

Between the Acts: Anonymity and the Gendered Self

by

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To my mum and sister with love

ABSTRACT

This thesis establishes and explores a new concept in critical theory: the anonymous mode. Developing from ideas around anonymity, gender, and authorship, the anonymous mode is my original contribution to the field of narrative studies, where the conventions of rhetoric represent identity through a discourse of self-conception based on absence. My critical reading of anonymity offers a new way of examining and understanding the central role of self-authorisation in gendered identity. The semiotics of absence in the anonymous mode, both as formal significant and contextual signifier, theorise identity as an objective construct: the private compromise of anonymity complicates the motive and intent of the self-producing subject.

The anonymous mode establishes identity as an object, where the primary condition of the subject is absence; it forgoes the narrative reconciliation of self-authorisation, and restores the subject to a state of dislocation. Literature in the anonymous mode demonstrates a persistent, intersubjective engagement with textual absence. Narrative examples of textual absence include, but are not limited to: doubled selves and dissociative states; shattered and split identities; non-identification (or non-recognition); nameless narrators, author surrogates, and other extreme acts of literary ventriloquism (such as the author-as-prosopopoeia); agender, non-binary, and other gender-fluid narrators or protagonists; collage, pastiche, and plagiarism, as a means of further distorting the self-conceived boundaries between fact and fiction, truth and reality. These encoded methods of communicating an *absence* of identity are thereafter decoded as gendered anonymity: an explicit, cognitive dissonance between self and subject.

There are two components to this thesis: a critical investigation of gendered anonymity, and a creative component that satisfies the conditions of the anonymous mode. The critical evaluation of the anonymous mode begins with a historical survey of anonymous publishing, before providing a comparative reading of Virginia Woolf's posthumously published essay "Anon", and its companion piece, "The Reader". Woolf's final writings explore the theoretical assumptions of anonymity, signaling the preconditions of authorship later established by Roland Barthes's

declaration of the author's theoretical death. This critical position is fundamental to any reading of anonymity in female narrative consciousness, where the hegemony of authorship seemingly liquidates feminist artistic practice, deflecting questions of participation, inclusion, and autonomy. The critical component of this thesis engages with the semiotics of heteronormativity, feminist poststructuralism, narrative studies, and gender and queer theory to examine the representation of autonomy and sexual agency in writing by women. Writers in this thesis's critical framework include: Sylvia Plath, Angela Carter, Kathy Acker, Chris Kraus, Maggie Nelson, and Rachel Cusk.

The creative component of this thesis—*The Albatross*—is explicitly produced within the critical framework of the anonymous mode. By introducing a multiplicity of selves, and thereby destabilising a fixed identity, *The Albatross* draws attention to the anonymous mode's preoccupation with dissociation, depersonalisation, and derealization. An experimental text, intersecting at the level of criticism and autotheory, art and aesthetics, non-fiction, and autobiography, *The Albatross* demonstrates the creative value of the anonymous mode: it is a mode that constantly shifts and expands to incorporate experimental, intertextual practices as flexible methodology, actively displacing the subject within a text.

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“The *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs.”

Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”

“If we wish to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence and in his link to death, which has transformed him into a victim of his own writing.”

Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?”

“Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.”

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

INTRODUCTION

In her final project, recorded in her diary, Virginia Woolf began to conceive a new book tentatively titled *Reading at Random*. As Brenda R. Silver suggests, Woolf’s ultimate desire to evaluate the history of English literature, the indistinct patterns of art and creativity, demonstrates that Woolf’s “emphasis was less on discrete essays than on devising a format” that could wholly represent “the early forms of English literature and society” (357). The project aimed to spotlight “the anonymous men and women who created them”, repositioning these unknown individuals as belonging to a continuum of authorship (357). These notes, which exist in sketches, overlap with the completion of *Between the Acts* (1941), where Woolf’s preoccupation with the disruption between the public and private demands on the artist, and the cultural tyranny of a patriarchal hierarchy, colour her violent reading of the aesthetics of creativity. Though Woolf died six months after her initial jottings, Silver notes that she had “more or less completed an introductory essay, ‘Anon’, and had begun work on a second essay, provisionally entitled ‘The Reader’” (356). Borrowing again from Professor Trevelyan’s *History of England* (1926), famously invoked by Woolf previously in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) to illustrate the conditions surrounding the myth of Judith

Shakespeare, Woolf's initial piece—"Anon"—considers the pre-history of the creative instinct, and seeks a return to nature, to the fundamental conditions of human consciousness. But here, just as the looming threat of a fascist invasion infected the writing of *Between the Acts*, the question of art's capacity to "overcome darkness and disruption, and to promise a new beginning, haunted Woolf in the essays as well" (Silver 358). Chiefly, Woolf's concern with *Reading at Random* is "how to create a form that would convey the underlying forces of historical process as she perceived them", and her sketches offer a reading of her "obsession with creating an internal order", which so "[dominates] the writing of 'Anon'" (359). And though "Anon" deftly maps "the evolution of the anonymous element in writer and audience from its beginning to its death as a conscious aspect of literary form and experience", Woolf noticeably encounters "difficulty in providing a transition" between "Anon", and her second piece, "The Reader", which interrogates the rising attention given to the modern, nebulous relationship between the audience and the writer (359-360). In terms of its function, "Anon" was an elementary experiment in Woolf's consistent engagement with the malleability of form. The essay employs a mode of anonymity that disrupts Woolf's subjective reading of a historical continuity in literature.

1.1 Gendered Anonymity and Authorship

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first documented use of the word "anonymous" in the English tradition appears in 1601 with Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny's *Natural History*. Here, the meaning for anonymous is to be "nameless", to "[have] no name", or to be of "unknown name", for, in its earliest usage, the term was used to describe "a person whose name is not given, or is unknown".¹ Furthermore, in its most obscure application, "anonymous" broadly described the "unacknowledged" and "illegitimate": the misbegotten bastards of the world. And so, where "anonymous" previously signalled only the individual's state of non-being, it was later

¹ "anonymous, adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. Web. 02 July 2017.

directly applied to the text “of unknown or unavowed authorship”, and so “bearing no author’s name”.² Writing of the literary history of the word, Anne Ferry succinctly identifies a curious anomaly in its conception, where the adjective “anonymous” gives way to the adjectival noun “anonymity”. Though initially “anonymous” appears to have carried no general meaning beyond its literal translation from the Greek *anonymia*—“without name”—its transmission to an adjectival noun suggests here that “something new in language has come into existence which did not exist before” (Ferry 193). The understanding of anonymity as a “compact signal of cultural change” facilitates a reading of the “presuppositions and preoccupations” associated with its application as an adjectival noun: it specifically signals to the reader “that we can often sense the structure of feelings associated with [anonymity] to be present even in contexts where the word is not explicitly used” (Ferry 193). Anonymity, both explicit and inferred, presumes a universal carriage of meanings and associations, permitting a reconsideration of the epistemological structure of the term, and thereby its literary application in the rhetoric of authorship and narrative.

The historical context for anonymity points towards an unknown entity, a nameless figure of obscurity. It also establishes the parameters for examining both textual and authorial anonymity, an important shift in the term’s political capital. Anonymous as it first appeared in the sixteenth century became a “conventional shorthand – soon abbreviated *anon.* – to signal writings whose authors were unknown”, or wished to remain unknown (Ferry 194). Previous attempts at communicating unknown authorship appear to be unaware of the term anonymous, for, as Ferry indicates, numerous miscellanies of the 1570s attribute their texts to “*Incertus author, Jncerti Authoris, the autor unsertayn*” (194). Similarly, poems of unknown authorship were circulated with “only a blank space beneath them, or initials, or a personal motto” (194). Examining the stigma of print in Tudor poetry, J. W. Saunders records that where the “typical Court poet shunned print”, conversely the “poet who went to market with his wares was a universal butt” (140-141). Within

² Ibid.

the context of authorship, court poets, he states, “did not write for print”, as the recognition of publication beyond manuscript was “completely irrelevant” and arguably “discreditable”; and with less emphasis on readership, no expectation to reach a wider audience beyond an immediate network of friends and acquaintances, “the poet was often dead before his work was printed” (139-140). However, where this hesitancy towards print was “socially desirable”, the professional poet of the theatre approached the printer out of “economic necessity”; and it was the success of the press that enabled “these first strivings towards an independent literary profession” (141, 141fn). The act of withholding an author’s name from a text underwent a remarkable shift amid the rise of printing houses across Europe: anonymous authorship became an explicit acknowledgment of socio-political transgressions and financial cause.

In such cases where a poet was “obliged to seek print”, Saunders notes that the individual behind a text could deliberately obscure their identity “behind anonymity, a pseudonym or initials” (143). The absence of signature was imperative for both the “political or religious” consequences of attribution, as well as ameliorating the “convenience of business” between poet and publisher; most often the use of such calculated namelessness “[protected] the author from social condemnation” (143). As Ferry points out, the anonymous author “could be read as significantly charged in various, often simultaneous ways”, where the “social disdain still attached to publication by persons of rank (and by women), and political caution called for some anonymous appearance” (195). Here, this practice of anonymous publishing acknowledges the nameless form not as a consequence of circumstance, but rather as a determined methodology: the purposeful actions of the anonym to excuse themselves from the text.

Ferry is right to describe the fluctuation of anonymity in publishing across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as both necessary and fashionable. Arguably, the motives of poets who published works anonymously—a list which includes John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Matthew Arnold—cannot,

comprehensively, ever be truly known. But her aesthetic reading of anonymity's literary history intimately situates the term within poetry, where the emerging novelist borrows from the rich, established practice of removing the poet from their associated works. Writing of E. M. Forster's 1925 pamphlet *Anonymity: An Enquiry*, published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf in The Hogarth Press essay series, Ferry isolates this practice of "extension", locating Forster's "urgently felt argument for a return to the literary past when 'writers and readers ... did not make a cult of expression as we do today'" (199). Indeed, Forster's developing image of the faceless anonym behind a text loosely builds a connection to Woolf's characterisation of words as reckless entities, whose meanings shift accordingly: "Books are composed of words", Forster writes, "and words have two functions to perform: they give information or they create an atmosphere" (8). For Forster, attribution is necessary for purely informative texts—those that speak of fact—while "the question of signature surely loses its importance" when words come to cultivate an "atmosphere" (12). Giving the sentence a voice, Forster claims of words that "I, not my author, exist really", theoretically positioning the Author as God, his creations rebellious and detached, naturally inclined towards the paradox of erasing their Maker:

To forget its Creator is one of the functions of a Creation. To remember him is to forget the days of one's youth. Literature does not want to remember. It is alive—not in a vague complementary sense—but alive tenaciously, and it is always covering up the tracks that connect it with the laboratory. (15)

Forster's grievance against the "curse" of such rampant interest in a writer's personality, at the expense of his words, is that the act itself creates a wholly unsatisfactory, unstable foundation for criticism: "Modern education promotes the unmitigated study of literature and concentrates our attention on the relation between a writer's life – his surface life – and his work" (19). Forster's argument that "all literature tends towards a condition of anonymity" stands apart from his identity

as a novelist, thereby “obliterating that distinction between poems literally without name and those, though signed, that suppress the author’s personality” (Ferry 199). Forster’s actions, Ferry concludes, therefore “cut the noun *anonymity* from its root meaning” (emphasis original, 199). This singular, radical division by Forster quietly locates the impasse between the personal and private life of the novelist, and the public, political demands of their social milieu.

