leads his father when the monster wants to tell Frankenstein how he has suffered because of his father's actions. Here, the monster inscribes his own confession into the text that contains his story of abjection.

The power shift that takes place as the monster is about to begin his autobiographical tale is signified not only by the arrival into the topography of the north, the forsaken, frozen, liminal space where human beings cannot govern nature, but also by the way that that landscape strengthens and empowers the monster. Once Victor Frankenstein agrees to listen to the tale the monster has to tell, the very air becomes the monster's element, the cold air an aspect of the monster's strength and voice, while the downwards push of the rain oppresses Frankenstein. After the monster and his maker cross over into the abandoned mountains which are the monster's territory, Victor comments:

The air was cold and the rain again began to descend: we entered the hut, the fiend with an air of exultation, I with a heavy heart and depressed spirits. But I consented to listen. (75)

The cold mountain air, so inhospitable to the cultured Victor, transmogrifies into the very breath of the monster. For the monster takes this air into himself as an "air of exultation," while Frankenstein feels only the weight of the rain pressing suffocatingly against him. In other words, the monster, with an air of exultation, partakes of the life-giving breath of his own turf, which is the topography of the highest mountains and the abjected terrain of the boundary. Victor Frankenstein, in the monster's left handed landscape, becomes silenced and depressed and loses his voice. The father is pushed downwards by the very elements, or aspects, of the frozen border territory that make the far north border the abjected monster's own terrain.

The territory of the mountains, a no man's land, allows the monster to speak precisely because it silences Frankenstein, the father. The language of this passage encodes the monster as being like the air, while Frankenstein is encoded as a sinking being, aligned to the sinking motion of the rain. The territory of these mountains is liminal rather than simply abject. The northern territory, where Frankenstein's monster inscribes his

confession into *Frankenstein*, is a topography at once sacred and profane. Indeed, Hertz gestures towards the uncanny, liminal, meeting places of the sacred and the profane when describing a religious ceremony of weaving:

Naturally, only the right hand comes into contact with the sacred post, the profanation of which would be fatal to the initiate; and it is the same hand that carries the thread, which is also sacred, from left to right. (Hertz 19)

In other words, the sacred hand pulls through the space of the profane into the space of the sacred. The profane power of the left approaches oppositely, from the left, the power of the sacred right. The priest and corpse meet in the uncanny symbolic space of death. The monster, built of corpses, is a corpse. Victor Frankenstein is a priest of sorts, inasmuch as he hears the confession of the monster, and inasmuch as he assumes access to a secret knowledge. The monster/corpse and the scientist/priest meet, then, in the border territory of the mountains, a territory both profane and sacred, uninhabited by men and also considered the apotheosis of the sublime within the Romantic landscape. Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Mont Blanc" expounds upon the idea that this mountainous terrain of the Swiss Alps is the apex of the natural sublime (*SPP* 89). The mountains, then, and particularly Mont Blanc, the most sublime of territories, represent the domain of Percy Bysshe Shelley and of Victor Frankenstein. However, these same sublime mountains are also portrayed in *Frankenstein* as profane, in that they cannot support human habitation while they do support the monster's existence.

The monster's left handed or profane writing articulates the sort of power which also adheres to women writers' use of the trope of the posthumous voice. The woman writer who chooses a dead speaker to narrate her text uses the forbidden ground of the corpse to protect her, acting as a barrier between the reader and the narrator. The interdiction against touching a corpse functions rhetorically to protect the posthumously

postured narrator from the gaze of a reading public, a gaze arguably coded male.⁶ Frankenstein listens to the monster's tragic tale partly because he fears the revived corpse which is the monster. He doesn't want to confront the corpse, to further profane his fingers by touching it again.

Frankenstein's own exalted status, beloved by his kith and kin, is purchased at precisely the cost of the monster's continued degradation and abjection. If you will allow that Frankenstein's acts of opening and reaching into graves are sexually charged acts of violation, acts which absorb Frankenstein's sexual energy, then it is clear that Elizabeth's much vaunted purity is preserved through the monster's bodily abjection. While Frankenstein was penetrating graves and ravaging the corpses which became the body of his monstrous progeny, he was specifically not seducing Elizabeth. When the monster murders Elizabeth on her bridal bed, he is only repeating across the topography of Elizabeth's vulnerable body the violating acts Frankenstein committed upon the bodies which became the monster's body (*Frankenstein* 144-145). The monster's body absorbs the sexual abjection otherwise constantly deferred in this violent novel until the scene in which he forces his abjection onto the body of a woman.

The monster's monstrous body is, as it were, all left hands, for he is built of corpses, which inhabit the realm of the profane. The story of the monster can only be presented to the public when it is de-stigmatized within the enclosing narratives of Victor Frankenstein and Robert Walton and Mrs. Saville. The profane monster stands in contrast to his deified father, Frankenstein, whom Walton calls "a divine wanderer" (24). However, Mrs. Saville's position as the final arbiter of these left handed and right handed tales, these profane and sacred confessions, complicates the trajectory that the novel's

⁶Mary Russo, for example, makes the argument that the spectacle of the female grotesque is based upon the "empowered male gaze," a gaze which constantly reads the female body and all its gestures as a theatre (*The Female Grotesque* 121).

narrative follows. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's own respectable, matronly ideal, a woman harmoniously at home receiving missives from the wilderness, appears in the character of Mrs. Saville, a receiver of messages. However, it may also be argued that, as the character who places together the epistles of which the tale is made, Mrs. Saville controls the telling of the novel. Mrs. Saville's position is, then, that of the sacred or set apart, that of a narrator who cannot be touched within the space of the text. If we agree that Mrs. Saville is the narrator of the tale of Frankenstein's monster, then her relationship with the abjected, raped monster enacts the contrapuntal steps between the sacred and the profane that also appear in the rhetoric of the trope of the posthumous voice. The trope of the posthumous voice establishes a respectable and untouchable narrator who covers for the abjected corpse hidden in the text. It is Mrs. Saville, rhetorically speaking, who allows us access to the monster's monologue and thus to the interior topography of the most extreme abjection: the monster's abjection is that of the corpse denied proper burial. Mrs. Saville, then, is the highly respectable, set apart, or sacred, sister who receives words but, femininely decorous, does not speak them. She is also the conduit to the interior knowledge of an abjected language. It is M.W.S. who leads us to the text revealing the monster's mutilated, abrogated body.

Mary Shelley's gesture of simultaneously distancing and bringing together the two poles of sublime and abject within the characters of Mrs. Saville and the monster is predictive of the trope of the posthumous voice developed in *Mathilda*. Mrs. Saville's position as the receiver of epistles, that makes her the implied narrator of the novel entire, is a position assumed in *Mathilda* by the character of Woodville. Woodville receives Mathilda's confession and, by implication, publishes the text we read. Unlike Mrs. Saville in *Frankenstein*, however, Woodville is an active character in *Mathilda*. Woodville has been the beloved friend of the woman who writes her death-bed confession to him. Woodville is not protected by the cloak of bodilessness that hides in unseen narratorial

presence the sister of Robert Walton. Instead Mathilda herself assumes that cloak of invisibility by speaking from a posthumous point of view throughout the text of her novella. It is Mathilda who retroactively receives the cloak of invisibility or bodilessness when she becomes in effect an unfigured speaker, telling her tale after her own death.

Mathilda's dead body secures her ability to speak. Indeed, she must silence her own body before her tale can be heard. The flesh, in *Frankenstein*, enacts a quite literal parable of translation: from dead corpses to living monster. In *Frankenstein*, the tale to be told is the story of the flesh, the gruesome persistence of matter. In *Mathilda* the horror of the flesh, the gruesome persistence of matter, gives way to an in-depth exploration of abjection as a metaphysical state. Mathilda's father desires to rape her, but she escapes him and is apparently never touched. Nevertheless, Mathilda experiences her father's desire to become her lover as an assault as serious as that of rape. In *Mathilda*, the mortal becomes the moral. The concrete symbolism of dismembered flesh found in *Frankenstein* develops into a complicated rape-through-language, which is the story of *Mathilda*. In Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* the heroine retains the physical impenetrability of Mrs. Saville, but also partakes of the abjection of the monster. The heroine feels that, because her father has expressed to her his overwhelming sexual desire for her, her story cannot be revealed: "There was too deep a horror in my tale for confidence: I was on earth the sole depository of my own secret" (*Mathilda* 216). Similarly, the Frankenstein's monster is a child palpably and irrevocably marked by his maker's appetites. The monster becomes a figure of abjection, figuring into the text of his body his maker's hidden profanations.

Written onto the monster's body are the marks of the violence and violation through which he was created. In a sense, the monster's body gives allegorical form to Victor Frankenstein's sins. Not only is Victor Frankenstein's desire to pursue nature to her hiding places, as Mellor argues, a desire encoding a sexual lust, but also Frankenstein's

physical interaction with the earth he digs up and with the corpses he tears apart encodes sexuality as violence against the other's flesh. That is, Victor Frankenstein suffers from a specific desire to violate and not merely from a diffuse, misguided lust. Produced through the rapes his father enacts, the monster expresses figuratively the internalized self-image of Mathilda, a beautiful young girl whose father wants to rape her. There is evidence that real-world victims of incestuous rapes do indeed see themselves as monstrous. As Judith Lewis Herman explains:

Many victims of father-daughter incest felt that what set them apart from others was their own evilness. With depressing regularity, these women referred to themselves as bitches, witches, and whores. The incest secret formed the core of their identity. (*Father-Daughter Incest* 79)

Mathilda's father, however, does not physically touch her. His rape is enacted through language only. The development in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's writing, that leads from the parable of the monstrous flesh in *Frankenstein*, to the purely verbal, trope-driven play that forms the action of *Mathilda*, traces the paradigmatic gesture of the trope of the posthumous voice. It changes from abject figure to the metaphor of the unfigured speaker. If the heroine of *Mathilda* and the monster of *Frankenstein* are both characters profaned and set apart, what does Mary Shelley achieve by altering the mode of rhetoric from the parable, as in *Frankenstein*, to the meta-linguistic play, found in *Mathilda*? Shelley's decision to express the wretchedness of the child raped by a parent through the trope-within-a-trope motif of Mathilda's linguistic rape and rhetorical suicide mitigates the intensity with which the reader fears the monstrousness of the raped child. In *Mathilda*, then, Mary Shelley buries the brutal, physical aspect of paternal rape. Nevertheless, it is father-daughter incest that engenders this monstrous progeny: Mathilda, a corpse who speaks. By re-creating her monster as a pretty young girl, in *Mathilda*, Shelley loses the

rigorous allegorical structure of *Frankenstein*. Trading body parts for parts of speech, she trades a best-seller for a work unpublishable for more than a century.

By arguing that Frankenstein's monster and Mathilda both suffer bodily abjection, I am not arguing that Shelley had in mind incest per se when she wrote her famous first novel. Rather, I am arguing that she delineates a pattern of extreme abjection, expressed first allegorically through the monster's body and then expressed metaphorically through Mathilda's posthumous linguistic performance. Robert Hertz identifies the designated space of the dead as the place of crossing over, within which the sacred and the profane are both represented. Hertz argues:

The right side is the side of life while the left is the side of death. Fortunate and life giving influences enter us from the right and through our right side; inversely, death and misery penetrate to the core of our being through the left. (Hertz 12)

The dead body is unclean and, if touched, will draw the one who touches it into the profane or abject space of the dead. However, the spirit of the deceased may enter the space of sacredness, intersecting with the domain of the priest in the loci of saints and martyrs. Similarly, the daughter in *Mathilda* marks an uncanny liminal space within which the sacred and the profane cohabit. The daughter is seen by her father as a creature to be worshipped above all others. The incestuous father refers to his daughter as a "sacred type," and an "image of loveliness and excellence" (*Mathilda* 209). Abjected by his desire, she is also set apart by his incestuous desire.

Mathilda becomes vile in her own eyes because her father's sexual desire for her has redefined the symbolic space she occupies within her culture. This vileness is not, in the text of *Mathilda*, an interdiction self-imposed by its heroine onto herself. Instead, the text suggests that no one, not even Woodville, in Mathilda's cultural milieu, could separate Mathilda as a moral/ethical actor from the incestuous desire her father felt for her. Mary

Shelley's decision to portray the daughter's trauma through the trope of a verbally proposed rape, that effects the post-traumatic outcome of an actual rape, obviates within *Mathilda* the spectre of the degraded body. By protecting Mathilda from an actual rape, but exposing her to a verbal assault, Mary Shelley forces consideration of how rape humiliates and abjects the victim spiritually. Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*, by enacting its violation entirely within the realm of the verbal, renegotiates the territory of the abject, shifting the ground of the abject from the body to the soul. The trope of the posthumous voice emerges through the symbolic connections between rape, language and death.

Mary Shelley's concern with the theme of the abjected, humiliated child of an egomaniacal father governs both *Mathilda* and *Frankenstein*. The topos of the body, that governs the text of *Frankenstein*, becomes the trope of bodilessness in the novella *Mathilda*. In *Mathilda*, Mary Shelley fashions a mode of abjection and degradation that excludes physical punishment and does not express itself in physical deformity or injury. The mark of Cain is used by Mathilda as a metaphor, while the monster wears it as his monstrous body. The structure established in *Mathilda* implies that if the rape of the daughter occurs only on the level of the linguistic, then death need not silence her. Mathilda's body, exempted from actual physical penetration by the raping father, is also exempted from a death which silences. Mary Shelley implies, then, a troubling connection between a woman's ability to preserve her virginity against assault and the woman's ability to speak.

By placing Mathilda on the moor and then in her grave, Mary Shelley presents Mathilda's body as a space literally set apart, a space sanctified because it cannot be entered. By contrast, by placing Mathilda's body in the lustful and incestuously priapic gaze of her father, Mary Shelley locates Mathilda's body in the place of the profane. This double-shaping of Mathilda's body within her own narrative as a space simultaneously erased by death and forefronted or highlighted by desire enacts a crossing from the left

hand to the right hand that is the definitive gesture of the trope of the posthumous voice. The dead daughter who speaks and the virgin daughter who is raped are figures of a paradox. The paradoxical position of the narrator narrating from the place of death works like that of Mathilda, narrating from the sacred space of virginity but telling the story of her own incestuous victimization. *Mathilda* constructs a pattern of narration that ruptures and reconfigures the mimetic aspect of written text, for it gives dramatic precedence to what has been intimated rather than to what has actually taken place. The monster in *Frankenstein* is an allegorical figure, while *Mathilda*, a text spoken through the mask of a dead woman who narrates her own story, is an extended metaphor. Inasmuch as the monster is Victor's double, the monster is also and more intimately the double of the souls whose dead bodies construct his living one. In the same way, Mathilda's double is not merely Woodville, who bears her text to the public gaze, nor even her mother Diana, whose body duplicates a punctum of the father's lust. Mathilda's double is her former self, her body before her father incestuously desired her. The text constantly, nostalgically, refers back to the Mathilda who existed before the father's incestuous desires were known. The trope of posthumous speaking employed in *Mathilda* solidifies Mathilda's post-traumatic status of having become her own double, a second, or posthumous, self.

Abjection and Mimicry

Contending that the parable of the raped daughter is essentially an unspeakable story, we return to Cathy Caruth's argument that the nature of traumatic experience is a "leave taking" from memory (*Unclaimed Experience* 65). Indeed, the central claim of *Unclaimed Experience* is that extreme trauma is impossible to remember. By arguing that what cannot be remembered cannot be written, Caruth posits a gap in linguistic performance itself as a necessary aftermath of trauma. While the absence or impossibility of memory, a gap or aporia in the place of history's core, is a seductive notion, within the trope of the posthumous voice there occurs not so much an absence of knowledge as a

hiding of knowledge. The leave taking aspect of post-traumatic narrative, I argue, is not necessarily based upon traumatic amnesia but rather upon the structural exigencies of hiding the abjected body. The text imitates trauma by hiding the confession or replication of the penetrated body. This mimesis in turn enacts a crypt, repeating the structures of the trauma within the architecture of burial.

The concept of metaphor as mimesis developed in Walter Benjamin's "On the Mimetic Faculty" guides my consideration of the rhetorical structure of the trope of the posthumous voice. When mimesis is performed in the space of the narrator as a figure, as is the case in the trope of the posthumous voice, since the narrator is pretending posthumousness, the text is flattened, or rendered uncanny. Benjamin argues that the mode of signification through which language is manufactured is a broken structure which is nevertheless linked to an intact, ideal whole language. This concept of an original language draws on Plato's notion of forms but also subverts Plato's contention that the product of mimesis is necessarily less than the thing itself. Instead, Benjaminian mimesis resonates with the Aristotelean concept that mimesis is itself a formal gesture, originary in the way that the essence of each act is originary. Benjamin writes:

In this way language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complex archive of non-sensuous similarity.

("On the Mimetic Faculty" 336)

Language imitates the real by adumbrating the integument of "non-sensuous similarity" or metaphor that binds together the signification and the object. This mimesis of non-sensuous similarity, then, is an original gesture. The trope of the posthumous voice does not imitate death but rather originates an act of self-erasure within self-disclosure. By writing about oneself as a dead woman, one writes oneself out of the story, or out of the poem, leaving intact only the formal or aesthetic shape of the language of the text. The trope of the posthumous voice is not a secondary echo of death, but rather uses the self-

erasing aspect of death to create a metaphor expressive of permanent traumatic damage. The "self" written out of the troped posthumous text is the narrator. As the narrator disappears into the performance of death, the text that confesses this vanishing nevertheless is supported by the narrator.

Benjamin's concept of mimesis depends upon an orchestrated control of the semiotic, for the "mimetic element in language can, like a flame, manifest itself only through a kind of bearer" ("On the Mimetic Faculty" 335). Sylvia Plath's, "Edge," captures this aspect of Benjaminian mimesis. In "Edge," a young woman is presented to the reader as "perfected" (*CP Plath* 272 -273 line 1). The rhyme of "perfected" and "dead," in the lyric's opening couplet, emphasizes the gesture of the young woman's removing herself from the field of discourse in order to seal into perfected, finished form one utterance. "Edge," evokes and then dispenses with Platonic criticisms of mimesis by off-handedly referring to "a Greek necessity," not bothering to specify which, if any, actual Greek tragedy it references. Rather, Plath's heroine presents simply herself as *de facto* transfigured into the stuff of Greek tragedy. Quite unlike Medea, the dead mother in "Edge" is not necessarily abjected, that is, rejected and betrayed. Plath's poem brooks no criticism of its heroine for killing her two children, figured as two serpents. The coiled white serpents at the heroine's breast call to mind, of course, Cleopatra, the Ptolemaic queen in Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* (*Riverside Shakespeare* 1343). Cleopatra speaks of the serpent whose bite is her suicide as if it were a child she is suckling. The historical question of whether Cleopatra, despite her family's generations on Egyptian soil, is still Greek, argues for the legitimacy of the speaker of "Edge" including herself in the category of Greek tragic heroines.⁷ Cleopatra's questionable status as a

⁷For a discussion of Cleopatra's ancestry, see E.M. Forster's *Alexandria* 231.

Greek heroine mirrors the liminal classicism of the heroine of "Edge." Imitating both Greek and Shakespearean theatre, the speaker of "Edge" reverses the theatre of mimesis, replacing her own rhetorical death for the earlier heroines' theatrical deaths. The heroine of "Edge," like Cleopatra, who makes use of a snake for her suicide and speaks of it as if it were her progeny, describes her infant children as "white serpents" (*Ariel* 84). This confusion of suckling infants with asps, by blurring the distinction between symbols of new life and of suicide, effectively blurs the border (or, if you will, the edge) between the text produced by a living author and death as a production itself, death as a theatre of the edge.

The death performed in Plath's poem, paradoxically, gives birth to the formal completion of the woman who is the mother of that text. This aesthetic form, which overrides fracture, implies a Benjaminian notion of mimesis. Plath's poem also evokes the notion of the Platonic form, inasmuch as the poem focuses upon the woman's posthumous or otherworldly achievement of a formal, embodied perfection. Benjamin's notion of an intact, originary language whose fractured pieces are the languages we speak and write, is, of course, not quite the same as the Platonic concept of forms. The Platonic form acts as both template and object, casting its shadow but remaining hidden itself, while, according to Benjamin, the original language has been shattered and we speak and write with its shards ("The Task of the Translator" 79). This original language is analogous to the Platonic form, for both embody an aesthetic perfection, the perception of which renders the viewer blind to everyday language or objects. Like the philosopher who seems blind in the cave of shadows, symbolic language moves, as if blind, away from the linguistic functions of intention, sense, and information. Benjamin argues:

To turn the symbolizing into the symbolized (is) to regain pure language (and) in this pure language all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished.

(*"Task of the Translator"* 80)

The return to the "pure language" is a violent turn. That is, the purest language would mean an erasure of language, collapsing signifier into signified. These "fragments" of language with which we speak and write are not shadowy imitations of the real language extraneous to and existing apart from our language, (78). Rather, our words are themselves the broken body of the original language. If all the fragments were put together, the ideal language would be returned to our mouths. For Benjamin, then, mimesis as a mode of signification is not a less-than proposition. Rather, mimesis is an originary gesture in the aftermath of the fall. Mimesis bridges the gaps between the broken pieces of the original, whole, pre-lapsarian language.

Plath's late poem, then, expresses the perception of a similarity between the profane corpse and the sacred grave-stele, even though the moment of perception itself is "consumed in a flash" and "its perception is in every case bound to an instantaneous flash" (*"On the Mimetic Faculty"* 335). Even though the poem is about an anonymous dead woman, Plath's heroine in "Edge" also establishes herself as a perfected form. Here is the function of the lyric: to enplace a perfected form, as metaphor, marking as scar the place where the fatal or consuming flash of perception crossed. Although Plath's poem's heroine imitates classical heroines, with quick, deft gestures of the line, "the illusion of a Greek necessity," the speaker of "Edge" establishes the contours of her own primacy. She not only imitates the powerful, murderous heroines, but also she sees through the illusion of their lives, as indeed she has seen through the illusion of her own life and has ended it.

"Edge" oscillates between the text of the left hand – the abjected "dead/Body" – and the right handed writing that creates the sanctified space of the perfected form, here,

the sacred space of the classical canonical text (lines 2-3). It is a literary performance that buries the abjection of its inception. Plath begins to write her poem with the rhetoric of the left hand, for "Edge" is about a woman's corpse, an abject space. The lyric, however, progressively shifts towards the right hand, mapping out the rare and sacred possibility of a perfected life. The classical body, that which wears the toga, and the illusion of the perfection of classical forms inflect the poem.

The perfected woman, a young mother, retains an association with the youthful imagery of rose gardens and nursing mothers. She has only, as it were, fallen asleep, as gardens sleep under night coolness. This perfected woman may be interpreted as a sacred icon, a very young woman tender as the "sweet deep throats of the night flower" (line 16). "Edge" re-enters the territory of the abject, or the left hand, however, in its final two stanzas. The image of the aged mother of the young suicide appears. The mother of the perfected woman inhabits entirely the space of the left hand. Her flesh has been honed down to bone, and yet she still is not silenced or stopped. While the feet of the young mother are epitomized as stopped dead in their tracks, the moon, the mother of the young mother, continues to move, dragging her sinister topography with her. The moon takes over the poem with the power of the profane that the young woman rejects. "Edge" employs gestures of the right hand, or sacred, inasmuch as the poem draws upon classical, canonical imagery, painting its young suicide as a sacred victim. However, the lyric's aged moon writes with the left hand, revealing a power to survive the abjection of the flesh. The moon in her "hood of bone" closes the poem, doubling and enclosing the innocent, perfected suicide with a more powerful trope of survival at all costs.

The border territory between the sacred and the profane is the territory of the trope of the posthumous voice, the territory of texts that harness the uncanny power of supernatural speech but also risk being branded profane, because of their connections with corpses. The liminal space between the powers of the sacred and of the profane is

described by Hertz as a space of intersection, a place within which a symbolic chiasmata occurs. The impure is separated from the sacred and is placed at the opposite pole of religious codification. Within Hertz's theory of the right and the left sides of the body, however, it is also possible to argue that the profane is not defined by purely negative or powerless features; rather, the profane appears as the antagonistic element which by its very contact degrades, diminishes, and changes the essence of things that are sacred (Hertz 8). Hertz describes the left handed or profane topos as "a nothingness, as it were, but an active and contagious nothingness," indicating the alliance of the antagonistic left hand with the uncanny (8). The topos of the figured dead body that speaks is a place wherein elements of the sacred and of the profane intersect.

The active and contagious nothingness, that Hertz allies both with "baleful influences which oppress, diminish, and harm," as well as with "weakness, evil, and death" represents the alliance of the power to negate with the counter-claim of powerlessness (7). Pretending to assume the voice of the dead, then, is a way of pretending to assume an entirely powerless, vulnerable body while harnessing the strength of an "active and contagious force" (8). Just as Dickinson's early lyric, "Twas just this time last year I died" (poem 344 line 1), emphasizes the physical powerlessness of the corpse, Hertz emphasizes the association of the corpse with powerlessness. However, the abjection that attends the corpse in Dickinson's poem gives way to the ascendancy of a supernatural voice, a dead and disembodied lyric narrator, for the narrator describes herself as having become too high for mortals to reach (lines 17 - 20). Of course, this topos, within which a knowledge of the dead is assumed, is merely a rhetorical structure, a platform from which the woman writer may express her own knowledge of how it feels within the self to suffer a symbolic death.

Hertz contends that the power of the left hand, which he is at pains to make clear is a culturally constructed and not a natural or essential power, is allied with feminine power. Indeed, presenting an analysis of cultural constructs, Hertz writes:

If woman is powerless and passive in the religious order, she has her revenge in the domain of magic: she is particularly fitted for works of sorcery. (9)

In order to elucidate the nature of the marginality within which the text troped posthumously is written and read, I have borrowed the framework of the left and the right side of the body, or the profane and the sacred, the masculine and the feminine, that Hertz develops in "The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand." For, although the trope of the posthumous voice produces writing in the margin, that marginality is the space of crossing over from the abjected, often physically violated, female body, into the place of the sacred sacrifice. That the body of the woman vanishes through this trope of posthumousness only indicates the centrality of the woman's body to the text.

The body of the speaker troped posthumous maps a ground between the sacred and the profane. Hertz asks "How could one man's body, the microcosm, escape the law of polarity which governs everything?" (10). The woman's body even more so does not escape the effects of cultural polarity. Like the left hand, her body is perceived as a site of uncanny power, abjection her cultural assignment. The centrality of the abject body in the distinction between the pure and the impure, the sacred ground and the interdicted ground, provides a critical basis for the textual gesture of the trope of the posthumous voice. For the body that centers the struggle between "sacred, noble, precious, a male side, strong and active; and another profane and common, a female side weak and passive" is a male body (Hertz 7). The female body, within this dichotomy, is shunted off-stage, stage-left, into "a nothingness" from which it is left to exert its power of nothingness. The logic of a woman writer assuming the trope of the posthumous voice is the logic of beginning in the

place of bodilessness, the place of no-place, and from that emptied topography creating a self-engendered topos which makes manifest a state of fatherlessness. From this place comes a paradoxical female self-fashioning: fashioning the self as an absented body that speaks a presented text.

I began by arguing that the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing is a trope of refusal: a refusal of the quotidian, the domestic, and, of course, life. Emily Dickinson's posthumously famous oeuvre delineates the contours of refusal. While her work is often situated inside the father's house, it establishes its speakers as outcasts within the gates, revealing the father's house only to describe the way in which the daughter within that house is dead. Her choice to write using troped posthumous speakers, then, is a gesture of claiming power for herself. Her troped posthumous speakers evade and erode the father's house and grounds. I will next give consideration, then, to the way that the symbol of paternity, as the capacity to name, and the metaphor of posthumousness, or the capacity to speak after the father, work in her poems

*Sixth Chapter***"Death Don't Apply to Me:"¹ Emily Dickinson's Taboo**

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler suggests that the post-structuralist idea that the gap between signifier and signified is a necessary part of linguistic production, a *différance* that makes the difference, alters our understanding of the incest taboo which Levi-Strauss interpreted to be a foundation of culture. Butler contends that, because gender identities are unstable, woman's position as an object of exchange cannot provide a necessary condition for culture. She further contends that the concept of the *non du père*, Lacan's linguistic extrapolation of Levi-Strauss's anthropological insight, reflects not a masculine hegemonic law but rather an ambiguously gendered taboo (71-72). By the terms *non du père*, or the no of the father, and *nom du père*, or the name of the father, Lacan establishes the mechanism of the paternal law: the father names and the father denies. This naming and denying, argues Lacan, govern linguistic production and use. Butler, however, contends that Lacan's so-called law of the father, an interdiction that apparently holds the signifier and signified at an impasse, is not the cause of *différance*. That the meaning of a sentence will always be deferred or interpreted partially, since the signifier never completely reaches the signified, for Butler only indicates the instability of the paternal law. In place of the *non du père*, Butler inserts an instability of identity. Lacan's idea that a paternal injunction governs the way that symbolic language is created, then, is subverted by Butler's reading. Turning from the Lacanian paternal order, she implies that the so-called law of the father is simply a law against fixed meaning, its only imperative an ungendered, always residual, deferral of meaning.

¹Wayne Koestenbaum, sonnet 72 "Medusa (Emily Dickinson)," line 13, from the sequence "Metamorphoses (Masked Ball)," *The Milk of Inquiry* 112.

Through her subversion of Lacan, Butler confronts Claude Levi-Strauss' notion of an incest taboo. The incest taboo, as Butler reads Levi-Strauss, holds in place an exigency of exogamy: by giving the women of one's own family to men of other families one builds a social structure (*Gender Trouble* 83). Butler, by contrast, argues that woman-as-object-of-exchange is itself a false categorization, denying women any internal self-identity, and therefore incapable of fostering culture (85). The principle of the exchange of women, or exogamy, she argues, merely engenders culture in the sense of creating categories (99). Culture, then, is created through the constant slippages between the margin and the center, not through the exchange of women, who have accidentally, as it were, traditionally marked the margin. Developing from Butler's subversion of Levi-Strauss and Lacan, I argue that this margin may be read as the place of the dead, while the interior denotes the space of the living. The paternal function, in Lacanian theory, represents death as a terminus whose punishing patriarchal edge creates symbolic expression. By contrast, I am extrapolating from Butler and reading death itself as an always destabilizing force, a force that confuses meaning and unsexes speakers and readers, obviating the paternal law. Language as such is bounded by a "no," a limit, but this no is not necessarily the father's. Rather, it is the frame of death, death as "no," that encloses text as a manifold of symbols.

If Lacan's notion of the father's legislative power is a misprision of death's imposition of limits, then what better way to subvert the house of the father than through writing as if from the grave. That is, if, as Butler argues, the paternal law does not create discourse in the symbolic order, then writing from the rhetorical place of the nameless dead, a place across a boundary, works to subvert the father's perceived power over language. Here, death marks a boundary, making all social identity, of which bearing a name is one aspect, unstable. If the incest taboo which forbids fathers keeping their daughters for themselves is broken as a matter of course in patriarchal cultures, indeed if the taboo is rather an interdiction forbidding daughters from abandoning their fathers, then

the scene of a kept daughter writing may be typologized as the scene of writing from the underworld. Here, by the phrase kept daughter, I mean a daughter who is in some sense kept in her father's house.

Emily Dickinson was a daughter who, famously, did not leave her father's house. She was also, I will argue, a daughter who wrote from the topos of the margin, the place of the nameless dead or of the underworld. Her father and brother did not follow Levi-Strauss's exogamic law of bartering away their daughters/sisters, Emily and Lavinia. Instead, for reasons upon which I would not speculate, Mr. Dickinson *père* and Austin kept their objects of exogamy at home. Kept home, Emily Dickinson made good use of her private bedroom to write poems. She spent her time in her soft prison reading and writing, paying attention to the very issue of deferral which her posthumously famous oeuvre emblemizes. In her father's house, Dickinson created a body of work whose central premise is deferral. Typically, this deferral is expressed through the metaphor of the Christian afterlife. Her use of the Christian topos of the Judgment Day does not take away from Dickinson's original insight into the necessity of deferring life through a language that refuses to close on one meaning. For example, in "This is my letter to the World," the central question of the contents of the letter is never given away (*Poems ED* poem 519). The speaker says her letter would tell "The simple News that Nature told/ With tender Majesty" but declines to reveal what that news is (lines 3, 4). The letter, then, acts as a rhetorical ruse, serving principally to obviate the possibility of the reader ever having read and finished reading the letter's contents and then setting the letter aside. The lyric's refusal to reveal its own contents preserves the lyric in a sort of perfect tense, always evoking a letter which, because it is never read, will never be set aside.

In this chapter, I will draw a connecting thread between Dickinson's development of what I am calling the trope of the posthumous voice and the trap of the paternal house within which Dickinson wrote. Whether the father's house was a lucky briar patch for her

is not strictly relevant to this argument. Rather, I will explore the function of her rhetoric of already dead speakers, speakers who stand in the space of the aftermath of death and speak both from and of the place of death. "Death don't apply" to the speakers of some of Dickinson's most powerful lyrics. From the grave they are still able to talk to and influence the living. This topos of death, the marginal persistence of the underworld or burial place, becomes normative in some of Dickinson's lyrics, enough so that death begins to function as a site of home, a homecoming for the daughter never allowed a home of her own.

The troped posthumous speaker's power inheres in her knowledge of death, her ability to persist as voice in that space of death that categorically nullifies her. The speaker exhibits an expertise, a practice of death, a thorough knowledge of the very powerlessness and abjection that she ironically subverts through her powerful language. Dickinson's poems about the deaths of others initiate us into her troped posthumous speakers' intimacy with death. In a poem describing an older man's death, for example, Dickinson explores how a speaker mysteriously already familiar with what it is like to die guides the man through the gate of mortality (*Poems ED* poem 454). How it is, specifically, that the lyric's speaker already knows how it feels to die is not explained in the poem. However, her firsthand knowledge of how it feels to die is the central story of the poem, for it is the application of this knowledge to the scene of the man's death that gives her power.

The poem's speaker describes how the man's loss of power gives her strength. "I rose -- because He sank" the poem begins (poem 454 line 1). On its surface, the poem describes a common experience of nineteenth century daughters, that of watching after the sickbed of a dying parent. That Dickinson spent a number of her days watching over her mother's sickbed is both complained about in her letters and finally rejoiced in. When Dickinson writes of her aging mother, "when she became our Child, the affection came" she indicates the same celebration of a shifting of power explored in this lyric about a

father's death.² The mother's invalidism, however, yields the daughter the pleasure of finally enjoying a close, loving mother-child relationship. In this relationship the daughter becomes the maternal figure and cares for the very woman who was distant as a mother.³ This recuperation of a mother's love through the loving capacity of the daughter, while deeply poignant, takes place within the static scene of both mother and daughter being permanently imprisoned, indeed buried. Dickinson writes of herself and her mother, "mines in the same ground meet by tunneling," referring to the intimacy her mother's dying allows, but also suggesting the underworld status of both mother and daughter (Sewall 89). Only the father's death confers real power onto the daughter as a speaker. When the mother is dying, the daughter meets her underground, as it were, to give birth to her through those dark, burrowed tunnels. By contrast, when the father is dying the daughter finally realizes her own latent powers, her strength held down in her father's house. The daughter rises when the father sinks because the father's control over the daughter finally begins to cede as the man begins to die. The daughter uses her paradoxical grace in the place of the abject to guide the father into the role of the abject while she rises from it.