1.2 Point of Origin: The Anonymous Novel

The theoretical relationship between anonymity and authorship speaks of the broader tension between the figure of the poet and the emergence of the novelist. Where the signature of verse in the advent of print was suffused with the complexities of attribution, circulation, and reception, the introduction of a new and popular form—the novel—further complicates the different categories of anonymity: complete and partial. James Raven’s survey of English prose fiction published between 1750 and 1830 indicates that the practice of anonymous authorship was markedly common. A fashionable feature of early novels, the ascription of an amorphous signature becomes a distinct characteristic of these publications. According to Raven’s profile of anonymity during this period—a comprehensive bibliography drawn from “review notices, booksellers’ and printers’ records, advertisements, and term catalogues”, as well as “extensive searches of ESTC [English Short Title Catalogue], OCLC [Online Computer Library Centre], and hands-on stack work in hundreds of libraries worldwide”—the “overwhelming majority of the English novels of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were published without attribution of authorship either on the title page or within the preface or elsewhere in the text” (142-3). However, the proportion of new novels published anonymously noticeably changes over time. In the decades between 1750 and 1790, “over 80 percent” of new titles were released unattributed, and “only during the 1790s did admitted authorship increase” (Raven 143). Again, the majority of authors—62 percent—offered little clarity of their identity, and thus continued the trend of “anonymous novels bearing a very general and unverifiable ascription” (Raven 143).

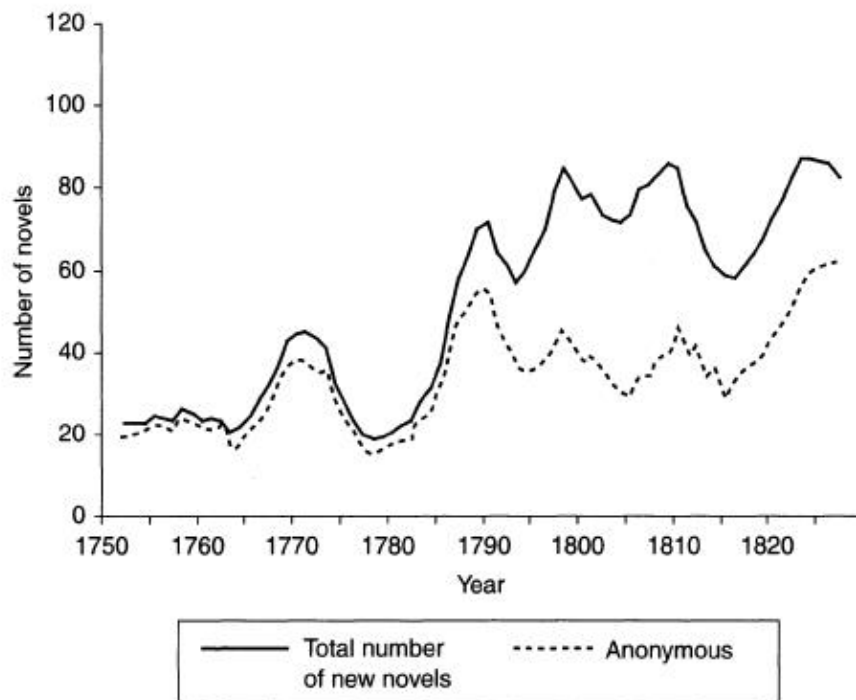


Fig.1 Total of new novel titles published compared to the number published anonymously, 1750 to 1829, five year moving averages (Raven 144).

The question of literary genre is critically relevant to the authorial practice of calculated obscurity: there is difficulty in isolating anonymous publishing to the novel. The modern novel in the English tradition “has no rigid boundary”, and “what ‘novels’ were depends on subtle interpretation, then and now” (Raven 142). Composed with alarming pace, frequently rewritten and passed off as new, the majority of these works were hastily circulated and received with indifference. Though some publications were reprinted and occasionally met with a modicum of success, the majority of the novels published during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in England “were soon left to gather dust, summarily disposed of, or returned, after brief reading, to the fashionable circulating libraries for which so many of them were chiefly written” (Raven 141). For this reason, within the historical context of anonymity, the novel’s rapid development as

an increasingly popular category of fiction seems to lend itself towards eluding classification, inviting a re-examination of the dubious question of unknown authorship.

But one must be cautious here, for the historical absence of a name on the title page, preface, or text proper does not immediately guarantee complete anonymity. Varying levels of anonymous publishing suggest that while some texts were (and remain) entirely unattributed, still, the engaged, voracious reader would be aware of similarly authored works. As Paula R. Feldman notes, after *Waverley* (1814) was anonymously published, Walter Scott informed John Morritt that he would never “own” to the work, deeming the title of novelist as one less than “decorous for ... a Clerk of Session” (283). Scott’s previous poetic works were openly attributed to him, but it would seem the “recent genre” of the novel had not yet acquired the designation of being a “respected literary form” (283). Moreover, Feldman reiterates Seamus Cooney’s suggestion that, through anonymity, Scott doubly “protected his poetic reputation while ... creating speculation and a controversy that called attention to the novel and increased its sales” (283). And while the “well-known critic Francis Jeffrey guessed the truth almost immediately”, the question of authorship surrounding *Waverley* undoubtedly demonstrates the fact that anonymity was “far more widely practiced among novelists than among poets”, revealing that, “in the early years of the nineteenth century, it was not all that easy to remain anonymous” (283). With subsequent novels in the series introduced as being “By the author of *Waverley*”, Scott’s inability to remain unattributed reveals that complete authorial anonymity was an exceptional feat. Indeed, references to previous novels, the open acknowledgment of seemingly anonymous works to be “By the author of...”, expose not only the complex intertextual network between a number of novels published during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but the common practice of publishers “issuing anonymous novels whose authors were open secrets or very easily discoverable” (Raven 145). But even with these overt suggestions of anonymity, or their partial concealment, there exists a further unconventional method of veiled authorship: the intimation of gender.

The “highly dubious” suggestion that a text was authored “By a Lady” or “By a Young Lady” was adopted by publishers and authors alike in the late 1780s “with particular enthusiasm” (Raven 145). The suggestion of juvenilia was further bolstered by prefaces which “frequently confessed to youth and inexperience” (146). Though, ironically, all reviews of this period were issued anonymously, the anonym’s commentary on an anonymous signature frequently identified the problem of gender. Attempting to lessen the lash of the critic, the first-time unknown author would often attribute their novel as “By a Lady”, but the reviewer, ever suspicious, was conscious of the tactic. Just as the *English Review* surmised the female pen as inherently responsible for the immoral, the unprincipled, so too did the *Critical* dismiss “branded claims of female authorship”: “We are not without suspicion ... that in anonymous publications, the words written by a lady are sometimes made use of to preclude the severity of criticism; but as Reviewers are generally churls and grey-beards, this piece of finesse very seldom answers” (Raven 155). Moreover, critics suspected the trickery of male writers, “looking for better sales and review notices” (149). While Raven identifies in his survey that the class and “gender of the writers clearly did make a difference to the likelihood of a name appearing on the title page of a novel”, these works—“literary gad-flies”— “ensured that the question of authorship was not easily pursued and very often confused, deliberately or otherwise” (160). However, this is a model of gendered anonymity that does not extend to poetry of the Romantic era, and appears to be confined to prose fiction.

The “familiar portrait” of the anonymous female Romantic poet is dismissed by Paula Feldman as a “fiction ... a myth”, pointing out that “of the more than two thousand volumes of [women’s] published poetry ... relatively few are authored by poets who remain unidentified: only five appear under the heading ‘Anonymous,’ only sixty-one appear under the heading ‘A Lady,’ and only twenty-three are listed as ‘By a Young Lady’” (280). According to Feldman, the literary device of anonymity was “either a temporary state or a transparent pose” (281). Moreover, pseudonyms—as a constructed absencing of authorial identity—were also designed to be “transparent”, with Feldman citing the example of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, where subsequent publications lend the

impression of faux-anonymity (281). Speculating on the origin of such a myth, Feldman isolates the gender distinction as one which lies in “the differences in the attitudes authors had about publishing novels, and those they had about publishing poetry, during the romantic era”, differences which “have not been sufficiently appreciated” (282). The historical context of unattributed, partially anonymous prose fiction offers a reading of gendered anonymity that precisely locates the tense public reception of works seemingly written by a female hand, against the professional author who emerged during the Romantic era.

As the literary marketplace shifted in the nineteenth century to accommodate the popularity of the novel, so too did the subject of a single authorial identity—the professional writer—and the question of their signature. Within the critical and historical context of anonymous publishing, the application of a pseudonym to completely shield (or, at least, partially veil) one’s identity was a practice that acknowledged the popular convention of novelists to disguise their personage as much as it gestured toward an unconscious gender bias in literary criticism. The speculative aspect of a pseudonym undoubtedly provoked the “marketability of the personal name”, which Catherine A. Judd positions as being symptomatic of the rising “cult of authorship and the commodification of the signature ... throughout the nineteenth century” (255). Moreover, in terms of gendered pseudonymity, Judd dismisses the “critical commonplace” assertion toward Victorian women writers: rather than “[illustrating] the repression and victimisation of the female writer”, the male pseudonym “offered a way for women to overcome the prejudices of the marketplace” (250). And though women writers of this period “were no more inclined to use pseudonyms than were their masculine counterparts”, and would sooner “adopt a pseudonym from their own gender”, the discrepancy between the historical trends of pseudonymous publishing and the “modern perceptions” of the suppressed Victorian woman novelist does not fully appreciate the male pseudonym as gendered praxis (Judd 251). The assumption of a male pseudonym by a female author was, fundamentally, an explicit form of gendered anonymity, in the sense that the perception of true authorship was doubly concealed: unknown and, arguably, male.

1.3 Unprincipled Scoundrels: Pseudonymous Publishing and the Woman Question

Writing on feminine pseudonyms in Restoration print culture, Margaret J. M. Ezell explains that “the relationship between early modern women writers and the practice of anonymous and pseudonymous authorship is seen as a direct response to gender conflicts within a culture, an authorial device which acts as a disguise for the protection of the writer” (63). Ezell’s assessment of the pseudonym notes its usual characterisation as a “protective cloak of anonymity for the gender and the individual identity of the female writer”, as much as it “[denies] her a chance at true, direct self-representation as an artist” (64-66). “In such interpretations”, argues Ezell, “anonymity is imposed, not selected”, and the practice of concealing identity via a pseudonym raises more questions than answers about gendered authorial practices (64). Critically, Ezell’s examination of pseudonymous authorship isolates Woolf’s conceptualising of “Anon” as a “means of creating a ‘common voice’ in which the reader/audience participates”: she suggests, therefore, that the sobriquet “a Lady” functions as a generic, “shared community” of experience, where individual writers are “not distinguished by individual features but a shared femininity and shared concerns” (75). In considering the multiple functions of the gendered pseudonym—“shield, disguise, costume”—Ezell argues that women writers “[maintained] an ironic self-determination” behind a deliberate performance of the cultural (male) expectations of femininity, and the feminised voice (77). For the woman novelist, who followed the likes of “a Lady”, or “a Lady of Quality” even, as much as the male pseudonym facilitated the act of writing in a different mode, the distinct creation of a provisional masculine identity provided the locus from which to dissect the emergence of Forster’s faceless anonym: the agent behind all literature’s tendency towards anonymity.

The paradox of an authorial pseudonym—a designated identity that both does and does not exist—figures the conditions of female anonymity. The absence created by a pseudonym is constructive, where the woman writers herself *out* as she writes herself *in*. In *Nobody’s Story*, Catherine Gallagher explores the relationship between gender and modern authorship in the

literary marketplace by examining, among others, eighteenth-century novelist Fanny Burney. Gallagher notes that Burney recognises the power of being Nobody, “a substantive that overtly proclaims the nonexistence of its referent but nevertheless has all the grammatical functions of any proper noun” (203-204). Similarly, in *Woman as “Nobody” and the Novels of Fanny Burney*, Joanne Cutting-Gray argues that as a credited writer, Burney “not only had to cope with the paradox implied by the categories of author *and* female, but with the then ascendant notion of the authority of the author as one who originates what is said” (emphasis original, 109). Consistently, the subject of woman being reduced to Nobody is a “question that Burney raises in each of her novels”, including, most notably, the protagonist of *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814), who self-identifies as “Incognita” until she is unveiled by a rival (109). Similarly, Burney’s diaries probe “the linguistic paradox” of the reader as Nobody:

To Nobody, then will I write my Journal! since To Nobody can I be wholly unreserved – to Nobody can I reveal every thought, every wish of my Heart, with the most unlimited confidence, the most unremitting sincerity to the end of my Life! For what chance, what accident can end my connections to Nobody? No secret can I conceal from No-body, & to No-body can I be ever unreserved. (Gallagher 203)

The vacuum of Nobody exists along the continuum of non-identity, as a correlative of the pseudonym. As Gallagher says of Burney’s use of the disembodied self, “Nobody is thus at once the prototype and *reductio ad absurdum* of the fictional character; [Burney] names a ‘persona’ who is emphatically detached from all that normally defines a ‘self’ – the particulars of time, place, sex, class, and age that no real body can escape – and who therefore cries out for imaginative embellishment” (206). Burney’s Nobody—“neither author nor authority”—encourages not only a reevaluation of the “multivoiced” individual responsible for producing a text, but simultaneously invites “the concept of the author reinterpreted as plurality” as a corollary (Cutting-Gray 110). Like

the woman novelist using a male pseudonym, the conflicting states of woman and author are contained within Burney's response to the patriarchal conditions of authorship: the notion of nonbeing, Nobody.

While Burney did not write or publish under a pseudonym³, her repeated interrogations of Nobody as both author and, in turn, audience constantly attend to the conditions of anonymity in women's writing. Unwittingly, Burney's ambiguous declaration of Nobody as the desired receptacle of a text fosters the self-referential paradox of being both woman and author. Indeed, the question of Nobody similarly vexed Mary Shelley during the composition of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). When first given the now-famous prompt, she found herself unable to conjure an appropriately ghostly story for the gathering at the Villa Diodati by Lake Geneva. In "Nothing's Namelessness: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*", Susan Eilenberg states that while introducing the 1831 edition of her novel, Shelley's reflections on Nobody are briskly captured: "I felt that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations. *Have you thought of a story?* I was asked each morning, and each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative" (emphasis origin, 167-68). Much like the pseudonym, Nothing or Nobody "both is and is not"; the "embodied paradox" of the "anonym's pseudonym, a radical prosopopoeia" displaces the author, substituting "a creature of referential rather than optical instability flickering ... between reality and unreality" (Eilenberg 168-69). In this way, as much as Burney's Nobody communicates the conditions of authorial plurality, Shelley's Nothing-as-story similarly "[wields] the power to cross identities, redistribute agency, and destabilise certainty" (Eilenberg 168). And it is precisely this anguish of absence that Shelley's Creature reflects upon while staying with the cottagers, where the divisions between virtue and knowledge, creation and destruction, impress on him the lessons which bind "one human being to another":

³ Fanny Burney's first novel, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), was published anonymously, deliberately concealing her literary achievements from a disapproving father. However, Burney was later revealed as "the authoress of *Evelina*" by George Huddesford in a footnote to his poem "Warley: A Satire" (1778).

Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind, when it has once seized on it, like a lichen on the rock ... I admired virtue and good feelings, and loved the gentle manners and amiable qualities of my cottagers; but I was shut out from intercourse with them, except through means which I obtained by stealth, when I was unseen and unknown, and which rather increased than satisfied the desire I had of becoming one among my fellows. (Shelley 120-121)

But with no friends, no relations, and having never “yet seen a being resembling me”, the Creature is forced to concede “all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing” (121). The Creature then as both *nihil* and *nemo* performs in text what Shelley’s rhetoric of Nothing and Burney’s invocation of Nobody each promote for women as authors: a model on which to narrate the extremities of female authorship. Quoting Shelley’s introduction, Eilenberg reminds us that Shelley argued that “Invention ... does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself” (168). Rather, “Invention”, Shelley continues, “consists in the capacity of seizing on the capabilities of subject, and in the power of moulding and fashioning ideas suggested to it” (Shelley 8). Therefore, as much as the rhetoric of Nothing and Nobody seems to be self-fulfilling, simultaneously self-replicating and self-undoing, the paradoxical logic of the anonymous pseudonym permits the crude association of non-existence with the self-effacing practices of female authorship.

The emergence of the linguistic “I”—Burney’s Nobody who speaks for a text’s reflexive self-consciousness, or Shelley’s rhetoric of Nothing that attends to the paradoxical conditions of a self-referential void—validates Forster’s inquiry into the parameters of anonymity in literature. Words, in their capacity to create atmosphere, exist independently of their author and creator. The consequent alienation of the narrative subject from an authorial voice permits anonymity to be

reconfigured as Nobody, a disembodied, destabilising multivoiced author; and the deliberate use of a pseudonym repositions an acceptable identity in the logical vacancy left by “Nobody”. Similarly, if the pseudonym is a variant of anonymous publishing, then the conscious application of a male pseudonym by a female author is an instance of gendered anonymity. And though the historical use of the pseudonym by women novelists in the nineteenth century is not explicitly suggestive of a gender bias in publishing, what it does ratify is the multiplicity of Nobody and Nothing. Into the void of Nobody the pseudonym gives form, inverts the conditions of textual authority, and forces the relocation of textual agency in criticism to an inherently shapeless author, one who materialises from a state of nonexistence.

1.4 Anon is Dead: Textual Absence and the Death of the Author

The ribbon of thought regarding authorial demise is often debated in literary criticism, where Roland Barthes’s blanket claim of the author’s theoretical death determined the preconditions of authorship in structuralist discourse. The destruction of an authorial voice in writing, of “every voice, of every point of origin”, occurs, according to Barthes, in that “neutral, composite, oblique space” where the “subject slips away” (142). In “The Death of the Author”, Barthes argues that a necessary disconnect between subject and language facilitates the ability of the “author [to enter] into his own death” (142). Like Virginia Woolf, Barthes identifies the modern shift towards the emerging individual who produces literature. Our capacity for attaching such esteem to an individual thus reflects the “epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology”, where the “greatest importance” firmly rests with the “‘person’ of the author”, the one who “still reigns in the histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines” (Barthes 143). Culture’s obsessive preoccupation with the image of the author, “his person, his life, his tastes, his passions”, leaves much to be desired in criticism, according to Barthes, for the explanation of a text and the locus of its applied meaning is “always sought in the man or woman who produced it” (143). It is a response that systematically undermines the function and supremacy of language in the rhetoric

of subject, and therefore justifies the author's removal as an essential practice in the reading of a modern text.

The spectrum of Barthesian authorship repeats the questions Woolf in fact posed for herself in *Reading at Random*. Where Woolf earlier struggled to conceive of a narrative form that adequately represented the past, present, and future of English literature, Barthes's temporal reading of the author's relationship to his works seems to intimate a similar description: "The Author is always conceived of as the past of his own book: book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*" (emphasis original, 145). Just as Anon's ambiguity is lost when the present is revealed, settled against recorded history, the individual figure Woolf thus creates, conscious of the past, here becomes a proxy for Barthes's "Author", who, in attaching his name to a book, similarly exists in no other time than the present: "every text", Barthes declares, "is eternally written *here and now*" (emphasis original, 145). But language becomes performative, and writing no longer functions as "an operation of recording, notation, representation"; as Barthes argues, "life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred" (145-47). Just as the possession of anonymity permits a sense of impersonality, and its subsequent loss understood as restrictive for the writer, Barthes similarly suggests that the imposition of an author on a text is to "furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (147). And, as Woolf locates Anon's death and gestures toward the metamorphosis of the audience-to-reader, Barthes similarly concludes with the author's theoretical destruction and the relocation of authority in the critic, the receptacle of a text that, unlike Anon and the Author, exists without history. The characterisation here of Anon and the Author—two spectral identities—as well as their respective relationships to both text and reader, suggests a similar fostering of ideas between Woolf's late modernist writing and the Barthesian rhetoric of modern authorship. Of course, it would be misleading to imply that Woolf predicted the theoretical "death" of the author; but her preliminary work for *Reading at Random* suggests a line of inquiry surrounding anonymity and authorship that seems to have naturally been born out of her

later writings in the 1930s, responding to the challenge of Bloomsbury's perceived apolitical positioning, and interrogated the public demands made of artists and writers alike.