The speaker's assumption of power in "I rose -- because He sank" (poem 454) is a surprise event. The speaker relates: "I thought it would be opposite --" (line 2). She does not plan to take power and is indeed surprised by her own nascent strength. Her ability to become powerful specifically because he is dying inheres in her ability to acquaint him with her early acquired and thorough knowledge of the suffering and degradation of the body, suffering which only in dying is he forced to experience. The speaker says, "I told him Best -- must pass/ Through this low Arch of Flesh" (lines 12, 13). The "low Arch of

² See Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*. 89

³ Dickinson wrote she "never had a mother." *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. 475.

Flesh" conjures up images not only of a prostrated body, bent low to get under the arch, but also of a sort of antithesis to Saint Peter's presence at the holy gates. By contrast, the speaker of this poem casts herself as a fleshly foil to Saint Peter, her body standing guard over the "low Arch of Flesh" through which the dying father must bodily pass, even though the father may be part of the company of the elect. The daughter watching her father die envisions herself in the subversive role of a judge of the body alone. She seems to already know the suffering of the "low Arch of Flesh," and it is with some irony that she assumes a place analogous to Saint Peter's and ushers her father through this first, less exalted gate: the body's death.

Indeed, the speaker's image of this "low Arch of Flesh" also brings to mind the suggestion of the loss of virginity, a painful threat which could have introduced the speaker to an abjected embodiment in the aftermath of which she survives. By contrast, the dying father only in death experiences the abjection of being in an assaulted body. He is seen by the speaker as weak, because, unlike her, he cannot survive his own annihilation. At the same time, he is given the easier role, being allowed death after suffering. By contrast, the daughter keeping watch over him has endured suffering and been forced to remain alive afterwards. While Sabine Sieike, in *Fashioning the Female Subject*, argues that Dickinson, in this poem, actually acknowledges a deformity of her own body, I am not so sure (41). Rather, it seems to me that the poem describes the horror of the body in specific states of abjection, one of which is the state of dying and another of which is the state of being metaphorically murdered, through some bodily degradation. The daughter speaks from the place of the abject, the low arch of flesh, but also uncannily alters her voice into a force that asserts the speaker's distance from that bodily abjection.

The daughter's rise to power, nevertheless, seems to come too late, and this belatedness yields a vindictive flavor to the poem. The father's death, which finally grants to the daughter rights and privileges in the paternal house she inherits, occurs only after the

daughter has already suffered the abjection of living in a degraded body. We know this to be the case because the entire premise of the poem is that the speaker can help the poem's dying "he" to die precisely because she herself has an old acquaintance with the abrogation of the body's boundaries, a violation which the powerful father experiences only as death penetrates him.

The poem, "I rose -- because He sank," then, elucidates a concern: how to express the experience of extreme bodily abjection in a language that refuses to describe directly bodily abjection. A literal retelling of violation replicates, repeats the trauma. The interdiction against just telling the facts, for Dickinson, may be an interdiction against leaving oneself open to misprision. This difficulty of telling just the facts, of communicating through that telling the internal reality of one's experience, reflects the issue of power imbalance within the symbolic order. Butler theorizes that Lacan's language in the name of the father is a language built on the flawed basis of an assumption of fixed gender identity. These fixed positions within narrative production are not gendered, as Lacan would have them, but rather are fixed according to power imbalances within which gender is often but not definitionally implicated. In other words, the difficulty of telling what it is like to be violated may have to do with the discomfort of hearing speech from the mouth of the abjected other. The experience of violation from the point of view of the violated may be an experience that cannot directly be understood but instead only metaphorically understood.

The positions within the narrative structure of a story of violation are those of the powerless and the powerful. The victim is fixed into a position of mute abjection by the very structure of symbolic discourse as it describes violation. The position of the subject which she has been given makes it difficult for her both to reveal her abjection and also to assume the stance of authority necessary for legitimate utterance. A dichotomy asserts itself implacably in the story of violation, making illegible, or marring, the speech of the

violated. The trope of the posthumous voice recuperates the illegible speech of the abject by transposing a violation into an impossible mode whose illegibility then takes place within the legible space of high rhetoric. This mode is the speech of the dead, evoking prosopopoeia but differing from prosopopoeia in that the trope of the posthumous voice places the words of the dead in the mouth of the self. Here, the death-mask is not someone else's face but one's own face.

Emily Dickinson's poem about a daughter's ascension to power through the death of the father, then, returns us to our earlier question concerning the role of the incest taboo, as codified by Levi-Strauss, in shaping the daughter's language. Levi-Strauss identifies the incest taboo as emanating from the need for exogamy, that is, the need for men to exchange women as objects that secure the male bases of power. Levi-Strauss considers the prohibition against fathers and sons retaining in their own household their female kin. Hauntingly, however, he ignores the instances and the implications of fathers assaulting their daughters, keeping them home to have them. Indeed, if an incest taboo is in place in order to keep the family virgins intact until they can be exchanged to other men, then a form of incest most strongly prohibited would be that of fathers assaulting their daughters, since it is the daughters who are still viable goods on the virgin-exchanging market. It is the fathers, then, who ought logically to be prohibited from taking their daughters, rather than the sons prohibited from raping their mothers, if a culture based upon the exchange of virginal women is to be promulgated.

What is the situation of the daughter taken, or kept, by her father, *vis á vis* her chance to use language to tell her story and be understood? The daughter who has been kept by her father speaks from a position opposite that of the daughter who has been given away. While the latter's range of expression is, within speech in the paternal order, quite limited, the assaulted daughter experiences both an absolute negation of any subject position from which she could speak as well as a repositioning of herself from that space

of treasured virgin daughter to that of abjected body. The father-kept daughter, symbolically killed within the configuration of Levi-Strauss exogamic structure, moves into the place of the abject, one who interacts with the dead. Like a priest who says the last rites and prayers over the corpse, this abjected daughter has symbolically come through the territory of the dead. The priest is given codified linguistic structures for his return in the form of prayers, whereas the daughter must create her own topos from which to speak legibly after she has been symbolically erased.

The abjected daughter, if she speaks at all, speaks from the torn or damaged topos of the abject. This rhetoric of fracture is emblemized in Dickinson's brief lyrics. Her lyrics are torn out of normal linking phrases, torn out from the hymnal music they approximate. The enigmatic dashes, representing breaths, also represent the sewing shut of injuries, graphic sutures that secure the lyrics whole cloth against the abjection of the dead speakers they describe. The dashes, as it were, knit closed an already twice-torn, twice-"Closed" life (see poem 1773 line 1). While there is no evidence that Dickinson was a victim of incest, her position within the frame of the incest taboo was that of a daughter whose father chooses to keep her, and, in that sense, it mimics somewhat the position of the daughter who has been taken by her father. Dickinson's speech, then, comes from the place of the rupture, the torn border, even though it does not necessarily participate in the memory of the physical experience of being torn, of being ruptured.

Daneen Wardrop, attending to the gothic resonances in many of Dickinson's lyrics, reads the lyric "Because I could not stop for Death –" (poem 479) as a veiled confession of having survived rape, noting the use of verbs connotative of sex in that poem (*Emily Dickinson's Gothic* 70). A difficulty with Wardrop's reading is that, while the poem clearly stages a scene of romance, or even of seduction, the poem nowhere suggests physical violation. Instead, the poem focuses on moments of interlude, gaps of intimation. The poem's speaker has been too busy to die, she claims at the opening of the lyric:

"Because I could not stop for Death/ He kindly stopped for me" (lines 1, 2). However, far from being a scene of rape, the social encounter that surprises the speaker into putting away her childhood things contains a chaperon of the highest order. The speaker tells us that: "the carriage held but just ourselves/ and Immortality" (lines 3, 4). Immortality here plays the role of the watchful mama, making sure the suitor doesn't touch her daughter until he has built a home, a proper married woman's domicile, for the girl. The leisurely pace of the seduction that becomes a kidnapping belies any conflation of the scene with a rape scene.

To be sure, the speaker of "Because I could not stop for Death" is somehow overwhelmed and taken away, but that is not the same being raped. Rather, this poem describes the most typical of courtship or marriage scenes. It is a prototypical bridal narrative. Wardrop considers the "fields of gazing grain" (line 11) a space of voyeurism, indicative of sexual perversion (*Emily Dickinson's Gothic* 70). By contrast, I interpret those watchful fields as signs of the force of the terror the bride feels. She is being abducted by the most unsuitable of suitors, and the whole community watches her abduction and does nothing to save her.

The position of the speaker in this poem is, then, not that of the rape victim *per se*, but rather that of the daughter whose father has chosen to keep her for himself. Here, Dickinson predicts Butler's argument that it is accurate to exchange the role of the father for that of death, in linguistic production. The speaker shows us, through her evocation of school and farms, that the entire community sees clearly how her father takes her for himself, and yet the town entirely fails to protect this daughter from her father's desires. By implication, it could be argued that the speaker is saying no one protects daughters against their fathers claiming them, but the poem does not gesture towards, much less produce, a scene of rape. Instead, the daughter ends up in a fatal home:

Since then – tis Centuries – and yet
 Feels shorter than the Day
 I first surmised the Horses' Heads
 Were toward Eternity – (lines 21-24)

In other words, the speaker describes this journey as a scene of courting, indicating the horror of the daughter who is kept by her father to keep his house. In this inverted courtship, she is involuntarily brought back, brought home, to his house. The father's house, like the horses' heads, turns towards death. The daughter has been kept home, then, to attend the father as he approaches death. This daughter's entry into marriage is opposite that of the normative situation of the bride who marries in order to begin a life with her husband. Instead, the daughter married to her father marries into death. The bride in this poem is a daughter who has been given to her paternal home, returned to her father.

The courtship in "Because I could not stop for Death—" is not violent because it veils a description of a rape. Immortality, the chaperon who preserves the daughter's chastity, shows up at the end of the poem as "Eternity," making clear that the daughter has not been raped (line 24). Instead, the journey is a violating journey because, while leaving the daughter physically unmolested, it takes her to the very place – the house of the father and of his death – away from which a suitor should have taken her. In this poem, the suitor is sinister because he is the speaker's father and should not be posing as a suitor at all. This transposition of who "Death" is follows if, as Butler argues, the "no" of death is co-opted by the father as his own law. Death, then, in a patriarchy, is the father who stops for the daughter. Death, as the boundary to language, and the *non du père* merge into one limiting force, figured as a man who gives one no choice. The journey on which he takes the speaker is sinister because it is circular. Rather than being a true lover who will take the daughter away from her father, the suitor called "Death" insists on returning her to his house where her role will be to care for him as he dies.

The incompleteness of the daughter's bridal attire attests to the inappropriateness of the father asking the daughter to be his bride. She tells us of the flimsiness of her clothes: "For only Gossamer, my Gown --/My Tippet -- only Tulle --" (lines 15, 16). Even though, in this poem, the suitor does not sexually abrogate the speaker's virgin body, her body is inappropriately revealed: by implication, her body is seen naked through the gossamer and tulle. She appears stripped, unprotected. This daughter's death-trap, then, is not necessarily sexual invasion, although given the metaphors of freezing and enforced nakedness, we may interpret that the threat of sexual invasion concerns her.

More overtly, the "I" absconded in "Because I could not stop for Death --" is trapped into a permanent position of being a child. While the poem may not imply a rape, it explicitly delineates an entrapment. If the daughter taken on a courting journey by her father is to be returned to her father's home, there to remain in her father's home, then she will be forced to remain in the stance of a child. Paula Bennett, in *My Life a Loaded Gun*, considers the child-speakers in many of Dickinson's lyrics, arguing that Dickinson manages, in time, to overcome the position of the child and to speak with a more mature voice (41). The imprisoned child, however, in fact remains a persistent motif in Dickinson's poems. For example, the poem "My Life had stood, a Loaded Gun" presents precisely the subject position of a member of the house whose powerlessness conflicts with her powerful capacity for perception (*Poems ED* poem 764). The loaded gun must obey the master, even though the loaded gun would be capable of annihilating the master. The lack of "the power to die" is the key to this lyric, for the gun which can kill but cannot die is parallel to the imprisoned daughter who can use her powerful words to annihilate her father only if the father/master chooses to allow her to speak (line 24). In either case, the master's hands hold the barrel lock. Dickinson locates the gun's paradoxical power and powerlessness in the gun's liminal status with regards to death. The gun lacks the power to die just as the daughter, once her father has decided to keep her in his house for himself.

lacks the power to enter into the mortal concourse of publicly recognized sexuality. Her one passage into adulthood will be that of dying: until she dies, she will be heard as a child. Held permanently in the position of the child, the daughter whose father has chosen to keep her in his house suffers the specific difficulty of gaining an adult voice.

Dickinson's keenly perceptive exploration of what it means to be a kept daughter, infuses her poem "My Life had Stood, A Loaded Gun" with the powerful threat of vengeance. One false move on the part of the master, the poem suggests, and the gun may go off: the daughter may annihilate him with the language she has stock-piled in her childhood bedroom. On the other hand, the poignancy of the poem inheres in the speaker's realization that there is no solution for her: even if she does manage finally to kill the master, through his own mistaken firing of the gun, she herself, the gun, will never become the master in his house. The grief of her imprisonment at the hands of her owner can never go away because the original misuse cannot be undone even after he is dead. She may be able to kill him, but she cannot retrieve her self, a loaded gun, held in her father's house throughout her life.

It is important, then, to distinguish between the constraints placed upon a wife and those placed upon a daughter, in order to clarify the way in which Dickinson's loaded gun might differ from, say, a typical nineteenth-century wife's weaponry. Paula Bennett extrapolates from Dickinson's youthful complaints against doing housework that Dickinson hopes to avoid ever becoming mistress of a house (*My Life a Loaded Gun* 94). Bennett considers Dickinson's dread of becoming mistress in her (Dickinson's) mother's place to be a dread of being mistress of any house, of any kitchen. While that may be how Dickinson felt, it seems clear, upon reading Dickinson's early letters, that her complaint is lodged quite specifically against becoming mistress in her mother's place, in her father's house. Dickinson's exclamation about the kitchen in her father's house, "My kitchen I called it, — God forbid that it was!" expresses a deep dread of being kept to supervise the

very kitchen of which Dickinson was indeed to become mistress (*The Letters of Emily Dickinson* 99). Again, I am not arguing that Dickinson's creativity would have been better served had she become wife and mother. Quite probably it would have been worse served. However, the youthful Dickinson in this letter expresses dread not of becoming a wife who has her own kitchen but rather of becoming, as it were, her father's helpmate and serving in his kitchen. The inability to die, that is to leave childhood, to be mortal, describes precisely the fate that Dickinson dreads in this letter, her horror at the possibility of being kept as the mistress of her father's kitchen. Perhaps her youthful fear of being kept by her father for her father stemmed from her perception that such an eventuality was possible. In any event, the loaded gun that symbolizes a powerful force paradoxically controlled by a less powerful master/owner neatly expresses the fate of the kept daughter who, while never assaulted, has been held in the symbolic position of a sexually available wife but allowed none of the real wife's adult powers.

A condition of powerless power may well be argued to apply to many of the speakers of Dickinson's lyrics. Powerfully observant, these dead speakers cannot do anything with their omniscience. The position of speaking as a child also presents a keen observer who cannot act. The role of the child speaker was a burden that Dickinson took up as she wrote her poems. Significantly, during the first half of the twentieth century, Dickinson's poems were sometimes marketed as poems for children.⁴ This publishing tactic partly reflects a contemporary concern with the aggressive mood of some of Dickinson's poems, unmeet for a lady writer. To market her as a writer of poems for children is automatically to excise her more disturbing lyrics from her oeuvre. However, I also contend that the publishing tactic of presenting Emily Dickinson as a writer of nursery rhymes simply reflects the tenor of some of her poems themselves. Most of the lyrics

⁴See, *Poems for Youths*. ed. Alfred Leete Hampson.

included in, for example, *Poems for Youths*, are either written explicitly from the point of view of a child or are poems about being a child, as if the speaker of the poems were already dead, thus lending a permanent child's eye view to the poems. *Poems for Youths* was a collection of Dickinson's verse published in 1950, only a few years before the Johnson version of her poems, which is still widely read today, was published.

Extrapolating from the child's eye view found in many of Dickinson's lyrics, Elizabeth Petrino, in *Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries*, examines what she calls the "Child Elegy, [. . .] popular in mid-nineteenth century women's poetry" (96). These poems, Petrino suggests, are typically placed in the mouth of the grieving, bereaved mother, who may guess at the child's experience of death, but does not speak first-hand from that experience (97). Petrino develops her argument that Dickinson wrote typical nineteenth century elegies, especially elegies for dead children, by rejecting earlier critical commentaries linking Dickinson's use of a child's voice to tactics of feminist subversion. Petrino argues that only by ignoring the other women elegists of Dickinson's day can one contend that Dickinson's poems showcase the "use of child speakers as a way to overturn accepted doctrines concerning women's place" (47). While Dickinson doubtless was disenchanted with women's disenfranchised place, I agree with Petrino that Dickinson's writing of elegies in a child's voice initiates a rhetorical complexity that sets her apart from her contemporaries. Dickinson's use of the child's voice, and in particular of the dead child's voice, was more than a tool to speak out against the confines placed upon women in their roles as wives and mothers. Indeed, Dickinson's own experience as a wife and mother was limited to the observation of her mother and sister-in-law. She observed as those two women struggled with the strictures enforced upon them as married women and as mothers. By contrast, Dickinson's own immediate experience of the strictures placed

upon women was of the limitations placed upon daughters, the role of the child in the patriarchal household.

It Often Alarms Father: Dickinson as the Un-named, Buried Child

Of course, it is always a mistake to draw too straight a line between the scant historical facts enframing any author's life and the poetry the author produces. I will, however, suggest that the child's eye view that Dickinson gives many of her lyrics' speakers tells us about the confines placed upon children, and in particular upon daughters, rather than wives. Petrino examines closely the early lyric "Twas just this time last year I died" (poem 344) as an example of a poem spoken from the child's point of view (*Dickinson and Her Contemporaries* 100). The speaker of the poem, narrating from the space of death, does indeed concern herself with childish things: Christmas stockings and Santa Claus. Dickinson's reference to Christmas also raises issues of the sacrificed child, the Christ child as icon *par excellence* of the child born to serve the purposes of His Father and then return home to His Father. The poem, then, takes up the point of view of the sacrificed child. The child being carried through the fields observes the harvest-time sacrifice of the grains ready to be scythed and gathered in, a ritual sacrifice of sorts. In Dickinson's lyrics, the connection between the topos of death, that is, the rhetorical gesture of a speaker speaking from the place of death, and the point-of-view of the child, press beyond the Victorian commonplace of an elegy for a dead child. Dickinson's lyrics speak from the abjected position of the sacrificed child herself. The poems do not merely tell about a dead child; they let the dead child speak.

Elizabeth Petrino discusses the nineteenth century custom of choosing not to name a child until the child was old enough to have a good chance of survival. She refers to the resultant profusion of gravestones carved during the nineteenth century for babies buried without names (53). These children who died nameless and are revered on headstones engraved with phrases like "Little Lamb," in graveyards, are indistinguishable from

children who may have been privately named. Such infants were considered "too delicate, too precious to have that name mentioned in public" (68). As such, they were buried without names engraved onto their tombstones. Dickinson claims for herself as a lyric speaker, in her poems which use the trope of the posthumous voice, the space of the unnamed and therefore undefiled, dead child.

Just as Lavinia, after Emily's death, described her sister as "too delicate to bear the public gaze" (Sewall 147), the babies buried without names were considered too delicate for their names to be known by the public. By claiming in her poems the point of view of the innocent dead child, Dickinson pleads her case not only as a daughter sacrificed, delivered in a circular journey back to her father's house, but also as a creature too innocent to be implicated in a father's improper attentions. One of a father's improper attentions, in the context of nineteenth century mores, would be to name a child publicly when the child is too delicate to live, too sensitive to endure public attention.

Strikingly, Dickinson tells Higginson of her decision to remain anonymous in death by explicitly describing this decision as a rebellion against her father. She writes to Higginson concerning her decision not to have molds made of her hands and face, nor to sit for portrait, as was considered a meet manner of preserving past death some relic of the self (*Letters ED* 411). In choosing not to have her body thus replicated, Dickinson directly contradicts her father's wishes. She chooses the anonymity of bodilessness if not namelessness. Of this decision she writes: "It often alarms Father, He says Death might occur and he has Molds of all the rest, but has no Mold of me. [. . .] But I forestall the dishonor" (*Letters ED* 411). The "dishonor" is that of bodily revelation and of giving her body, as symbol, over to her father. Petrino argues that this letter describes Dickinson's desire to immortalize herself in poems (*Dickinson and Her Contemporaries* 97). While that well may be half the import of the letter, it also seems clear that the letter presents to a

patriarch-figure, Higginson, Dickinson's desire that her father not claim a physical piece of her, especially not when she has been forced into the most powerless of positions, that of the dead.

By the ingenious decision to preserve herself without the usual adult trappings of monument – bust cast, head cast, or hand-cast – Dickinson recuperates the purity of the child who dies without ever having been named, the child of whom no cast has been made. Indeed, she recuperates for herself the purity of the symbolic position of the child who has never yet been taken into the family through the appropriative gesture of being named by a father. Removing her posthumous self from her father's gaze, Dickinson removes herself from bearing the full weight of the abjected subject position of the daughter chosen to stay with the father, the daughter forced to perform the quasi-incestuous role of being the father's kept piece. Dickinson's decision to preserve herself in death not through adult mortuaries but rather through lyric poems she never published represents a precise return, of herself and of her body, to the familiar topos of the child who has died so young as to have preserved absolutely its anonymity, too delicate to be named. Implicitly, such nameless, buried infants retained as well a symbolic independence from the patriarch into whose family they were born.

The trope of the posthumous voice, as Dickinson employs it in her lyrics, preserves her position as a subject apart from the abjected place of the kept-daughter, even as it allows her to extrapolate that abjected point of view, to the point of view of the dead. The dead, like the sacrificed daughter, view the world from a place of absolute powerlessness. The already buried, dead speaker, unlike the abjected daughter, however, speaks from the uncanny topos of bodilessness, a topos highly desirable to a daughter unprotected from her father's touch. If trope is where the body enters text, since trope is the turning of figures through the text, then the trope of the posthumous voice has a tangential relationship to the body. The trope of the posthumous voice effectively erases

the body, claiming that its speaker is dead and bodiless. However, it simultaneously foregrounds the body, calling irresistibly to mind the moment of crossing, the *rite de passage*, when the narrator died. The narrator's implicit body is eschewed by the trope of the posthumous voice. Knowing that the speaker is dead, we resist the image of her dead body precisely because that unraveling image is strongly present behind the text, threatening to undo the text.

While hiding the corpse within the text, the poem, "Twas just this time, last year, I died," confesses immediately its status as a lyric using the trope of the posthumous voice (poem 344). The speaker admits that she has already been dead for a year before she wrote this poem. The poem clearly states that its speaker is dead. However, as if realizing the difficulty living people will have in believing that dead people can speak, the speaker begins to prove that she is dead. The speaker, testifying to her death, describes herself being carried in a coffin from town to the site of the burial. Of this journey, she tells:

I know I heard the Corn,
When I was carried by the Farms --
It had the Tassels on -- (lines 2-4)

The dead speaker, distanced from the living cycles of birth and harvest, is measuring the time of the calendar year by measuring the shifts in the natural world. The final three lines of the first stanza may not merely be demonstrating the truth of the speaker's claim of having been dead for a year, but may also indicate the speaker's enforced abjuration of written text. Dead, she could not look at the calendar to check the month. Evicted from the social world, she inhabits only the natural world, the world of the fields beyond the town.

The speaker of this lyric, then, is doubly forced towards silence. Death prevents her access to written language, represented metonymically as the calendar she cannot read, and also death prevents her access to easily legitimate utterance. The poem has to earn the belief of its readers in the already dead speaker's ability to speak. By substituting for the

question of how to speak after death the question of how can one speak after trauma, the poem may be read as a riddle. Having crossed through a trauma that causes a speaker to be cut off from written language and to speak from the illegitimate place of the dead, the poem both sets and answers its own riddle. In Dickinson's lyric the psychic isolation following great trauma is metonymized by death. The trauma is symbolized as death, but the rhetoric of speaking from the place of the dead necessarily reveals itself as a feint. The reader knows another trauma is obliquely referenced, for the trope of the posthumous speaker can only work as a seamless metaphor. That is, in the rhetoric of showing that she is dead, the speaker ironically proves that she is alive and is using death as a metaphor for some other great loss. The poem gives and answers its riddle.

The speaker's testimony, then, is of prostration and entrapment. The motif of crossing a field, or crossing a school-yard, in the prone position of the dead, is a motif that also appears in "Because I could not stop for Death" (poem 479). The image of being carried conjures up feelings of extreme and palpable powerlessness, and Dickinson situates that powerlessness right in the center of the continuance of everyday life. In "Twas just this time last Year I died" (poem 344), the powerlessness of the speaker becomes a spectacle. She sees the farms, the fertile world, continuing while she herself cannot continue. Strikingly, even though the poem's speaker is hidden in a box, the harvesting world nevertheless sees her: it views her in her coffin, prone and powerless in her death. The phrase "gazing grain" in "Because I could not stop for Death—" marks the appearance of these farms as the place of reapers, of death or of harvest. The fields can see her but she cannot look back at them. The spectacle of the powerless, prone speaker is exacerbated by her lack of eyesight in "Twas just this time last Year I died." Inside the coffin, she can only judge the ripeness of the corn by the sound of its tassels in the wind. The poem describes the powerlessness of the dead. The speaker could not rise from her coffin because, she says, "something held my will" (line 8). The something that holds the will is

both the annihilating power of death and the power of the normative, everyday world, which gazes at the speaker, sees her suffering and casts her out of the community of the fertile cycles of harvest.

The lyric "Twas just this time last year" is quite blunt and direct about the status of its speaker as a dead daughter, a posthumous narrator. The question is, since we as readers know a speaker cannot be dead, who is the agent of the poem? Who is responsible for the poem? The poem quite effectively dodges questions of authority, establishing the narrator's double, her buried body, to bear the weight of our scrutiny. The question of agency, of who is speaking and by what authority, plays hide and seek throughout many of Dickinson's lyrics. Her frequent use of the ambiguous "It" typifies the effectiveness of her eluding the taking of a stance of agency, of authority.⁵ By authority, I mean the narrator who rhetorically claims responsibility for the text. In the same way that the word "it" occults the specific object, the troped posthumous narrator occults the legislative task of the narrator within the text. The placement of the speaker in the grave, like the use of the indeterminate pronoun "it" gains for the poem a distinctive and distancing lack of agency. At the core of the troped posthumous poem is an aporia, a dead speaker. While this narrative of passivity may, at first glance, seem a demure gesture, at second glance one interprets that the rhetoric that creates a gap in the place of a speaker in fact creates an impenetrable grammar. The speaker of the troped posthumous lyric cannot be found. In

⁵ The frequent use of "it" or other indeterminate nouns has been examined by Mary Loeffelholz (*Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory*), among others as evidentiary of Dickinson's use of the riddle poem. I am arguing here that Dickinson's use of indeterminacy goes beyond the riddle poem and instead develops an ironic epistemology of the unknowable. The lack of specified agency in the lyrics, then, enacts a double rhetorical gesture. On the one hand, the speaker is presented as powerless, – "Something held my will," – on the other hand, the speaker implicitly claims for herself the liminal power of death, a topos which empowers as well profanes the living person who enters that boundary.

this sense, she is hardly an ideal lady. By erasing her body, she gives her body to no one, no husband, no father.

Dickinson's decision to use the point-of-view of the grave in her lyrics may resonate with other nineteenth century mortuaries poems, but it pointedly rejects the gentle physicality of these poems. Gilbert and Gubar briefly refer to the commonplace of the poem spoken from the place of the grave in nineteenth century women's poetry (*The Madwoman in the Attic* 627). However, Dickinson's dead speakers do not inhabit the external, mortuaries world. Instead of presenting a scene in which a mourner comes to a dead woman's grave and hears the dead woman speak and then recounts that speech, Dickinson presents the insider's view of death. Hers is the immediate, *in medias res*, presentation of the speech of the dead. Dickinson's dead speakers describe the interior of the tomb and the experience of death that goes on after burial. Her troped posthumous poems move beyond the grave or burial site, that last trace of earthly existence. These poems consider the space of the grave a territory largely left behind. Lyrics like the following one consider what happens when the grave is no longer a site of symbolic interchange. Instead, here, the speaker's language has, as it were, gone past the grave:

I died for Beauty – but was scarce
 Adjusted in the Tomb
 When One who died for Truth, was lain
 In an adjoining Room –

He questioned softly "Why I failed?"
 "For Beauty," I replied –
 "And I – for Truth – Themselves are One –
 We Brethren are," He said –

And so, as Kinsmen, met a Night --
 We talked between the Rooms --
 Until the Moss had reached our lips --
 And covered up -- our names -- (*Poems ED* poem 448)

This poem moves not into but through the interior territory of the grave. The poem ultimately cedes the space of the grave, claiming an anonymous eternal place of speaking, or of authority, for its troped posthumous narrator. Dickinson's speaker assumes the trope of the posthumous voice specifically by removing herself from the gaze of the living. By contrast, the commonplace grave-side poem of nineteenth century literature sets its scenes in the exterior of the grave, by the gravestone, that part of the dead which the living can still see and read (see *The Madwoman in the Attic* 627). By writing from the culturally illegible place of the already dead body, the trope of the posthumous voice initiates a speech of parable.

Dickinson's work is often rendered enigmatic not only by her frequent use of troped posthumous speakers, but also by the blurring of agency caused by her characteristic use of the indeterminate pronouns "it." For example, Dickinson's poem, "Death Leaves Us homesick" (poem 1066) blurs the question of whether its speaker is a dead person mourning the world left behind, like the speaker in the poem discussed above, or a living person mourning the dead who left her behind. The poem opens with the line "Death leaves Us homesick, who behind". The lyric's first lines, then, immediately center upon two questions: who is left behind by whom, and who is the "Us" feeling homesick? These lines could mean that, after one has died, one feels homesick for the home one left, or they could mean that, after someone beloved has died, one misses that person in the way that one misses a particularly needed place, a home. Grammatically, the line lends itself equally to either interpretation. Either homesickness is that emotion felt by the dead or that emotion felt for the dead. The poem continues:

Except that it is gone
 Are ignorant of its Concern
 As if it were not born (lines 2 -4)

The poem again places the identity of the "Us" in a liminal, boundary space between the living and the dead (line 1). The poem could be saying that, once a person is dead, they do not know any more about death than they did when living: that all the dead know is that they can no longer inhabit the spaces which the living inhabit. Alternatively, the poem could simply be written from the perspective of a living person describing a bereft feeling, like homelessness, that follows the death of a beloved. If the poem is spoken from the point of view of the living mourning the dead, then the alienation that the living feel in mourning their dead is the subject of the poem. The definite object referred to by "it" in the line "Except that it is gone" could either refer to death itself, which vanishes even as it appears, or to the vanished beloved (line 4). However, the extraordinary alienation of the dead, the implication that the dead are in no way protected from suffering because they are dead but rather are merely denuded of power, is poignantly put forwards by the poem's suggestion that the dead are fully aware of the landscape of the living and yet cannot re-enter that landscape.

Finally, the poem's second stanza, far from giving away the meaning of the lyric's riddle, far from telling whether the "It" is death itself or the dead beloved, further obfuscates the question of who misses whom, and of who is searching for whom. The stanza reads:

Through all their former Places, we
 Like Individuals go
 Who something lost, the seeking for
 Is all that's left them, now — (lines 5 - 8)

This stanza again blurs the issue of whether the searching individuals are ghosts who haunt their former earthly homes or are mourners re-entering the places the now dead and once living used to inhabit. The "we" could be a dead person describing herself haunting her former home, her self split into two by the trauma of dying (line 5). In this case, the claim that "we" haunt "their" former places signifies that, after dying, a person is split, as after any great trauma, and therefore haunts her own former house as if it were the house of an other (line 5). Alternatively, if the speaker is dead, then she is describing what it is like to haunt her old haunts, searching for that which she cannot possibly find: herself as a living, intact person. The dead speaker haunts her own former places and cannot inhabit them, since she has become bodiless. Her voice has become separated from her body.

This reading of "Death leaves Us homesick," by ascribing the state of being already dead to the speaker, also explores the function of trauma in the formation of voice. If death is the outer limit of trauma, the vanishing point beyond which trauma cannot look, then the speaker who is already dead is split into her former self and her current self. Her former self is given topographical form, becoming a place personified by the phrase "Their former Places," while it is her current self who will keep seeking through the landscape of the former self (line 5). The earlier self is the self prior to the trauma while the current self is the post-traumatic self, the one who searches memory obsessively, finding nothing except her own process of searching. An alternate reading of the poem, in which the searchers are living people walking around through the rooms the dead once inhabited, considers the question of how extreme trauma effects voice from a less immediate, more impersonal perspective. In this alternate reading, in which the "Us" are the living who are quite aware that they will not discover the dead in their former places, the bereaved continue looking anyway because that ritual of searching eases the sense of emptiness that finally engulfs the poem after the dash (—) at its end (line 8). The dash at the close of the poem catapults the poem into the open, empty landscape that haunts the substantive text.

My reading of this lyric argues that its narrator is a troped posthumous speaker. I interpret the lyric as engaged in describing a post-traumatic state of abjection, a fractured self metaphorically presented as a posthumous self. However, perhaps the point of the poem is to argue that the dead and the living aren't very different, after all. This lyric may be construed as a riddle-poem with no one solution. "Death Leaves us Homesick" follows the anamorphosis of the riddle but does not resolve it. Instead of separated, the dead and the living are ultimately merged together in the poem. The presence of absence, then, becomes a rhetorical strategy through which the trope of the riddle without answer becomes the typology of a trauma which cannot be healed. This double, unanswerable, riddle also stages the rhetorical strategy of a recuperation of a loss. The trauma cannot be solved precisely because the ambiguity of naming what was lost protects the lost object by hiding it. The ambiguous possession of suffering in "Death Leaves us Homesick," that is, the unanswered question of who suffers when the dead are buried, subtly mirrors the ambiguity of who becomes abject when trauma is inflicted upon a body. It asks if perhaps the violator rather than the violated should be the abject. Dickinson's ambiguous epigram asks us to reconsider our assumptions concerning death, and therefore concerning abjection. The questions of who holds the place of the dead and who holds the place of the abject form the twin topoi of her interrogation. The unacknowledged and unsettling manner in which Dickinson shifts from the perspective of the living to that of the dead not only blurs the established boundaries between the living and the dead, it also effects an annexation of the rights of the living by the dead or, rather, the rights of the powerful by the abject.