The equivocation of authorship, however, leaves much to be desired, with both Barthes and, later, Michel Foucault explicitly distinguishing a clear difference between the categories of "author" and "writer". For Barthes, the author is the man who "performs a function", whose actions upon his instrument – here, language – reveal him to be one who "labours", who "radically absorbs the world's *why* in a *how to write*" (emphasis original, "Authors and Writers" 187). This is unlike the writer, loosely described by Barthes as simply an "Intellectual" who performs an "activity" (186). Like Anon, too, the author "conceives of literature as an end", where, "in this perpetual inconclusiveness", does he "[rediscover] the world" and thereby "lose his own structure and that of the world in the structure of language" (187). The author's function within language becomes intransitive, with his labours "[inaugurating] an ambiguity", while the writerly pursuit, transitive and problematic, exists solely to "give evidence, to explain, to instruct" (188-99). What separates the author from the writer therefore is the inability of the author, according to Barthes, to act upon language. Into this space Barthes introduces the hybrid author-writer, the individual with an "inevitably paradoxical" function:

He provokes and exercises at the same time; formally his language is free, screened from the institution of literary language, and yet, enclosed in this very freedom, it secretes its own rules in the form of a common style; having emerged from the club of men-of-letters, the author-writer finds another club, that of the intelligentsia. (192)

A bastardised individual, the Barthesian author-writer exists "without 'style'", and so comes to represent the "distant and necessary model" to "communicate 'pure thought' without such communication developing any parasitical message" (192). The author, the writer, and, indeed, the

author-writer, are united at the level of language, but their theoretical and, arguably, hierarchical positioning suggests a privileging of the singular “Author” by structuralist discourse. While later critics such as Robert J. Griffin have securely located Woolf’s reading of anonymity, the death of Anon, as being directly related to the subjective reading of the author-function in criticism, the significance of anonymous publishing continues to grow and questions surrounding the phenomenological conditioning of unknown authorship remain.

The representation of female subjectivity in contemporary writing by women prompts a re-evaluation of the anonymous mode, where a gendered reading of anonymity interrupts poststructural critiques of the author-function. Responding to the death of the author, Linda S. Klinger argues that critical theory “cannot accommodate ... feminist artistic practice”, and poststructuralist understandings of authorship formulated by Barthes and Foucault “[deflect] the trajectory of feminist cultural production” (39). The critique of authorship “may not completely erode a feminist position”, and Klinger therefore argues that the author-function “carries enormous potential for stymieing the full participation of women artists in contemporary culture at the point where critical practice and artistic production meet” (39). Here, my research locates the impasse between these two points in contemporary culture: my analysis of textual absence explicitly engages with feminist artistic practices, where the question of authorial agency transforms into an interrogation of the self: who is speaking thus?

1.5 The Anonymous Mode

In considering the tradition of writing, Roland Barthes’s *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) argues that his literary predecessors—Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Breton—have made no great departure from conventional form: they have not “disturb[ed] any order”, but merely enhanced the existing language through a literary dislocation, clichés of speech that organise themselves as “a chaos of forms and a wilderness of words” (74). It is a “disintegration of language” that can only lead, in Barthes’s words, to “the silence of writing”: a “poignant self-destruction of literature” where “any

silence of form can escape imposture only by complete abandonment of communication” (75). The solution, according to Barthes, is to write at the zero degree: “to create a colourless writing, freed from all bondage to a pre-ordained state of language” (76). This “new neutral writing” repositions itself as a “transparent form of speech”, emerging from an “amodal form” that demonstrates neither a subjunctive nor imperative mood, but “takes its place in the midst of all those ejaculations and judgments, without becoming involved in any of them”: it is a style of writing that “consists precisely in their absence” (76-77). To that end, this thesis establishes the theoretical parameters for anonymity as a specific literary production: the anonymous mode.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2003), Judith Butler surveys the complex moral production of selfhood: subject formation and the ethics of being in community. Where the “I” speaking has no story of its own, Butler asserts that “when the “I” seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist” (8). Citing Theodor Adorno’s philosophy around negative dialectics, with particular references to erroneous “claims of collectivity”, Butler argues that “the “I” turns against itself, unleashing its morally condemning aggression against itself, and thus reflexivity is inaugurated” (8-9). Her account of the non-narrativisable “I” squares responsibility with the emergent self, where “to take responsibility for oneself is to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community” (84). Exploring Emmanuel Levinas’s *Otherwise Than Being* (1974), Butler reconsiders the primacy of the other as a crucial factor of subject formation: Levinas’s concept of the preontological self is read by Butler as “synchronic and infinitely recurring” (90). The self-producing subject is therefore morally engaged with subject relationality: the tense connection between “I” and Other. Butler’s account rightly indicates that the problem of responsibility occurs in the “mode of address”: the control and agency of “I” as “You” (84). Elsewhere, however, Butler notes that Levinas “separates the claim of responsibility from the possibility of agency”, and so “responsibility emerges as a consequence of being subject to the unwilled address of the other”

(85). But where the subject emerges from absence, the trauma is compounded, and the self-producing agent is thereby inaugurated into their own de-subjection. In this way, Elizabeth Howell's *The Dissociative Mind* (2005) specifically addresses the self as multivoiced, polyphonic. Examining the self in context, Howell identifies the critical relationship between unity and multiplicity, noting the extensive history of a double consciousness (duality and discord) within psychoanalytic literature. Howell's text presents an extensive inquiry into the dissociative mind and relationality, and her exploration of hybrid models of self-production (such as disidentification) demonstrates the critical impact of non-identity on the subject: the discrete experience of relationality.

The anonymous mode re-evaluates the trauma of self-production; its specific intervention in existing scholarship substitutes the tautology of traumatism by renegotiating the process of reflexivity in narrative. Critically, the anonymous mode makes clear the ontological merits of anonymity as self-conception. That is to say, there is agency in anonymity; to self-determine from a place of narratorial non-existence is to seize upon the structures that previously positioned that experience as unspoken. By engaging with textual absence, the anonymous mode elevates the speaker's communication of self-authorisation as, paradoxically, the inexpressible expressed. Rather than reproducing a symptomatic reading of a traumatological narrative, the anonymous mode is a productive corollary to the self-producing subject and its environs. Moreover, the anonymous mode explicitly recalibrates absence and non-identity as constitutive products of subjective relationality. The tautology of trauma is, of course, the precise source of its approximate distress; trauma is not a mode of literature, but an *affect*. While trauma theory makes clear the psychological effects of dissociation and disidentification on the self, the anonymous mode reframes the narrativising of non-identity: as a narratological device, textual absence stands apart from traumatism as it provides a productive, active reclamation of self-memorialisation.

The first chapter of this thesis ("The Girl in the Mirror") focuses on Esther Greenwood as the ubiquitous "I" of Sylvia Plath's only novel *The Bell Jar* (1963): Esther experiences a fractured

selfhood, where her composite parts are simultaneously reflected and deflected across the novel's many glittering surfaces: mirrors and mercury, her doubled and dissociative selves. The chapter examines "Sylvia Plath" as a radical prosopopoeia, providing a clear reading of the schizoid narrative strategies that facilitate gendered anonymity, such as non-recognition, or non-identity, within the anonymous mode. Esther's continuity of self is interrupted by her absence, her forced removal from the frenzy of Manhattan to the disquiet domestic of suburbia, and later still to a psychiatric ward at Caplan and then Belsize. A *prima facie* reading of Esther's de-volution as a failure of the female *Bildungsroman* precludes a reading of gendered anonymity, where Esther's presumed reconfiguration as a mother is, arguably, inevitable: it is not that the novel 'fails' per se, but rather that her transmogrification replaces the narrative's perceived failure of denouement. It cannot be claimed that Buddy Willard is the father of Esther's unnamed baby just as it cannot be deduced that the child is Irwin's, or even that Esther conceived within a marriage: there is no explanation for the impersonal truth of Esther's self-regression, except the blanket realisation that *The Bell Jar* is the analeptic narrative of her sequenced motherhood. As an example of the anonymous mode, Esther's unseen recalibration as a mother-figure functions a site of narrative triumph: her absence is performative, her multiple selves endlessly refracting under the metaphorical bell jar. "The Girl in the Mirror" argues that the anonymous mode positions identity as an object within a text, where the primary condition of the subject is absence. In doing so, it rejects the narrative reconciliation of self-production that so often vexes the presumed success (or failure) of a female-voiced text, restoring the subject to a state of dislocation.

The anonymous mode directly facilitates the collapse of the central voice, where the primary application of textual absence deliberately distorts the presence of a singular, narrative identity. For this reason, chapter two ("Anatomy is Destiny") focuses on how Angela Carter's writing reshapes (and refines) a feminised sexuality that resists the psychic degeneration of the individual: her characterisation of the grotesque and abject violently transforms the gendered individual as an unresolved, unanswered figure. Through a comparative reading of Carter's novel *The Passion of New*

Eve (1977) against her feminist polemic *The Sadeian Woman* (1978), chapter two considers how gendered anonymity is used to articulate female sexual agency. By mediating the critical exchange between absence and presence, Carter deliberately separates women's reproductive function from an idealised femininity, an exchange represented as the division between the cultural discourse on female desire and agency. Furthermore, Carter's redemptive application of sexual violence subverts the feminised passivity of gendered anonymity.

Chapter three ("Ode to Anonymity") analyses the codified relationship between silence and erasure in Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations* (1983) and *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), where one's personal historiography illustrates the anonymous mode's archetypal self-production-as-destruction. Acker's writing demonstrates that gendered anonymity is as fecund as it is a febrile state, her experimental texts influencing contemporaries like Chris Kraus. For this reason, chapter three's analysis of authorship and subjectivity in Kraus's *I Love Dick* (1997) demonstrates the critical and creative value of gendered anonymity, as a subversive performance of desire and abjection. The fractured topologies of texts, such as those by Acker and Kraus, reorient the literary terrain of gendered anonymity, positioning contemporary, hybrid textualities as prototypical of the anonymous mode. Chapter three's concern with the relationship between form, content, and figure within the anonymous mode illustrates the mode's expansion following postmodern writers such as Acker and Kraus: Kraus's biography of Acker considers how the anonymous mode shifts to incorporate the self (and self-identification) as an explicit subject.

Chapter four ("(Re)Producing Anonymity") examines new feminist writings on gender and sexuality, texts that are increasingly constructing a hypertextual relationship between autobiography (as a genre) and the self (as subject). The association between reality and truth, fact and fiction is consciously ambiguous; this negotiation of form and content manifests as the self-displacement of the figure within a narrative. Insofar as autobiography is an attempt to reconstruct an authorised, linear development of selfhood, emergent genres such as autofiction and autotheory ("autocriticism") deconstruct the perceived singularity of self-testimony. Where the first-person

experience is recontextualised as *praxis*—to be critic and critique, subject and object—the potentiality of autotheory within the anonymous mode signals the reinvention of gendered self-representation. The intimate act of implicitly re-writing one's lived experiences presents the self as a subject in motion, a specific site of cultural production. Rachel Cusk's *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* (2001) meditates on the metaphorical death of her former selves, shattered by motherhood and the introduction of another's consciousness: the presence of her daughter interrupts Cusk's sense of self-continuity. Cusk's produces as she re-produces; *A Life's Work* is an account of her own self-production-as-destruction, where Cusk (as the maternal figure) experiences a degradation of the self. Patriarchal motherhood in the anonymous mode is represented as a performative state of perpetual non-identity. As an explicitly queer text, Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015) does not resist this reorganisation of form: for the queer parent, the means are justifiable. To be constantly remade, over and over and over again, is a desirable state of creativity, allowing the unknowable subject to eternally return to a state of simultaneous production and re-production. Nelson's intersubjective engagement with textual absence—her own self-thinning, as opposed to self-shattering—demonstrates the expansive potential for gendered anonymity as a state of infinite creativity.

Together, these chapters explore what I establish as the anonymous mode. Developing from ideas around anonymity, gender, and authorship, the anonymous mode is a new concept in critical theory, where the conventions of rhetoric represent identity through a discourse of self-conception based on absence. The anonymous mode establishes identity as an object, where the primary condition of the subject is absence; it forgoes the narrative reconciliation of self-authorisation, and restores the subject to a state of dislocation. Literature in the anonymous mode demonstrates a persistent, intersubjective engagement with textual absence. Narrative examples of textual absence include, but are not limited to: doubled selves and dissociative states; shattered and split identities; non-identification (or non-recognition); nameless narrators, author surrogates, and other extreme acts of literary ventriloquism (such as the author-as-prosopopoeia); agender, non-binary, and other

gender-fluid narrators or protagonists; collage, pastiche, and plagiarism, as a means of further distorting the self-conceived boundaries between fact and fiction, truth and reality. These encoded methods of communicating an *absence* of identity are hereafter decoded as gendered anonymity: an explicit, cognitive dissonance between self and subject. The coda of this thesis (“How to End it All”) makes the case for further reading into the anonymous mode, identifying textual markers that classify the mode in other forms of creative media: literature, film, media and television, theatre, and the visual arts.

The final section of this thesis is a creative component: *The Albatross*. Shifting from first-person to second-person, *The Albatross* exposes the creative potential of gendered anonymity, where the multifaceted, multi-modal experience of being is compartmentalised in a collective voice: “I” as “you”. *The Albatross* is explicitly produced within the critical framework of the anonymous mode. It structures a contextualised response to the rhetoric of absence in female self-authorisation, and explores the complexities around self-conception by engaging with the subjective unknown, illustrated by the breakdown of the central voice in the text. As a specific narrative method of thought and speech, the anonymous mode insists on absence as a corollary to self-authorisation. By introducing a multiplicity of selves, and thereby destabilising a fixed identity, *The Albatross* draws attention to the anonymous mode’s preoccupation with dissociation, depersonalisation, and derealization. An experimental text, intersecting at the level of criticism and autotheory, art and aesthetics, non-fiction, and autobiography, *The Albatross* demonstrates the creative value of the anonymous mode: it is a mode that invariably shifts and expands to incorporate experimental, intertextual practices as flexible methodology, actively displacing the subject within a text.

“There it is: the beginning and end in one breath. How would the novelist manage that?”

—Sylvia Plath, “A Comparison”

Chapter One: The Girl in the Mirror

This chapter will establish the parameters of the anonymous mode by examining Sylvia Plath’s narrative model of selfhood in her only novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963). Markers of textual absence in the novel clearly delineate the dimensions of self-authorisation, where the protagonist, Esther Greenwood, the semi-autobiographical surrogate for Plath’s undergraduate years at Smith College, acts as an intermediary between the subjective unknown and the fragmentation of the “I” in the text. Though Plath’s writing is more commonly assessed under the rubric of the confessional mode, the anonymous mode characterises selfhood as a method of dislocation and confrontation. Plath’s stratagem of the schizoid narrative, a dividing practice of narration, precedes Esther’s mental disintegration, where the self-referential “I” experiences a complete degeneration, interrupting the narrative continuum of selfhood and subsequently imposing a state of anonymity. Furthermore, Esther’s disambiguation of self, illustrated in the novel by a series of comical but deliberate misrepresentations, suggests that the patterns of anonymity in *The Bell Jar* are organised around a central conceit: the doubled, or duplicate, self.

Plath’s separative model of selfhood demonstrates both the artificiality of self-authorisation in *The Bell Jar*, and the tension between the internal and external conceptualising of self, as tested by Esther. Anonymity, as a specific narrative mode of thought and speech, insists on textual absence as a corollary to self-authorisation, where the self-conscious agent of a text fundamentally yields to a state of non-recognition. The perceived inevitability of Esther’s disrupted sense of self magnifies the potential of textual absence as a narrative device in the anonymous mode. Esther’s position as both observer and observed doubly reflects the paradox between her projected and reflected selves, as much as it facilitates an analysis of the duplicate. Esther’s doubles—Ee Gee, Elly Higginbottom, Doreen, Betsy, and Joan Gilling—organise themselves beneath the metaphor

of the bell jar, where Esther experiences her own dumb and subdued disembodiment, a total disassociation from her real-self. Esther engages with the subjective unknown, confronting her own doubles and reassembling her real-self at the novel's end as a mother, this action is not disclosed. Indeed, the temporal marker of her reconfiguration as the maternal figure frustrates a sense of narrative continuity. The perceived inevitability of the female body—rendered within the novel as the dummies and mannequins at the magazine, and the patients and cadavers in medical school—ultimately distorts Esther's ability to recognise her own form. The female body is fundamentally anonymous, where patriarchal cultural inscriptions mark the female self for ritualistic sacrifice. That *The Bell Jar* could be read as a failure of the female *Bildungsroman* for Esther's contradictory regression of self magnifies the text's grotesque re-presentation of a pre-supposed feminine narrative of growth.

Within the anonymous mode, however, this supposed failure of selfhood becomes a transmogrification of the separative patterns of self-conception that correspond to the spectral image of Sylvia Plath. Plath's creative discourse conducts itself as an explicitly feminist instrument of agency, but the archetypes of selfhood largely practice a grand self-deceit. When Plath committed suicide in February, 1963, *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960) was her only published collection. Furthermore, though *The Bell Jar* was released in the United Kingdom several weeks before her death, it was done so under a pseudonym: Victoria Lucas. After dying intestate, all of Plath's remaining work—finished and unfinished, personal and creative—passed into the hands of her then-estranged husband, the poet Ted Hughes. And, in the decades since her death, her journals, letters, poems, novel, and drafted fragments have been grafted (by others, including Hughes) onto the spectre of the silent woman behind the page. Additionally, biographies—authorised, unauthorised—consistently reassemble the portrait of Sylvia Plath, but the radical indeterminacy of her narrative presence is a structural problem that inhibits any coherent manifestation of her real-self. Plath is the inarticulate void within her own work, an anonymous

entity, much like the feverish Rachel Vinrace of Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915)⁴ or the frustrated painter Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* (1927).⁵ For this reason, "Sylvia Plath" has become a wider signifier for the necessary disambiguation of authorship, where her poetic voice is a silent oxymoron, both filtered and challenged by the authority of the Plath Estate, as well as critical readings of her posthumously published work.

2.1 I Am I Am I Am: Spectres of Sylvia Plath⁶

In her foreword to *Ariel: The Restored Edition* (2004), Frieda Hughes (hereafter, Frieda) explains that her mother, Sylvia Plath, after her suicide in February, 1963, was found to have left a black spring binder, "a manuscript of forty poems" (xi). The collection, first titled *The Rival*, but altered by Plath before her death to *The Rabbit Catcher*, *A Birthday Present*, and *Daddy*, contains nineteen poems written during 1962, while living in Chalcot Square in London, and an additional thirteen, which Frieda notes were finished during the last two months of Plath's life. "Death & Co.", Frieda explains, composed on November 14, 1962, is the last poem to be included on Plath's working list of contents: it is probable, she deduces, that this poem corresponds to the last time Plath edited the arrangement (*Ariel* ix). This manuscript, drafted and redrafted by Plath in a damp flat on Fitzroy Road, formerly inhabited by W.B. Yeats, was initially published by Ted Hughes as *Ariel* in 1965, with now-glaring omissions. "Lesbos", for example, was removed from the UK publication, and heavily censored in some US versions; and poems such as "The Rabbit Catcher", "Barren

⁴ In the novel's climatic scene, Rachel succumbs to death beneath the heat of a fever, experiencing a physical dissociation from her own self-conscious: "She had come to the surface of the dark, sticky pool, and a wave seemed to bear her up and down with it; she had ceased to have any will of her own [...]" (Woolf 404).

⁵ Lily returns to the Isle of Skye in "The Lighthouse" and, struggling to achieve her own creative agency, similarly encompasses a disembodied presence within her own work: "Against her will she had come to the surface, and found herself half out of the picture, looking, little dazedly, as if at unreal things [...]" (Woolf 202).