This trope of the posthumous voice also appears in a Dickinson lyric which does not immediately reveal itself as spoken by a dead person. Yet this brings its fabular drama into the place of the dead. Dickinson's "Ample make this Bed —" (poem 804) could quite easily be spoken by a living woman. One could almost imagine the command of the first

line, "Ample make this Bed," given during house-keeping chores. However, as the poem progresses, the certainty that the speaker is currently living begins to erode. As the poem develops, the place of the bed, marking the topos of a cozy safe sleep, becomes less clearly that of a bed in a bedroom and begins to garner attributes of the grave. Further, the first climax of the poem is unquestionably the climax of death, followed by second harrowing: "In it wait till Judgment break/ Excellent and Fair" (lines 3-4). The second line, "Make this Bed with Awe—" begins to shift the poem's focus from a scene of simple housework to a different context for the word, "Bed". While a bed in a bedroom could simply be desired for its "Ample" size, to make a bed "with Awe" is a symbolic act. One might make a bed with awe, for example, if making a marriage bed. For the maker of the bed to then be asked to enter the bed, and "In it wait till Judgment Break" pulls the poem categorically into a liminal realm (line 3). No longer is making the bed the gesture of bridal attendants preparing a bridal bed, instead, the gesture of getting into the bed until Judgment Day is that of preparing for death.

The poem's second stanza further adumbrates the formal qualities of the bed. The lines "Be its Mattress straight—/Be its Pillow round" do not describe but dictate the confines of the bed (lines 5, 6). These directions echo simply the dimensional directions God gave to Noah for the building of the ark, thus indicating that this bed is a space of crossing and for crossing over (Genesis 6:14-16). That is just as Noah crosses through the condemning flood in the ark, the speaker of Dickinson's lyric envisions her well-made bed as a safe space within which she will make the crossing as from childhood into adulthood, and from death into eternal life. In the bed the speaker and her addressee will cross the waters of oblivion into the waking at Judgment. The precious enclosure the speaker anticipates sharing reads like a depiction of Judgment day: "Excellent and Fair" (line 4). The poem places itself precisely and irrevocably inside the topos of death even as it creates a homey, cozy feeling within that topos. The uncanny resonance of the poem depends

upon the strong presence of the fearful space of death and the comforting space of a bed shared with a beloved. The speaker's entrapment in a mortal or indeed, paternal, house, then, structures for her a maze whose navigation necessarily turns her towards the unknown territory of the Judgment day.

Although it is not accurate to say that the speaker of the lyric, "Ample make this Bed," is posing as dead, the poem's climax is so utterly enclosed in death, a continual and secret space of dying into the life of post-apocalyptic peace, that it is not accurate to say that the speaker poses as a living person, either. The pose of the speaker is hidden and elliptical. The topos of the poem is death, but not death as a fixed event, a still space. Rather, in this poem, the speaker gradually begins to use the trope of the posthumous voice because death opens in the poem as an expanse, not at all an enclosing boundary. The spectre of the buried nameless child, then, also appears in the poem "Ample Make this Bed," for the poem could be spoken through the mouth of a newly dead young child, addressing its mother as she prepares the child for burial. Just as the commonplace nineteenth century poems of mothers mourning children often center around the scene of the child's final bed, "Ample Make this Bed" takes as its setting a final bed (see *Dickinson and Her Contemporaries* 98). The speaker seems to be speaking to another figure, telling someone how to make the bed. Inasmuch as the mother's role would be to prepare the child's crib during its life, "Ample Make this Bed" performs a crossing over, pulling the commonplace scene of the child's watching its mother prepare its bed into a more radical aporia of a child addressing its mother, telling her how to prepare its eternal bed, not its crib but its death bed. The crossing from death to Judgment, then, parallels in this lyric the crossing from childhood to adulthood.

The rupture of this lyric's bed forms the dramatic centerpiece of the poem. This rupture is given form by the unsolvable questions of the place and space of the bed: Is it in a house? Is it in a graveyard? Is it sized for a child, or for a grown woman? The ambiguity

of the poem pulls the poem open, making a rupture the poem's central drama. However, the dictatorial statements: "Ample Make this Bed/Make this Bed with Awe/In it Wait" and "Let no Sunrise Yellow Noise/Interrupt this Ground" also mimic the form of a young child's demands on a mother (lines 1-3, lines 7, 8). Perhaps young children don't specifically make quite these eloquent demands, but the demanding form of the poem, the setting of a scene in which an unknown person is making a bed and a speaker is telling the person how to do it, mimics the typical scene of a mother helping to prepare her young child for sleep.⁶ The anonymous child speaker of this poem, however, asks her mother to prepare for her an eternal bed that will be wide enough to hold an adult – an ample bed. This speaker's time of crossing from childhood to adulthood, then, will occur after death, or in the place of death. Dickinson uses the trope of the posthumous voice, a gesture of the un-named buried child, in this lyric to stage an entry into adulthood, specifically into the full authority denied her as her father's kept daughter.

Inasmuch as the gesture of staging death to gain one's voice subverts the silence demanded of a woman, the trope of the posthumous voice is a rebellious act in writing. However, this trope simultaneously acts as a shield, obscuring the text's rebellious quality. The shield covers the source of rebellion: the woman's body hidden within a text forefronts her body's disappearance. Her body is both emphasized and occulted. For example, in her lyric "The Soul selects her own Society –" (poem 409). Dickinson explicitly refuses her reader access to the imagined body of the dead speaker. The lyric describes a soul's posthumous rejection of those desiring her body. Suitors "pausing –/At her low Gate--" and suitors "kneeling/ Upon her Mat--" are rejected by the posthumously empowered, feminine "Soul" (lines 5, 6; lines 7, 8). The poem is arguably set in the place

⁶Significantly, the copy of the poem sent to Susan Dickinson was marked with a child's writing. Franklin suggests that Susan may have thought the poem appropriate to read to her small child. It reads then, at least in one interpretation, as a child's poem (*Poems ED Volume II 759*).

of a grave, since the "mat" can be interpreted as the gravestone laid flat over the body and the "low gate" could be the very low gated iron fencing oftentimes surrounding family clusters within burial grounds. The lyric clearly rejects any efforts to commune with its dead speaker. Indeed, the entire point of the poem is to reject us, telling each implied reader that a selection has already been made and that, if the reader is reading the poem, he has been left out of the society. Of course, if the reader isn't reading the poem, he is all the more excluded. The poem stands, then, as a statement of rejection of others, softened by the speaker's posthumous posturing. We forgive the speaker her rebellion because she has paid her life for it.

The moment in which the poem asserts the power of the speaker coincides with the very event that we might assume would entail a loss of power: the moment of death. The poem establishes a posthumous speaker who, in death, performs the very role that the judgment of the Christian Lord is supposed to perform on the soul upon the death of the body (Matthew 25:46). The lyric thus enacts a rather striking reversal, for the "Soul" disallows God the Father His judgment and instead the "Soul" performs the function of judging everyone else. The poem subverts the power of the father. That this "Soul" would then perhaps not join the heavenly kingdom on Judgment Day does not seem to bother the speaker of this poem. She counts herself out from everything, including the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. The extremity of the cynicism, or mistrust, expressed in "The Soul selects her own Society--" may be unusual within the scope of Dickinson's oeuvre. The lyric's tone, however, bitterly rejecting the easy comforts of a blessed afterlife, is usual for her poems which employ the trope of the posthumous voice. The imperial, rejecting tone is, as we have seen, *de rigueur* in those Dickinson lyrics which use the trope of the posthumous voice. Their narrators narrate from within the physical place of the dead rather than speaking from the place where the living can still meet the dead (that is, at the outside of the grave). Dickinson's speakers' reject the comfort of a

sugar-coated afterlife, in which the dead and the living can communicate. Her afterlife is instead characterized by a radical disorientation of the dead from the living.

"I died for Beauty, But was Scarce Adjusted in the Tomb" (Poem 448), for example, although set in a graveyard, takes as its topos the interior of the tomb where the maudlin, sentimental aspects of graveside poetry give way to the harsher realities of burial: the entrapment that this claustrophobic lyric details. The poem is placed in the interstice between death and the acceptance of death. This interstice does not always characterize the placement of Dickinson's posthumous speakers, who sometimes seem to be addressing an audience from the perspective of an eternity isolated and self-chosen. However, this atypical poem is critical to understanding Dickinson's use of the trope of the posthumous voice, for the poem makes a revelation of the topos, or the ground, of speakers speaking from the place of the dead. The initial gothic gesture of the poem, established by the pretense of a speaker addressing us from the point of view of being laid out for burial, falls away as the poem continues, for the poem's feint is to use the silencing entrapment of the dead metaphorically to express the enforced silence of the living. The two dead speakers in this poem illustrate a moment of irrevocable trauma, an enforced and insoluble passivity, as that trauma relates to speech. The prone position of the dead speakers suggests their victimization. However, it is the moss covering the mouths of the dead that makes an explicit demonstration of the aftermath of trauma, the silence trauma enforces on those victimized. Here, the moss covering the mouths of the dead indicates by metonymy the highly endangered and transient status of their ability to speak. This fragile connection to language, then, emblemizes post-traumatic speech.

While this poem's already dead speaker at first retains the gothic, theatrical power to shift herself about until she finds a comfortable burial position, the failure of the speaker's power circumscribes the text. The profound failure of the narrator of the poem to find "Beauty" before she dies, a failure underscored when the narrator's partner voices his

question, "Why I failed?," enframes the poem (line 5). The primary speaker is "adjusted in the tomb" while her friend is "lain in an adjoining Room" (lines 2-4). The adjoining room is the room of the powerless dead, which she also will enter. The dead speaker's position, far from being that of a powerful, uncanny speaker, in "I Died for Beauty," is that of a person who must rapidly communicate a message before the power of communication is taken away from her. This urgency to speak, here metonymized as posthumous speech, is an emblem of censorship anticipated.

The "Moss" that reaches the lips of the dead significantly finishes its silencing task by "cover[ing] up -- our names," consigning their pure lives, lived for Beauty and Truth, to anonymous oblivion (line 12). The state of namelessness, then, may be not only a state of purity desired by Dickinson as a cleansing from the taint of life, but also may embody death's greatest threat, the threat of the absolute and unalterable silencing of the soul's vision. In some of Dickinson's lyrics, death as a metaphor helps the speaker to achieve the speech of which life deprived her. However, in the above poem, death itself is recognized as a threat to the voice of the speaker. The poem is reminiscent of Beatrice Cenci's fear that death, which she hopes will allow her to escape from the memory of being raped by her father, may just as likely return her to her father's arms, reconfigured as an eternal rape (*SPP* 298). Dickinson's lyric, "I Died for Beauty," explores the fate of a speaker who attempts to gain the power to speak through the use of the trope of the posthumous voice and yet instead is overwhelmed by death. The silencing father presented in Lacanian theory is a death that metonymically represents the absolute limit, the "No," of the *non du père*. Here, however, the moss erases the daughter's last, or paternal name, and also her first name, her own name. The speaker uses death to preserve her purity, but finds her victory pyrrhic.

The trope of death, then, frames a narrow escape hatch for the woman writer. The trope of the posthumous voice is a double gesture that erases the father by pretending to

erase the engendering force of language: a living speaker. As this trope refuses to speak under the interdiction of the paternal law, the rhetorical stance of posthumousness posing a countering "no" to the father's interdiction, the trope must immediately insert a "yes," the affirmation of the renegade daughter's own name. This "yes" is the encrypted name of the always already posthumous narrator. In Dickinson, then, the daughter's name is "Soul," a fickle and intransigent character, in Shelley it is "Mathilda" or "Matilda," a double character who eludes her progenitor, Dante, and in Brontë it is Cathy or Catherine Earnshaw Linton, a name that overrides death.⁷ The danger, then, of enlisting death as one's literary agent is that one may avoid speaking in the name of the father only to avoid writing any publishable utterance. By deferring speech until after the father, the writer using the trope of the posthumous voice risks becoming self-erased by death, a death that Dickinson metonymizes as the "Moss" that covers up the lips which are still trying to speak.

Why does the name of the father need erasing if a daughter is to speak? Lacan contends that fatherhood is the first, or primary, enactment of symbolization: it creates the kinship structure (*Écrits* 285). Heavily reliant upon Levi-Strauss' *Elementary Kinship Structures*, Lacan argues that fatherhood is the primary template for all symbolic discourse for, in birth, the child is claimed by the mother through the body, but the father's claim upon his progeny must be enacted through the symbolic gesture of naming them his own (*Écrits* 290). Like language, fatherhood possesses by deferral. The semiotic, then, is literally the trajectory of the seed through the incarnating mother's body that forms linguistic discourse shaped into the symbolic. Kristeva expands upon Lacan, arguing that the semiotic is the pre-symbolic maternal or elemental language material (*Revolution in*

⁷Strikingly, Mary Shelley seems never to have decided on a spelling for her heroine's name, having spelled the name Mathilda in manuscript and Matilda in letters referring to the text (*An Introduction to Mary Shelley* 153). Perhaps Mathilda/Matilda's double name forms a further protective barrier between this troped posthumous incest victim and her assaulting father.

Poetic Language 47). Indeed one could read the moss covering up the lips of the dead in Dickinson's lyric as a sort of elemental maternal gesture, a mother placing her finger to her child's mouth at night to bid the child be quiet and sleep. The maternal element, the earth, in Dickinson's poem rises up to gently close the mouths of the dead.

Nevertheless, according to Lacanian theory, it is the paternal function that creates the trope of the name and that decrees any legitimately speaking self be aligned with the name of the *pater familias*. The paternal role arbitrates the law that controls symbolic discourse. The idea that the self and the language of the self are annihilated when one's father-given name is erased cedes to the father both the power to die and the power to kill. The father can disown the child, making the child's utterance illegitimate. The speaker of Dickinson's lyric, "I died for Beauty," then, is consigned to speak of "Beauty" only from that narrow gap between the cessation of her living self and that moment when death causes her to lose her voice to the silencing moss. Dickinson's troped posthumous poems are written at this boundary line of the legible, a topos that persists in the slender divide between the devoted daughter's reticence, her lifelong obedience to the paternal interdiction against her speaking in her own name, and the moment when death as a rhetorical marker silences the daughter by returning her to the father's domain, a fatal interdiction. The trope's placement on this boundary line between the name and the "no," as it were, grants troped posthumous texts a legitimacy denied explicitly wayward daughters. Marking a topos that grounds a language written not in the name of the father, but rather posthumously, after the father, the loaded gun of the trope of the posthumous voice targets its master and erases the father.

My goal in borrowing Levi-Strauss to interpret Dickinson's poems has been to show that many of her lyrics are attempts to specify an escape from the confines of her

father's "house and grounds," that is, to gain a topos of expanse.⁸ Although Dickinson's use of the trope of the posthumous voice places those lyrics, within which this trope appears, in a liminal territory, it is important to see that for Dickinson this topography of a boundary was the widest world available, as if it were a method of "spreading Wide [her] narrow Hands" (poem 466). Whether Dickinson claimed her father's house as her self-chosen space or whether that house was forced upon her and she came to accept it, is irrelevant to my argument. In this chapter I have made an argument based upon structural considerations. That is, I have used only the fact that Dickinson remained in her father's house until her death as the basis for applying my re-reading of Levi-Strauss's claims concerning the incest taboo to Dickinson's lyrics troped posthumous. I have specifically not tried to guess what went on in the house of Emily Dickinson's father but instead have tried to highlight the power structure in place during Dickinson's life: a patriarchally dictated and regulated power structure that gave to Edward Dickinson the ultimate choice and final veto concerning his daughters' abode. That he chose not to exchange on the exogamic market his daughter reveals nothing more than Emily Dickinson's address. That she may have dreaded marriage as much as or more than entrapment in her father's house also may well be true, although her few poems commenting on the situation of wives are really quite ambivalent, alluding as they do to the benthonic depths whose pressures produce the very treasures, pearls of great price, many have considered Dickinson's lyrics to be.

⁸ In his biography of Dickinson, Sewall argues that Dickinson herself chose, because of her extreme delicacy, to remain within the safety of what she named her "father's house and grounds." My argument is that Sewall's reading of Dickinson's words is at the very least paternalistic. His reading of her decision to confine herself in her father's house rests upon his assumption that Dickinson was a creature too delicate to manage without her father's protection, an assumption which cannot be separated from the very patriarchal, notion of hyper-domestic women poets which Dickinson's own poems struggle to unravel (Sewall 69).

*Seventh Chapter**Dolls and Daughters:
The Body's Trauma in the Trope of the Posthumous Voice*

Gracefulness is directly associated with death.

– Paul de Man¹

Leaving behind Edward Dickinson's homestead, the pressure of playing the role of the good daughter will still haunt my attempt to trace a connection between women's writing, *per se*, and the trope of the posthumous voice. There are many ways of playing the good daughter's role, but, here, I am interested in that subversive gesture of obedience which manifests itself as the erasure of one's body. In the trope of the posthumous voice the body of the speaker is erased: why is this absence a successful aesthetic gesture? In other words, what do certain aesthetic forms impose upon women? While the following consideration of Kleist's meditation on aesthetics, "On the Marionette Theatre," hardly qualifies as an exhaustive search of modern aesthetic models, it does critically connect the male gaze and its violence with the imposition of a violent aesthetic. To perfect this aesthetic almost requires a woman artist's posthumousness, the absence or near absence of her body. In this chapter, then, the bodies of dolls, or of marionettes, metonymize a desired weightlessness and passivity, presenting the concept of a grace entirely predicated upon a posthumous feminine form.

The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing presents a narrator who occupies liminal ground, her active voice predicated upon the disappearance of her implied body. Dolls, neither dead nor living, are also liminal figures, at once partaking of death and unable to die. In its double-edged relationship to death the doll's voice, that is, the

¹*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 287.

doll's figured rhetoric of expression, mirrors oppositely the contours of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing. The doll presents a lifeless body without a voice while the narrator troped posthumous enacts a voice without a body. In this chapter, by tracing the role of the marionettes in Heinrich von Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre," I will suggest some of the formal parameters of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing.² I will argue that formal constraints placed upon the dance of the doll and upon the figure of the doll, in Kleist's essay, establish and proscribe a liminal space for women's speech.³ Because the dolls are feminine figures, Kleist's essay describes a feminine aesthetic that turns on the assumption that a narrator's voice is culturally, rather than intrinsically, gendered. Extrapolating from Paul de Man's tracing of the marionettes' distinctly feminine grace, I will argue that the doll occupies the symbolic space of the posthumous and, as such, speaks through metonymy from the doll's passive body. In a text, the doll crosses the divide between voice and voicelessness. The blind gaze of the doll directly antithesizes the bodiless vision of the narrator troped posthumous. While the marionette's passive, lifeless form sees nothing, the troped posthumous narrator uses her posthumous stance to observe a great expanse.

A doll who is the central figure within a text presents a main character who receives gaze and never gazes. The troped posthumous narrator, or the dead woman speaking, is the opposite of this seen but unseeing doll, for the dead woman who speaks is posited as the one who sees everything but is herself no longer vulnerable to being seen. The doll and the troped posthumous feminine narrator, then, are counterbalances, contrapuntal images

²See "On the Marionette Theatre" in Idris Parry, Trans., *Essays on Dolls* 1 - 15.

³ Throughout this essay I use the terms *doll*, *marionette*, and *puppet* synonymously, because, for my concerns here, each of these toys functions identically, and it is important to see the connections between them.

of a problem that confronts women writers: the problem of how to be read as a seer rather than as something seen. The masculine gaze tends to double the feminine voice into body and absence by splitting the feminine figure into doll and ghost. This splitting turns into the elision of the body that shapes the trope of the posthumous voice. The split divides the voice without a body from the body without a life. If the doll is a feminine figure cast as blind and mute, then the posthumously speaking feminine narrator portrays an ability to see without being seen, to speak without listening. The anamorphosis of this trope of posthumousness follows that of the dance of Kleist's marionettes; however it is precisely the same curve followed from the opposite edge, for the trauma that the mute bodies of his dolls metonymize is the trauma whose aftermath the trope of the posthumous voice inscribes. It is the trauma of the degraded, powerless body. The trope of the posthumous voice speaks what the marionette cannot: the tale of the mutilated body, a mutilation that severs the voice from the body. This topos of aftermath encodes a muteness enforced through the abjection of the body. While Kleist's marionettes embody a silenced traumatic history, the trope of the posthumous voice disembodies a history of trauma.

To get a sense of the history of the reception of Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre," I will turn to Paul de Man's seminal work on Kleist's essay, "Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*." Responding to the figures of Kleist's marionettes, "Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*," de Man considers loss a kinesthetic phenomenon, opening his essay with a quote from Schiller that describes a formal English dance as the perfected "aesthetic society" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 263). Schiller explicitly aligns aesthetic perfection with moral/ethical perfection, stating of the dance that:

Such a dance is the perfect symbol of one's own individually asserted freedom as well as of one's respect for the freedom of the other. (263)

That is, the perfectly beautiful gesture, according to Schiller, is also the just, or moral, gesture. De Man, however, follows this epigraph with the assertion that the force of Schiller's statement points towards the union between epistemology and aesthetic experience. De Man claims that:

What gives the aesthetic its power and hence its practical, political impact, is its intimate link with knowledge, the epistemological implications that are always in play when the aesthetic appears over the horizon in discourse.

(263)

It is striking that de Man elides consideration of the ethical realm, for this realm is Schiller's prime consideration. Simultaneously foregrounding the role of knowledge in relation to aesthetic experience, de Man erases Schiller's ethical concerns. To privilege knowledge, or epistemological boundaries, as the absolute boundaries of aesthetic experience is to implicitly argue that pedagogical discourse is the bedrock of analytical thought. De Man argues, then, that pedagogy is essentially implicated in formalizing aesthetic categories. He turns away from Schiller's premise that ethical perfection describes a form necessary for aesthetic perfection.

De Man inserts the epistemological into the aesthetic category, a move he calls "the tautology of art," and translates the concept of tautology, a mathematical form, into a mode of bondage (265). In de Man's analysis, tautology becomes a lock-step dance that any aesthetic form must follow, and the beautiful gesture (painted or danced or written) becomes not a freely performed act, but an act essentially coerced. Schiller argues that the formal dance demonstrates, by virtue of its formal rigidity, the essential link between just behavior and the aesthetic category of the beautiful. Into Schiller's text de Man, by contrast, inserts what he claims to see "over the horizon [. . . of the text's] discourse," and de Man's vision is of a link between the experience of apprehending beauty and the experience of knowing some fact or system (265). De Man's linkage of coercion, as

tautology, to knowledge shapes the unstated foundation of his treatment of the question of aesthetic formalization, a question that he considers through the body of Kleist's text: "On the Marionette Theatre." De Man's commentary on Kleist's essay, then, enacts an initial and displacing violence against that essay. It is important, here, to note that the connection between traumatic narrative and formal perfection that de Man presents in "Aesthetic Formalization" is based upon his rejection of the connection between the ethical category of the just and the aesthetic category of the beautiful that Schiller proposes.

By enacting a move away from a union of ethical behavior with aesthetic experience, de Man grounds the aesthetic category of grace not upon a gesture of easing suffering but rather upon a stance of observing suffering. De Man insists that knowledge is synonymous with the principle of aesthetic balance or formal perfection, which always remains just beyond the ken of the person experiencing the aesthetic category of the beautiful. De Man argues that:

Kleist's text is concerned with the same articulation of the aesthetic with the epistemological, (but) by way of formal computation. (267)

Drawing on the mathematical terminology in Kleist's essay, de Man contends that Kleist grounds beauty, as a quality, on an ineradicable mathematical formula, rather than on the ethical correctness towards which Kleist's essay also gestures, with its repeated evocations of the word "grace."

De Man posits that the beautiful is that which knowledge enframes, making grace in language a sort of formal cage. De Man, however, rejects the possibility that the trauma of the fall from grace, as it is expressed through the bodies of the marionettes, may be the trauma of the failure of just, or moral, behavior. I focus here on the question of trauma because de Man's attitude towards the trauma of falling is critical to his reading of the formal laws governing the aesthetic category of the beautiful. De Man's contention that the formal grace of beauty is necessarily devoid of ethical boundaries echoes Kant's

categorical imperative, which divorces emotion from morality. By eradicating the traumatic impact of the fall – the fall of the marionette, or man, to gravity, and of the semiotic line to reference – and by privileging the anamorphosis of the dance, or trope, de Man turns from the ethical implications of the physical trauma of falling. Referents necessarily call into play history, or physical events, but de Man reads the fall from grace in Kleist's essay as a universal rather than a particular example of the trauma of the fall from grace. He consequently considers the problem of referentiality without thoroughly reading Kleist's references. That is, de Man ignores the marionettes whose bodies, dead weights, have fallen in "On the Marionette Theatre."

The final statements of Kleist's essay especially call into question de Man's insistence that ethical and aesthetic categories are not essentially related in Kleist's work. The closing paragraph of "On the Marionette Theatre" summarizes the fall from which the soul may rise:

As one line, when it crosses another, suddenly appears on the other side of the intersecting point, after passage through infinity; or as the image in a concave mirror, after retreating into infinity, suddenly reappears close before our eyes, so, too, grace will reappear after knowledge has gone through infinity. So that we shall find grace at its purest in a body which is entirely devoid of consciousness, or which possesses it in an infinite degree; that is, in the marionette or in the god. (14)

I quote at length to emphasize the centrality of the body to Kleist's thinking about the fall from grace, and the rise into grace. Far from focusing on the mathematical premise of infinity as a primarily epistemological concern, Kleist uses mathematics as the most physical of phenomena, a description of the physical universe. When Kleist writes, "we shall find grace at its purest in a body which is entirely devoid of consciousness, or which possesses it in an infinite degree," he indicates a physical fall: not the fall of the body but

rather the fall in the body. Physical falling cannot be separated from the ethical/moral fall, for the consciousness which could salve the injury of falling in the body is itself found only in a body, suggests Kleist's essay. The emphasis on the marionettes is an emphasis on the body, for the puppets are purely figured bodies.

Throughout his analysis of Kleist, de Man repeatedly substitutes for questions of the body questions of consciousness, whereas Kleist writes of these difficulties as inextricably linked. The force of de Man's commentary, then, is to elide the suffering of the figurative body, as well as the grace of referential language. De Man substitutes for Kleist's concern with the trauma of physical suffering de Man's own question of hermeneutics. De Man's turn from the trauma of the body, which in one sense is simply the trauma of embodied existence, towards a discussion of mathematics as pure form, rather than as a bedrock description of the physical world, amounts to a gesture of ignoring the fallen bodies of the marionettes who inhabit Kleist's text, the marionettes who are the chorus and the core of "On the Marionette Theatre."

In particular, de Man's perhaps erroneous understanding of the nature of a mathematical proof governs his approach to Kleist. De Man argues that Kleist's consideration of the mathematical structure of an hyperbola approaching an asymptote illustrates that Kleist's essay is not about the fall in the body. De man argues that:

Although the *Marionettentheater* can be said to be about a proof, it is not set up as one, but as the story or trope of such a demonstration, and a very cagy story at that. (268)

By implication, then, he is asserting that a mathematical proof is not itself a trope. However, de Man's grasp of mathematics may be somewhat faulty here, for a mathematical proof is, in a sense, nothing but a trope that describes the behavior of aggregates, numbers as they occur in the physical world. In other words, Kleist's repeated incursions into discussions of the hyperbola-asymptote relationship are not efforts to evade

the fall into the body, but rather they codify, through the anamorphosis of the description of equations, the trauma of having a body. De Man calls Kleist's staged essay, "a very cagy story," a phrase that belies de Man's own vision of knowledge as the cage bordering and locking in all aesthetic categories (268). Explicitly, the cage becomes de Man's metonymic figure for knowledge as it defines aesthetic experience. However, implicitly the figure of the cage becomes a trap in which de Man keeps hidden the puppets' bodies.

De Man's cage is built of narratives, or, as he calls them, "dialogical frames of staged scenes" (268). The dialogue enframes the scenes of the narrative. The dialogue, then, becomes that elusive limit of knowledge to which, as asymptote, de Man joins his notion of aesthetic categories. The fall from grace, according to de Man, is a loss of hermeneutic control, which he presents as a loss of the capacity to explore, or even to transgress, boundaries. Kleist's essay, by contrast, is concerned with the body, with the body's fall as the inevitable condition of human existence. De Man reads Kleist's essay according to his own desire to penetrate its dialogical frame, but this mode of reading precisely denies the centrality of the fallen body of the marionette in Kleist's parable. Denying this trauma of the fallen body, de Man only defers the intrusion of the problem of reference, or of referential language, into his essay. But, as we will see, the problem of reference, or of the falling body, returns.

The issue of loss: the "loss of hermeneutic control" and the "loss of control over meaning," haunts de Man's essay like a ghost limb (269, 282). One could argue that de Man's essay, explicitly discussing the parameters of where aesthetic form and epistemology intersect, is privately concerned with that boundary of loss which enframes aesthetic forms. De Man's essay on Kleist turns on his discussion of pedagogy, but he only considers pedagogy as it shapes the boundaries of disciplines. De Man contends that:

The aesthetic can be taught only if the articulation of aesthetic with mathematical (and epistemological) discourse, – the burden of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, – can be achieved. (270)

In other words, de Man wants to begin where Kant left off. By referencing Kant, de Man justifies the notion that the frame of the aesthetic category, or of the beautiful, is that of the knowledge towards which the beautiful tends. Referencing Kant, however, re-introduces the issue of referential concerns. In other words, in attempting to codify aesthetic formalization as Kant would have, through a transcendental aesthetic, de Man falls back onto Kant as a reference. This use of a reference in turn returns de Man's essay to the problem of the body's capacity for loss, a problem from which he has tried to divorce Kleist's meditation on the metaphysics of puppets.

The effect of de Man's placing the epistemological category between those of the aesthetic and the ethical is to hollow out the victims of Kleist's essay, that is, literally to turn the marionettes into figures bounded by a liminus of being known. Instead of considering the ethical situation of the marionettes, their subjugation to the puppeteer, de Man insists that ethics exist only for the sake of pedagogy and that therefore the apparent connection between ethical, aesthetic and epistemological concerns is really only a connection between aesthetic and epistemological categories. Suggesting that ethics, as a category, is illusory, de Man writes that:

The possibility thus arises that the postulate of ethical authority is posited for the sake of maintaining the undisputed authority of teachers in their relationship to their pupils. (270)

The resonant, symbolic bond between the powerless position of pupils and of puppets is graphically revealed but not directly admitted. That is, in stating that the ethical category is hollow, de Man paradoxically provides graphic, as it were, physical, evidence of its centrality to Kleist's text: ethics are made up by teachers, and he, a teacher, will tell you

there are no ethics. The link between the philosophy of ethics and the problem of reference occurs behind de Man's essay, a ghost text made up of the limbs that his critique of Kleist casts off. As we will see, however, these ghost limbs of referentiality and morality do not remain still.

De Man's essay describes a critical inquiry quite strikingly physical and violent. This physical violence is all the more surprising given the turn from the body previously enacted by de Man's refusal to recognize the marionettes' status as passive bodies constructed from prosthetics. De Man describes critics doing each other bodily harm in their frantic pursuit of the desired text:

Far from finding that the spot toward which one directs one's step has been vacated, one finds oneself bumping clumsily into various intruders, or getting entangled in one's own limbs and motions. (272)

He adds that a critic often ends up on the floor, "entangled in one's own limbs," an image precisely like that of a marionette discarded (272). The physicality of de Man's metaphor of jostling and entangling critics then cedes to a sexual metaphor, describing the journey of the masculine gaze towards a feminized empty space, the powerful masculine critic surveying the feminized, passive text. However, the metaphor of sexual conquest used to describe a critic's approach to text ironically reveals de Man's attempt to locate the marionette whose hollow body is the empty space at the center of Kleist's essay. Instead of a gap where the doll is, de Man finds bumping and entangling limbs. The textual appearance of tangled figures, tangled limbs, where comprehension ought to be found, strikingly demonstrates the haunting, visceral quality of the marionettes' trauma. The aporia within which critics fall and tangle their members is the doll's mind, a figurative map of the memory of bodily trauma.

This gap within the doll, a mnemonic absence, de Man does not consider, for such a consideration would bring into play ethical concerns. De Man's narrative instead turns

away from the consideration of the internal experience of the abjected victim, away from the mutilated body metonymized by the prosthetic limbs from which the marionettes are constructed. Kleist, by contrast, introduces the grace of the marionettes by speaking of the grace of artificial limbs on the bodies of wounded men. The central trauma of Kleist's essay, then, is emblemized precisely by the site/sight of the marionettes' mutilated bodies. This entanglement is the symbol that de Man almost ritualistically refuses to read, his language repeatedly approaching and then turning away from perception of the always present fall, gravity itself, embedded in the marionettes' powerless bodies.

The knowledge of the flesh, that double-edged phrase, leads to the knowledge of trauma in the context of Kleist's essay, "On the Marionette Theatre," for the central human image in that essay is the figure of a wound. The main figure in Kleist's essay who shares the textual stage with the puppets is a youth. The essay recounts the story of this youth's fall from grace as follows:

I was at the baths with a young man who was then remarkably graceful. He was about fifteen [. . .]. It happened that we had recently seen in Paris the figure of the boy pulling a thorn out of his foot. [. . .] My friend looked into a tall mirror just as he was lifting his foot to a stool to dry it, and he was reminded of the statue. He smiled and told me of his discovery. As a matter of fact, I'd noticed it too, and at the same moment [. . .] but I laughed and said he must be imagining things. He blushed. From that day, from that very moment, an extraordinary change came over the boy. His attractions slipped away. (8-9)

The boy loses his beauty not only because of the narcissistic wounding that de Man discusses but also because of the thorn, the real wound, to which the boy cannot attend because he is caught in the mirroring behavior of a trope of strict mimesis (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 280). If one interprets the trauma shown in the statue as a bodily trauma, a

sharp splinter in a flesh and blood foot, then one suffers empathically with the statue. Failure to suffer with the wounded boy depicted by the statue is a sort of fall from grace. The boy in the mirror watches his own body, and sees in himself a vulnerability to bodily trauma which is figured as a splinter in the body. Ironically, that vulnerability represented by a statue is replicated by the boy's mirrored and mirroring body. The grace of the boy in the mirror is primarily an ethical grace, for that boy is seeing in himself the vulnerability of the body: the boy sees in his own body the suffering of others' bodies. He reads in the mnemonic of the wounded statue his own form. The older man then forces upon the boy a denial of the statue's splinter's connection to the boy's body's vulnerability. Here, Kleist's mirror is not a topos of purely physical beauty, but rather it is the topos of history, accurately recording death and decay, the vulnerability of the body. The trauma embedded in the text is at once that of the boy who is made a statue by a moment of violation and also that of the narrator whose words cause the boy to fall. The masculine narrator uses the boy's fall to delineate his own recuperation of grace.