⁶ The (literal) Plathian iamb "I am, I am, I am" first appears in "Suicide off Egg Rock" (1957), where the subject of the poem, "his blood beating the old tattoo", shrinks into his own existentialism and suicides (*Collected Poems* 72). It is twice-repeated in *The Bell Jar* (1961); Esther's game attempt at suicide-by-submersion off a beach in Massachusetts (not too dissimilar to "Egg Rock"); following Joan's suicide, Esther doubly recognises her own mortality and choice to live (152, 233). Each time, Plath's iamb ("I am") is punctuated by the thudding of blood: where Esther's life "boomed like a dull motor", she is left listening to the "old brag" of her heart (152, 233). "I am I am I am" gestures towards the sempiternal duality of the self: to be, or not to be—da-dum, da-dum, da-dum.

Woman”, “Thalidomide”, and “Magi” were removed entirely. Frieda notes that her father had “no lack of choice” for what poems to select for this first edition, clarifying that he removed twelve poems from the U.S publication, and thirteen out of the U.K version, “[replacing] these with ten selected for the U.K edition, and twelve selected for the U.S edition” (x). However, what is perhaps most striking about this decisive, seemingly destructive act of editing is not so much a noted incompleteness, but that Hughes’s initial arrangement predetermines an aesthetically satisfying encounter with the poet behind “Tulips”, “Daddy”, “The Bee Meeting”, and “Lady Lazarus”. While *The Colossus* (1960) was published to some critical and professional success during Plath’s life, it was not until *Ariel* and, later, a revised US edition of *The Bell Jar* in 1971, that Plath’s status as a canonical (cult) feminist writer was crystalised. Indeed, the posthumous popularity of Plath insists on a dual engagement with her public writing and personal circumstance: an inherent doubleness. For a contemporary reader considering the complexities of an authorised, official account of her life and work, there is a notable disconnect between these dual selves: the author of *Ariel* and *The Bell Jar*, and the spectre of “Sylvia Plath”.

The language of continuity surrounding Plath’s sequencing of self-exposure across her literary oeuvre reflects the understanding that biographical truths do not offer any satisfactory conclusions; and insights into Plath’s creative discourse are, at the very least, shrouded in a sense of mitigated access. The paradox of the confessional mode is that there are undeniable limits to the process of self-disclosure, and the parameters in which Plath voiced her complaint are structurally determined: the confessor, and the unseen confessant. Critically speaking, Plath exists in a state of permanent suspension, her confessional voice and, arguably, her literary autonomy abruptly terminated by her suicide. It is a brutal interruption, and the resulting urgency undoubtedly disrupts her final collection of poetry, a direct reflection of “all the agonies and furies” Plath endured between “the breakup of [her] marriage” to Hughes, and the “resolution of a new life” (*Ariel* xii). Plath’s silence is, of course, unavoidable, and its critical impact remarkable. Though she separated

from Hughes in the months before her suicide, they remained married; and her death intestate required that her literary estate pass to him, forcing Hughes into the position of legal executor, fulfilling the demand to speak on her behalf. For Hughes, this was a colossal responsibility. Determined to protect their young children, Frieda and Nicholas, from the cultish hysteria of second-wave feminists championing Plath, Hughes cherry-picked from her remaining material what he considered to be the most accurate representation of his late wife's creative genius. That *Ariel* drove a cleft in modern feminine narrative consciousness is as much the result of Hughes's dogged editing as it is of Plath's ferociously scathing excoriation of the conditions surrounding her eventual mythologizing.

Across Plath's writing, a number of pure, contradictory selves are contrived. Her earliest letters, where she writes at her most playful, project an inventive, untampered voice. As a child, her letters home to her family and friends are silly and precocious, punctuated with illustrations and, occasionally, caricatures of other children. She signs off Sylvia, dotting the "i" with a heart, and appends her correspondence with personalised poems. Writing to Margot Drekmeier, she gives herself the aliases "Moose", "The Stamp", "Toothpick Bean", and "Sylvia Artemis Platowsky"; she freely uses exclamation marks, brackets interjecting sarcasms, and underlines her own irony. In February 1946, she is aghast to learn the Jamestown Stamp Company has been misspelling her name: "They utterly thought I was two different people — Sylvia and Sulvia. I thought Sulvia was really the worst as I printed very plainly. (sniff-sniff!)" (*Journals* 44). In July of that same year, "Siv" appears, writing to her mother; but the following June she shifts into "Sherry" as she arrives one Saturday afternoon for a sailing camp in Martha's Vineyard: a postscript confirms "Sherry is my new name" (*Journals* 89). The next day, however, "Sivvy" finally emerges; and over the subsequent months and years, Sherry and Sivvy, Siv and Sylvia, alternately write to Mummy and Mum, Mother and Maman.

That these voices are at once themselves, distinct and separate, but belonging to a whole, invites a neat but necessary comparison with Virginia Woolf, whose youthful correspondence with Vanessa Stephen, Violet Dickinson, and Madge Vaughan similarly echoes an artful experiment with voice, and contain within their lines an exuberance later reimagined by Plath. In *Hellenism and Loss in the Work of Virginia Woolf*, Theodore Koulouris proffers that Woolf's letters "interweave fact with fantasy", and cites Susan Sellers's suggestion that Woolf's concerted use of private names engages with the "play and possibilities of writing" (39). Letters, he argues, are themselves a narrative, "a particular form of proto-fiction", and the individual behind them, Virginia Stephen, was "silent": the "personae who spoke and invited affection and attention on her behalf were the imaginary identities behind and within which she hid her 'self'" (39). Moreover, in much the same way as Sylvia begets Siv begets Sherry begets Sivvy, Hermione Lee's biography *Virginia Woolf* identifies a similar "literary parthenogenesis", where nicknames would be nicknamed, turning Woolf as "the Goat" into Capra, or Il Giotto, and Emma Vaughan's "Toad" to dearest Reptile, Todkins, Toadlebinks, or Todelcraz (111). To read Plath's aberration of her own identity against Woolf, a forebear she identified as her own novelistic parallel, provides a concentrated locus to begin to disambiguate the spectres of Sylvia Plath. Any attempt to consolidate a unitary, singular self across her writing—prose, verse, letters, journals—refracts when her voice passes through the medium of her correspondence and fictions.

The polyonymous Plath responsible for her letters is undoubtedly as distinct from the writer of her journals; as the poet behind *The Colossus* and *Ariel* is as separate from the novelist responsible for *The Bell Jar*. For each authored text, there exists a complex filtering of Plath's self-consciousness, where the relationship between the production of material and subsequent publication is circumstantially different. Within *Ariel*, there is an evasive, intangible division of Plath, where the working manuscript and facsimiles of the revised edition seemingly resurrect a pure version of Plath with which to converse: Frieda's foreword pointedly identifies a "unique",

“distinctive *Ariel* voice” in her transitional poems, an “otherworldly, menacing landscape”, full of “urgency, freedom, and force” (x-xi). But still, the image persists of Plath’s voice being strained through muslin, and Hughes collecting, hushing up the gathered sediment. His act of brutal censorship demonstrates the impossibility of accuracy and representation in the mythos of Sylvia Plath, where, curiously, the reader is actively protected: “He wished to give [*Ariel*] a broader perspective in order to make it more acceptable to readers, rather than alienate them”, Frieda explains of Hughes’s editorialising, noting her father’s awareness of Plath’s “extreme ferocity” to “[dismember] those close to her” in her poetry (xi). Unimpeachably, Frieda identifies a modern public possession of Plath, and an obsessive preoccupation with the pillory of her father, raising an uncomfortable observation of the mythologising around Plath. As she explains, “it was as if the clay from her poetic energy was taken up and versions of my mother made out of it, invented to reflect only the inventors, as if they could possess my real, actual mother, now a woman who had ceased to resemble herself in those other minds” (xiv). It is, of course, an awkward point to consider: as much as the Plath reader unwittingly moulds the feminist icon, the cultish figure felled by the hyper-masculine Hughes, they would similarly contest that those responsible for the Plath Estate have undoubtedly defined, and redefined, the discourse surrounding her works. As a polyonymous author, Plath has an indispensable multitude of selves across her personal and creative output. Therefore, all engagements with Plath’s writing reaffirm the presence of duplicate self, a double that solidifies and parodies her life and work:

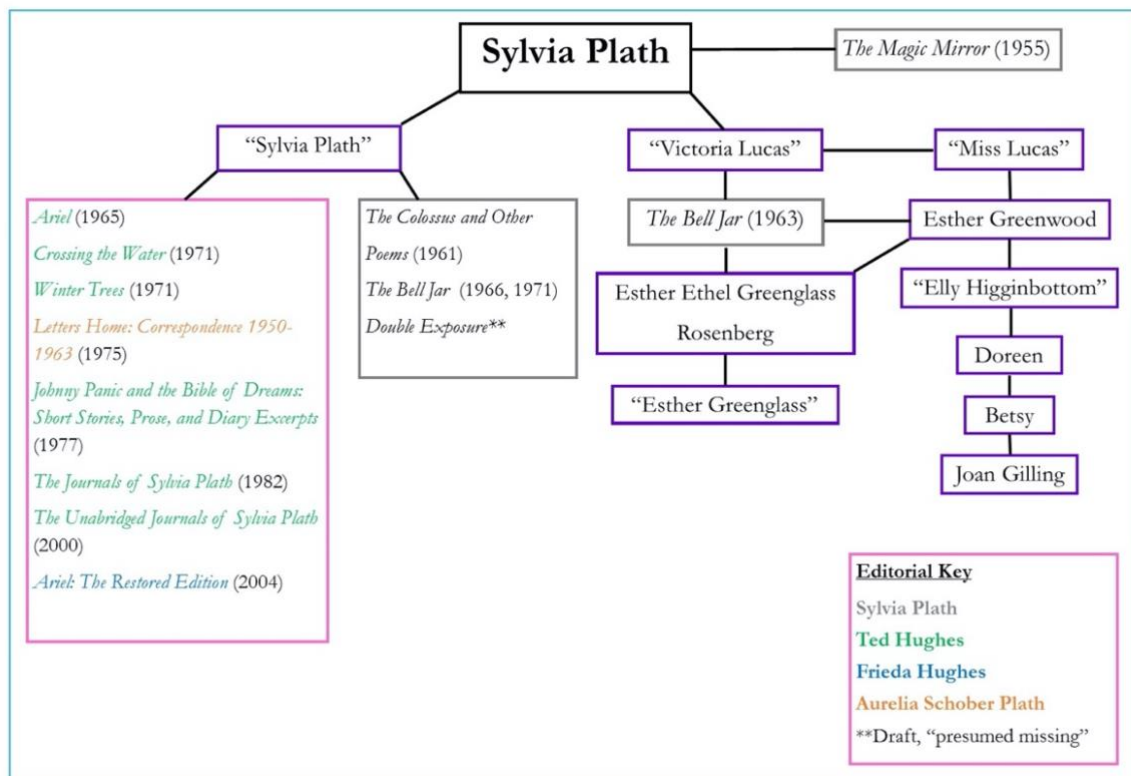


Fig 2: “The Self at War”, a visual of the radical prosopoeia of Sylvia Plath: “I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked [...] I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest” (*The Bell Jar* 73).