The boy's fall from grace occurs when the boy stands before the mirror, transfixed by his own beauty. The beauty of his own body entralls the boy. But the mirror is also death. The mirror stops the action, revealing the body of the boy in its capacity to stop, to die. The boy's symbolic death is emblemized by the statue he sees in himself. The boy makes himself vulnerable not so much by revealing his boyish capacity for self-love as by revealing his childish capacity for selflessness, the ability to cede the self to the aesthetic moment. The boy's connecting the body's mortality with the aesthetic moment, the image of fixed in the mirror, is immediately undercut by the narrator. The narrator of Kleist's essay lies to the boy. Instantly, upon hearing him confess that he lied to the boy, we readers are put in the position of the boy. We cannot trust the narrator of the essay except insofar as he has been willing to confess his fault by recounting the tale of his own deceitfulness. Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre" describes and enacts the trauma of a

young boy betrayed in part by the narrator of the essay. The boy's trauma of seeing himself in the mirror of mortality crystallizes the essay's larger concern with the trauma of consciousness, but it also implicates the narrative project as part of this trauma.

The boy in the mirror's task, however, may in any case be seen as hopeless, for he is attempting to remove a splinter that is not currently in his own foot. In other words, the trauma to which the boy in the mirror responds is a trauma he cannot ever actually solve, for it has already occurred, and in that sense cannot be undone. In effect, the traumatized body recollected, even if it is one's own former body, is a site of trauma impossible to reach. The body after trauma may be emblemized as a statue. Here, the trauma is a splinter that can no longer be removed from the post-traumatic body which has become, as it were, a statue, or like a stone. At the heart of the statue is a gap: the wound the splinter creates. The boy in the mirror cannot get at the real splinter, the real source of trauma, rather he can only gesture towards the gap remaining in the wake of the splinter. Kleist's parable of the boy in the mirror imitating classical sculpture is a parable of traumatic re-enactment. The wound the older man deals the boy is precisely that of denying the trauma, the splinter of identity in the body, which is the locus of the boy's gaze.

The uncommon grace of the boy, then, is both the grace of seeing in another's wounds his own body's vulnerability and also the grace of accurately remembering through the metonymy of the statue his own history of wounds, his own mortality. The older man effects the eradication of the boy's grace by denying the boy's recognition of the trauma which the splinter represents. In other words, the teacher's denial of the ephebe's suffering eradicates the possibility of grace in the ephebe. It is not knowledge that, in Kleist's parable, takes away grace, it is not consciousness that deprives the ephebe of his youthful beauty, but rather the displacement of the memory of the body, or the body of memory. The older man dictates that the younger man's splinter, be ignored. The older speaker's denial of the double image the boy sees in his mirror indeed prevents the boy's

access to the "historical mode" that is essential for shaping a narrative (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 275). The boy's capacity for grace, then, inheres in the mnemonic of the wounded statue. The older man's insistence on denying the history of the original wound, the wound emblemized by the statue the ephebe reflects, takes away the grace of accurate memory. Without an accurate recounting of history, the wound becomes a source of shame, and the boy falls from grace. Kleist's parable of marionettes, of bodies wholly body, then, seems to locate not only the fall from grace in the body, that is, in reference or memory, but also locates the solution to that fall in the body, that is, in figurative speech or in figuring memory.

Without considering the metonymy of the traumatized body upon which Kleist's essay is based, de Man nevertheless does explore the issue of trauma in "On the Marionette Theatre," for he draws attention to the 1810 essay's false appended date of 1801 (283). The false, early date is something already left behind: it stands for the body at a certain point in time. This replacing of a consideration of the body's trauma with a consideration of the inscription of the body's absence is like the rhetoric of the trope of the posthumous voice in as much as this trope uses the implied gravestone, the implied instant of the body's death, as the inscription and site that launch the text. Of the false date, Man informs us that: "1801 is certainly an ominous moment in a brief life rich in ominous episodes" (283). During the year 1801 Kleist suffered the loss of his betrothed and the loss of his chance to follow Kant into the chair of philosophy at Königsburg. The date, then, refers to Kleist's own fall from grace, his inability, even by depriving himself of his beloved, to become pure intellect in imitation of Kant. In other words, if Kant successfully pulls the splinter of the flesh from his life, Kleist is the young man imitating the wounded statue while gazing in the mirror. The wound of the splinter can be removed by Kant because for Kant it is only a splinter, that is, an acknowledgement of the problem of the flesh. For

Kleist, as for the boy in his essay, the splinter is a double wound, a traumatic memory and also the impossibility of solving that injury which the memory encodes.

If the original wounded boy depicted in the statue is beyond saving, and the statue represents the self frozen by trauma, then the boy watching himself in the mirror represents the attempt of the post-traumatic subject to create a formal narrative, an aesthetic of memory, which can tell the tale by mirroring the traumatic event even though the traumatic event itself can never be returned to, or corrected. The history that the older man attempts to deny the young man, then, is a history of a trauma that in any case cannot be changed. Inasmuch as the older man denies the younger man's identification with the splinter in the foot of the statue, he presses into the ephebe's memory another splinter of betrayal which, Kleist tells us, the young man never succeeds in removing from his mind. The history of the trauma, then, is a history of both a physical wound and a denial, a splinter and its embedded permanence.

For the boy in Kleist's essay, the splinter's wound can never successfully be healed since the splinter itself is gone. The ability to access the self figured at the root of the trauma has been lost because the post-traumatic self is a self transfigured into statuary. The date in Kleist's essay becomes the only way to make concrete the topos, as monument, of the trauma. Just as the boy's life is marked and marred, "from that very moment, from that very day," Kleist's false date reveals a trauma which cannot be solved because it cannot subsequently be gotten at, or returned to ("On the Marionette Theatre" 9). Like the splinter in the statue the boy imitates, the trauma is a splinter too far in the past of Kleist's history to be pulled out. Here, getting rid of the body, figured as Wilhelmine, only leaves a wound, an insurmountable gap, which Kleist later demarks by the date of 1801. The date acts like a tombstone, signifying the loss. In response to the amnesia of the trauma, figured as the loss of the splinter, Kleist's essay uses a date to mark this absence, a loss which in no other concrete way can be signified. De Man's return to this marker of

the inaccurate date, then, signifies an implicit recognition of the persistence of the space of the body, as figuration, in memory as speech.

Kleist's use of this false date to metonymize an otherwise unspeakable trauma is like the trope of the posthumous voice inasmuch as this trope uses a false, or rhetorical, death to metonymize some other trauma. A specific moment of death serves precisely as a gravestone serves, to mark tangibly a loss. If a trauma is a gap, a lost remembrance of itself, then the only concrete evidence left of the wound is the date marking the time or date of the trauma. The fatal interaction between the traumatized victim and the violator becomes legible through the encrypted inscription of a date that marks a splinter in time. In a similar fashion the trope of the posthumous voice uses the implied instant of death, a day marked on a figurative gravestone, to stand for an otherwise unspeakable trauma. The moment of trauma, like a splinter, forms the center of the troped posthumous text. In Kleist's essay, the trauma figured is depicted not by a narrator's dead body but rather by a doll's body. The dolls whose inanimate bodies are plundered for metaphor are depicted as violated victims within Kleist's narrative. The essay presents the marionettes as purely prosthetic bodies, the aftermath of amputations.

Not only are the marionettes figured as prosthetics following the trauma of amputation, but also Kleist's dolls' absolute submission to the puppeteer is emphasized in all his descriptions of their grace. De Man nearly entirely ignores the marionettes themselves in his commentary on Kleist's essay. When de Man's essay finally, towards its close, does mention the dolls, it is to caution against "the pathos of an imagery of bodily mutilation," to which he adds, "do not forget we are dealing with textual models" (289). The dolls, who, according to Kleist, are mutilated figures, should not, inveighs de Man, engender our empathy. The marionettes, de Man argues, are only tropes: they are the anamorphosis of their dance. According to de Man, the lines the dolls describe in their dance, and the lines they describe as metaphorical figures in Kleist's essay, are the limits

of the marionettes. These dolls, according to de Man, are not figuratively violated by their death-like deathless existence, but rather they are themselves a boundary, a boundary which describes the pure law of gravity. Kleist's text reads:

"Have you heard," he asked, as I looked down in silence, "of those artificial legs made by English craftsmen for people who have been unfortunate enough to lose their own limbs? [. . .] I tell you, these people dance with them, [. . .] The range of their movements is in fact limited, but those they can perform they execute with a certainty and ease and grace which must astound the thoughtful observer."

(*"On the Marionette Theatre"* 4, 5)

By extrapolation, then, the reader becomes the watcher of the formal beauty of the dead limbs' anamorphosis. By reading the dolls' dance as a boundary itself, de Man elides the issue of their violation which Kleist's essay highlights.

De Man further compares the text of Kleist's essay to the text of the puppets' dance by setting these tropes parallel to each other. De Man emphasizes the parallels between the puppets' dance and the writers' tropes, claiming that:

The anamorphosis of the line as it twists and turns, and tropes of ellipses, parabola, and hyperbole, [. . .] are quantified systems of motion.

(*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 286)

De Man suggests that the dolls represent a language of pure trope, not at all governed by gravity or reference. His elision of the dolls' subjugated status is an elision of the amputated limbs, the images of which anchor "On the Marionette Theatre." In other words, if the elision of the memory of trauma is the loss of grace, then the source of the dolls' grace is their illustration of the persistence of the memory of trauma. In contrast to the ephebe who becomes wooden, the marionettes' dance shows the way in which wooden

traumatic memories do not go away but rather continue to dance, or to trope. The puppets' singular grace inheres in this, their revelation of the body of memory.

If all the doll's limbs are, as it were, the after-effects of amputations, then all their wills are the effects of gravity's thrust. De Man, writing of the violence implied in the histories of Kleist's marionettes, suggests that the marionettes are like the dead:

Caught in the power of gravity, the articulated puppets can rightly be said to be dead, hanging and suspended like dead bodies: gracefulness is directly associated with death, albeit a death cleansed of pathos. (287)

De Man articulates the doll's inanimate, or dead, status, only to argue that its death should not move us, as observers, to feel pity for the mutilated body. He argues that these images of mutilation, of subjugation, and of symbolic death, should be cleansed of pathos. The dolls should not make us aware of death, de Man argues. He reads the marionettes only as symbolic markers, like dates.

I argue, however, that the marionettes are not only expressive of pathos, but also that the attempt to cleanse the trope of death of pathos is itself misguided. In Kleist's essay, the marionettes are abjected by their figurative analogy to dead bodies; indeed they are introduced as debased figures, for the narrator of the essay expresses "surprise" to see the principal dancer attending performances of the marionette theatre ("On the Marionette Theatre" 1). The opening of the essay, then, makes the rhetorical gesture of devaluing the aesthetic achievement of the marionettes' dance even as it places that form at the core of the essay's aesthetic claims. The principal dancer squarely defends the marionettes, assuring his old friend that:

The mute gestures of these puppets gave him much satisfaction, [and] that any dancer who wished to perfect his art could learn a lot from them. (1)

The question of aesthetic grace, here, is linked to abjection, for the marionettes are immediately presented as low art. Even when the narrator admits to the beauty of the mute

gestures of the puppets, he does so by comparing the puppets to the debased figures of peasants, and also to a minor type of artistic creation, that of miniature painting. Kleist writes: "A group of four peasants dancing the rondo in quick time couldn't have been painted more delicately by Teniers" (2). The essay at once, then, places the marionette theatre in a low aesthetic realm while paradoxically claiming that its figured dead dancers achieve a sublime grace.

The contrast between this emphasis on the marionettes' abjection and the aesthetic perfection claimed for the marionettes' dance reveals a connection between the violence that can cause abjection and the formal beauty that Kleist uncovers in the movement and speech of these dolls, metonymy for a survival of violation. The marionettes are degraded, their limbs said to be only pendulums. They are described as objects receiving both gravity's full force and the violence of the puppeteer, and yet they exhibit grace despite this double violation:

Often, shaken in a purely haphazard way, the puppet falls into a kind of rhythmic movement which resembles dance. (2)

The violence that the marionettes under the sway of gravity receive does not allow them to dance, to create art, rather it allows them to produce grace, a quality which Kleist's essay argues cannot be purposely created because it inheres only in passivity.

Kleist's marionettes are unable to pull their own strings and it is this quality of passivity, he asserts in "On the Marionette Theatre," which ensures the marionettes' absolute grace. The essay calls the gestures of the puppets mute, even though human dances are equally devoid of spoken language (7). One must, then, understand Kleist to be commenting on the dolls' lack of expressive motion; unlike ballet dancers, the marionettes do not dance to communicate their emotions or their thoughts. The beauty of the marionettes' dance inheres in its empty adherence to form, argues Kleist, while human dance is mired, always, by the thinking human being within the dancing body.

Not only is the marionettes' passivity praised, in "On the Marionette Theatre," but also it is gendered feminine. The narrator of Kleist's essay immediately links the grace of the doll with a feminine absence of weight and with a feminine passivity. By analogy, the relationship between the asymptote and the hyperbola functions like that between the male puppeteer and the feminine marionettes. Kleist reads the feminine dance of the marionette as beautiful, but this femininity is bound up with the figuration of death. The lighter and more feminine the doll, that is, the closer to bodiless, the more graceful will be the doll's dance, claims Kleist's essay. By analogy, the feminine adumbrated in Kleist's essay becomes the curve, or logarithm, dependent upon the masculine straight line, or number. The graceful feminine puppet is absolutely passive. "On the Marionette Theatre" argues that only this very dependence of the marionette on the puppeteer ensures the beauty of the dance.

Within the framework implied by Kleist and de Man, then, the prescription for the feminine writer to achieve classical grace is that she must both appear to be without knowledge, without gravity, like the dancing marionette, while still somehow managing her own motion. Kleist conflates the weight of flesh with the weight of knowledge, arguing that the absence of one or both of these weights is necessary for the achievement of grace. Knowledge and weight are analogous to the two lines through which a section is drawn, the lines which Kleist argues reappear after passing through eternity (14). However, the section drawn through them is that of the feminine form, for the feminine, in "On the Marionette Theatre," is cast as that which threatens knowledge and that which weighs down all bodies.

In Kleist's essay it is, then, the weight of the female body that has to be shed or kept passive in order for aesthetic grace to be achieved. One need only remember the constant references to the small physical stature of Emily Dickinson, and to the metaphorical slightness of weight which Sylvia Plath, in life a large woman, achieved by

dying, to recognize the importance of woman's physical absence from a text for that text to be considered sublime, or in Kleistian terms, classically graceful. Indeed, his ballet-dancer narrator specifically refers to the desire of his female partner to weigh the same as "a balance-weight" (5). The grave, or gravity, of the flesh from which the male writer in his sublime mode escapes, then, cannot simply be shed in a woman-authored, female-narrated text, for the place of the body is given as the place of the female. A woman writer using the trope of the posthumous voice impersonates the *pallida Mors* marionette, imbuing with grace her own textual anamorphosis. Unlike a male writer, she cannot so simply leave behind the fallen feminine body as the other's body, for the textual feminine body inscribes itself into the implied body of the woman writer.

The passive or abject body absent from but also adumbrated by the text troped posthumous is a feminine body, but a body prone and mute. The trick of the trope of the posthumous voice, however, is that it grants voice as a double, or counterpart, to this abject corpse while taking away voice from the reader. When we read a poem or a novel written in the guise of the posthumous confession, that is, written through the trope of a speaking corpse, we are in a sense rendered pure readers, for one cannot respond to the dead. For example, reading Dickinson's lyric "This is my letter to the World" (poem 519), we are, as readers, rendered silent, for we cannot enter into discourse with a dead speaker; we can neither fail nor succeed in our response to her poem. As the impossibility of response renders us powerless, it gives us, at the same time, the grace of escaping a failed conversation. One manoeuvre, then, of a female author writing a narrator who speaks as if from the grave is to allow the reader of her text a certain passive grace: the reader achieves a sort of grace by virtue of being rendered a pure reader, that is, rendered a recipient unable to respond to an always already dead-letter text.

Reading a rhetorically dead woman narrator's words we are unable to fail her because she has already been, fatally, failed by other readers. Consider the opening couplet of Dickinson's lyric:

This is my letter to the World

That never wrote to Me --

(poem 519 lines 1, 2)

This couplet is emblematic of the closing down of discourse that the trope of the posthumous voice achieves. The couplet establishes the ineradicably finished status of communication between the female speaker and the world: the world never wrote to her, and that's the end of it. The poet does not allow that the world may at some later date write to her, rather, she writes as if she were already dead. She writes the line "This is my letter," as if the time during which the world might have written her back is certainly gone. The premise of posthumous utterance, then, guides this lyric.

Reading Dickinson's lyric, one is inevitably placed in the company of the silent world, those countrymen who never wrote to her. By implication, then, all readers of her letter are absolved of the chance to write back to her. One cannot reply to the troped dead woman's letter. Ironically, Dickinson's poem ends on a supplicatory note, asking the readers to "judge tenderly of me," that is, to read with grace her unanswerable letter (line 8). If the arch passivity of the posture of death, as a speaker's trope, is a feint, it is a genuine feint, movingly expressive of the woman author's overwhelming sense of powerlessness before the world. The subversive power of this feint of the troped posthumous speaker inheres, then, in the double motion of supplication and thrust. The female speaker writes for the metonymically masculine world that does not write back precisely by centering her language in the space of that male deafness. By interdicting reply, the troped posthumous speaker retains a silencing power.

Part of the world's unwillingness to write back while the female poet is still alive may be attributed to a fear or dislike of the flesh which the female author, because she is female, especially attracts. The feminine is the impassable and impassive terrain through which Kleist, and de Man in his analysis of Kleist, establish it is necessary for language to pass in order to achieve grace ("On the Marionette Theatre" 15). Notably, Kleist's essay ends with the idea that one must eat a second time from the tree of knowledge in order to achieve grace. Of course, the tree of knowledge is bound up with the image of Eve offering the fruit. Kleist implies, then, that one must return to and expiate the site of the female body in order to escape the finitude, or mortality, of the body *per se*.

De Man highlights what he considers the failure of Kleist to navigate this very treacherous sphere of woman, metonymized as Wilhelmine von Krug, Kleist's fiancée. De Man argues that Kleist's loss in the year of 1801, the loss of his fiancée, was a wound which Kleist apparently inflicted upon himself in order to become "like Kant" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 285). De Man points out that by losing Wilhelmine, Kleist did not become like Kant. On the contrary, Kleist subsequently watched another man gain both the girl and also Kant's old chair at Königsburg. De Man implies that the territory into which Kleist unwisely entered was that of Wilhelmine von Krug. The territory of the woman, the female body at once debased and also partaking of grace due to its powerlessness, becomes the topos of infinity, the space through which the classical aesthetic navigates. But what happens when the doll, or the feminine figure, begins to speak?

The Strings Attached

What are the connections between Kleist's marionettes' dance and the texts written by women authors employing the trope of the posthumous voice? Just as the doll's dance is a trope, so also the author's language in this extended metaphor follows an anamorphosis, the tracing of the body's disappearance. The grace of the dance of the marionettes and the grace of the language of the woman writer using this trope of

posthumousness are predicated upon a silence and an absence, respectively. The doll's embodied silence mirrors the troped posthumous narrator's disembodied voice. Kleist's introductory paragraph calls the gestures of the dancing marionettes "mute" ("On the Marionette Theatre" 1). Kleist, then, emphasizes the implications of the marionettes' inability to speak. The grace of their mute gestures, argues Kleist's principal dancer, inheres in the fact that under no circumstances could the marionettes break the motion of the dance themselves. In other words, what is mute in the marionettes is an absence of will. Their lack of desire is juxtaposed against an interplay with the burlesque, the field within which desire is granted its most public play and display. The marionettes' grace relies both upon their lack of authorial will, their inability to author themselves, and also upon their silence and stasis in the face of that degraded aesthetic which is the burlesque. A double degradation lays the foundation for the grace of the marionettes' dance: the degradation of the burlesque body and also the degradation of lacking autonomous will. Indeed, Kleist's principal dancer describes the dolls' limbs as dead. The narrator relates that:

Each movement, he told me, has its centre of gravity; it is enough to control this within the puppet. The limbs, which are only pendulums, then follow mechanically of their own accord...When the centre of gravity is moved in a straight line, the limbs describes curves. Often, shaken in a purely haphazard way, the puppet falls into a kind of rhythmic movement which resembles dance. (2)

In other words, because the soul of the doll is either absent or subjugated to the puppeteer, the grace of the doll's limbs is greater than the grace of an human being whose soul is not subject to a puppeteer. Indeed, according to Kleist, it is the dolls' capacity to receive violence without resistance, to be shaken in a purely haphazard way, which ensures the dolls' grace.

Though it may sound odd to mention the soul of the doll, I am taking my cue from Kleist, who speaks of the soul of the dancer as nothing other than the ellipsis described by the motions of the dancer's limbs, an ellipsis also described by the motion of a dolls' limbs. The elliptical curve reaching towards the line which is the invisible center of gravity reveals the soul of the human dancer within the dance just as it reveals the soul of the marionette dancing. Kleist's narrator argues:

Seen from another point of view, this line could be something very mysterious. It is nothing other than the path taken by the soul of the dancer.

(3)

The path taken by the soul of the doll is the dance itself, merging soul and dance. The doll's soul is the curve which the doll's movements express when the doll is shaken by the puppeteer.

If the soul of the doll is motion, then the soul of the text's anamorphosis is reference. The fabular untold tale of violation at the core of this post-traumatic text is the history obliquely referenced. However, the anamorphosis of the text, as metaphor, also expresses this confession of trauma. The marionettes' dance only seems to evade gravity because the dance seamlessly accepts and expresses gravity. The bodies of the puppets become conduits for gravity.

The analogy Kleist establishes between the masculine puppeteer who governs gravity, or who traces an asymptote with his hands' guidance of the puppets, and the feminine marionette who traces with mute gestures an hyperbola, a passive reaction to the puppeteer, leads to a formulation of feminine grace which demands muteness and complete deference to masculine force, metonymized as both gravity and the puppeteer's hands. Kleist's contrasting metaphors for feminine and masculine are curve and line, a passive and an active principal, since the marionettes' dance is mute, or without a storyline, while the puppeteer's show tells a story. Although the decidedly not mute male principal dancer

narrates the essay, when he compares the marionettes to human dancers, he uses a female dancer as the object of comparison (4, 7). The woman dancer, however, cannot quite equal the grace of the marionettes, for she retains the capacity to move her own limbs.

At Kleist's essay's conclusion, the path that men may take to return to grace is depicted as that of eating again the fruit of knowledge, proffered, of course, by Eve. Eve presents at the essay's conclusion, then, a silent terminus, implied but not explicitly mentioned. She is the topos through which the mouth of the man must travel, by eating her offered apple, in order to regain the capacity to speak gracefully. Graceful male authorship, then, depends upon the absolute subjugation of the feminine puppet:

Grace appears most purely in that human form which has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness. That is, in the puppet or in the god. (12)

My concern here is not with how the male "god," the puppeteer of infinite consciousness, introduces grace into his speech, but rather with how the feminine puppet with dead-limbed pendula expresses grace through her dance. The troped dead speaker is the speaker most radically engaged in this metaphor of the mute dance, for such a speaker's references are occluded. The speaker who pretends to be dead plays at the outer edge of the possibilities of the intersection of reference and trope. To what inhabited landscape, to what home-base of reference, do the dead refer? The narrator who is posited as speaking from the position of death has ceded the referential turf of the home of her own body.

Just as the gravestone, implied or explicitly described within the troped posthumous text, functions as a body that centers the text in the absence of the narrator's body, the ideal feminine figure of a marionette replaces the female body in Kleist's essay, and also in de Man's analysis of that work. De Man's delineation of the formal aesthetic qualities, that Kleist argues the marionettes embody, reveals the structure of the rhetorical landscape into which the trope of the posthumous voice is cast: the landscape of a subversively passive femininity. The absolutely passive marionette, whose very soul is

defined as a constant capitulation to gravity, and who paradoxically evades gravity, is Kleist's saint. The mute gestures of the marionettes become the antecedent to Kleist's resumption of graceful language. The male author, unwilling to rhetorically erase his own body, makes use of the troped dead feminine body of the doll to express trauma. However, the marionette herself describes an unanticipated grace. This surprise of grace after trauma appears also in the trope of posthumousness.

If Kleist's marionettes are the woman writer's mirror image, the mute gesturers whom she is asked to mimic in her efforts to speak gracefully, then the rhetorical play of false and true dates, the years or moments of falling from grace, become the tombstone markers whose encoded meanings mark the circumference of the feminine speaker's semantic reach. In other words, if the marionettes present the ideal grace of feminine expression, a grace of which the male consciousness must partake before achieving its desired goal of infinite consciousness, then the topos granted to the feminine speaker is that of the fixed date: the trauma of the fall, or, of the moment of death. The topos, the place, granted the woman writer is that of the grave, marking a trauma which is irrevocable. The date which does not change metonymizes the connection between trauma and memory, for trauma is that unspeakable and ineradicable center towards which the curve of the metaphor of posthumousness draws.

The trauma of Kleist's marionettes is their status as amputees, their status as mutes, and, by implication, their eradicated mnemonic space. This dollish lack of memory is the last effect of trauma. This erased consciousness is also the necessary pre-condition of graceful feminine troping, as Kleist's essay establishes this feminine aesthetic along the parameters of a formal aesthetic grace. It is not the masculine speaker, the principal dancer, who is identified with the marionettes' mute grace. Rather, the feminine speaker, the woman lyricist, is implicated in Kleist's sublime manifesto. She is the heir to the feminine passivity of the marionettes' grace. By pairing off doll and god, puppet and gravity, false

date and real text, trauma, in "On the Marionette Theatre," is transposed from the injured masculine amputee onto the more fully traumatized, because blinded and mute, feminine doll. Within such a system of aesthetic formalization, the woman writer, then, is offered a theatre beginning from and limited to the fixed date of a trauma, a symbolic tombstone that marks her memory. The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing replies to the restricting frame of what is considered feminine grace by pretending to remain mute while in fact speaking.

Like the marionettes' dance in "On the Marionette Theatre," the trope of the posthumous voice in woman-authored texts translates humiliation into grace, subverting the analogy between woman and doll. The dollish woman, a mute, passive object, is reconfigured through the transformational trope of the posthumous voice. Such writing shifts from the topos of physical abjection, the desecration of the female body, into a space of bodilessness as a type of sacredness. While bodilessness and namelessness are not the most desirable bases for authorial inscription, they do provide sites for resistance. Refusing to perform as a violated body, the woman writer develops the trope of the posthumous voice to demonstrate the power of her capacity to create a home base out of that homelessness which is bodilessness. The site of the violation that is the feminine body may be a topos for the post-traumatic narrative. However, since this violated body is a site already symbolically erased by the violation itself, the topos of the post-traumatic narrative becomes one of homelessness. Like the marionettes who never touch ground, the troped posthumous text claims only the home site of homelessness.

*Eighth Chapter**The Death's Head Moth: Elizabeth Bishop's Man-Moth*

If, as I have argued, Emily Dickinson writes out of the trap of the father's house by transforming the space of death into a place of crossing-over, Elizabeth Bishop picks up the narrative in this no-man's land, this underworld between the father's house and the daughter's as yet unrealized house. Bishop's early poem "The Man-Moth" gives an emblematic form, through the symbol of the death's head moth, to the homelessness of the renegade daughter's voice.¹ While "The Man-Moth" travels the underworld of a modern city, and indeed participates in the twentieth-century mode of Surrealism, it also carries on a conversation with Emily Dickinson's buried speakers. In "The Man-Moth," Bishop ironizes the plight of the woman writer using the rhetoric of feigned posthumousness as her cover. Bishop draws a cartoon character death's head, a quite harmless moth. Bishop's poem maps out possible modes of departure from the underworld, ways in which the feminine voice, emblemized by this luna moth, may temporarily but meaningfully climb out of the tunnels where Dickinson locates herself and her mother. Bishop's moth climbs towards a site of feminine power: the elegant and impenetrable moon whose light governs the poem's nightscape.

Strikingly, while Dickinson lived her life as a daughter in her father's house, Bishop was orphaned early by her father. David Kalstone, in *Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell*, tells us that Bishop's father left her a financial inheritance, granting her, then, the power of the father's house without its necessary entrapments (30). If Dickinson's feminine corpses are buried, as it were, in her father's backyard, then Bishop's underworld is the nexus of travel, in the tunnels beneath

¹*The Complete Poems of Elizabeth Bishop* 14 -15.

the great modern city. The poets' connection, of course, is a shared homelessness, that mirror of disembodiment which the trope of the posthumous voice inscribes.

I will begin my consideration of Bishop's poem "The Man-Moth" with a glance at its affinity with André Breton's surrealist aesthetic, exemplified in his novel *Nadja*. At the beginning of the end of his relationship with Nadja, the narrator of Breton's *Nadja* describes the negative side of the woman with whom he has been entranced. Nadja's body, throughout Breton's surrealist romance, has been a site of escape and a site of aesthetic realization, a sort of embodied surrealist manifesto. Suddenly, the male narrator realizes that his lover, viewed through other eyes, is a fallen woman, a prostitute. This moment of the male narrator's realization of the woman's vulnerability, indeed of her victimization, is encapsulated in the trope of revulsion, disgust over the abjected female body. The abjection of Nadja is first and foremost located in her assaulted body. The violated body of the woman enacts a double pull, at once attracting the male narrator to the accessible, because already violated, site of the woman's body, and also repelling him. The abjected woman's recounting of her trauma disgusts her lover, nearly causing him to lose his desire for her:

I reacted with terrible violence against the over-detailed account she gave me of certain scenes of her past life, concerning which I decided that her dignity could not have survived entirely intact. A story of a blow in the face that had drawn blood, a blow from a man whom she gave herself the sly pleasure of refusing. [. . .] This story almost managed to alienate me from her forever. (*Nadja* 113)

The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing responds to just this problem of a woman recounting trauma: this problem of the assaulted woman's body's surviving with "dignity intact." *Nadja*, telling an accurately detailed story of an assault she once suffered, almost loses her male audience. The horror the male narrator of *Nadja* feels when

confronted with Nadja's abjection reflects the challenge of women's post-traumatic writing. The woman writer using the trope of the posthumous voice distances her depiction of trauma from a graphic description of physical violence, instead inscribing a metaphysics of violation, a metaphysics occluding the body. By borrowing the site of her own rhetorically dead body, the troped posthumous narrator erases the spectre of woman's body from the text. In this gesture, she borrows her own corpse to shield her voice.

Elizabeth Bishop, whose early poetry reflects an affinity with Breton's surrealist project, often textually borrowed other bodies – of animals, of fantastical creatures, as well as of other women – to mark the place of the physical in her metaphysical, meditative poems. "The Man-Moth" may be Bishop's most fully realized work of surrealism, for it not only presents a fantastical creature, a production of found art, but also "The Man-Moth" textually confronts the surrealist use of the female body as a moment of passage into the place of the aesthetic. While the narrator, in *Nadja*, moves through the body of Nadja to arrive at visions of the beauty of a random, topographically shifting city, "The Man-Moth" presents a masculinized cityscape through which the man-moth, as a posthumously troped woman's voice, scoots and scurries. In Bishop's surrealist poem, the body of the woman, the haunting Nadja, has gone underground, into the subway's passages, while the moth, metonymy for breath or voice, sneaks towards the place of aesthetic achievement, through the nocturnal gambit of climbing towards a locked moon. "The Man-Moth" responds to the tactic of placing uncanniness in the space of the feminine, the trope of *Nadja*, by tacitly arguing that the mysteriousness of the feminine aesthetic, represented by the moon and by the inscriptions which the man-moth dreams of writing across the moon, is in fact a product of man's misreading.

Bishop's poem is haunted by the female body, spectral and buried, but it never shows this body. The paradox of the body, in many of Bishop's lyrics, is solved not through acceptance of the speaker's self as a complicatedly embodied space, but rather

through the rejection of the self-as-body, a rejection accomplished by borrowing the physical forms of others. Her poems often focus on characters whose bodies act as figurative masks that occlude the implied body of the speaker. In Bishop's oeuvre, a partial list of what I'd call mask-poems includes: "Pink Dog," "The Moose," "Crusoe in England," "Sandpiper," "The Armadillo," "Songs for a Colored Singer," and, the focus of this chapter, "The Man-Moth". My argument is that Bishop's use of the mask is a form of the trope of the posthumous voice, a way of burying the implicit body of the woman speaking within the visible other whose body covers the poem. This gesture covers the body of the narrator. The narrator's voice splits from her effectively buried body and the anthropomorphized animal – dog, moose, or moth – takes the place of the body in the poem.

The main characters of "Pink Dog," "The Moose," and "The Armadillo" each encounter and, within the scope of the poems, escape, death. The dog is issued a costume to help her survive Carnival, the moose is narrowly spared being hit by a bus, and the armadillo just evades falling fire-works (*CP Bishop* 190-191, 169-173, 103-104). These animals not only display the body in their respective lyrics, but also they demonstrate the body's survival. By contrast, the ambiguously gendered hero/heroine of "The Man-Moth," inhabits the borderline existence of the posthumous. "The Man-Moth" is a troped posthumous poem: it inhabits from the outset of the lyric a no-man's land. Neither human nor animal, the man-moth's correct name is neither legible nor entirely erased.

The word man-moth, the poem's note tells us, is a misprint from a newspaper: the newspaper intended to print the word "mammoth" (*CP Bishop* 14). This creature whose birth occurs through a misprint is immediately relegated to the realm of the posthumous, mammoths being long since extinct. Even if the misprint were a misprint of the adjectival use of mammoth, the poet's use of the misprint to create an animal draws upon the noun, "mammoth," the extinct beast. The question of extinction runs furtively throughout

Bishop's poem. The moon is represented as a force whose strength has been rendered extinct by man's inability to properly read and interpret the light of the moon. The moon's properties cannot be calibrated by masculine science. They cannot be read. Similarly, the man-moth itself is surely the last of its line, inasmuch as no partner or companion is hypothesized for this little creature. Like Mary Shelley's monster, the extinction of the man-moth seems assured, even though the man-moth has clearly descended from some family, having thereby inherited at least metaphorically the tendency to touch or to consume poison:

[. . .] the third rail, the unbroken draught of poison,

[. . .] a disease

he has inherited the susceptibility to. (lines 37 - 39)

The man-moth's absence, then, predates and outlasts its presence. Unlike Breton's Nadja, whose disappearance also seems more pertinent than her role in the novel entitled after her, Bishop's man-moth is both aware of its posthumous status and also manufactures the shape of this posthumous existence. The man-moth creates itself out of a scrap of language and preserves itself through a crafty ability to alternately hide and search. The subway tunnels where the man-moth's crystalline tear is produced may be the opposite of the illuminated lunar inscriptions that the man-moth hoped to write, but writing the "tear," a clear if brief elegy, is better than nothing.

The gesture of manufacturing a life, or a poem, out of a misprint is particularly well suited to a woman poet. For, this gesture is emblematic of the larger struggle of the woman writer to use a patriarchally controlled language out of which women have been written. Teresa de Lauretis, in *The Violence of Rhetoric*, argues that women writers have lost a linguistic space:

If Nietzsche and Derrida can occupy and speak from the position of woman, it is because that position is vacant, and what is more, cannot be claimed by women. (240)

The absence of woman from the culturally granted place of the rhetorician encourages a trickster approach to textual production in women writers. Bishop's transformation of the misprint in a newspaper which, in the 1930's, surely still represented a patriarchal publishing hegemony, into a creature of her own making, parallels metonymically the act of the woman writer producing lyric text: she must find the gaps in the father's language and enter through them, in disguise, into her own texts. The misprint is the gap or fault in the father's language, the proverbial crack in the armor. Just as the gaps or cracks in the poem's nighttime city-scape give the man-moth his opening to explore, so also the misprint gives the woman poet the chance to write. She uses the misprint to describe feeling like an hybrid of sorts, a textual creature self-formed from torn pieces of the father's language.

Although I am claiming that "The Man-Moth" is a poem using the trope of the posthumous voice, the man-moth is presented as an active creature. It "pays rare, though occasional, visits to the surface" (line 10). In what sense, then, can I argue that the man-moth is a mask like that of the trope of the posthumous voice? I contend that, although Bishop uses a misprint as the rhetorical gesture which launches her poem, the image of the moth itself takes over the poem. The image of the moth is resonant with allusions. This emblem, the moth, is an image symbolic of death. In *Over Her Dead Body*, Elisabeth Bronfen remarks that, according to European tradition, the moth emerges from the deceased body just after the moment of death:

The moth, also called "death-bird," because the traces on its body suggest the patterns of the skull, is iconographically read as a figure of death and immortality. Because it is a nocturnal butterfly, often found hovering

above graves, classical Greek tradition saw the moth as a figure of the soul departing from a dead body. (8-9)

The man-moth, then, is the soul departing from the body at death. If the body from which the man-moth originated was a woman's body, then Bishop's poem rhetorically erases the woman's body while preserving her soul, through the elegant symbolic gesture of preserving the soul as the figure of the moth. The death-moth hovers over graves, in folklore, and thus it metonymizes the posthumous voice. The death-moth is the woman's soul risen from her buried body.

However, the gender of Bishop's moth, even if it represents a soul, is problematic. It is called a man-moth, and yet its time of ascendancy is during the night, when the moon holds sway. More than anything else, the man-moth is entranced by and connected with the luminous moon. The creature's one goal is "to push his small head through that round clean opening," that "hole at the top of the sky," to force his way through the moon (line 20). If we read the moon, as it is traditionally interpreted, as a female symbol, then the man-moth's efforts to push his body through the moon at first seems a characteristically masculine efforts to dominate the female body. Indeed, on one level, the entire poem can be read as chiding men about the smallness of their vision and the violence of their efforts to invade the female body. "The Man-Moth" implies a meditative concern with the inaccuracy of men's sense of self-importance, suggesting this to be hubris:

The whole shadow of Man is only as big as his hat

It lies at his feet like a circle for a doll to stand on. (lines 3, 4)

Noting the inadequacy of masculine instruments to measure or read the feminine moon is the observance with which the poem opens. However, the poem's focus tends away from men, and towards a consideration of the moon. As "The Man-Moth" progresses, the doll-like man recedes from view. The poem becomes increasingly concerned with developing

its portrait of the moon and her minion, the moth. This luna moth is connected to the moon. Bishop's moth, then, is a feminine creature with a masculine name.

Bishop's poem's attention to the moon closes the first stanza, effectively shifting the point of view away from that of the dominant man:

He does not see the moon; he observes only her vast properties
feeling the queer light on his hands, neither warm nor cold
of a temperature impossible to record in thermometers. (lines 6-8)

The man-moth is a figure neither like the man nor like the moon. David Jarraway, in his essay "The Spectral Lesbian Poetics of Elizabeth Bishop," has discussed the moth as a possible coded symbol for lesbianism, and, clearly, the exploration of gender identity forms an important subtext to Bishop's poem (250). However, the questions of gender and sexual identity are deeply connected with adumbrating the speaker's absent or buried body and the present voice. The moon's light infiltrates the poem, presenting a constant subtext for the man-moth's journeys to the moon. The man-moth is a creature haunting a post-traumatic landscape of desire. The man-moth's desire is to inscribe itself in what Bishop calls "scrolls on the light." The depiction of the creature's obsession with using up his whole being to create text, to be made "black scrolls on the light," is the controlling narrative of the poem (line 21). The man-moth is a creature primarily focused on the creation of text.

The poem's depiction of the moon's invisibility within the masculine topography of the city cedes to a story about the struggle of the creature miscegenated from a misprint and a woman poet. The man-moth emerges from an underground space, a liminal space evoking burial. The underworld, here, is given a modern twist. The man-moth is a creature of the New York City subways: the subways provide the half-way house from which he emerges and into which he returns after his falls. Like the troped posthumous speakers in Dickinson's lyrics, the man-moth's home is that of burial, a state of being underground,

submerged. The moth visits the surface from an underworld and this designates him a posthumous creature, a creature with ties to the dense network of underground tunnels. The underground, the place of burial which the man-moth inhabits, forms a literal and figurative subtext to the poem. The creature's effort to emerge and, by scaling buildings, reach the space of writing involves first an emergence from this underworld. The man-moth embodies posthumous utterance because the moth is the folkloric creature that emerges from the dead. The heroism of the man-moth is based upon the moth's struggle against muteness as an underground posthumous creature.

The conduit to writing the self as text, to becoming the "scrolls on the light," is presented in the poem as the moon (line 21). The moon is imagined first as a locked door. However, the moon itself is not presented as being productive of text. Instead, the moon creates only invisibility, a quality of absence, of being "neither warm nor cold" (line 7). The moon, here, must be gone through in order to transform the body of the self into the body of the text. The poem describes the man-moth's desire to enter the place of text, metonymy for the desire to write, as an effort to "push his small head through that round clean opening," that round clean opening describing the man-moth's vision of the moon (line 20). Just as the image of a small head pushing through a round opening conjures an image of birth, so also the poem's moon deflates this natal imagery. For Bishop's moon is not an opening to another space but rather an opaque and impenetrable place, a severe and securely locked door. Within topography of the "Man-Moth," the path to becoming a writer cannot be through the moon, for the moon is not an aperture. Instead, the man-moth misreads the moon as a door that could be gotten through, and this error means that the man-moth's efforts to press its body through the moon are doomed to fail.

If the man-moth is the soul escaped from the body of the poem's originary speaker, then the man-moth's efforts to create text by going through the moon's body exemplify the problem of a woman writer trying to produce "scrolls on the light" by going through the

textually imagined space of a feminine body – in Bishop's depiction, an opaque and solid moon (line 21). The poem suggests, then, that the female body may be occlusive and silencing of the female voice. The man-moth is an emblematic depiction of the disembodied feminine voice, just as the moth of folklore is the embodiment of the soul of the deceased. The speaker of her poem is, then, not the man-moth *per se*, but rather a disembodied, omniscient feminine narrator whose posthumous presence is implied through the poem's use of the death-moth as its primary emblem. The death-moth masks the female body of the speaker of the poem, for the death-moth represents her soul after the burial of her body.

The man-moth's role as the soul, or voice, of a posthumous speaker is underscored by the moth's homelessness. While we are told that the man-moth "calls home" the subways where he travels, the network of subway tunnels only transport the moth (line 26). Like the sublunar, but above ground, landscape where the moth attempts to write himself through the female body, the subway tunnels trope a space of homelessness, a homelessness which is the posthumous speaker's home. The underground provides the topos within which the moth actually writes what he imagines would be the scrolls of his perfected text. The status of the subway as a place where many homeless people do spend a great deal of their time underscores the man-moth's homelessness; when the poem states that he calls the subway tunnels home, we may assume that he has no home. The man-moth's home is liminality, marginality, invisibility. The man-moth's terrain is the border territory between the daylight landscape shadowed by man and the nightscape of the battered and occluding feminine moon.

The man-moth is an aspect of feminine voice not because Elizabeth Bishop created him, but because the man-moth inhabits the symbolic borderland between the codified feminine body, as moon, and the "whole shadow of Man" (line 3). In other words, the woman writer, as Bishop elliptically presents her in this poem, writes neither as the

powerful authorial figure who casts a shadow over the daytime, above ground landscape, nor does she write from the space of the occluding body of the moon, for the moon, being "impossible to record," leaves no traces (line 8). In one sense, the man-moth is genderless. The moth is neither like the man who cannot see the moon's properties, nor like the moon, cool and refusing of entry, saying nothing.

As a paradox of gendered writing, the cultural illegibility of post-traumatic women's writing is mirrored by the trope of the posthumous voice. Bishop's man-moth problematizes the erasure of the body and the topos of embodiedness. These erasures are enacted by the trope of the posthumous voice. The image of the death-moth, a figure of posthumous speech embodied, reveals the persistence of the body within metaphor, within lyric text. The moon's cloistered body is neither effaced nor embraced within the narrative of the man-moth's struggle to write within the space of the moon. Instead, it is repeatedly climbed towards and struggled with. No resolution is possible. Anne Colwell, in *Inscrutable Houses: Metaphors of the Body in the Poems of Elizabeth Bishop*, responds to the ambivalent stance towards the body that she claims is characteristic of Bishop's poems, arguing that this very ambivalence is the message of the poems:

Bishop's poems explore the paradox of this bodily existence that both isolates us and joins us; they depict the body as the limit of the otherwise boundless imagination, and yet the only means of connecting with other people, and the external world. (3)

My contention, however, is that the apparent genderless quality of the man-moth, the fact that the moth is called "he" but is able to act and to be seen only within the landscape of the feminine moon, indicates the nature of female utterance as Bishop sees it. She reproaches the confines of a readership's expectations of woman's writing, that audience presenting a constant boundary to the woman's imagined possibilities of text. The woman writer's voice arises, then, neither from the topos of the speechless moon, nor from that of the man

who cannot see the moon, but rather it comes from a borderland, between the silencing threat of being in a woman's body and the annihilating threat of being entirely ignored by the dominant, shadow-casting man.

The border territory of the subways, although not the source of the man-moth's inspiration, provides the topos of the man-moth's one great textual achievement. Here, in the territory of homelessness, the man-moth shapes the tear "pure enough to drink" that is metonymy for pure lyric poetry (line 48). The man-moth must enter the topography of the inscrutable moon because that is the source of its inspiration, the source of a cold and radiant vision of lyric text. In this vision, the perfect lyric utterance would be a complete transfiguration of the body. By going through the female body, and doing away with that body, perfect lyric would be written "in scrolls on the light" (line 21). However, it is in fact within the subway tunnels, the underworld, that the man-moth writes the elegiac poem or cries the pure lyric tear. In its admission that the female body cannot be erased as a basis for female utterance, Bishop's poem differs from the lyrics of Dickinson and Brontë, who attempt the trope of bodilessness. Instead, Bishop's man-moth represents the female voice divested of the female body but not of all embodiedness. The man-moth's comical aspect derives from Bishop's implicit recognition of the difficulties of writing, as Dickinson and Brontë succeed in doing, as if the bodiless had begun. The man-moth's grief, its tears, come from the incompleteness of its posthumousness. The man-moth cannot remain in the underworld.

The simultaneous desire to surface and to remain submerged, a conflict that characterizes the man-moth's trips to the moon, surely depicts Bishop's sense of her position as a woman poet. Whereas Dickinson gained fame posthumously, through a male editor's presentation of her work, Bishop was compelled to present her own work (*Becoming a Poet* 51). The mask of anonymity, then, which Dickinson kept on, Bishop transmogrifies into a mask of the disguised self. Paul de Man's notion of prosopopoeia, as

it relates to the writing of the self, to autobiography, helps us to uncover a structure of masking the self operative in "The Man-Moth." Just as de Man argues that "Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament," so also the figure of the man-moth is a displaced figure expressive of the predicament of the woman writer ("Autobiography as De-Facement," *Rhetoric of Romanticism* 81). The woman writer, in the topography of "The Man-Moth," begins as the moon itself, emitting her own queer light and owning vast properties, but the moon's precipitous loss of legibility makes the moon a figure like a shut door (lines 6, 7). The round circle at the top of the sky, that appears to be an aperture, is no opening. Instead the moon behaves exactly like immovable stone. Here, Bishop's codified relationship with the moon, in rejection of the masculine sun, resonates with de Man's formulation of writing the self in the gaze of the paternal sun-as-eye. Bishop, rejecting the paternal sun, the gaze that regulates life and memory, or afterlife, in favor of the lunar "temperature impossible to record," creates a new form of prosopopoeia, a masked speaking self troped posthumous (line 8). This trope of masking the self in the guise of posthumousness allows confession of the true self without offering up the actual corpse of the self, the bodilessness Dickinson concedes.

The eye of the sun, that corrosive paternal gaze that de Man contends threatens the male writer, in the topography of Bishop's "The Man-Moth," utterly annihilates the woman writer, leaving only the night and its moonlight as her field of utterance. The creation of the hybrid moth, then, shields the feminine voice from the annihilation of cultural illegibility that the feminine body, the moon, has already suffered. The man-moth, the death's head moth which becomes the mask the woman poet wears to save her language, inscribes, then, a figurative confession. The autobiography that the man-moth figuratively describes is the story of the woman writer's struggle to create text after she realizes that her body is illegible and illegitimate in the dominant patriarchal ideology.

Perhaps one may also read a bit of Bishop's tragic relationship with her mother into

the image of the always already posthumous man-moth attempting to enter the sphere of a beautiful and occluded moon.² Just as Bishop's mother's insanity cut off her language, the moon's language has been locked away, but the faithful daughter, hybrid creature that she is, tries to reach her mother. In any event, it is the death's head moth whose body, masking the feminine body, inscribes the struggle of the female lyricist to write through the moon, or from the place of the female body. That the voice which this death-moth represents is a posthumous voice is indicated not only by the moth's home in the underworld, but also by the moth's lack of home, of land, and of material possessions. The moth has only one possession, the tear, just as the woman writer using the trope of the posthumous voice has already been denied other legitimate rhetorics.

The power of the trope of the posthumous voice, like the moth's tear, rises from the immense pressure of the underworld that unexpectedly produces poetry of great purity and force. The rhetorical gesture of speaking through the mouth of the dead, paradoxically restores the legitimacy of the autobiographical text, argues de Man. De Man states:

The dominant figure of the epitaphic or autobiographical discourse is as we saw the prosopopoeia the fiction of the voice from beyond the grave. (77)

He contends that the "fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave" reintroduces the prosopopoeia in the "fiction of address" (78). Here, I interpret the fiction of address in two ways: not only is the solution with which prosopopoeia provides the problem of autobiography one in which the voice of the figuratively dead restores the losses of the body of the living, but also this fiction of address is the fiction of having an address, in the sense of having a home. Home, or possessing an address, is always a fiction for the dispossessed speaker. The woman writer using the trope of the posthumous voice develops this sort of fiction of address, a fictive home. Deprived of a legitimate site of

²In his biography of Bishop, Brett C. Millier tells us that Bishop's mother was placed in an insane asylum in 1916 (*Life and the Memory of It* 3).

speaking, or writing, the man-moth develops the fiction of an underground home. Burial, or going underground, is the man-moth's homecoming.

In "The Man-Moth," the moth representing the soul of the occluded female body restores the text of the "scrolls on the light" through the gesture of a mirror image of these lost scrolls: water from underground springs. The writing in heavenly light is what the moth never creates. The man-moth never translates its forays above ground into the pure text of heavenly light. Instead, in the liminal space of homelessness that the subway tunnels demarcate the man-moth cries tears pure as underground springs. "The Man-Moth" does not entirely erase the site of the speaker. Instead, it replaces the body with an embodied symbol, the moth. The failure of the troped posthumous voice to write the text of bodilessness becomes, in Bishop's poem, the capacity of that trope to express the text of the buried, homeless, and bereft self. Whereas Dickinson accomplishes a lyric body of texts that elide the implied body of their feminine speaker, Bishop's man-moth returns to the site of the occluding moon, tracing a reiteration of the female body. The death-moth, or the breath-moth, presents in her poem an emblem of an absence that still seeks the presence of the female body.

While de Man writes of autobiography as a masculine gesture responding to the sun, the trope of the posthumous voice is a feminine gesture allowing not defacement of the self but rather for erasure, or effacement, of the self. This effacement of the body is proffered in exchange for the chance to speak. De Man's notion of autobiography as defacement turns on the assumption that the gaze of the sun is a masculine or paternal threatening gaze. Indeed, de Man argues that prosopopoeia, which is closely related to both the trope of the posthumous voice and also to Bishop's poetics of masks, begins to dismantle the paternal gaze, the language in the name of the father:

Prosopopoeia undoes the distinction between reference and signification upon which all semiotic systems depend. (*The Resistance to Theory* 50)

In other words, the rhetorical gesture of assuming the mask of the dead, which makes of the self the other, not only shields one's name as it appears written on the gravestone from the father's corrosive gaze, but also dismantles the very originary power of that withering gaze, that all-fathering eye of the sun. De Man contends that the sun, or the paternal eye, becomes something secondary to the posthumous text: "The sun becomes the eye that reads the text" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 75). The trope of the posthumous voice, by removing the text from the eye of the sun into the underworld, that is, by pre-emptively erasing the paternal name engraved on the gravestone and burying an anonymous female body, achieves an alternate or liminal landscape. The trope of the posthumous voice yields a topography within which the sun, the father, is blind.

Unlike autobiography, however, the landscape of alterity that Bishop's man-moth inhabits elides questions of return. For the man-moth, any return is in fact impossible, for the maternal home, the moon, has been locked against this rare creature. The man-moth's "rare although occasional visits" to the surface do not so much describe a repetition compulsion as they belie the application of this Freudian concept to homeless subjects (line 10). Only the empowered male subject can luxuriate over the enactment of a repetition compulsion, suggests Bishop's poem. For the woman writer troping posthumous deems the space of homelessness, like the subway an underground space, the only possible topos for her speech. The man-moth "must do what he most fears" not because the man-moth obsessively returns to its home but rather because it must continually create the territory of the border, the space of homelessness, that is the only permitted topos of the man-moth's writing (line 23). The autobiography of the masculine speaker is as unlike the man-moth's autobiography as is the night landscape whose cracks are filled with battered moonlight different from the daylight landscape the dominant man inhabits. The man-moth confronts only the photographic negative of that daylight landscape, but even this moonlit carapace is not quite safe for the moth.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the hopelessness of both the masculine daylight city and the feminine night city the man-moth writes from a liminal topos between them. Strikingly, in the final stanza of the poem, this unique topos becomes the man-moth's own body, for the man-moth's eye, which is "all dark pupil, an entire night itself" is the pure lyric tear of elegy (line 43). The man-moth's capacity to find an alternative to the dominant daylight landscape of the man of power, and an alternative also to the silenced landscape of the moon, describes the essential gesture of the trope of the posthumous voice. The moth's eye's creation of a space for the production of lyric text, an "entire night itself," is analogous to the creation of the posthumous voice, a trope wherein speaking as if one had no body becomes a gesture that disengages culturally inherited problems of speaking from the place of the female body (line 43). The borderland of the subways, like the borderlands of Dickinson's homey graves and Brontë's maternal moor, provides the moth with a topos distinct and apart from the moon and the man. The trope of the posthumous voice creates its own topos of liminality.

Borderlands and Burials

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa structures a theoretical space of the home place which is the place of homelessness. This liminal space she calls the "borderland" (Anzaldúa 28).³ While Anzaldúa's concern is the homelessness caused by the United States' colonizing aggression southwards, her theorization of the space of homelessness, a topos of liminality, as a discrete and entirely legitimate commonplace for the rhetorician also illuminates the man-moth's subway home. The subway, unlike the Mexican border, was never an uninvaded originary home. Of course, as the subways are the earth itself, they do mark a sort of home site, but this home site has contained the culture of Persephone and Eurydice, a feminine, posthumous and subversive culture,

³I will be referring to the concept of a "borderland" – a space physically and also symbolically liminal – as Anzaldúa develops the concept in *Borderlands/La Frontera*

while Anzaldua's pre-colonial Mexico was a home for men and women, for living rather than for dead people. Nevertheless, Anzaldua's understanding of a people who, like the man-moth, inhabit a "no-man's borderland" clarifies the issue of homelessness that fundamentally structures Bishop's poem (Anzaldua 93). *La Frontera* uses a slippage between two languages, Spanish and English, to trace and indicate the linguistic marks of homelessness. Just as the man-moth's language is not that of the paternal metaphor epitomized in the poem's opening stanza, so also the man-moth's language is not that of the invisible moon, a territory of the feminine body whose possibilities for speaking have been erased by the dominant man who cannot perceive the moon's "properties" (line 6). The fact that the moon has properties, a word not only suggestive of qualities, but also of land and its ownership, signifies the moon's displacement as a place. The man-moth's desire to return to the place of the moon as an idealized topos for feminine utterance is doomed because of the moon's displacement. Displaced by the whole shadow of man, the moon recedes into the realm of the unheard and misread. The man-moth's tear is that hybrid language of the borderland, the underworld, that borders the daylight, patriarchal culture and also borders the displaced homeland, here represented by the moon.

In light of the moon's displacement the question of how to write the self after one's home has been erased emerges in Bishop's poem. The trope of the posthumous voice splits the subject's language from the subject's body and also from the subject's memory, creating language as a site discrete in itself. In this way, Bishop's man-moth embodies a site of the voice split off from the subject. The man-moth "flits, he flutters," just as breath flits and flutters (lines 26, 27). The death-moth, then, is also the breath or soul of the killed body. In "The Man-Moth," the rupture between the creature and the creature's misprinted name is a split that Bishop's poem seeks to knit shut again. This division between the social and the physical self, Lacan argues, is the trauma inside the formation of a cultural self, or a self in the symbolic order:

This split constitutes the characteristic dimension of analytic discovery and experience; it enables us to apprehend the real, in its dialectical effects, as originally unwelcome. It is precisely through this (split) that the real finds itself, in the subject. (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 67)

However, Lacan's formulation of the female subject profoundly complicates the nature of the traumatic rupture at the center of the textualized self, if that self is a woman. Not only does Lacan formulate a more radically violent rupture in cases of psychosis, that is, in cases of the aftermath of extreme trauma, at the core of identity formation, but also, in his theorizing of the boundaries of female identity formation, the language of the self is definitionally excluded (*Écrits* 201). Lacan explains that to write as a woman is to write illegibly, outside the realm of symbol, for Woman, as a category, is interdicted from the phallic function of writing, the paternal metaphor. Lacan states:

"Woman" can only be written with a bar through it. There's no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal. There's no such thing as Woman because in her essence she is not whole.

(*On Feminine Sexuality* 65)

In other words, within the patriarchal system of language always already codified as language spoken in the name of the father, woman's speech categorically cannot be legitimized.

Noting that Bishop's uncharacteristic use of a capital "U" to designate the masculine "Universe" the feminine moon tells to "go to hell" echoes Lacan's capitalized category of "Woman," we can unravel Lacan's belief that woman's self is unspeakable (*CP Bishop* 70). For, in Bishop's lunar landscapes, the masculine hegemony is inverted. Inversion is the word she chooses to describe the insomniac's topography. There is also an inverted topography mapped onto the landscape of the man-moth's struggles. "The Man-Moth," however, not only describes the border territory or marginalized status of lesbians,

but also it tells the textual homelessness of women writers who invert the traditionally acceptable topoi of home and hearth. The world inverted, then, is Bishop's code for a linguistic terrain within which women are allowed utterance.

In "The Rewards of Indirection," Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller have argued that this encoded quality of women's lyric writing is a response to the very patriarchal regime which Lacan codifies by his observation that all language is understood within the paternal order. Keller and Miller particularly designate Emily Dickinson and Elizabeth Bishop as adepts at the art of implication rather than explication. They argue that:

Women [have] voiced radical conceptions of themselves and their world under a guise of obedience, respectability or triviality. (533)

They identify Dickinson and Bishop as champion practitioners of this subtle rhetoric. I argue, however, that Bishop does not pretend to be feminine while actually subverting male dominance. Rather, I suggest that Bishop's world inverted implies quite directly, albeit through parable, that the so-called natural order of things is only a construction men have fashioned analogously to the way that they have built great cities. I do not interpret Bishop's strongest lyrics as being particularly obedient. Instead, they map out the illusory and empty status of the father's house, or even the father's city. The place of the body within Bishop's "The Man-Moth," the body hidden and yet privately ascendent, illustrates a departure from the realm of obedience.

In departing from the obedience of staying home, however, Bishop's "The Man-Moth" also repeatedly departs from the site of the female body. Indeed, that departure is the entire drama of the poem: the man-moth repeatedly falls from the moon. The female body, here, is encrypted as a site of trauma from which the feminine speaker must depart if she is to speak at all. Always a traumatic history is encoded into the female body, in female-narrated texts troped posthumous. Death, figured, symbolizes a site of profound trauma. The troped dead female body, then, implicitly centers around its own

disappearance texts that use the trope of the posthumous voice. Such a text then becomes the site of a buried violation. The trope of the posthumous voice is necessarily the post-traumatic voice, the speech of aftermath, even if there be some pleasure in that aftermath, viewing homelessness as a release from the domestic.

Orphaned twice, rejected by the cold moon and the ridiculous father, the man-moth accepts the subway, the underworld, for its home. "The Man-Moth" describes the border territory inhabited by the feminine voice. Here is the linguistic text produced by a woman who, while barred from writing through the female body, also refuses to write as a man. This liminal lyric space is the topography the moth inhabits, writing neither from the place of the female body nor from the place of the dominating man. Bishop once publicly suggested that she too would like to inhabit the border territory of not being seen as a female writer when she refused to give poems for an all-woman anthology (see *CP Anne Sexton*, introduction xxxiii). While it might be tempting to criticize Bishop's lack of feminist spirit, it makes better sense to read her as textually inhabiting the liminal territory where her desire not to be read not as a woman poet, but rather as a poet, placed her.

If Bishop struggled with the feminine corpse in her writing, it is no wonder. Lacan's argument that the word "Woman" can only be written with a bar through it implies that a woman writer can only approach language through the line of interdiction. Strikingly, woman's body, typologized in "The Man-Moth" as the moon, is drawn as an occulted and occlusive space, a space with a line drawn through it. The topos, or common ground, of the woman lyricist is represented through the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing as a place of no place, an already interdicted topos from which the woman's body cannot be barred. But just at that vanishing point, where it seems the feminine narrator's body has been given up, the trope of the posthumous voice remembers that body, the echo of its ritual death and burial seared into the fabular death that goes

beneath the text troped posthumous. Although buried in interdicted ground, the body, within this trope, tenaciously persists. This very interdicted ground is the borderland, a margin of homelessness where the man-moth rides the subway.

The poem's poignant struggle with the body marks "The Man-Moth" as a twentieth-century metaphysical poem. Just as the death-moth climbs the buildings in Bishop's city, the poem itself climbs through the liminal space of the lyric topoi arrogated to the woman poet. Both moth and text attempt to reach the fully realized feminine lunar landscape of woman's writing or the scrolls of the light of the moon. Both fail in this goal, although I don't believe that Bishop's poem is a failed poem. Rather it depicts failure. "The Man-Moth" is itself the place wherein Bishop establishes herself as a poet, however hybrid. Susan McCabe, in *Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss*, contends that Bishop's man-moth's "dream," is a dream of rebirth:

Of rebirth, to push through that "round clean opening" and end up scrollwork written into the light. Bishop's man-moth certainly believes in overcoming death through the imagination. (77)

The rebirth of a creature made of an extinct mammoth, a newspaper misprint, and a woman writer, is no easy matter, however. The death McCabe mentions, the death that forces the man-moth into the posthumous posture of the death-moth is the symbolic annihilation of the way that the paternal gaze misreads the moon's inscriptions. The man who dominates the city's daytime landscape does not see the moon. His inability to record her in his thermometers is analogous to the impossibility of speaking as a woman within a language spoken in the name of the father. The interdiction of her speech, then, forces the moon into a space of closed and silenced physicality. The moon, or the feminine body, is an illusory opening that forces the man-moth, the metonymic voice in the poem, to fall. The death-moth falls back down into the liminal underworld. The creature's rebirth, then, never

occurs. Instead, the man-moth has to come to terms with the impossibility of rebirth, and create a posthumous language.

Both McCabe and Colwell read the subway tunnels as figurations of the female body. However, Bishop makes clear that these underworld spaces are not natural but forced, they are "artificial tunnels" (line 34). Thus, the liminality and encryption of the female body is not, suggests Bishop's poem, natural or part of the essence of the female body, but rather it is artificial and created by the dominant man who created the daylight city. The ghettoization of the female body, argues Bishop's poem, is not natural but man-made. The symbolic burial of the woman's body is itself artificial. The homelessness of the man-moth/death-moth occurs because the woman's body must be buried before the woman's voice may emerge to speak.

In Bishop's "The Man-Moth," then, the feminine lyric voice is emblemized by the death-moth, a disembodied voice within a patriarchal culture. The death-moth would like to regain the topos of the female body, the moon, and be transfigured into pure lyric, her whole body transformed into the "scrolls on the light" (line 21). But that transcendence into the proper or rightful topos of female utterance is presented, within the topography of "The Man-Moth," as an impossible goal. Repeatedly, the man-moth falls back down into the tunnels of homelessness, the border territory, which the moth calls home. The death-moth's only home, like the topos created by the trope of the posthumous voice, is the space created by the moth's own language, literally by what is called home. The called words themselves create the man-moth's home even as this act of speaking, of having to call subway tunnels home, acknowledges the homelessness from which the man-moth calls. It is the act of calling, of writing, that creates home. The portrait of the man-moth is analogous to Dickinson's buried speakers, and analogous also to Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*, for the man-moth who "cannot get aboard the trains fast enough to suit him" takes

cold comfort from the tunnels, yet, like a moor or a grave, this uncanny site suffices for home.

The moth's liminal position is the space of the voice troped posthumous. This topos, created through trope, exists between the entirely abjected body of the woman-as-corpse and the sacred bodilessness of the soul beyond the body. Elisabeth Bronfen, discussing the image of the moth in Gabriel Von Max's painting, *Der Anatom*, focuses upon the liminality of the moth. The moth is metonymy for the soul of the dead woman whose body is the subject of the painting. The moth is

posed in the liminal zone between the body's total decomposition and the spirit's secure position in the beyond. (*Over Her Dead Body* 9)

Figurative language, enacts the same gesture in the trope of the posthumous voice as does the moth in Bronfen's reading of *Der Anatom*. The moth represents the soul in its passage away from the abjected, dead body in the same way that the troped posthumous voice figuratively separates voice from the space of the abjected body. The woman writer using this trope of posthumousness chooses this figure of abjection as an expression of the post-traumatic self, splitting the narrative voice from the traumatized body. Bronfen comments upon a male painter's depiction of female sexuality abjected by death. She argues that Von Max's painting illustrates a dominant male belief in the abjection and passivity of the naked female body (38). By contrast, the trope of the posthumous voice, as employed by women writers, takes the memory of being abjected and expresses it through a rhetoric that distances the textual self, the voice, from the abject body.

From Bishop's "The Man-Moth," no clear autobiographical history of trauma can reasonably be decoded. A trauma figured as death is represented by the moth, and that moth, the death's head moth, is the figure that guides the poem in the aftermath of the moon's abjected silence. The death's head moth represents metonymically the soul of the buried narrator: this flitting luna moth is a cue that Bishop's poem is troped posthumous. I

argue that "The Man-Moth"'s narrator is feminine only because the landscape the poem portrays is specifically that which, the poem tells us at its opening, the male writer can never see, can never record or remember. Here is the lunar landscape. The trauma at the heart of the poem, then, cannot be decoded beyond the occluding symbol of death, a death illuminated by a silenced moon. Death, symbolized by the death's head moth, stands as a symbol for an unspeakable trauma cryptically referred to but never revealed by a feminine narrator.

Bishop's man-moth, a character born of a misprint in a male-authored newspaper and the woman writer who notices and cherishes the misprint, is, in "The Man-Moth," a messenger. The man-moth exhibits a mobility like that of breath, independent of the traumatized body's burial. By being able to sustain itself in a state of unremitting liminality and homelessness, the man-moth is able to produce the lyric tear that connotes the survival of the troped-buried woman's voice. This man-moth, a creature all breath and aftermath, always hovers near to the site of death. A culturally given symbol of the soul after the death of the body, the moth remains always dangerously near "the third rail, the unbroken draught of poison," that "runs there beside him" (lines 37, 38). The man-moth's home is burial, a tunnel, a topos of travel without arrival. To open the crypt, to break the unbroken draught of poison, metonymy for the act of speaking the memory of trauma, would be to erase the moth's ability to produce the lyric tear which is its "only possession" (line 45). The poem follows the shape of the trope of the posthumous voice: a simultaneous effort to remain true to the spirit and shape of the encrypted trauma comes together with an interdiction against confessing the actual trauma. The lyric is what must be wept as symbol because to confess the trauma directly would be to break the draught of poison: suicide.

The poignant final stanza of Bishop's "The Man-Moth" concerns the triumph of this creature, a death-moth. The stanza begins with violence, with the image of the poor little creature being caught. The Alice-in-Wonderland-like, size-shifting image of an human

being holding up a flashlight to a moth's eye jolts the poem into the realm of the traumatized child's physical experience, the physical experience of smallness invaded by largeness:

If you catch him,
 hold up a flashlight to his eye. It's all dark pupil,
 an entire night itself, whose haired horizon tightens
 as he stares back, and closes up the eye. Then from the lids
 one tear, his only possession, like the bee's sting, slips.
 Slyly he palms it, and if you're not paying attention
 he'll swallow it. However, if you watch, he'll hand it over,
 cool as from underground springs and pure enough to drink. (lines 41 - 48)

The tear of lyric that is the moth's only possession is something he doesn't want to share. The implications of this scene in which a certain violence is necessary to take from the moth his tear are striking. The audience violates the lyricist to get her lyric. Nevertheless, only the presence of the violating audience, the audience which must catch the poet, causes the tear. The moth's insistence on closing up the eye, the dark pupil that is an entire night itself, is a gesture of encryption, but this gesture of encryption is the act that produces the tear, the elegy for the buried self.