It is a queer distinction that Hughes himself fell victim to in his foreword to *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* (1982). Janet Malcolm’s *The Silent Woman* (1993), which examines the impossible posthumous relationship between Hughes—husband, editor, creator, destroyer—and the metaphysical spectre of ‘Sylvia Plath’, precisely isolates the dilemma of cataloguing Plath’s warring “false selves” (3). Reading his first foreword, Malcolm notes that Hughes identified a “remarkable prefigurative moment” in Plath’s final months, and, consequently, he determined that her real self finally emerged within the *Ariel* poems (3). However, Hughes finishes the first version of his foreword with the revelation that he destroyed a journal kept by Plath from “late ’59 to within three days of her death”, judging his actions as worthy of remission: “[...]I destroyed it because I did not want her children to have to read it (in those days I regarded forgetfulness as an essential part of survival)” (4). A second version, however, exists, “longer, denser, and more complex”, and

lacks, according to Malcolm, “the elegant, single-threadedness of the first version” (5). Hughes’s revelation of the destroyed notebooks opens, rather than closes, his second foreword, and Malcolm goes on to challenge the significance of Hughes’s removal of the single, self-reflexive “I”: “...he has himself disappeared”, she concludes, unable to “sustain the fiction—on which all autobiographical writing is poised—that the person writing and the person being written about are a single seamless entity” (5). Hughes’s second foreword is a concentrated effort to explicate his “awareness of the discontinuity between the observing and the observed self”; and though Malcolm recognises that publishing Plath’s journals was “evidently undertaken to elucidate this relationship”, his “destructive act has made a kind of mockery of the enterprise” (5-6). It is a hopeless division of Hughes’s self, neither “true” nor “false”, that Malcolm registers as “[allegorizing] the impossibility of his situation as both editor and destroyer” (6). Just as it is seemingly impossible to divorce a singular Sylvia Plath from her warring, unknown selves, the dissection of Ted Hughes as both observer and observed more or less reproduces the same voyeuristic, psychic conundrum of a double self-exposure simulated in Plath’s own writing.

To consider *The Bell Jar* to be an example of the anonymous mode requires an explicit acknowledgment of the textual and critical impact of Hughes (and the Plath Estate) on the cultural significance of Sylvia Plath to modern feminist discourse, as well as the history of the work’s composition, publication, and continuing reception. As noted, the first edition appeared in the U.K in January 1963, a month before her suicide, under the pseudonym “Victoria Lucas”. In the novel, Plath reframes her visceral experience of clinical depression and psychiatric treatment as belonging to the novel’s protagonist “Esther Greenwood”, borrowing extensively from her years at Smith College, and six-month recuperation at McLean Hospital. Using the pseudonym here as a false self, a further concealment of such unknown warring selves, Plath’s “Victoria Lucas” explicitly engages with textual absence. Plath distances herself from her experiences at McLean Hospital by allocating them to Victoria Lucas, the novel’s original protagonist and author, and

then further separates herself as both author and subject by introducing Esther Greenwood: both Lucas and Greenwood are spectres of Plath. In June 2015, Bonhams auctioned a rare, uncorrected proof copy of *The Bell Jar*, which a student had purchased from a Winchester second-hand bookstore in 1985 during her first year in college. The 1962 proof, attributed to “Victoria Lucas”, explicitly states it is “Not For Sale”, and contains, according to Bonhams, “more than 70 textual variations” when compared to “the final published first edition from Heinemann in 1963” (Flood). One of these variations concerns the naming of the novel’s protagonist, for the uncorrected proof reveals “Miss Lucas” to be an earlier version of “Esther Greenwood”. After trying to kill herself by swallowing handfuls of sleeping pills and wriggling into a crawl space in the cellar, which Plath herself did in August, 1953, Esther is taken by ambulance to “you-know-where” in the city (*The Bell Jar* 169). Here, “a whole troop of young boys and girls in white coats [come] in ... all smiling with bright, artificial smiles” and “group themselves at the foot of [her] bed” (170). When the doctors address her, they ask “And how are you feeling this morning, Miss Greenwood?” (170). However, in the uncorrected proof copy, the question is posed for someone else: “And how are you feeling this morning, Miss Lucas?” (Flood). It is a conscious attempt by Plath to disambiguate the boundaries of autobiographical fiction, where “Victoria Lucas” is fledgling version of “Esther Greenwood”. That Plath, Lucas, and Greenwood project and reflect one another warrants the acknowledgment of a duplicitous, multiplied self as a marker of the contemporary anonymous mode.

It is through anonymity that Plath’s sharp dislocation of her multiple beings is more readily observed; the anonymous mode facilitates a recognition of the complexities around self-conception by engaging with the subjective unknown, where the reclamation of one’s most authentic self is illustrated by the breakdown of the “I” in a text. Of course, Plath’s poetry is most commonly associated with the confessional mode, where the “I” speaking engages in a deeply personal, revelatory conversation with an accepted, yet unseen, audience: the confessional mode

presumes the presence of a confessant, while anonymity does not require an external objective marker to consolidate the “I” of a text. Confessional writing superimposes a figurative personality, whereas textual absence destabilises a central, singular voice. Esther Greenwood, as an anonymous protagonist, consistently engages with textual absence: her own self-erasure. Where the confessional mode expresses self-reflexivity through the fantasy of autobiography, the anonymous mode refashions the narrative dimensions of self-conception through the self-referential double. Esther re-presents herself as Elly Higgenbottom, Ee Gee, Betsy, Doreen, Joan Gilling; Esther is all of these, and nobody. Sylvia Plath’s only novel invites a reconsideration of the pseudonym in the anonymous mode, where Plath’s use of textual absence corresponds to Fanny Burney’s desire to be Nothing or Nobody. As I explained earlier (page xviii), the “embodied paradox” of the “anonym’s pseudonym, a radical prosopopoeia” displaces the author, substituting “a creature of referential rather than optical instability flickering ... between reality and unreality” (Eilenberg 168-69). Plath’s decision to publish under a pseudonym, coupled with Esther Greenwood’s sense of being nobody, briskly capture the self-referential paradox of being both observer and observed. Yet “Sylvia Plath” has itself become a radical prosopopoeia, an obscene displacement of the author, substituting a spectral image of referential instability, occupying the liminal space between reality and unreality.

2.2 The Schizoid Self: Narrative Strategies in *The Bell Jar*

The narrative presence of a duplicate self is a marker of textual absence in the anonymous mode, whereby the resurrection of repressed or concealed traits inverts the process of self-conception through dislocation and confrontation. The dividing practices of narration in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (1963), gesture toward the metaphysical disassociation illustrated by Esther Greenwood. Plath’s separative model of selfhood—the doubled “I”—recapitulates the tension between the interiority and exteriority of female self-consciousness. This section will examine the

unspeakable silence at the centre of the novel through the organisation of anonymity around the conceit of the bell jar, a signifier of the narrative disjunction modelled by Esther's self-deceit: the paradoxical growth of disintegration, inscribed in the perceived inevitability of the female body. Esther strives to realise a future for herself outside heteronormative sexual essentialism, but from the novel's earliest pages the reader is acutely aware that Esther has already been refashioned into a mother. In this section, I will argue that the novel's narrative trajectory re-forms the process of self-realisation as one of entropy: the transgressive act of self-actualisation forces Esther into a state of enclosed anonymity, her dislocation marked by her confrontation with her double, the bell jar. Esther's self-realisation is characterised as the degeneration of selfhood, where markers of textual absence, such as dissociation and non-recognition, disrupt the narrative continuity of self-conception.

Plath's narrative strategies are paradigmatic of the anonymous mode. In her writing on the double personality, Plath identified the significance of such a paradoxical presence to the construction of character. Her undergraduate thesis—"The Magic Mirror: A Study of the Double in Two of Dostoyevsky's Novels"—considered the relative merits of duality as they appear within literary doubles, here citing Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1846) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). As Plath saw it, the double manifests as an undesired consequence of concerted attempts toward suppression, where suddenly "man is brought face to face with his own mysterious mirror image, an image which he confronts with mingled curiosity and fear" (1). Inherently ambivalent, both creative and destructive, the double, as Plath determines, "is the form given to any and all personifications of man's ego in both the psychic and physical world" (1). In plotting the appearance of the double, from primitive superstitions to theoretical studies by Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud, Plath identifies a gradual process of shifting centrality in the double's substitute of man, from that of an immortal soul to a symbol of death: as a subject, the double has "sociological, philosophical, and psychological" significance when read as the "creation and

extension of a new personality” (2). Most notably, she quotes Rank in passing, where, at its most extreme, the comparative treatment of the double with its progenitor will expose “the tragic, almost pathological loss of one’s real self with a superimposed one” (3). The “shadow, reflection, portrait, brother, twin, phantom, or hallucination” are identified by Plath as several treatments of the literary double, but they are by no means an exhaustive list (3). However, as the sinister double magnifies the more grotesque features of its original, it paradoxically “reflects ... the growth of disintegration and degradation in its counterpart” (3). Man, in his limited capacity, attempts to flee the persecution of his real self, where the concealed aspects of his personality disperse themselves to the point of total collapse. To confront the double is to succumb to psychic terror, or to death.