If, in "The Man-Moth," the death's head moth figures the trope of the posthumous voice, giving a liminal body to the voice itself and deflecting attention away from the traumatized and occulted body of the moon, then the moon is nevertheless a subject of the poem. For the invisibility of the moon, her impossible-to-record properties, her "queer light," shape the entire landscape of the man-moth's experience (line 7). Bishop uses the moon as a symbol for the powerful yet illegitimate source of feminine utterance. She writes of the moon, in "Insomnia," as an outcast:

By the Universe deserted

*she'd tell it to go to hell
and she'd find a body of water*

Or a mirror, on which to dwell. (*CP Bishop 70 lines 7-10*)

Here, the moon represents an opposite to the masculine hegemonic "Universe." The moon is capable of creating an embodied bodilessness: "where the shadows are really the body" (line 15). This lyric's emphasis on the femininity of the moon is indicated by the italics in which Bishop places the pronoun "she," standing for the moon. Bishop emphasizes that the moon is a feminine. The lyric's use of capitalization to emphasize the dominance of "the Universe" clarifies Bishop's vision of the masculine topos as a space within which language itself has been colonized by men, the masculine characteristics of this universe indicated by a capital letter. The moon in "The Man-Moth" also has become an occluded, silenced space, deserted by the masculine universe. It is the man-moth's task to nevertheless attempt to re-enter this abjected topos of the moon and from the place of that feminine topos write the tear of elegy.

The shadows which are really the body are the landscape the moon creates in the woman poet's insomniac vision and also in "The Man-Moth." These material shadows delineate the partialness of the trope of bodilessness that characterizes Bishop's use of the mask. The man-moth, as a code for the death-moth, represents the posthumous utterance of the woman writer; however, the man-moth as an emblem is not bodiless. Whereas Dickinson and Brontë seek through their lyrics to manufacture the possibility of speech after the erasure of the symbolically problematic female body, Bishop borrows the mask of a fantastical creature, a man-moth, to hide rather than erase the female body within the lyric text. The elided narratorial presence of the moon provides the background of the poem, while the dramatic absence of the woman's body, an absence represented by the man-moth as figure for death, inscribes the poem.

Strikingly, in "Insomnia" the moon's gaze is nearly infinite, for it "looks out a million miles" (line 2). In "The Man-Moth," by contrast the moon is trapped, producing a queer light incomprehensible to men. The mirror, then, metonymically representing any accurately descriptive phrase, is the mechanism for expressing in a form comprehensible to men the queer light and the vast properties of the moon. The mirror of accurate language becomes the trope necessary, for Elizabeth Bishop the lyricist, to create a topography of the feminine voice. In this sense, it is not surprising that the figurative language of the early poem, "The Man-Moth," is rarely returned to in her work. Her strength as a poet instead becomes that of the painterly eye, the observer.

The man-moth's tear, an elegy for the self, is a nice symbol of the text produced by the voice troped posthumous. Here the woman writer mourns her own symbolic death by overcoming linguistically that death, creating a type of elegy as dense and pure as water from underground springs. Bishop's man-moth, a linguistic object she found in a newspaper, becomes an emblem, then, of her capacity to charge and alter the found landscape, the city-scape the death-moth haunts after the moon's writing has been erased. This original site of the erasure of the feminine writing of the moon becomes the electric landscape of the man-moth's mourning: subways which are home, shadows which are the body.

*Ninth Chapter**Uncanny Crossings:
Figurations of Mute Women in Kleist and Benjamin*

The prostitute is in a paradoxical position regarding the boundaries of the self: in a sense, she has sold off her rights to privacy, at least within the time frame of the trick. This lack of boundaries around the prostitute's body is a type of abjection.¹ The text troped posthumous paradoxically relies upon a similar erosion of the body's boundaries: here, the line between the living and the dead body is blurred. However, the trope of the posthumous voice, by placing the feminine narrator's body in burial, refuses even fictional access to the narrator's body, just the opposite to the prostitute's situation. The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing, by mirroring prostitution, effectively speaks against the general cultural prostitution of woman. By blurring the line between the living and the dead, while reinstating and insisting upon the boundary between the reader's gaze and the narrator's implied body, the trope of the posthumous voice subverts abjection. It is this absence of the narrator's body which, in the trope of the posthumous voice, inscribes into the text the evidence of a trade having been made: a woman's body buried so that her voice may be granted a ground for speech.

But does the prostitute's body nevertheless touch, at tangents, the cloistered text inscribed over a woman's dead body? The figure of Eurydice will close this chapter, and in her figure one may trace an intersection not only between the living and the dead but also between the prostitute, a figure always already taken, and the buried woman, a figure untouchable, remote. Desired for her body, Eurydice yields something else: herself transfigured into the text of Orpheus' elegiac lyrics.

¹I will be using the term "abjection" as it is developed in Julia Kristeva's book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

The figure of the prostitute and the figure of the marionette work similarly in Walter Benjamin's "A Berlin Chronicle" and in Heinrich von Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre." The prostitute and the doll are figures for the state of having no will, a state alternately damned and graced. The prostitute creates a mute terrain through which the language of the young boy in "A Berlin Chronicle" crosses into a mastery of adult utterance. Inasmuch as she is a prostitute, the prostitute is allowed no desires. She is hired to give body to the desires of others. Yet adult speech is typologized in "A Berlin Chronicle" as mastery over one's desires. In this essay, Berlin is a city mastered through an exiled man's ability to speak of it. By contrast, the prostitute metonymically represents the absence of such mastery. She embodies muteness just as Kleist's marionettes embody muteness. Both the prostitute and the marionette represent a kind of gendered silence, a distance from language enforced upon the feminine body.

In "A Berlin Chronicle" Benjamin claims to master the city of Berlin by mnemonically mapping its geography. Yet this mastery, through a verbal codification of memory, strikes a poignant note, contrasting with the mastery of, say, a resident who lives his whole life in his natal city. Benjamin grounds his mastery through memory, by arguing from this place of loss that:

No one ever masters anything in which he has not known impotence; and if you agree you will see that this impotence comes not at the beginning or before the struggle with the subject but in the heart of it. (4)

This struggle with impotence at the heart of mastery returns us to Kleist and to the section drawn through two lines which reappears after crossing through infinity ("Marionette Theatre" 15). Just as Benjamin locates mastery within the core of loss, so also Kleist locates grace as a state dependent upon having come through a great loss. The section that Benjamin draws through the city of Berlin, a section drawn by his boyhood path through this city, traces the topography of the city itself. This grid that traces memory through loss

and returns to what is found again only in memory, echoes precisely Kleist's notion of a section drawn through two lines which reappears after crossing through infinity. While in Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre" it is consciousness that falls from grace or innocence through knowledge, in "A Berlin Chronicle" memory becomes the way through which man can partake of God. Here, grace depends upon memory. Benjamin, in "The Task of the Translator," describes the value of writing texts read only in the "memory of God," that is, written for God alone to know them (73). Grace, here, is described as the ability to write only for the memory of God. For Benjamin, this ability is linked to the use of the trope. Metaphor is crucial, because a literal recounting of the past is impossible.

Benjamin specifically writes of the impossibility of literally accurate memory, contending that "memory is the figuration that time assumes in the moment of remembering" (27). Carol Jacobs argues that for Benjamin "memories are a medium in which debris and buried ruins are reinterred as one probes, a digging in which no thing is brought to the surface" (38). Remembering, then, is making metaphors for what has been lost. However, to follow the analogy of the ruin, the more ruined the memory is, the more radically will the trope or figure differ from the memory's original form. In "A Berlin Chronicle," William III's and Luise's statues, slipping into ruin, work as allegories of Adam and Eve, as if the couple had stayed in the ruined garden, figures for the slippage of memory (5). Here the ruined garden is Berlin. But what of the ruin that has already been buried? What of the memory that has gone underground? Benjamin offers the analogy of digging to describe anyone engaged in the process of remembering. The recovery of memory, in "A Berlin Chronicle," acts both as metaphor, where the figure is the representation of the city itself and also as a way of digging beneath that figure.

In the textual figures of the prostitute and of the marionettes we discover what must be dredged to the surface of metaphor. These mute feminine bodies mark the

borderline towards which women writers employing the trope of the posthumous voice also gesture. The trope of the posthumous voice works as a dual metaphor: the commonplace of death which that trope establishes stands for a place apart, and the corpse represents a traumatized body. Similarly, in "On the Marionette Theatre," the bodies of the puppets bear the weight of the fall even though these same marionettes are used metonymically to represent a state of grace. The similar role which the body of the accosted prostitute and the body of the fallen marionette play in Benjamin's and Kleist's essays describes a boundary line of post-traumatic rhetoric. The body of the puppet, like that of the prostitute, represents the place of the fallen. The threatened male narrator talismanically protects himself from the worst abjection, that of being voiceless, by resting his text on a voiceless feminine body. For the woman writer using a feminine narrator to delineate a post-traumatic narrative, however, this voiceless feminine body cannot stand as a boundary that the narrator evades. Instead, it marks a boundary that the feminine, post-traumatic narrative must enter.

The critical and analytical notion of *écriture féminine*, for example, contends that women writers more than male writers write from the body. Hélène Cixous, in *Le Rire de la Méduse*, has asserted that inescapable connections exist between woman's writing and the female body, stating that "Il faut que la femme écrive par son corps...plus que l'homme...les femmes sont corp. Plus corps, donc plus écriture" ("Le Rire de la Méduse" 48).² Cixous argues that not only are women writers connected inextricably to their bodies in the act of writing, but also that they are more connected to the body itself, or to the state of being embodied, than are male writers. Similarly, Julia Kristeva explores the aesthetic of chaos, theorizing the *semiotike*, a force and source which runs, topographically

² Unless otherwise noted, I will be referring to this essay as it originally appeared in *L'arc* (1975): 39 -54. Where noted, I will refer to Paula Cohen's English language translation "The Laugh of the Medusa" which appears in Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks, eds., *New French Feminisms* 245 - 265.

imagined, beneath the truncated, legible masculine speech. Kristeva writes, "J'entends donc par "femme" ce qui ne se représente pas, ce qui ne se dit pas, ce qui reste en dehors des nominations et des idéologies" ("La Femme, ce n'est jamais ça" 21).³ While Kristeva does not quite argue, as does Cixous, that women are more of the body than are men, she does contend that women's writing comes from a different place than men's writing and that this different inceptive topology is the *semiotike* (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 70). The Kristevan *semiotike* represents the chaotic flow of language before it is cut apart into symbols, into metaphors.

Other feminist critics, notably Tilottama Rajan, have found within Kristeva's *semiotike* Nietzsche's notion of the Dionysian. Rajan, in illuminating the connections between the Kristevan *semiotike* and the Nietzschean Dionysian, opens the way to an understanding of *écriture féminine* as one manner in which some women write rather than a desirable mode of all women's writing ("Language, Music and the Body" 163).⁴ But if women writers are not necessarily writing from a different rhetorical stance than are men, why concern oneself at all with the relationship between woman's embodied female identity and woman's use of language? My contention is that women writers are not more of the body than are male writers but rather have more culturally dictated problems with the body than have male writers. Women's bodies are likelier than men's bodies to have been denigrated. The problems women writers have with the body, then, tend to trace a particular sort of post-traumatic narrative. If we return to Levi-Strauss, we learn that women's bodies, as tools for achieving male power, may be caught within a system that guarantees the abjection and subjugation of women specifically through their bodies, their

³The version of Kristeva's essay to which I refer appears in *Tel Quel* (1974): 19-25.

⁴See David L. Clark and Tilottama Rajan, eds., *Intersections* 147-172.

bodies used as symbolic markers of exchange. A women writer may be struggling with a far more problematic relationship between her body, as it has been appropriated and made into a symbol, and her own perceptions and memories, guided necessarily through the locus of the body. It may be complicated, then, for women to enact a symbolic escape from the abjected subject position of the violated body.

What do I mean by the phrase, "symbolic escape from the abjected subject position"? In both "On the Marionette Theatre" and "A Berlin Chronicle," it can be seen that a male author, writing after trauma, may write quite elliptically about the trauma. Benjamin writes about his broken relationship with Berlin by reconstructing the city through the allegorical structures of "A Berlin Chronicle." Of course, Benjamin's trauma was also a public, political trauma, that of the fate of the Jews in Hitler's Germany. When Kleist writes about his broken relationship with Kantian transcendental philosophy by considering the transcendence of dolls, he is also negotiating a public trauma, that of falling from grace in the field of Philosophy. Indeed, Paul de Man argues that at least one major theme of "On the Marionette Theatre" is an attempt to break with Kantian philosophy, inasmuch as Kantian philosophy is understood as transcendental philosophy (*Rhetoric of Romanticism* 270). Benjamin's and Kleist's essays, then, exemplify a sort of allegorical confession: they both locate their allegories in the margins of legible discourse. That is, the map and the statue, the crucial figures of Benjamin's and Kleist's essays respectively, function as liminal, boundary spaces within cultural discourse. A map is not a city, and yet it legibly stands for a city. A city's map is not an illegitimate or private code. A map immediately represents a city by effectively describing the boundaries of the city. Similarly, statues are formally connected to the grave stelae that mark ancient Hellenic graves. A stele represents the body of the dead person and acts as a boundary that prevents the living from mistakenly digging up the earth of burial ground. The statue offers to the living a concrete, tangible connection to the lost body of the dead. Statues typify the

frozen, dehumanized body which becomes the body of the self after great trauma or after death. However, statues also encourage public access, marking publicly legible displays. The statue and the map, then, describe boundaries to the city and to the body.

Kleist and Benjamin, in writing post-traumatic narratives, nevertheless claim for their narratives a legitimate space, in cultural discourse. Their narratives do not go beyond the legible confines of their cultures. In "A Berlin Chronicle," the narrator's crossing the street to the prostitute is symbolic of his eventual crossing into exile, a movement into a kind of abjection. However, the male narrator does not take this abjection of exile onto his own body. Instead, the body of the prostitute, her silence in the place of his speech and her transformative ability to speak through her body, by later causing the syphilitic uncle's death, carries the weight of his abjection. The prostitute's body is metonymically buried beneath the male narrator's mnemonic map of Berlin. The body of the prostitute, its destitute and diseased state, is the tell, an earlier city buried beneath the reconstructed mapping of a Berlin which Benjamin masters by writing it. Here, the feminine body is metonymically buried beneath the male narrator's regaining of mastery. The male narrator confronts the mute, passive feminine figure as a way to move through and out of his own abjection. Her silence prevents him from being silenced.

The figure of the mute woman, either the prostitute or the marionette, is shared in these two male authored texts. Her form marks a topos of liminality to which the male narrator returns so as to cross through the space of post-traumatic silence back to legible utterance. What relation, however, might this topos of the mute woman have to a woman authored text? The woman authored text cannot so easily place on one side the mute, feminine figure and on the other side the speaking female self. The trope of the posthumous voice, then, approaches the figure of the silenced woman from the other side. Here, the silenced female body is the margin. The woman author, who writes troped posthumous feminine narrators, writes from outside the margin. The troped posthumous

text rather than crossing through the abject body, enters into that topos. Here, the woman writer's topos is the margin, the ledge of legibility at the outskirts of public discourse.

The statue and the doll, like the map and the prostitute, mark the limits of society, the edges of culture. By contrast, the dead are entirely out of bounds. The woman writer employs the rhetoric of speaking through the mouth of herself as a figured corpse because this out-of-bounds topos is a place from which to tell her tale of trauma. In other words, the woman who has been abjected to such a degree that only the place of the dead provides a topos for her language speaks from a place of marginalization. The violated woman, speaking, is suddenly, within the symbolic order, not speaking at all. Her marginalized, because violated, woman's body becomes radically disowned, pushed outside the cultural margins. The woman writer describing trauma and the survival of trauma has in a certain sense already encountered in herself the figure of the mute woman through whom the male author crosses in order to regain his power of speech. By the rhetoric of the troped posthumous voice, the woman writer establishes a topos for her text outside easy legibility. The rhetoric of the speaking dead is an almost illegible rhetoric.

The body of the dead woman, then, is a rhetorical figure that, like the body of the statue, is both marginal and mute. However, whereas the statue runs symbolic interference between the living and the dead and holds a place in the cultural discourse, the dead woman's body is not, symbolically speaking, a generally accepted cultural form. While the statue is, on the one hand, marginal, a body standing as a symbol for the body, as a cultural marker the statue stands within legitimate symbolic discourse. By contrast, the body of a dead woman is itself a topos of abjection. Elisabeth Bronfen and Margaret Miles have written brilliantly about the symbolic role of the dead woman's body in art and in

literature.⁵ Developing from this notion of the symbolism of woman's body as figured space in text, I argue that the dead woman's body is at least a two-fold topos. On the one hand, the dead woman may be remembered as a disembodied spirit, cleansed from bodily taint. On the other hand, the dead body of the woman is itself abjected. It is a site of abjection to which Miles refers when she quotes a description of a monk tortured by sexual desire for a beautiful woman who had recently died:

When he heard the news [of her death] the monk put on his cloak in the night and went to the place where he had heard she was buried. And he dug the place and wiped the blood of her corpse on his cloak and kept it in his cell when he returned. And when it smelt too much he put it in front of him and hurriedly said to his temptation: "Look, this is \what you desire." And so he chastened himself with the smell until his passions died down.

(*Carnal Knowing* 76)

The woman, a corpse, in this scene is abject firstly because she is illicitly sexually desired and secondly because she is dead, her body grotesquely decomposing.

To this scene of abjection through death there are, of course, the counter examples of female saints whose incorruptible dead bodies furnish countless relics. Indeed, when relics are manufactured from the bodies of female saints a transformation of their bodies occurs through which the sexual possibilities of their bodies are erased. A similar effect is arguably at work when women writers use the trope of the posthumous voice. This rhetorical gesture places the body of the woman outside the bounds of mortal corporeality, though not by preserving the body but rather by transfiguring the woman's body into the, as it were, sacred text of high art. Women writers using the trope of the posthumous

⁵See Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* and Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing*.

paradoxically use the culture's rejection of woman's abjected body, its burial of the prostitute, to provide ground for their own sanctification as bodiless women.

The employment of the trope of the posthumous voice, then, cedes the woman's body, tacitly allowing that there is no culturally given topos that can contain a violated woman's body without abjecting it, while simultaneously claiming for the female speaker a disembodied voice. These women writers using the trope of the posthumous voice borrow from hagiography the gesture of separating the voice from the body. They figuratively hide the body inside the voice, making of language a relic of martyrdom. The virgin martyr's incorruptible body enacts a coded voice. Similarly, the writer's words, troped posthumous, enact a coded text. That reliquary text, the words themselves, trace a map of buried trauma in the same way that "A Berlin Chronicle" describes a place of grief for the man whose life has been ruptured through exile. One might argue that the abject prostitute's body buried beneath Benjamin's essay, through the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing, is transfigured into a sublime corpus, a text.

Statues, Maps and Marionettes

Walter Benjamin's Berlin is associated with the political situation in World War II that exiled him to his suicide. Similarly, Kleist's struggles with the transcendental philosophy that he cleverly disfigures in "On the Marionette Theatre" may also have precipitated his suicide. The place of the essays, "On the Marionette Theatre" and "A Berlin Chronicle" in a sense, then, is the same place: the public square that gains painfully private meaning through the encrypting force of trauma. Through trauma these public spaces, the city and the theatre, take on private meanings, encryptions often quite at variance with the public meaning of the places. Benjamin's home city becomes a private and privative place for him after it has been effectively taken away by the rising Nazi party. Kleist's common marionette theatre privately signifies a metaphoric of the fall.

This alteration of a place from a publicly accessible and publicly meaningful space to a private and dangerous space suggests trauma. The damage done in private causes public spaces to become encrypted, suffused with secret, threatening meanings. In Kleist's and Benjamin's essays, statues and geometry act as passages, conduits, through which the earlier public meaning of the topos enters into and informs the later private meaning of the space. In this way the post-traumatic narratives "On the Marionette Theatre" and "A Berlin Chronicle" seek to express personal and embedded traumas through public, but privately coded, media: the map and the puppet theatre. A public city map is not a secret document but rather refers to a space which others can find by specifically using the map. Similarly, the puppet theatre is a public exhibition.

In as much as I am arguing that the trope of the posthumous voice is a representation of trauma, a metaphoric of the body of memory, I am concerned with delineating how encrypted metaphors arise from trauma. Unlike the dispossessed son, the violated daughter loses subjecthood in a radical and complete manner. No longer protected as a sanctified space within the patriarchal system, she is also without recourse outside of that system (*Death and Dissymmetry* 79, 97). She cannot be a renegade son, an Absalom. Instead, she must be the Tamar whose degradation is so complete as to erase her from the story. David does not ultimately mourn his daughter, but his son "Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son, would I had died in your place" (2 Samuel 18:33). It is precisely the feasibility of the king-father and the rebel-son exchanging places that secures, even in the son's complete defeat, the son's signature, his name supplanting his father's.

By contrast to the violated daughter, the traumatized son has somewhat more power to speak. Within the broader culture he is not read solely in terms of his relationship to his father and brothers. Even sold into slavery by his brothers, Joseph rose to power. Benjamin's and Kleist's essays, then, enact the crossing from the traumatized space of a disinherited son to the legitimized space of texts that makes the name of the son. The

allegories the two men create, their allegories of statues and maps, are structured by and participate in those very legitimate, if liminal, markers of discourse. Women writers employing the trope of the posthumous voice, by contrast, use the trope of death to express the culturally illegible or illegitimate speech of the abjected woman. This topos for posthumous utterance is radically unstable. The allegorical extrapolation of the map and statue offers allusive insight into texts of historical trauma. "A Berlin Chronicle" and "On the Marionette Theatre" reference public, cultural trauma. However, the privative metaphor of death, in the trope of the posthumous voice, forces the trauma back into the private space of a violation of the self which no community sees. The public meaning of the narrator's figured death remains occluded.

In as much as the troping of death illustrates women writers' sense of abjection, this metaphor also refuses that abjection. In the same way that references to maps and statues in "A Berlin Chronicle" and "On the Marionette Theatre" introduce a category of bodily or formal purity into the physical world, women writers who use the trope of the posthumous voice to express the abjection of the traumatized daughter borrow the topos of death to shape a purity that a woman may claim after she has been assaulted. This purity of becoming bodiless is also explored in apocryphal tales of nuns who commit suicide rather than survive rape. Miles describes how the nuns of Coddington, circa 870, cut off their own mouths and noses to avoid being raped by Danish invaders (75). Similarly, the story of Maria Goretti, later canonized, tells how a twelve-year old girl who stabbed herself to death in midst of a sexual assault, preferring to die a virgin than to survive as a rape victim, was later sainted (*The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* 188). These women took apart their own bodies to preserve their access to the legitimate speech allowed the undefiled. The woman writer purifies the post-traumatic body from abjection through the symbolic death which the trope of the posthumous voice enacts. The unstable topos of death, then, offers a clean slate for women's writing that metaphorizes a post-traumatic survival story. The

woman writer becomes both puppet and puppeteer in this trope that emblemizes the writing of the doubled self.

Kleist's section which "reappears on the other side" is a trope for innocence lost and regained (15). "On the Marionette Theatre," then, leaves behind its injuries, closing with the idea that after the fall there is still the possibility of redemption. By contrast, Benjamin's concern remains, metaphorically speaking, with the injured boy whose childhood centers the essay. "A Berlin Chronicle" does not so much reflect a passage through early crisis as describe the place of early crisis, always without revealing what the crisis was. In both Kleist's and Benjamin's essays, the writing is post-traumatic because it allegorizes trauma, not because it confesses trauma. Both map and marionettes hold back the stuff of confession, allegorizing the trauma of loss: the loss of the city or the loss of grace.

Benjamin's city belongs to him through an encrypted ownership, an ownership not only burdened by memory but also buried by memory. Benjamin only possesses the Berlin of his childhood in memory, and memory is a topos that Benjamin specifically likens to burial, comparing the act of remembering to that of digging in the dirt. Memory is figuration, "A Berlin Chronicle" tells us, but the memory of what has been ruined is doubly a ruin, calling for intricate reconstruction. Again, a statue stands as a figure for the erosion of memory. Benjamin describes the statue:

A plaster statue of the Emperor Frederick, which had been deposited in a remote corner of the playground, puny and pitiful against a fire wall. This monument, unlike the classrooms, was never washed, and had acquired in the course of years an admirable coat of dirt and soot. (13)

The statue here acts as an impotent witness and figure for the child's damaged, begrimed history. Just as Berlin is such a city to let its former Emperor's image get eroded under soot, so also the essayist whose words have mastered the city has been dirtied and

begrimed by the city. The trauma encrypted and metonymized into the figure of a ruin, a statue, suggests the dualistic nature of remembering and writing about past trauma. The memory of the violent event is at once frozen like a statue, a trope or figure that cannot change, and also is a figure lost or broken.

If the buried prostitute, the abjected daughter's corpse, inscribed into post-traumatic narratives metonymizes loss, then what I am calling the trope of the posthumous voice is a mode through which some women writers describe this figure. The woman writer using the trope of the posthumous voice merges the speaking self with the place of burial or immolation. Burial and repression at once preserve and distort memory. Benjamin writes that the "immolation" of the self when shocked with grief is an aid to memory: "to this immolation of our deepest self in shock our memory owes its most indelible images" (57). The image of the childhood bedroom in "A Berlin Chronicle," into which the boy's father once came bringing news of death, remains clear because it held a traumatic event (68). Nevertheless, the deeper trauma of the news of that death – that a beloved uncle had died of syphilis – fell into the place of a memory both indelible and inaccessible. The adult narrator does not remember until years later the second half of his father's bad news, the statement that the uncle had died of syphilis, as if through a sort of sexual transgression. The room itself, like the map, like the statue, becomes supersaturated with clear recall but the actual trauma – the knowledge so damaging to the boy of hearing that his uncle died of syphilis – falls into the place of real ruins, obscurity, burial. The clarity of immolation splits away from the encrypted trauma. Syphilis is the essay's last word, the ruin of desire, or ruinous desire, that the essay's memorable digging unearths.

In the trope of the posthumous voice, the corpse of the abjected woman, while her body is invisible, is given the corpus of the text she narrates. The silenced women in "A Berlin Chronicle" and in "On the Marionette Theatre," by contrast, fall through the gaps of the texts in which they appear. The prostitute who gave the uncle his syphilis, figuratively

speaking, lies buried in the heart of "A Berlin Chronicle." The prostitute's body and her voice are occluded. Yet her body's language is not entirely erased. The last word of the essay belongs to her, its fatal power, the sibyl-like sibilance of its last word, "syphilis." Similarly, the female dancers who are mentioned in contrast to the more graceful marionettes metonymically represent the fallen state of humanity within Kleist's essay. "On the Marionette Theatre" refers to a Madame G. and a Madame Vestris, both dancers, whose bodies the male speaker states are too heavy (6, 8). The weight of the body in "On the Marionette Theatre" is given specific, named representation only with regards to women. While Kleist discusses the state of having fallen through knowledge, or through self-consciousness, in terms including all people, the specific examples of fallen bodies are the female dancers. In Kleist's essay, the burden of dying, of losing the body to find purity, is placed metonymically upon the female body.

If "A Berlin Chronicle" buries a dead woman at its close, what is her role earlier in the text? The prostitute, not only the murderer of the uncle, but also a corpse figure herself, is first encountered early in the essay. The prostitute is the means through which the young man initiates himself into the city whose remembered map becomes the essay in which he demonstrates mastery. The boy meets a prostitute when he is crossing from the position of the powerless young child into the position of the powerful, eloquent man who has memorized, or mastered, the city of his childhood. The prostitute is first described as an image of poverty, an insightful description. Nevertheless, her image alters as the author plumbs his memory for a more detailed glance at the prostitute:

There is no doubt, at any rate, that a feeling of crossing the threshold of one's class for the first time had a part in the almost unequalled fascination of publicly accosting a whore in the street. In the beginning, however, this was a crossing of frontiers not only social but topographical, in the sense that whole networks of streets were opened up under the auspices of

prostitution. But is it really a crossing, is it not, rather, an obstinate and voluptuous hovering on the brink, a hesitation that has its most cogent motive in the circumstance that beyond this frontier lies nothingness? But the places are countless in the great cities where one stands on the edge of the void, and the whores in the doorways of tenement blocks and on the less sonorous asphalt of railway platforms are like the household goddesses of this cult of nothingness. (11)

I quote at length to emphasize the complexity of the boy's act of crossing to accost the prostitute. The crossing over to speak to the prostitute is at first a crossing of social or economic boundaries, a class distinction transgressed. Benjamin writes that for wealthy children of his era poor children existed "beyond the back of beyond" (12). Significantly, however, the prostitute may not be a child. Even if she is in fact a child, she is not granted the protected social position of innocence that typifies the social codification of childhood. In any case, the prostitute described in this essay seems to be at least an adolescent woman, not a little girl. Speaking to the prostitute, then, represents the boy's crossing from childhood to adulthood. The poor children are invisible, but the prostitute, the symbolic opposite to the child, is all too visible.

The fascination of "accosting" the public figure of the prostitute is "almost unequalled," the narrator remembers (11). The prostitute, through her body, enacts a chiasm, shifting the child's tentative speech into an adult's secure language. In the process, the language of the woman herself must necessarily be nullified in order to keep open a linguistic space for the boy's utterance. The prostitute's language categorically falls into the place to which Lacan assigns to all women's speech, the place of no place (*Écrits* 281). The cultural place assigned to the prostitute erases the very possibility of her speech, at least in the context of "A Berlin Chronicle." The prostitute stands as a marker for muteness and the boy, in confronting her, confronts the terror of muteness. Through his

confrontation with her muteness, he gains the power of his adult speech. The prostitute cannot silence him, for she is disallowed her own speech. Yet it is she, this very silenced figure, who returns to damage the text of the boy's story from its own heart: for it is she who infects the uncle with syphilis, the word the boy forgets, the word that, by being forgotten, inscribes muteness into the very center of his eloquence.

What does it mean to speak through death, as this prostitute does, her word "syphilis" ending the essay? The prostitute speaks only as a metonymic figure of the "cult of nothingness," the carrier of a fatal disease (11). Women writers using the trope of the posthumous voice also assume the place of the dead in order to speak. Unlike the prostitute in "A Berlin Chronicle," however, the woman writer who narrates as if from the place of death does not assume an humiliated embodiment. Nevertheless there are clear parallels between the stance of the prostitute in "A Berlin Chronicle," a stance of silence that erupts into violence through the transmission of disease, and the rhetorical stance of the woman writer employing the trope of the posthumous voice. The prostitute is silenced because she is violated; but also, paradoxically, her violation silences, through disease, the uncle. The trope of the posthumous voice uses the site of the body violated by death to break into language. Indeed, the woman writer using the trope of the posthumous voice may also be read as a sort of Medusa figure, silencing her readers through her eerie assumption of the realm of the dead, her uncanny ability to make the grave seem like home.

Benjamin's prostitute stands at a rhetorical point of crossing. Unlike the prostitute, who sacrifices her body to continue to live, the woman writer using the trope of the posthumous voice marks out a symbolic sacrifice of her body in order to write. The role of the body is key to both these female figures: they show the gesture of a woman giving up her body, whether in reality through prostitution or symbolically through writing, in order to gain the few essentials she needs, to be fed or to be read. This trade-off is reflected in Benjamin's meditation on the figure of the prostitute as a silent guardian of language. Her

syphilis demarcates a line of silence at the end of Benjamin's text. In that text, her mute body stands as a space to be crossed.

The marionette, like the prostitute, inhabits the space of crossing, the incantory moment when the passive limbs are jolted into motion according to the will of the puppeteer: "shaken in a purely haphazard way, the puppet falls into a kind of rhythmic movement which resembles dance" ("On the Marionette Theatre" 12). The puppets' grace can only be perceived by the audience. Similarly, the prostitute's fascinating capacity to enact within the public space of her body a boy's crossing from childhood to adulthood is surely a fascination experienced only by the boy accosting her. His act of accosting her is not fascinating to the prostitute. Both the prostitute and the marionette by definition operate on the principal of having no will of their own. The puppeteer jerks the marionette into a dance of which the puppet is, needless to say, unaware. The boy, accosting the prostitute, draws her into a dance of linguistic exchange within which the prostitute, insofar as she is prostituting herself, must be absolutely without a will of her own. She is paid to cede her will, her knowledge, her self-consciousness, to the will and knowledge and consciousness of the accosting boy.

If the prostitute sells her will and her self-consciousness to the accosting boy, unlike the inanimate marionette, she cannot be rid of consciousness itself. Even as Benjamin typifies the prostitute as part of the map, her very body a topographical frontier, he cannot bury entirely the similarity between the boy, whose city is later taken from him, and the prostitute, whose body has already been taken from her. The boy's body extends out, symbolically, to walk across and master the city which he maps through memory while the prostitute's body encases her in a topography she cannot escape. Benjamin recognizes the double nature of his boyish crossing. It is not just that the boy is crossing from innocence to desire, from wealth to poverty, from purity to abjection; the act of accosting the prostitute is an act of recognizing, at least in the instance of remembering that

act of accosting, the abjected adult the boy has become, abjected because his city has been taken away from him in all but memory. Indeed, of crossing the street to accost the prostitute, Benjamin later asks if it is a crossing at all:

But is it really a crossing, is it not, rather, an obstinate and voluptuous hovering on the brink, a hesitation that has its most cogent motive in the circumstance that beyond this frontier lies nothingness? (12)

In other words, perhaps the prostitute's abjection is something the narrator now shares. This boy stands before the prostitute in much the same way that the boy in "On the Marionette Theatre" stood before the mirror, entranced by his own image (9). The prostitute mirrors back to him an abjected aspect of himself, and in her abjection he sees the potential for his own nothingness. Now, there are many ways to read his phrase, "beyond this frontier lies nothingness," but one sense of "beyond this frontier," is material poverty. The writer writing of the loss of access to the city where he grew up, a material loss of his childhood city, has himself encountered the prostitute's lack of ownership. He has crossed over into a sphere of having nothing, which, as a boy, he had never entered. In this sense, when the boy crosses the street and accosts the impoverished prostitute he is unwittingly crossing into his own future.

Similarly, Benjamin, who cannot return to the city he so eloquently remembers is enframed by a boundary of abjection, the abjection of the exile, much as the frame of degradation encloses the prostitute. It is not the same enclosure, to be sure, but the question that Benjamin raises concerning the accosting of the prostitute – "is it a crossing?" – indicates the sense in which the boy accosting the woman is not crossing into a space of otherness but rather stands frozen before a previously unknown image of himself. Just as the boy in "On the Marionette Theatre" stands transfixed before the mirror of his own injured beauty, the rite of passage of accosting a prostitute described in "A Berlin Chronicle" is not merely a crossing into sexual awareness but also it is a moment of

seeing for the first time one's abject or vulnerable self. It is a moment of horror. The brink upon which the boy hovers as he stands before the prostitute is the boundary of self-consciousness, that element of the psyche which Kleist, in "On the Marionette Theatre," claims causes the fall from grace of all once graceful boys.

The nothingness embodied and metonymically contained by the prostitute in "A Berlin Chronicle" is finally the nothingness of mortality. The prostitute ruptures the text at its outermost boundary, its conclusion, when she reappears metonymically through the death by syphilis of the uncle. It is the figure of the prostitute who most clearly demonstrates the power of trauma to bury memory. The narrator of the essay admits that for years he forgot how his uncle had died, even though he recalled with uncanny clarity the room in which, as a young boy, he was told that his uncle had died. The room, like the topography or map of the city of Berlin, contains cleanly the trauma whose core, the violation wrought by sexual disease, cannot be brought to mind.

That the figure of the prostitute contains within her crossed-over and crossed-out body this violation ultimately enables the essay to be written by the boy who once accosted her. The figure of the prostitute serves to contain the poisonous silence, the syphilis, so that it does not reach the boy. Similarly, the silence of the marionettes serves to contain within the dolls' bodies the supposedly graced state of *apathia* which the male narrator could not possibly achieve without becoming silent himself. The closest human equivalent to the mute and therefore graceful and graced doll would be the Holy Fool, but "On the Marionette Theatre" ends by extolling the goal of gaining infinite knowledge, rather than the goal of giving up all knowledge. As I have argued earlier, the figure of the marionette is itself feminine, the doll representing the prototypical aspects of feminine demeanor: silence, an absence of desire, and a body which can be entirely controlled by a man. The male narrators of "On the Marionette Theatre" and "A Berlin Chronicle," then, use the feminine figures in these essays, the puppets and the prostitute, to hold the place of the

voiceless abject, thus shielding the male narrators from the threat of becoming voiceless themselves.

The lyrics of Orpheus, for example, depend upon Eurydice in the same way that "A Berlin Chronicle" depends upon the prostitute and "On the Marionette Theatre" depends upon the doll. The writing that the male narrator, or poet, creates encircles the silent center held by the figure of a woman: a prostitute, a marionette, or Eurydice. If Benjamin and Kleist, like Orpheus, write in the aftermath of trauma, the central place of the trauma itself is located figuratively in a feminine body. For the woman writer the return to legible language after trauma may be blocked in the same way that Eurydice's return to life is blocked. The woman writer, figuratively speaking, once her body is seen, is silenced. When Orpheus sees Eurydice's body, she fades back into second death. The woman writer constructing a post-traumatic narrative is challenged, then, with hiding her body while sneaking across the boundary line between the symbolic death of trauma to the symbolic life of legible text. If her body is seen for an instant, she will be forced back, her narrative shut out.

Eurydice's Translation

The beauty of Orpheus' elegiac song for Eurydice is said to be such that it moves inanimate objects (see Ovid *The Metamorphoses* Book X).⁶ This animation of rocks relies conversely upon Eurydice's body having lost animation. Her body makes a conduit through which Orpheus' poetry is written. She is another space of crossing, like the prostitute, and like the doll. However, Eurydice is also dead, not just mute or inanimate. The complete inaccessibility of Eurydice's body after it has suffered two deaths makes Eurydice's body a topos not so much of marginality but rather of completed absence, the place beyond the map. Eurydice vanishes after Orpheus has crossed through her out of the

⁶Specifically I am referring to Horace Gregory's translation (272-276).

underworld into sunlight. The double death of Eurydice, like the double death of Clorinda, ought to be read from the point of view of the twice-killed woman.

The trope of the posthumous voice begins where Eurydice vanishes. However this trope does not consist in making visible the invisible woman. Instead it makes use of the very erased status of a dead woman's body, that erasure which was meant to silence the woman, in order to allow the woman to speak without fear of being seen. Eurydice, like Clorinda, is killed because of the misapplied gaze of her beloved. Both characters illustrate the danger to a woman of being seen. The rhetorical trick of the trope of the posthumous voice is to borrow metaphorically the invisibility of Eurydice's body and then to travel unseen out of Hades and back into the light of legible text. In this trope, the woman's erased body becomes the very hiding place for the woman writer's voice.

The Kristevan notion of the abject, or that which cannot be brought into bounds, is exemplified by death: the dead can no longer be known (*Powers of Horror* 3). The dead are out of bounds, and grief over the lost beloved, by wholly introjecting the dead into the living, may make the mourner abject. But what if death is displaced onto the text; what if the text becomes the lost body and the mourner becomes the author framed within her text? This conversion occurs in the text troped posthumous. Here, the speaker's own dead body becomes not a lost beloved but rather a text containing a psychic loss which is nevertheless not a text of mourning but rather forms an altered elegy. The role of boundaries, which textually is the role of genre, then, becomes critical in determining the legibility of the trope of the posthumous voice. Jacques Derrida argues in the "Law of Genre," that "in marking itself generically, a text unmarks itself" (*Acts of Literature* 221). To wear the garb of a recognized genre is to efface the connection between the author and the text. If the textual abject, the novella *Mathilda*, refuses to mark itself generically, it may not be, as Rajan argues, because its author seeks no reader (see "Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*"), but rather because its author does not wish to elide the moment of crossing over, the continual bridge

or boundary-line between the author and the text, between the mourner and the dead. *Mathilda* may wish to locate itself in the literally *sui generis* genre of the boundary text. The abject, or genreless, text of *Mathilda* foregrounds metaphor, continually exposing the translation from the unspeakable topos of death to the legitimate, legible topos of the text. The moment of metaphor, or of translation, or of crossing, is the temporal mode held throughout the text of *Mathilda*. Not only a mode of speaking from the place of the dead, but also the metaphor of a woman mourning her own already accomplished death, form the trope of the posthumous voice. The entire text is a metaphor for the process of creating metaphor, that is, of leaving behind the originary body.

If Eurydice had been able to control her husband, and prevent his turning back to gaze at her, if she had crossed over from death, would she not in returning to life have necessarily left behind her own dead body? If you will, Eurydice is the text which has fallen into abysmal silence and then re-entered its own presence through the metaphor of absence. The trope of the posthumous voice, then, avoids the direct gaze, in order to remain in the daylight of legibility. To write legibly, or to speak and be understood as a legitimate speaker, is a complicated task for the woman writing in the aftermath of violation. The sanctified, protected verbal space of the daughter who is a virgin, and whose language is therefore symbolically protected under the aegis of the name of the father, while itself a limited space, is nonetheless a topos of legitimate speech. However, the woman who has been violated has lost the possibility of using for self-expression this topos and is in danger of becoming the space of muteness through which male language legitimates itself, just as prostitutes' illicit sexuality effectively insures the sanctity of the legitimately born child's paternal name.

Let us reconsider, then, some other meanings of the speech of the prostitute. Margaret Miles, in *Carnal Knowing*, discusses how in the patristic writings the figure of the prostitute is emblematic of the worst degradation. A woman whose body is presented

as porous, penetrated, and infinitely penetrable, the prostitute stands iconographically not *at* but *as* the cross-roads between chaotic, illegible writing and clear, symbolic writing. By reading woman as a symbolic figure in text, Margaret Miles opens the door to the argument that the female body relates to linguistic tropes differently than does the male body (144). An implication of her contention that the troped figure is feminine is the idea that the text constructed consciously around the gap, or intentional absence, of the feminine figure is a text that renegotiates the use of trope. The text using the trope of the posthumous voice elides the space of the woman's body by structuring a language within which the figure, or metaphor, stands not for the body but as the body. It is a language, then, flattened and uncanny, like a de Chirico painting in which shadows are things themselves. Miles points out that the prostitute is not accorded any power of speech other than that of silencing legitimate male speech through seducing and thereby damning the educated man (71). In other words, the close relationship that Cixous postulates exists between a woman's language and a woman's body, Miles argues may indeed be destroyed by the violation of the woman's body.

The woman writing after trauma, that is, after experiencing her body as an abjected space, has the difficult task of claiming a legitimate place for her speech after her body has been interdicted, or made abject. The association of woman's mouth with her reproductive space doubly requires that a woman who has been raped, whose "lower mouth" has been forced open, should at the least keep her mouth closed (*Carnal Knowing* 72). The speech of a violated woman is, then, twice interdicted. The topos from which a violated woman might speak is emblemized in the Greek myth of Eurydice. Eurydice, violated, dies. By preserving her purity in death, Eurydice retains the possibility of a legitimate access to speech, although she does not speak.

This interdiction against a violated woman's speech acts as a double bind, ensuring that the only woman whose tale of trauma will be heard is the one who refuses to speak it.

Eurydice's knowledge of violation and of death, however, enters into Orpheus' language.

In "Orpheus' Gaze," Maurice Blanchot typifies Eurydice as:

The furthest art can reach: under a name that hides her, and a veil that covers her, she is the profoundly obscure point towards which art and desire, death and night, seem to tend. (*The Space of Literature* 172)

Blanchot discovers within Eurydice a place where art occurs, but not a writer who creates art. Blanchot uses Eurydice and Orpheus and their mythic marriage as a metaphor to describe his understanding of the difficulties of writing. Nevertheless, the textual fact of Eurydice's femininity is not without consequence. Blanchot comments that "she is the instant when the essence of night approaches as the *other* night" (172). Not only is Eurydice the name of the space that contains both absolute voicelessness and great lyric capacity, but also this paradoxical space is feminine. What Orpheus carries across the boundary of death into the daylight, then, is a lyric coded feminine. He is allowed to speak Eurydice's interdicted language.

Losing the body of his wife, Orpheus gains the body of the lyric, elegiac text. "He had indeed captured from Hell the obscure shade and had, unknowingly, led it back into the broad daylight of the work," Blanchot contends (173). Similarly, in the trope of the posthumous voice, the loss of the female body becomes necessary for the creation of the lyric, elegiac text. When Orpheus reaches the daylight and mourns, singing elegies so beautiful that trees and rocks cluster around him, it is the sacrificed body of Eurydice which allows the unspeakable loss to be spoken. What Blanchot calls Orpheus' "infinite sojourn in death" is his absorption of Eurydice, a textual conversion of memory into the forgetting afforded by language. The body of the woman writing as if from the place of death, figuratively Eurydice, is also lost. The woman narrator using the trope of the posthumous voice, then, gains Orpheus' elegiac ground. She achieves a translation accomplished through the subterfuge of mourning her own rhetorically absented body.

The necessary forgetfulness of translation, the way that any translated text must leave behind the body of the original text, is repeated as a metaphoric gesture in women's troped-posthumous narratives. These texts must leave behind the dead body, the body of the violated daughter. She must be elided because the moment in which Orpheus cannot see Eurydice, the moment in which he is blind, is the moment in which he is speechless. In other words, for the narrator to speak of her own death, she must annihilate her body by, Orpheus-like, turning to see her body and, by this seeing, erasing her own body. The plot of the text is the narrator's struggle to leave herself and to mourn having had to leave herself. This trope develops an implicit elegy, an elegy written by the woman whose audience is her own absence.

It is the impossibility of returning to the traumatized self, the Eurydice who was fatally seen, that necessitates the act of translation I am calling the trope of the posthumous voice. The pretense of the narrator's status as a dead person who still speaks re-enacts the voiceless pantomime of the body whose trauma may be hidden in the text. The body of the prostitute in "A Berlin Chronicle" and the form of the marionettes in "On the Marionette Theatre" center those texts not despite of but because of their efforts to elide the feminine body. A dead woman's body cannot be brought into bounds in the way that even a prostitute's body can be controlled and marked by patriarchal symbolic discourse. Once cast out, the body of the dead woman assumes an uncanny topography of its own. In the trope of the posthumous voice, then, the patriarchally given figure of the mute woman is overturned by the figure of woman as a posthumous speaker, a speaker who figuratively overcomes the most profound muteness, that of the dead.

*Tenth Chapter****Maternity as Vanishing Point:
Sylvia Plath's "Beautiful Silken Rabbit" ¹***

In contrast to the divine annunciation, natural motherhood presents an intersection between the veneration of the Virgin and the impossibility of replicating virgin maternity. Sylvia Plath writes from this conflicted and conflicting maternal territory, employing effects of the *Mater Dolorosa* alternately ironically and seriously. If the prostitute is the linguistic space crossed out, then the maternal body presents a site of contrast, the body's permeability here contradicted by the renunciation of the body. Plath's simultaneous textual use of and deferral of the trope of motherhood, her habit of writing poems spoken by troped posthumous mothers, problematizes her professed faith that maternity would simply make her life richer.² Her poems' troped posthumous maternal bodies subversively take a gesture from the Virgin's self-elision, while also claiming for themselves the bodily death and fame of her Son. Writing dead mothers, Plath ambivalently mines and erases the topos of maternity. It vanishes before her work not as a sign of defeat but as an emblem of passage, a point of departure.

The Vanishing Point

In this chapter, I present a reading of Sylvia Plath's use of the topos of maternity, a paradigmatic place she makes her own. In Plath's oeuvre, maternity often functions not merely as a symbol of various tropes of self annihilation and rebirth, but also as a frame for the very rhetorical structure of the poems. In painting, the vanishing point is that point at which receding parallel lines seem to meet. Represented in linear perspective, this

¹ Aurelia Schober Plath, ed., *Letters Home* 269.

²Plath writes: "If I could not have children – I would be dead. Dead to my woman's body" in Ted Hughes, ed., *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* 312.

drafting trick creates the illusion of three dimensions on a flat surface. Plath's poetry often uses the space of maternity as the point of disappearance towards or away from which the speaker of a poem tends. Her trajectory is towards or away from motherhood, and this trajectory enframes a poem's rhetorical triumph, making present through language an ontological absence. The woman speakers of these poems, by shedding their children or by shedding themselves in the creation of children, shadow forth the theatre in which a narrator's disappearance takes place.

While Plath wrote in some of her letters rather sentimental tracts about the joys of having children, her poems often make hard cold use of the space of maternal production, employing the topos of maternity as a sort of oracular moment of rupture through which the poem's landscape of emptiness is revealed (*Letters Home* 408). A contrapuntal tension is evoked by contrasting sentimental images of children as innocents, whose very existence attests to the fecundity of the world, against the articulation of an absence of meaning. This contrast gives the poems their uncanny power, making them, as it were, three dimensional objects on a linguistic canvas. For Plath's maternal poems neither wholly reject nor accept the nihilism often attributed to her. Rather, through the lens of a maternity alternately rejoiced in and rejected, they suggest a world alternately full and privative. These poems argue that Plath's famous suicide was merely one gesture, and not the telos of her oeuvre. My reading of Plath presents her as a shifting figure. She presents narrators who pretend to be dead in order to be heard, who give birth to the other in order to give birth to the self. The rhetorical complexity of her maternity poems cannot be flattened into one suicide.

A paradigmatic example of Plath's use of the trope of the posthumous voice is the poem, "The Rabbit Catcher" (*CP Plath* 193 -194). Ostensibly an analysis of hunting, from the perspective of the prey, the poem also reads as a description of marriage. Jacqueline Rose, in *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, applies an interpretation of Lacan's gendered theory of semiotics to Plath's "The Rabbit Catcher," analyzing the poem as an exploration

of lesbian desire (114). Tracing the torqued action in the poem, Rose argues that the way the speaker's voice doubles back onto the speaker's body in the text is a trope that figures woman's desire for woman. Rose's argument that Plath's poem is a confession of lesbian desire drew from Plath's widower husband and literary executor, Ted Hughes, a public death threat (*The Silent Woman* 171). Hughes apparently thought the imputation that his "children's mother" might have had homosexual desires an insult far more damning than the countless imputations of his children's mother's madness, accusations which surround the Plath oeuvre like so much buttressing.

Keying off Hughes' theatrical overreaction, I suggest that "The Rabbit Catcher" is written to Hughes, but that the trickster trope which the poem employs deflects the poem from Hughes's patriarchal eyes. This deflection brings the reader in as a witness against the rabbit catcher himself. Hughes, the father, is the primary target of "The Rabbit Catcher." The poem's encrypted rage aims at him. However, the poem's controlling metaphor, its undergirding trope of being spoken by a person who has no voice, bends the text so that just like a rabbit the text squirms beneath the hunter's trap. The rabbit's, or speaker's, desire, a desire that indeed drives the poem, may not be so much a sexual desire but rather more a desire for the right to speak and for the capacity to speak. The rabbit that runs through Plath's "The Rabbit Catcher" is, I argue, the speaker's language even as that language dramatically traces the speaker's shedding of desire into text. That Hughes, in impugning Jacqueline Rose's reading of the poem, focuses on Plath's role as a mother, identifying her primarily as his children's mother, reflects that Plath's poem makes central use of the topos of maternity: the escaping rabbit is a mother, escaping future birth pangs, escaping the forceful hunter who is the father of her children.

I argue, then, that the center of Plath's poem has to do with the struggle to speak. The poem effects an embodiment of the desire to speak, to be heard, or read. The realization of this desire contrasts dramatically against the death of the speaker, so that the

speaker's language only becomes legible after the speaker's disappearance into the rabbit hole of death. When the poem's speaker says that the wind "tears off my voice," the scene is set for the execution that closes the poem, the "constriction" that kills the poem's speaker (lines 3, 30). The necessary first step of the speaker's execution is the poem's revelation that the "place of force" tears away from the speaker her power, her voice, and hence prepares her to become the prey of the rabbit catcher (line 1). The landscape the poem carefully evokes is that of the Yorkshire moors: Ted Hughes' home-turf. In a letter to her mother, Plath depicts Hughes as master of that territory, writing:

I wish you could see your daughter now, a veritable convert to the Brontë clan, sitting upstairs in Ted's room. [. . .] last night Ted and I hiked out at sunset to stalk rabbits. Ted, a dead eye marksman shot a beautiful silken rabbit, a doe with young. (*Letters Home* 268-269)

The pregnant female rabbit whom Hughes kills during the apotheosis of his and Plath's courtship, that is, during the return to his home on England's moors, is transformed into a symbol of sacrifice and of escape in the text of Plath's poem, written six years later. In "The Rabbit Catcher" and in her much earlier journal entry, the boundaries blur between the woman who observes the pregnant female rabbit shot and killed and the pregnant rabbit itself. The beautiful silken rabbit is other and self. In both cases, Plath associates herself with the prey and depicts Hughes as the master of the landscape he hunts.

The poem portrays the rabbit catcher and the land on which he hunts as forces which work together to ensnare the prey, the rabbit. The primary aspect of the rabbit's trouble is its homelessness. The rabbit in "The Rabbit Catcher," resides on land that is aggressively not her own land, not her home, a place that in no sense belongs to the rabbit. The rabbit, then, unable to claim or own the landscape through which she runs, instead metaphorically maps that landscape through her language. She creates a topos through

which she retroactively gains the landscape as a rhetorical site she privileges above the physical moor.

This landscape reconfigured as topos corresponds precisely to the trope of escape. For just as a rhetorical commonplace may replace actual possession of a home turf, so also the trope of escape replaces the actual vanishing of the narrator. However, the two gestures rely upon each other, for only in leaving the landscape does the rabbit inscribe it. The rabbit's text is the map of aftermath. The poem establishes itself as a riddle, implicitly asking why the death of the rabbit charts a necessary balance to the rabbit's great run. In other words, the poem poses the riddle of why its speaker's vanishing body is the *a priori* condition of her eloquent speech.

Plath's poem begins with the Dickinsonian "It," a trickster's opening. The "It" immediately presents a riddle to the reader. Where is the "It" ? We are told only that the "It" is a topos, a "place" (line 1). In the first line of the poem, then, the fact that the poem is a riddle is established. The reader is to be brought into a place and not told where she is. The placeness of the place, the supremacy of its character as topos, and as topography, here, is foregrounded. Further, the first line subverts the expected adjective/adverb duality, saying of the "It," "It was a place of force." A gesture, a motion, even a wind, are typically understood to be "of force," as in the phrases: "it was a blow of force," or "it was a wind of great force." The poem begins with a blurring of the boundary between the stasis of place and the exigency of motion. The place receives so many motions of force – the violence of the wind and the repeated violent acts of the rabbit hunter – that the topos itself becomes imbued with violence. The place in "The Rabbit Catcher" feels altered in the same way that a person who has been repeatedly violated becomes altered.

In the second line, the poem's speaker introduces the dominant trick of the poem. The speaker reveals the paradox that she cannot speak, even though she is speaking as she confesses that she cannot speak. Paradoxically, but without irony, the narrator tells of her

own aphasia, "The wind gagging my mouth with my own blown hair/Tearing off my voice" (lines 2, 3). The act of announcing one's own inability to speak is a most complex gesture. The speaker announcing her own muteness could be referring to a past muteness, a state of speechlessness now overcome. However, since she brings her muteness into the center of the text, opening the poem with a confession of having had her voice torn off, her voicelessness is highly dramatized. Over the split or fractured self, this disembodied voice, a voice torn off, creates an unstable bridge.

The narrator speaking the poem is the aphasiac whose voice has been *torn off*. The speaker asks for your sympathy for the death that is the loss of her voice, even though this loss has apparently been healed. But if it had really been healed, why would she ask for your sympathy? Why would she foreground the fact of her voice being torn-off? The answer to this first riddle is in the violence of the metaphors "tearing off" and "gagging" (lines 3, 4). The voice has been taken from the speaker by measures of such extreme violence as to render the full return of her voice highly improbable. If one has been strangled, or gagged, if one has drowned, then one will not be the same afterwards, even if the smothering and strangling have been survived. In other words, the feint offered by the use of the past-tense, "It was a place of force" is itself a piece of trickery; for the metaphors describing and structuring the sort of place "It" was are so violent as to make perfectly clear that "It" is still a place of force, within the topography of the speaker's memory.

Fittingly, then, the verbs in the phrases describing the poet's aphasia are elided by her frequent use of gerunds. "The wind gagging my mouth with my own blown hair/Tearing off my voice" are phrases explicitly positioned outside of fixed time (lines 2, 3). The metaphors describing the voicelessness of the speaker are not written in the past tense. Rather, the words "gagging" and "tearing" are both gerunds, expressing an always germinating, never-really-finished, action. The speaker's voice has been torn-off, has been

gagged in an ineradicable manner, the violence of her experience engraving a permanent, ongoing action into her thinking and remembering. The memory of the trauma never closes, and so the belief that the trauma has in fact been survived never takes hold in the speaker's mind. The trope that the poem's text follows is the trajectory of the voice that has been torn off. "The Rabbit Catcher" goes where that torn voice goes: to the moor, to the gorse, and to the memory of the experience of being gagged. The poem's speaker presents us with a riddle. She is speaking with a voice that has been violently taken away from her and has also violently been shoved into her, gagging her. How does she harness such a voice to communicate anything at all? She too is a rabbit-catcher, a catcher of the rabbit of her own voice, her own elusive language, and the evasive tropes it figures. The speaker of the poem, like the rabbit catcher, is chasing the violated space of her own language and describing that chase in the text of her poem. The rabbit and the speaker's torn-off voice merge in this poem.

The place of force, as the poem progresses, evokes a known location, described in such manner as to identify its topography if not its precise geography. "It" has topographical attributes. It is a place which grows gorse, a grass of the north-country moors in England, and also a place by the sea, a place at the edge of England. The riddle of the poem, then, is not to be "where am I?" That information is rather quickly revealed. The poem's setting is revealed by the clues "gorse" and "sea" as Yorkshire, near the North Sea (lines 3, 6). It is worth considering the fact that the poem's author, Sylvia Plath, was not from England, not at home amongst its flora and coastlines. The poem in part does enact a catalogue, helping the American speaker feel less unfamiliar in her strange surroundings in Yorkshire. Still, the riddle contains more than a revelation of geographic location, for the poem travels deeper into the landscape until clues of where the poem is set are surpassed by and effaced by clues as to who is speaking the poem.

The objects of the natural landscape shift, then, becoming symbolic markers of the speaker's concerns with death as an escape. The revelatory "gorse" turns metaphorically into candles: "yellow candle-flowers" (line 8). The gorse acts as an "extreme unction," blessing the speaker while she enters the ever narrower paths of bodily death (line 8). Extreme unction is performed just before death, while the yellow candle flowers suggest the prayer candles lit to remember the dead. The act of extreme unction here doubles back, signifying the deaths of earlier victims of the rabbit catcher, and predicting the drama of the death of the speaker that indeed ends the poem. The above-ground geography described in the poem will begin to withdraw as the speaker finally reveals that she inhabits the place of the dead, the place of burial, the underworld.

The violent metaphors of "snares" and "torture" offer an explanation of the next phase of the riddle (lines 10, 14). The speaker tells us, "There was only one place to get to" (line 11). This statement of isolation, of there being only one place, highlights the importance of where and what is the place the poem inhabits, or creates. The place introduced in the first line of the third stanza may or may not be a different place from the "It" that opens the poem. Certainly the "place to get to" is gotten to by following the twisting, inwards-curving tropes, the figurations in the text. The winnowing away of options, until only one place is left to get to, is enacted through the structural body of the text itself, by its use of the words "shutting," "nothing," "quiet," and "killing" (lines 15, 20, 30). Similarly, the metaphors whose asymptotic turns bring us through the text construct a geography of constriction. These metaphors lead both to the maternal space of the womb, where "the paths narrowed into a hollow," and to its illicit double, the tomb, the hollow at the end of all paths (line 13). Indeed, the snares set to trap the rabbits are likened to "birth pangs," the screams of pain they produce translating between the unspeakable body and the visible birth (line 16). The topographical return to the womb, via

birth pangs, heralds a return to voicelessness, to an enclosed space of suffering which is the poem's core and chorus.

The birth pangs and the inverted metaphor of the maternity of death, that is of returning to the womb of the earth, establish "The Rabbit Catcher" as a poem that uses the maternal space to enframe a meditation on the uncertain desirability of death. The speaker, re-doubling her riddle, tells us again that neither she nor her landscape can speak, despite the suffering she and her landscape share, a suffering as intense as the pain of childbirth, a suffering that causes the speaker and her landscape to cry out. The speaker reveals that the experience of voicelessness alters topography, saying that "The absence of shrieks/ Made a hole in the hot day, a vacancy" (lines 17, 18). The absence of the speaker's cries, those anguished cries stifled, materially alters the landscape. The speaker's self-avowed aphasia, so difficult to believe while reading her words, becomes gradually comprehensible if we believe that enforced silence, or the aphasia following trauma, is rather an encoded language that alters landscape. This language alters both internal and external topography with the force of its anguish. The line, "It was a place of force," then, takes on new meaning (line 1). The "It" is not only the place where the speaker evades the hunter, but also it is the place where the force of the speaker's anguish shapes and alters and gives birth to the poem's landscape.

The gagged voice that opens the poem, the voice forced back into itself, seems not to have vanished but rather to have burrowed underground. From underground, the voice has altered the ground itself. The torn-off voice has also altered the day by tearing into the day the hole of the voice's own absence. The vacancy is the apparent absence of a voice that is actually present but has been buried, or hidden. The riddle of how the speaker who tells us she has no voice can speak to tell us that she has no voice may be answered if you consider that those who have been violated do not disappear but rather, as it were, hide, tearing apart the landscape within which they have been symbolically buried. The "lives of

the dead," which, "spreading like oil," hide in the sea, linguistically and metaphorically surround the landscape of "The Rabbit Catcher." Here is an image of the transformation of the post-traumatic body into trope (line 4). Figured as oil, perhaps the oil used for extreme unction, the dead, paradoxically, have lives.

While the lives of the dead remain anonymous, the marriage that shapes the poem and engenders the birth pangs is specifically the marriage between the rabbit catcher and his prey. The rabbit catcher's prey is sometimes the "me" speaking the poem, sometimes the poem itself. The text of the poem, then, acts as a coded double for the "me" who is killed by the rabbit catcher's snares. Not only does the poem's text become a surrogate for the poem's speaker, but also the poem is built on the premise of a double self evoked by the constrictingly tight relationship between the rabbit and the hunter. That the poem has to do with marriage is supported by the poem's extensive use of the metaphors of birth pangs and birth canals, metaphors of motherhood. Further, the rather dislocated image of the tea mug in the penultimate stanza suddenly brings into the poem the violence of domesticity, or the violence within domesticity. The lines "I felt hands round a tea mug, dull, blunt/Ringing the white china" come out of nowhere in this poem about place, set on a moor by the sea (lines 22, 23). This poem about hunting suddenly pauses for afternoon tea. The domesticity of the tea mug, the archetypal British tea which smooths over all the violence of that Imperialist culture, enters this wild and natural landscape almost comically. One wonders where a tea mug fits into the landscape of a wild moor by the North Sea, and what sort of hunter goes round carrying his mug of hot tea. But the violence of the poem is enhanced rather than diminished by this spectral domesticity, this quiet British tea mug. The violence of domesticity, and in particular of British domesticity, the poem likens to the violence of strangulation. The violence of the hunter is not diminished because he holds a tea mug, or rather, is remembered as holding a tea mug. On the contrary, as she describes the hunter's hands round a tea mug, the speaker perhaps remembers his hands round her

neck, for she recalls the same dull, blunt force with which the hands encircle the mug as a force that also tries to strangle the generative site of her voice, her throat. The poem actually places the speaker momentarily inside the space of the tea mug, saying, "I felt hands round a tea mug," thus making explicit the connection between the speaker's neck and the tea mug, both encircled by the hunter's hands (line 22). That the hunter is not a stranger but a husband is implicitly alluded to by the tea mug's spectral appearance. Metonymically, then, the tea mug represents the domestic connection between the speaker and the rabbit catcher who sets the trap which catches her.

The caught rabbit, or the woman's voice, and the speaker's urgency to escape collide in the poem's revelation of murders. The rabbit catcher is not merely a threatening presence, he is a murderer. He has killed many times before. The speaker exclaims "How they awaited him, those little deaths! / They waited like sweethearts. They excited him" revealing that the rabbit catcher has killed, and killed often, killing rabbits held still and helpless in their traps (lines 24, 25). Interesting to note, here, the difference between the "dead eye marksman" of Plath's letters, that skillful hunter, and the "rabbit catcher" whose prey is already caught, entrapped, when he kills it. The rabbit catcher in the poem is a weak, sadistic, killer, quite by contrast to the virile "dead eye marksman" of the letters. The lines also reverberate with romantic intent, "little death" being a common metaphor for sexual intercourse, as Jacqueline Rose points out (*The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* 140). However, the woman's sexual pleasure is not in this poem a place of satisfaction and security. Instead her sexuality, her *jouissance*, is likened to a rabbit in a trap which can only be touched by the hunter, and the hunter's attentions are destructive in the extreme. Sexual congress, the little death, is not the speaker's possession but rather is another aspect of her body which the hunter takes by force. Like the speaker's voice, the speaker's sexual pleasure is taken away by the rabbit catcher and his place of force. His game is not to catch rabbits alive but to take rabbits by violence, effectively destroying the speaker's

possession of her body just as the place of force has erased the speaker's possession of her voice, has torn her voice away from her. The speaker's ruptured voice does not vanish but is severed from her. She connects this severed sound with the tearing of her body that has occurred in the domestic space of her marriage. Rabbits, in this poem, represent words that persist in the encrypted interiority that the speaker identifies as her memory. The rabbit catcher wants to take from the speaker every sensation and every word inside her until she becomes a vacancy.

Given its densely metaphorical process, it is surprising to consider that the poem may also refer to a common medical test, developed in the nineteen-twenties, which was used to ascertain pregnancy. The test used a rabbit's response, when injected with a serum taken from a possibly pregnant woman, to determine whether the woman was pregnant. It was a common misconception that the rabbit died only if the woman was pregnant, although the rabbit was in fact always killed in this test, for the rabbit's response to the serum could only be determined by dissecting the rabbit. The poem, then, uses rabbits not only as symbols of the rabbit catcher's predatory sexuality but also as sites, damaged bodies, revealing the dangers of procreative sexuality, indeed of maternity itself. The rabbit catcher is excited by the deaths of the rabbits because those little deaths indicate that his wife, or lover, is bearing his child. The rabbit catcher's paternally driven sexuality here is exposed as a sexuality linked with murderous desires and his pleasure in the deaths of the rabbits is essentially a father's pleasure in the way his name writes itself over the mother's name.

Perhaps, then, the answer to this riddle is that the speaker is telling us she has been raped. This explanation would fit with the topological turnings of the poem, that is, the way the eye-view of the poem is that of the pursued rabbit running from the rabbit catcher, a creature escaping down holes and narrowing paths. However, the trope of pursuit fails to adequately answer one last riddle of the poem: the question of where is the rabbit catcher.

The speaker does not find the rabbit catcher, the telos of the poem, until the final stanza in which the rabbit catcher appears at the trap where she is caught. It is suddenly clear, in that ultimate stanza, that throughout the poem's chase scene the rabbit catcher himself has stood still, manning his trap, while the rabbit who is the speaker has helplessly run straight into her death. She is not a victim of pursuit, but of her own credulity, or even of her own desire.

Plath's poem ends inside the trap. The answer to her riddle is that the rabbit is the speaker of the poem and the rabbit catcher has already killed the rabbit before the poem was spoken. This riddle re-stated becomes: how can a dead rabbit tell you what it's like to die? The troping lines of the poem, almost dizzying as the text veers and burrows from sea to rabbit hutch, stop dead inside the trap at the end. The entire poem rests on the vanishing point of the rabbit's death. The speaker, in two curt lines, describes her death as mental space occluded: "a mind like a ring / sliding shut on some quick thing, / the constriction killing me also" (lines 28, 29, 30). The poem ends at a point, the punctum of death. The death of the speaker by strangulation, entrapment, or "constriction," casts its sweeping shadow back across the expanse of the poem. The death of the speaker is a place of inescapable narrowness, of diminishment and condensation. This death adumbrates the wide and ranging landscape, the poem, the moor, the sky, the sea. The moor, the sky, the sea, all collapse into the focal point or punctum of a death in the death trap that is the place from which the speaker speaks.

A solution to the riddle of this poem, then, is death: the poem begins and ends with the rabbit's/speaker's death. Death catches the rabbit. However, this solution leaves unsolved the riddle posed by the poem of how can the speaker whose voice has been torn from her, whose own voice has been used to gag her, tell what it is like to have no voice. The answer to this riddle is the speaker's unusual capacity, revealed only in the final line of the poem, to speak from across the boundary of death. If the telos of the poem, like the

telos of the rabbit catcher himself, is the death of the rabbit, then the text of the poem is somewhat complicit with the rabbit catcher. The text of the poem joins the rabbit catcher in his pursuit of the speaker, his pursuit of the speaker's voice, until the rabbit catcher catches the voice, or the trope of the rabbit, and the poem also catches the rabbit, at its fixed ending point of death.

The strategy of the trope of posthumousness inheres in the poem's structuring of the relationship between place and voice. The voice has to have somewhere from which to speak, so the troped posthumous voice casts itself back across the poem's landscape to retrospectively gain ownership of that topos. The voiceless can speak in the same way the dead can speak, by entering into the space always already inscribed within the text of the writer's death. In other words, if as Derrida argues, text is the line of demarcation between life and death, then, within any text there is always reserved the place for that author's death (*The Ear of the Other* 38). The speaker of "The Rabbit Catcher" speaks about her own voicelessness and death by employing the trick of inhabiting this liminality of language, the place within discourse usually reserved for the object towards which language tends. This speaker casts herself as an object by casting herself as a dead body. We implicitly know that the text we are reading is itself the author's voice torn off. The text is the author's voice torn from her body.

The voice torn off by the place of force narrates "The Rabbit Catcher" because the author's voice torn off is the text of the poem and the place of force is the theatre of readers. In a poem troped posthumous, the trauma of the tearing away of the writer's voice is not hidden behind any authorial stance of textual ownership. Instead, the trauma of aphasia is forefronted and given the place of honor in the text. The trauma of having one's voice torn from one, which is the inevitable trope of authorship, is figured textually in the trope of the posthumous voice. This trope evokes the image of a voice torn from a speaker's body. The death of the speaker, then, becomes not the end point of the text but

its birth place. A reversal of the usual, perhaps the masculine, order of authority in writing is achieved by the speaker's *a priori* attainment of death.

By blurring the figurative distinction between her dead body and her torn-off voice, the speaker of "The Rabbit Catcher" claims retroactively the landscape in which she is killed. The speaker, knowing that the rabbit catcher desires her dead body, tricks the rabbit catcher into taking home, instead of her corpse, her voice. In the implied aftermath generated by the poem, we know that the rabbit catcher will come to remove the dead body of the rabbit from the trap which he has set. However, since we only engage the scene of the poem by reading the poem, the triumphant persistence of the posthumous speaker's voice is from the beginning inflected through the poem's text. What comes through the rabbit trap is not, after all, the dead body of the rabbit. Rather, the text in which the rabbit tells about her violation is taken home by the rabbit catcher, the poem's target audience. The existence of the poem's text implicitly proves that the body of the speaker's text rather than the body of the rabbit's corpse, has been carried into the public eye by the hunter. That the rabbit traps lining the path towards this death are metaphorically described as birth pangs illustrates the double movement of this text posed as if from the perspective of a dead speaker. She gives birth to her voice by losing her voice and thereby tricks her killer, the rabbit catcher, into carrying her voice home as his loot.

The rabbit hole of death, the escape hatch *par excellence*, functions in two ways in "The Rabbit Catcher." The space of death enables the speaker to speak by offering the only possible place of safety from the hunter. Death is the only safe place for the speaker, for the only rabbit a hunter will not hunt is a dead rabbit. The speaker's death, cast as preceding the telling of the tale that is the poem, constricts the poem. The poem reads like the voice of someone being strangled, inasmuch as its imagery narrows into a trap, and its rhyme scheme tightens into the final stanza in which the triple rhyme, "ring," "thing," and

"killing," leave a speaker, a self, a voice, extraneous and unimportant, a left over being called "me also" (lines 28, 29, 30).

The phrase "me also" exemplifies the dangerous exchange, of her body for her text, that Plath's poem's speaker has made to be heard. The poem establishes that the rabbit catcher is her only possible listener, the only possible recipient of the voice of the poem's speaker, and he fully desires the annihilation of the speaker. The only way for her to be heard, then, is for her to accept her own annihilation. The trick of the poem is that the speaker enters the rabbit hole of death separated from her voice. The speaker becomes a secondary object, a "me also," while her text gains supremacy over the rabbit catcher, superseding his bluntness and dullness. The telos of the poem is the death of the rabbit, metonymized as the rabbit hole and the trap. The disembodied voice speaks from the trap. The trap is the space between the empty landscape, a landscape signifying the lack of an audience to hear the speaker, and the hands of the rabbit catcher, his hands that cause her death. In "The Rabbit Catcher," then, the escape hatch is also the trap. The speaker's only place from which to speak, the site of her death, is the margin of the text. Plath's "The Rabbit Catcher" employs the marginal topos of death as a place from which to speak by casting that death as a moment of maternal triumph. The birth pangs describing the rabbit's trajectory towards the trap ironically figure the rabbit's entering the trap as a moment of rebirth. The constriction of the landscape kills the speaker's body, in this poem, but from that trap the speaker's voice rises.

If we read Plath's later poem, "Medusa," in comparison to "The Rabbit Catcher," the contrast elucidates the ways that tropes of maternity, as a sort of loophole in mortality, or a place of ceding and recasting the self, inform Plath's imagery (*CP Plath* 224-225). Maternity and birth pangs function in these poems as bridges into legible text. A speaker, by crossing through the space of maternity, bifurcates herself into a dead body and a living voice, a text. "Medusa" seems to be a poem addressed to the narrator's mother. As in "The

Rabbit Catcher," the speaker's gender is not directly revealed in the poem. However, "Medusa"'s speaker's apparent familiarity with the physical experience of childbirth, suggested by the poem's use of placental and umbilical imagery, reveals that the text stages a daughter's address to her mother, from the daughter's new found vantage point of having become a mother herself. The poem significantly stages the struggle of the daughter to discover a powerful but not monstrous feminine voice.

Gender attributes shift unstably in the early stanzas of "Medusa." The imagery describing the speaker includes tropes of paternity and masculinity. For example, the speaker has a powerful "water rod" (line 19). By contrast, the figure of her mother contains attributes of the female body: the speaker's mother is described as a "placenta," a "blubbery Mary," and, of course, a Medusa (lines 25, 33). The Medusa-mother ties the speaker to her through an "old, barnacled umbilicus," a gruesome image of an umbilical cord never cut (line 14). The Medusa-mother's body, however, is also described as grotesquely masculine and phallic, emitting a "cobra light" and "hissing" like an "eely tentacle" (lines 27, 39, 40) The gender denominations shift throughout "Medusa," the mother and the daughter each capable of imitating the power of the father, but each also tied to an abject powerlessness, connected by their female bodies. The poem suggests that it is not femaleness itself, nor the experience of maternity itself, that robs the mother and daughter of power. Rather, "Medusa" suggests that the Medusa-mother's unwillingness to let her daughter become an independent body denigrates the maternal role, denigrating the daughter's own maternity. Similarly, the Medusa's subservience to masculine modes of power reduce the daughter. The Medusa paralyzes because she has no other power; she mirrors her daughter into a powerlessness like her own.

The Medusa is a mother who gives birth to aphasia and paralysis. The ancient Greek myth of the gorgon called the Medusa describes two scenes of the Medusa's death. In one version, the Medusa is killed by Perseus in order to win his nubile bride from her

jealous father. Perseus does not see the gorgon. He mirrors her face in his shield, cutting off her head without directly looking at her. In another version of the myth, Athena kills the gorgon, and that is why the image of Medusa's face appears on Athena's shield, her aegis (See Rose, *Greek Mythology* 29-30, 271-273). Since the speaker of Plath's "Medusa" is a young woman, the speaker inhabits the place of Athena in the myth that describes Athena's killing of Medusa. If we read Plath's poem from the perspective of Athena, the young woman, then the speaker's aegis, her shield, becomes central to the metaphoric structure of the poem. Athena's aegis here becomes emblematic because it displays the face of the silencing gorgon who, vanquished, becomes a protector. In order to speak the speaker first kills the gorgon, a figure whose maternity is posthumous, giving birth as she does to Pegasus through her death. Pegasus rises from the gorgon's blood.

Athena the virgin and exalted daughter confronts Medusa the mother of Pegasus. The myth to which Plath's poem alludes, then, describes an exalted, virgin daughter confronting a terrifying, monstrous mother. Hélène Cixous describes this devalued status of motherhood in *The Newly Born Woman* when she develops Michelet's observance that "the woman who is extolled is not the fertile mother adorned with her children, it is the Virgin and Beatrice who dies young and childless" (32). Cixous reads the denigrated position of motherhood as endemic to the symbolically abjected space of the female body. Plath's "Medusa," a fairly brief lyric, takes on the complicated task of altering the image of the powerful virgin daughter into an image of an equally powerful daughter who is herself a mother. A subversion of the dynamic of the virgin daughter confronting the demon mother is staged in Plath's "Medusa." Plath's re-writing of the Greek myth of Athena's triumph over the Medusa argues for a more exalted maternity. Jacqueline Rose comments that the bitter and discomfiting final line of the poem, "There is nothing between us," is at once an effort to banish the Medusa-mother and also an admission that the mother and the daughter are too similar to allow the mother's banishment (*The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*

183). I argue that the very linkages between the speaker and the Medusa forge the power of the poem, complicating the otherwise clichéd confrontation of virginal feminine nobility with monstrous feminine maternity. In Plath's poem, the daughter confronting her mother is herself a mother.

While the speaker of "Medusa" refuses to reenact the Medusa's possessive maternity, insisting that she will "take no bite of your [Medusa's] body," the speaker cannot escape the arrival of the Medusa (line 34). The "unnerving head" of the mother moves closer and closer to the speaker throughout the trajectory of the poem until, at the poem's close, the speaker and the Medusa occupy the same space, nothing, no boundary or ocean, between them (line 4). They meet in the place of the trap. The inexorability of the mother's approach stages a contrast to the Greek myth in which Athena seeks out the gorgon to kill her (*Greek Mythology* 30). In Plath's poem, the mother-Medusa is the hunter who "steams over the sea" and encircles the daughter in a suffocating embrace (line 24). The gaze of this Medusa "paralyzes" by strangling the daughter with a gaze likened to an "x-ray" (lines 26, 31). The paralysis freezes the daughter in a state of suspended animation, a state in which the daughter cannot breathe. The speaker tropes the poem posthumous when she states that the paralysis the Medusa's gaze causes is a state of being "dead" (line 30). "Medusa," it is critical to note, is a poem spoken by a woman who has already looked at the gorgon, who has already been paralyzed. This woman speaks from the place of aftermath, from the place of having already taken the extreme unction of the Medusa's communion wafer. The gesture of the poem, then, enacts a ventriloquy through which the speaker's voice can create a space of "nothing," a space near but not of the speaker's body (line 41). From the topos of this "nothing," this empty, liminal space, the dead speaker writes the poem describing the manner of her own death.

"Medusa"'s speaker presents a paradoxical scene of the confrontation of the abject older mother, presented as the Medusa, by a young mother. How can the daughter who

has herself become a mother speak as something other than the Medusa, the poem implicitly asks; how does she avoid looking into the paralyzing mirror of the mother-Medusa's face? Plath's poem solves this paradox through its subtle use of the trope of the posthumous voice, staging an erasure of the spectral body of the daughter within the space of the poem, so that the daughter's own material maternity vanishes precisely at the point that the Medusa's awful body fills the poem. The daughter's body's vanishing, within this poem, finds a parallel in the theatrics of Plath's own suicide, inasmuch as her youthful death has tended to erase from the public imagination her status as a mother, tending instead to fix her in a Eurydice-like role, a young bride taken to a foreign country and killed there.³

The speaker's status of being dead, like her status of being still connected to her mother through the "old barnacled umbilicus," implicitly removes the daughter's body from the role of motherhood, even as the speaker's ability to viscerally describe the movement of a placenta indicates the speaker's familiarity with the physical aspects of childbirth. Having just become a mother herself, the speaker, by encrypting her body into the symbolic space of death, immediately retracts her body from the gaze of the maternal Medusa. Ironically this crossing-over into death is achieved by accepting the Medusa's fatal gaze. The monstrous maternity of the Medusa is revealed as a feminine mode which the poem's speaker both engages and deflects, just as she accepts the maternal role for herself only by assuming a posthumous stance.

Julia Kristeva, in "Stabat Mater," considers some parameters of the representation of maternity in western culture.⁴ Reading maternity through the looking-glass of traditional images of the Virgin, Kristeva references the Orthodox theologian, John Chrysostom,

³See Christina Britzolakis, *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* 172.

⁴See Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* 160-186.

Metropolitan of Antioch in the fourth century (163). Kristeva describes the simultaneous presence of body and absence of language ascribed to the maternal act, calling maternity the "un-nameable that one imagines as femininity, as non-language, or body" (162). Chrysostom, who authored the status of the Virgin Mother into a "bond," or interval, between the Christ and God the Father, comparing the position of the Virgin Mother to that of the Holy Ghost, emphasizes Mary's immaculate maternity (163). Indeed, the liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom claims that the Virgin bears the divine Logos: she literally gives birth to the holy word, she is the *Theotokos*, or God-bearer. Far from being mute, the Virgin's maternity speaks, but it speaks through her body. Within Chrysostom's conception of the role of the Virgin, the distinction between language and the body becomes blurred. His Virgin mother remains what Kristeva calls the "virgin daughter, a guardian of paternal power" (163). While the figure of the *Theotokos* alters the function of maternity in the symbolic order, the possibility of woman's speaking from the topos of her own hearth, as it were, rather than from the place of the father's house, nevertheless eludes the metaphor of the Virgin mother. The Virgin represents an erasure of the place of her body. The text to which she gives birth is the father's word.

Perhaps responding to the frustrating emblem of the Virgin, a woman who gives birth to the divine Logos but can never claim its authorship, Plath's poem denigrates the Virgin Mary. "Medusa" iconoclastically compares the Virgin to the Medusa. The speaker of Plath's poem asks her mother, "Who do you think you are? A communion wafer? Blubbery Mary?" (line 33). "Blubbery Mary," a grotesque description of the Virgin, implies a Virgin who does not bear the divine Logos at all, who has no truck with language, who is instead all flesh, and indeed rather whale-like, a body made out of blubber. The threat of the Medusa, then, is that she might turn the feminine speaker into a body incapacious of thought, a whale-like "blubbery Mary." Significantly, the poem's speaker attempts to retain the ability to speak by preserving her interaction with her mother

on the level of speech alone. The mother-Medusa is first metonymically represented as a disembodied voice: "Tremulous breath at the end of my line" (line 17). More telling, the umbilical chord, "old barnacled umbilicus, Atlantic cable" is the telephone line that connects the mother and daughter across the great gap of the Atlantic ocean (line 14). In Aurelia Schober Plath's notes to *Letters Home*, she chooses the word "tremulous" to describe Plath's voice over the transatlantic cable, when Plath telephones her mother just as she (Plath) is going into labor with her daughter, Frieda. Aurelia Plath describes her laboring daughter's voice with the same word which Plath chooses to describe the monstrously maternal Medusa – "tremulous" – thus forging an interesting verbal intersection between the mother's voice, the daughter's voice, and the nascent, arriving voice of the infant daughter (*Letters Home* 373). Here, the only viable connection between mother and daughter is language.

The great danger of this relationship held together through words across an ocean, however, is that the daughter's powerful words, her lines, will draw the mother to her (line 17). The "curved water" of the mother's body upleaps towards the daughter's water rod, and the tremulous voice in the mother's mouth, once caught on the end of the daughter's line, reaches the daughter and disturbingly enacts the gestures of a nursing child, "touching and sucking" (lines 18, 20). In effect, the mother-Medusa attempts to become the daughter's infant, forcing the daughter into the position of inhabiting the all-giving maternal body, the body that feeds the placenta, the body that feeds the nursling. This paralysis is like the psychic death of the mother who has given herself away entirely to her children. The speaker escapes this paralysis by using the trope of the posthumous voice to separate from her "dead" body, a body frozen by the trauma of the Medusa's gaze, her capacity to speak of that trauma.

Plath's "Medusa," centered around the spectral image of the Medusa's face, then, enacts an apparent self-effacement of its speaker. This double gesture of self-effacement

within a text that confesses the self mimics the classical rhetorical gesture of *prosopopoeia*. Plath's poem utilizes the image of a face and mouth which are not the speaker's own: the image of the Medusa's awful head dominates the poem. However, the Medusa's head and face do not speak in the poem. The poem does not so much use *prosopopoeia* as rather alter that trope by silencing the Medusa, the terrible face. Although the Medusa paralyzes the body of the poem's speaker, the face of the Medusa itself is rendered mute by the poem's speaker. The face that rises spectrally across the text of Plath's "Medusa" is the mask of the Medusa conjured by the phrases, "God-ball," "unnerving head," and it is a mask encircled, of course, by hissing snakes (line 4). The mother-Medusa's face provides the poem with a screen which effaces the speaker's face. Her own face rhetorically encrypted, the daughter is freed to speak. She speaks through her death mask, a mask granted her by the Medusa's fatal maternity.

The daughter's linguistic power, within the space of the poem, overwhelms the Medusa's paralyzing phalluses. The Medusa lacks the powers of language. That the Medusa's ears are described as "cupping the sea's incoherences," and the Medusa's tongues "hiss," demonstrates the Medusa's lack of linguistic power (lines 3, 39). The "unnerving head" of the Medusa remains locked into a muteness that parallels the speaker's bodily paralysis. The poem insists upon a separation between the body of the speaker and her voice. The body of the paralyzed, dead speaker has already been erased, or occluded, within the scope of the poem. Quite unlike the virgin Athena, the speaker of "Medusa" is not able to kill the gorgon. Instead, the speaker of "Medusa" uses her own spectral body as an object of sacrifice within the text, granting the Medusa the power to kill her progeny, but keeping from the Medusa the power to render mute this daughter who receives her paralyzing gaze. The Medusa's head is tricked by the speaker into providing a shield, or an aegis, for the speaker so that the speaker may confront the snakes, the phallic language, by which the Medusa's face is enframed.

The terror of the Medusa, suggests Plath's "Medusa," is not her femininity, not her maternity, but rather her unholy allegiance to the silencing phallus. The crossing over from the speaker's body, erased symbolically by paralysis, to the presentation of the speaker's text, is enacted specifically through the theatre of the speaker's own maternity. The poem presents and confronts, then, two tropes of maternity: a maternity which silences and a maternity which produces text, or Logos. The poem implicitly concedes the speaker's maternal body in exchange for her chance to speak. She enters text by erasing her fecund body.

Kristeva considers the bodily aspects of maternity as a focal point of the metaphors which present women as creatures more of the body than are men, a metaphors to which, to some degree, Kristeva also adheres. In "Stabat Mater" she argues that the maternal body often is portrayed as the mute body, the body wholly body. Kristeva states that:

The unspoken doubtless weighs first on the maternal body: as no signifier can uplift it without leaving a remainder, for the signifier is always meaning communication or structure, whereas a woman as mother would be, instead, a strange fold that changes culture into nature, the speaking into biology. Although it concerns every woman's body, the heterogeneity that cannot be subsumed in the signifier nevertheless explodes violently with pregnancy. (182)

In arguing that pregnancy is the "threshold of culture and nature," Kristeva seeks to elucidate the trope of pregnancy, that of the child inscribed within the mother's body. In other words, the pregnant woman's body becomes a site of the unspeakable. Here, the symbolic order breaks down, even as it presents the materiality of the paternal metaphor. The maternal body, a site wherein the signifier and the signified collapse into one gesture,

becomes necessarily the realm of aphasia. Indeed it is the selflessness, or as she argues, the masochism, of the pregnant woman upon which Kristeva's essay focuses.

The paternal metaphor that makes speaking from the place of the female body impossible finds its linchpin in the maternal body. The heavily pregnant woman cannot successfully cross-dress and appear male. Kristeva argues that "silence weighs heavily on the corporeal and psychological suffering of childbirth, and especially the self-sacrifice involved in becoming anonymous in order to pass on the social norm" (183). Kristeva locates an apotheosis of the crisis of feminine thinking, or of woman's relationship to language, within the status of maternity. The terror of the encroaching, enveloping mother expressed in Plath's "Medusa" indicates the dangers of a possible aftermath of the initial maternal imperative to cede the self to the child. The need for a language a woman can speak neither as a virgin guarding the father's house, nor as a Medusa whose only power is her body, is dramatized by the speaker's efforts to resist the Medusa's paralyzing gaze, in "Medusa." Kristeva considers the split between the mythic characters of Athena and Medusa, the gorgon killer and the gorgon, writing that:

Among things left out of the (Catholic) virginal myth there is the war between mother and daughter, a war masterfully but too quickly settled by promoting Mary as universal and particular. (183)

In other words, the Holy Virgin marks the place of the mother who remains a virgin and therefore retains the position of being "guardian of paternal power" ("Stabat Mater" 163). The plight of the speaker in Plath's "Medusa," then, dramatizes the daughter's effort to retain her place of power within the father's house, in order to author texts within the father's house, even after the speaker has been engulfed by the Medusa's maternal, paralyzing materiality. The Medusa's gaze, in Plath's poem, has the power to make the gazed-upon woman turn like the Medusa herself, a creature without language, whose only force is her gruesome body. The challenge presented by "Medusa" is the challenge of

creating a text of maternity which does not paralyze or make silent, which resists the abject mother's totalizing gaze.

Beyond the Medusa

In her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous explores the grotesque rendering of the female body as the gorgon along with new possibilities for the gorgon's response. Cixous utilizes the power of the female gorgon as an image to revive women's writing through an hypothesized *écriture féminine*, a language women do not borrow from men, but create themselves, writing by "emplacing" their bodies into inscriptions ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 258).⁵ Plath's poem "Wintering" hovers on the edge of this female writing from the body (*CP Plath* 217). While I do not argue that Plath predicts Cixous, Plath's complicated use of the female body as an image of interior emptiness and dormancy as well as an emblem of fruition and sublime dormition approaches the boundary of Cixous' theory of female writing, a writing which emanates from the woman's knowledge of her body. "Wintering" presents images of women who are not fertile during winter, but who are preparing for spring flowering: "This is the easy time, there is nothing doing" ("Wintering" line 1). The woman in winter becomes like a dormant flower, "Her body a bulb in the cold and too dumb to think," a gladiolus or tulip bulb, waiting out the frost deep in the earth (line 45). A clear alliance between the woman's body and the earth's fertility is announced here: when the earth is dormant, in winter, women are also resting. Indeed, the bee-keeping woman who centers this culmination of Plath's apian poems uses a "midwife's extractor" to take the honey from the bees (line 2). The bees' production of honey Plath compares to a woman's giving birth.

Plath envisions the bee community as a sort of archetype for a community of women: "The bees are all women, / Maids, and the long royal lady. / They have got rid of

⁵See Paula Cohen's translation of Cixous' essay in *New French Feminisms*.

the men" (lines 38–40). However, the smallness of the bees undercuts and ironizes a vision of woman's strength. Where Cixous emphasizes the strength of the female body as a topos capacious of linguistic production, her emblem a Medusa who has the last laugh, Plath's "Wintering" tends to turn away from the laughing female body and towards the creation of a static, perfected, posthumous female body. While the men, the "blunt, clumsy stumblers," are removed from Plath's bee-keeping poems, the woman's body in these poems also becomes less human and more like the body of the earth (line 41). Rather than aligning the mother, the bee-keeper who implicitly centers these bee-keeping poems, with the powerful Medusa who appears both in Plath's poem "Medusa," as well as in Cixous' essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Plath develops the image of a woman whose body's beauty is its capacity to cede its own life, to give up its life to its children or perhaps to its poems. The woman whose body in winter is "a bulb in the cold and too dumb to think" has in one sense become, as Cixous says, *plus corps*, or more body, for certainly a flower bulb is a physical thing ("Laugh of the Medusa" 260). On the other hand, the bulb gives up its body for the flower; the bulb always prepares for its own body's vanishing. It is the nature of the bulb to vanish into that to which it gives birth. Indeed, when the bees do re-emerge in spring, they will taste of "the Christmas roses," an image resonant with the Virgin's sacrifice, that is, the Virgin Mary's willingness to give up her body to the divine Logos, as God asks her to do (line 49).

Paradoxically, Plath's bee-keeping sequence uses the female body as the crucial metaphor in the poems, but the poem's maternal images predict the sacrifice of that maternal body. "Winter is for women, – / The woman, still at her knitting, / At the cradle of Spanish walnut," Plath writes, describing a woman whose work is of the body: she knits and takes care of her baby (lines 42–44). These lines also describe a woman who is metaphorically preparing for the body's disappearance: the woman is knitting a skin which, as clothing, is made to be shed, and she is rocking a cradle of walnut, a nut whose

shell must be shed in order to release its meat, its kernel. These emblematic metaphors may be rooted in the imagery of the female body, but their teleology is to shed that very body. Indeed, the poem's striking imagery that characterizes the bee hive and the mind contrasts the snow's whiteness to an enclosed space of darkness, building to a metaphorical splitting of mind and body. The white snow is the body that will be shed, melting come spring, while the black swarm of bees are the brilliantly, fervently working mind of the woman, her "black / Mind against all that white" (lines 32, 33). It is the woman's mind that will be "flying" when it finally tastes the spring, even though this is precisely the time when her body, the snow, melts away, vanishing (line 50).

The determination of the bees to persist during winter is like the determination of the expectant mother, a "time of hanging on" (line 22). However when Plath's bees revive it is not to give birth to babies, but to themselves. This "last badge of victory," which may also be a figure for death, is the bees' goal (*CP Plath* 217, "The Swarm" line 41). Plath's use of maternal imagery in envisioning the resurgence of the female self brings us back to the difficult issue of the relationship between virginity and the feminine voice. In the texts of Shelley, Brontë, Dickinson, and Bishop, which I have so far considered, motherhood and the bodily interrogation it entails remain outside the space of legible discourse. If, for example, Brontë suggests in *Wuthering Heights* that pregnancy and motherhood can only bring aphasia to the woman writer, then Plath suggests that pregnancy and motherhood may offer an approach to the production of language that pre-empts the paternal metaphor. The woman writer who has given birth has necessarily lost the place of the virgin daughter who, as Kristeva argues in "Stabat Mater" guards the father's language. In Plath's bee-keeping sequence, this loss of the virgin's right to speak from the place of the father's house is partially replaced by the mother's right to speak from the place of her own house.

In "Wintering," a comparison is made between the woman's "black mind," a metaphor for the female mind as a busy, fertile hive, and the hollow "heart of the house" in

which the father is represented by the dissipated "Sir So-and-so" whose empty gin bottles litter the basement (line 10). In other words, in this poem's topography of an entirely female house, a winter house, the name of the father has been erased to all but a vacant name, the cipher title of "Sir So-and-so." This father's phallic bottles are all emptied out. To speak from the place of the father's house would be absurd, to this poem's speaker, for the place of the father's house is the place of emptiness, vacuity. The paternal name of "Sir So-and-so" is a blank name. Instead, in Plath's winter house, the paternal metaphor has become an empty bottle of gin, and the maternal metaphor is a busy bee-hive, creating honey and readying for flight. However, that flight leaves behind the house encrypted as a mausoleum.

The bee poems express enormous anxiety about the viability of a female voice speaking from the place of the maternal heart of the house. For example, the poem "The Swarm," presents an image of men's wars encroaching into the woman's town, and finally into her house (*CP Plath* 215-217). However, these poems at least express the possibility of a woman speaking from her own house, guarding her own maternal hearth. In the end, Plath's women speakers speak only in flight, as they escape the father's house, but at least they present the possibility of an alternative to speaking from the father's house. Cixous writes, "flying is a woman's gesture – flying in language and making it fly [. . .] flight, stealing away" (*Newly Born Woman* 20). By implication, the flight the bees make at the end of the bee-keeping sequence is indeed a flight of escape, an escape from the "mausoleum" as well as an escape into an heterogeneous eroticism which Cixous typifies as female ("Laugh of the Medusa" 258). The flight of the queen, however, has a fatal inscription, for the mausoleum, the wax house she leaves, is the house of her own body, or of the hive itself. Plath uses what Cixous considers a feminine rhetorical gesture of taking flight and expresses with this image of flight an escape from the body, rather than escape into the body. The wax house which the bees build, and which the queen bee

governs, is analogous to the poet's work of rooms, her oeuvre. Plath imagines the woman poet flying away from her own careful work, leaving behind her oeuvre, and entering a place of nowhere, leaving behind the house of the female body as well as the well-kept rooms: the woman poet's stanzas. The bee-keeping poems' insistence on finding the path for the flight "Over the [. . .] mausoleum, the wax house," suggests that the poet has decided that speaking from the place of the father's house is inadequate to the strength of her voice (*CP Plath* 215 "Stings" line 60). It also suggests that she has not found a stable alternative topos.

The asceticism of Plath's vision is not aligned with Cixous's notion of language as a revolutionary site of female plenitude, or, of woman's prodigious eroticism. Instead, Plath's use of the trope of the posthumous voice, a remaking of the traditional masculine rhetoric of prosopopoeia, enacts in figuration an erasing of the space of the narrator. In a sense, this subversive rhetorical gesture is a trope modelled on pregnancy, a trope of ceding the space of the self. Crucial to an understanding of the trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing, then, is to see the way that this trope is figured in the margins: between the living and the dead, between the pregnant woman and the mother, between the virgin daughter and the wife. It is a rhetorical gesture of passage through, of literally moving from the space of the buried dead into the space of the living voice of the text. The trope of the posthumous voice, then, does not necessarily reach a telos, for the nature of the rhetoric of pretending one speaks from the place of death is to refuse any goal but that of the production of text. The trope of the posthumous voice becomes, in women's writing, the creation of a border territory within which the woman writer evades the proscriptions of the paternal metaphor not by creating a feminine text born out of the female body, but rather by delineating the way that the interdiction of that body informs her text. The trope of the posthumous voice in women's writing does not celebrate the female body but instead uses the tools of traditional masculine rhetoric, the tools of prosopopoeia

and figuration, to occlude or bury the female body within the text, so that the text itself becomes a protected site for the threatened female body. The self-protective aspect of this trope reveals it to be a mode which responds to extreme threat, and, in this sense writes against audience.

I have argued that the trope of the posthumous voice is a post-traumatic rhetoric, a writing that delineates the act of leaving a place of force. Plath's poem "Wintering" presents an image of maternity as a mode of taking leave, not a maternity leave, but rather a leave-taking of the self from the self, accomplished through the act of mothering. The woman at her knitting who is "too dumb to think" is neither a figure of censure or embarrassment nor a figure of adulation (line 45). Instead, she is a transitional figure, a bulb which will flower, just as the bees in winter "so slow I hardly know them" are neither denigrated for their dormancy, nor praised (line 23). The liminality of these figures shapes the topos of a maternity which enacts a shedding of the self.

An iconographic figure of the vanishing self, a kernel that emerges after those "old whore petticoats" have been melted away, is the Virgin Mary. The image central to Plath's "Fever 103" is a "Virgin / Attended by roses, / By kisses, by cherubim," an image rather camp (*CP Plath* 231 lines 46, 47). However, the goal of the poem is to figure for its speaker a dormition like that attributed to Mary. "Fever 103" ends with its speaker rising "To Paradise" (line 52). Similarly, "Nick and the Candlestick" imagines that the speaker's infant son is not only like the infant Christ, but also the speaker's son metonymically becomes the infant Christ within her poem, for she writes of him: "You are the baby in the barn" (*CP Plath* 242-242 line 42) By placing her son in the place of the Christ, the poem's speaker places herself in the place of the Mother of God, assuming a self of unblemished physicality. In "Stabat Mater" Kristeva points out that the Virgin Mary is not necessarily a helpful model for real-world mothers (182). However, what Plath achieves, through her association of her poems' speakers with the Holy Virgin, is a model of female utterance

which speaks from the place of the maternal hearth, rather than from the paternal house. Using the site of pregnancy, Plath shifts the Virgin's topos from the paternal logos to the woman's own body, metonymized as her house. Cixous meditates on the metonymic force of the figure of the pregnant woman:

This says a lot about the power she seems invested with at the time, because it has always been suspected that when pregnant the woman not only doubles her market value but also takes on intrinsic value as a woman in her own eyes and undeniably acquires body and sex.

("Laugh of the Medusa" 261-262)

That Plath's inscribed mothers, in "Ariel," in "Fever 103," in "Edge," and in "Death & Co." (*CP Plath* 239, 231, 272, 254), all speak posthumously, all tell the stories of their last days and minutes on earth, does not undo the fact that she is offering a model for female speech that has rejected the father and has melted his wax house. The pregnant body in these poems becomes a site of possible expiation. Although the mothers in these poems pay with their lives for their ability to speak as mothers, allowing their bodies to be burned up, or simply erased, nevertheless, the female body appears powerful within these texts and is only retroactively erased. In other words, the troped posthumous poems of Plath's collection, *Ariel*, give place to the maternal, female body before it is erased through the deaths that close the poems. The power of this fertile female body may be only liminal, a vanishing point, but it is nevertheless centrally figured within many of Plath's poems. By contrast, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the work with which I began this dissertation, describes the violent and enforced erasure of the maternal body at the hands of the phallogocentric father, Victor Frankenstein.

The poem "Edge" (*CP Plath* 272) presents the incorruptible body of a young mother whose maternity is effectively erased within the scope of the poem, symbolically

returning the woman to the state of virginity necessary for a woman's consecration.⁶ By presenting the young mother's body as incorruptible, perfected, the poem proposes that the woman's maternity was a mistake, an accident that befell a woman who should have been preserved as a virgin ("Edge" line 1). The poem portrays the woman's two dead children as bodies whose deaths return the woman to her properly virginal status, making her body incorruptible. Of course, the logic here is, in one sense, skewed. The fact that the woman has killed her two children as well as killed herself would hardly argue for her sainthood in the Vatican. However, within the symbolic order of the poem, it is the world of the flesh which has damaged the young mother. The fleshly world of husband and children has worn her out. The paternal metaphor which she has used has also used her up, her exhaustion metonymically represented by her feet "saying: We have come so far" (line 7). Therefore her revocation and destruction of her children's bodies as well as of her own body is cast as an act of asceticism, of self-emptying. The young woman in "Edge" kills her children as a way of preparing for the perfection of her body's incorruptibility just as female saints have fasted and submitted to bodily tortures in their approach to sainthood. The poem revolves around gestures of renunciation, of taking it all back: "as petals / of a rose close when the garden / stiffens" (lines 13-15). In this high-stakes asceticism, the young woman's death and her children's deaths mark the only gestures sufficiently compensatory to balance her involvement with the paternal metaphor. Her own maternity, then, is a trope which forms the figure she unravels.

The maternal poems in *Ariel* celebrate the creative mode of maternity, the shedding of the self to reveal the "transparent crystal" of the semiotic "womb" of verbal production. However, the poems also renounce and undo the very site of the poet's maternity, allowing her to become a mother in her texts only because the texts are written from the

⁶As Carolyn Walker Bynum argues in her book on Medieval women saints *Fragmentation and Redemption* 204

basis of the maternal narrator's death (*Fragmentation and Redemption* 200). The maternal speaker of these poems speaks posthumously. Her verbal fertility is based on her knowledge of maternity, but the trope of maternity is effaced by the counter-turn of her willingness to erase her body, as it were, before the space of the text.

The title poem of *Ariel* demonstrates this ascesis of the self through the maternal metaphor (*CP Plath* 239). In "Ariel," the speaker becomes "the arrow" by moving through the space of maternity (line 27). "The child's cry / Melts in the wall" before the speaker (lines 24, 25). The trajectory of the poem moves through the space of the child's cry. That is, the arrow of the maternal voice rises through that melted infant cry, and the maternal body vanishes into its own articulated drive to speak. Represented by the metonymy of the arrow that is an "I" and that hits the bull's eye, the woman's body vanishes through the space of maternity (lines 26-27). Upon the disappearance of the woman's body the woman's voice, her cry, becomes an established site of mourning. The troped posthumous, the rhetorically buried female body becomes the encrypted site of the woman poet's lyric production, a maternal gesture that doubles back self-reflexively. Although the female body troped as a maternal space is sacrificed in these poems, the process of mothering has metaleptically inscribed the voice of the poem, whose ideal form is indeed like that of the trajectory of an arrow which hits its mark.

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