Plath’s theoretical reading of the literary double resonates with *The Bell Jar*, for the novel’s protagonist fluctuates between Nothing and Nobody, observer and observed. That Esther Greenwood both identifies with, and differs from, the image placed before her is symptomatic of Plath’s intense yet profitable experiments with the literary double, and emphasises the necessary examination of narrative duplicity with her writing. Writing in his foreword to *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, Ted Hughes probes the “warring selves” at pains to unmask themselves within Plath’s writing (xiii). Though Hughes observes that her “complex ... remaking” was no doubt achieved within the posthumous collection *Ariel* (1965), he concedes that “a real self ... is a rare thing” and “the direct speech of a real self ... rarer still” (xii). He continues: “Our real self ... is usually dumb, shut away beneath the to-and-fro conflicting voices of the false and petty selves” (xii). That the false-self communicates Plath’s practical use of self-deceit demonstrates a preoccupation with the artificiality of selfhood, and indicates the disquieting presence of the unknown, primitive real-self, yet to claim a voice. Here, Hughes defines this “dumbness” as “the universal characteristic of the real self” (xii). Within the novel, the narrative duplicity of Esther—much like Plath’s “lesser selves, her false or provisional selves”, an exhibit of “camouflage cliché facades, defense mechanisms”—corresponds to the distribution of her doubles and eventual disassociation from her real-self (xii).

Plath's "Letter to an Over-grown, Over-protected, Scared, Spoiled Baby" demonstrates the excruciating conflict between the artificial self—the "I" of the letter—and the real-self (*Journals* 82). Here, the letter opens in the second-person singular, with Plath addressing a dislocated first-person version of herself. As the self-reflexive "I", Plath negotiates her rejection from Frank O'Connor's writing course at Harvard Summer School, and, consequently, mockingly unpacks a hypothetical summer at home: "I will not be earning money, and not really spending money. I will have to be cheerful and constructive, and schedule my day much harder than if at Harvard. I will learn about shopping and cooking, and try to make Mother's vacation happy and good" (84). She intends to read Joyce, determined that she "Will Not Lie Fallow or Be Lazy", and playfully charges that she "must not also begin dreaming up idealistic pictures of summer school" (84). But the second-person intervenes and, noting that "the worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt", launches at the moral paralysis of the doubled "I"—"I" as "You":

You are an inconsistent and very frightened hypocrite: you wanted *time* to think, to find out about yourself, your ability to write, and now that you have it ... you are paralyzed, shocked, thrown into a nausea, a stasis. You are plunged so deep in your own private little whirlpool of negativism that you can't do more than force yourself into a rote where the simplest actions become forbidding and enormous. Your mind is incapable of thinking.
(emphasis original, 85)

The extraordinary mental disequilibrium of Plath as both "I" and "you" here establishes the narrative limits of reflexive self-knowledge: that the "mind ... incapable of thinking" is the same mind analysing "you" (85). Duality complicates self-determinacy in the sense that Plath ceases to be herself, instead transforming into a gross exaggeration of the divided mind.

In comparing the self between Woolf and Plath, Solenne Lestienne identifies a dividing practice within Plath's writing, where "the self is attacked by disruption and disjunctive identity" (338). That Esther doubles as the observer beyond the bell jar, while she performs as the specimen beneath, neatly characterises the complexities of a singular, coherent identity. This division of self-perception is similarly demonstrated in Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941), where Isa Oliver oscillates between her public and private selves: Mrs. Giles Oliver, and the poet manqué who scribbles verse in an anonymous cheque book. Beholding her reflection before a three folded-mirror, Isa observes "the three separate versions of her rather heavy, yet handsome, face", and notes with crude detachment the simultaneous reflection of her duplicitous self: "Inside the glass, in her eyes, she saw what she had felt overnight for the ravaged, the silent, the romantic gentleman farmer ... But outside ... was the other love; love for her husband, the stockbroker ... Inner love was in the eyes; outer love on the dressing table" (14). The chaotic imagery of Isa's self-presentation confers the notion that "the mirror that reflected the soul sublime, reflected also the soul bored" (16). Plath positions Esther as both observer and observed, a deliberate borrowing from the Woolfian reinvention of such "providential acts to cohere the self" (Lestienne 340). This mental disequilibrium contaminates the air beneath the bell jar. Esther's final, invisible assimilation as a mother reconstructs the internal and external disjunction of the distorted self, signalling Esther's ambivalence toward, but eventual yielding to, the wider cultural inscriptions of the feminine narrative.

The schizoid features of the novel—the dislocated, fragmentary self-conceptions of Esther—invite a reconsideration of the metaphorical bell jar as a doubled image, both projection and reflection, of the narrator.⁷ Esther presents her self-examination as an achievement of the split-personality, an amalgam of wry detachment and violent disruption. Narrative stability within *The*

⁷ While my application of "schizoid" (as a particular feature of Plath's narrative stratagem) relates to the term's wider cultural misuse to mean multiple selves, there are specific presentations of schizoid personality disorder (or schizotypal disorder), such as psychosis, depersonalisation, and derealisation, that are reflected by the term's use here.

Bell Jar is frustrated by Esther's characteristic melancholy, uncertainty and doubt. Arriving in New York City during the "queer, sultry" summer that they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, Esther's mind is soon preoccupied with recurrent, obsessive fantasies of unbeing (1). Like disorganised schizophrenia, Esther transforms the esoteric Rosenbergs into the conscious cadaver, observed at Buddy Willard's medical school, its head "or what there was left of it – [floating] up behind [her] eggs and bacon at breakfast", weeks after the fact (1). The disembodied head similarly hovers "behind the face of Buddy Willard" and soon Esther feels "as though [she] were carrying that cadaver's head around ... on a string, like some black, noseless balloon stinking of vinegar" (1-2). The unusual connection between the detached head of an unknown corpse, a silent vision with a definitive stench, and the Rosenbergs, a temporal marker of reality, demonstrates the instability of the narrator's sense of self.

Duality and parallelism are the means by which Esther seeks a reconciliation with her disembodied selves. Nora Sellei identifies of Woolf that "the choice between being a wife-and-mother and being a female creator" underpins the "psychic collapse" of the gendered self (347). Esther's engagement with an idealised femininity, as it exists within *The Bell Jar*, functions as a commentary on the restrictive sexual essentialism compounding the divided female self, particularly one affected by the "notion of creativity, considered a male privilege" (Sellei 348). To examine the schizoid features of Esther's self-conception is to directly engage with an entire spectrum of doubled, duplicitous experiences.⁸ Here, citing theorist R. D. Laing, Sellei considers that "the root and cause for the ontological insecurity behind schizophrenia is the basic existential experience of the self's alienation from the body, the experience that one's biological existence is

⁸ Sylvia Plath's "Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices" examines maternal subjectivity from a triadic perspective. Explicitly set in "a maternity ward and round about", the three speakers of the poem—First Voice, Second Voice, and Third Voice—meditate on their fertility and self-destruction, the "parts, bits, and cogs, the shining multiples" of their gendered selves (*Collected Poems* 126). Second Voice explicitly engages with a loss of her former self, a metaphysical "deprivation" of spirit as she enters motherhood: "I am dying as I sit. I lose a dimension" (126). She reflects on the "particles of destruction" that she "suck[s] up" in "this death, this death" (127). Plath's triumvirate of maternal subjectivity illustrates a clear schizoid narrative stratagem, where a multiplicity of voices destabilises the "I" at the centre of the text.

not rooted in one's body" (348).⁹ The incongruous nature of female creativity, that which exists beyond a biological imperative, forms the unspeakable silence at the centre of Esther's metaphysical decline: "The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence" (*The Bell Jar* 17).

Instances of non-recognition within *The Bell Jar* interrupt Esther's sense of continuity. That Esther seems not to identify with her reflection proffers a disturbance between her internal and external conceptions of self. Esther fails to recognise the image before her, an anticipation of the difference between self-projection and self-reflection. Previously unknown aspects of Esther surface in the mirror, confronting her position as the looking-glass beneath the bell jar: "I wanted to see as much as I could. I liked looking on at other people in crucial situations. If there was a road accident or a street fight or a baby in a pickled laboratory jar for me to look at, I'd stop and look so hard I never forgot it" (12). But that Esther is unable to view herself is an undeniable distortion of her role as looking-glass, where her self-as-observer occludes her double: self-as-observed. Writing of the "Dangers of Disassociation" in *Herself Beheld: Literature of the Looking Glass*, Jenijoy La Belle notes that when a reflection disrupts the means of self-definition, "a dichotomy emerges between a former and a potential personality", and the mirror's "crack can become a chasm" (115). And though "non-recognition of self in a mirror can be an act of heroism", the "intense magnification of self-consciousness ... converts objectification into alienation" (120). It is this two-step transition that La Belle identifies as the narrative pathology of an exclusively feminine schizophrenia: "first, the non-recognition of the reflection as the self, and second, the transference of will to the supposed otherness in the glass" (120). The inability to engage in self-

⁹ R.D Laing's critical research on schizophrenia is later cited by both Kathy Acker and Chris Kraus (in chapter three of this thesis) as directly influencing their writing. Kraus directly quotes Laing's theory that "the schizophrenic believes that he is no-one" in *I Love Dick* (221); Acker similarly applies Laing's theorising of schizophrenia to the narrator of her writing, wondering whether the "I" could be de-formed rather than integrated in a text. Laing's particular relevance to Plath, Acker, and Kraus illustrates a clear theoretical relationship between these writers.

observation is indeed a reflection of the absurdity of self-recognition in *The Bell Jar*, where Esther's non-recognition becomes a schizophrenic parallel of her psychic degeneration.

Esther's projected self therefore becomes a standard measure of textual absence, where the image reflected produces a doubling of identity. One night, at a bar with Doreen, having separated herself from the other women, Esther introduces herself to Lenny Shepherd as "Elly Higginbottom", to avoid "anything [she] said or did that night" being connected with "[her] real name" (11). Esther's initial encounter with Doreen introduces her false, projected self: "everything [Doreen] said was like a secret voice speaking straight out of [Esther's] own bones" (7). That Doreen operates as the hyper-ideal reflection of Esther's real-self is especially clear: Doreen "singled [Esther] out right away", with her "bright white hair ... and blue eyes like transparent agate marbles, hard and polished and just about indestructible" (4). There is an inherent perfection with Doreen; she attended a "fashion-conscious" college, where "all the girls had pocket-book covers made out of the same material as their dresses, so each time they changed their clothes they had a matching pocket-book" (5). In the darkness, only Doreen, "so white she looked silver", is visible to Esther, who concludes "she must have reflected the neons over the bar" (9). Doreen's transparent, indestructible presentation of an embodied self, where the projected image is the true-self reflected, is an insightful commentary on Esther's visual preoccupation with Doreen as a deflected double, a surface on which to perceive her own cheap imitation.

But under Doreen's deflection, Esther begins to wither, feeling herself "melting into the shadows like the negative of a person I'd never seen before in my life" (9). Moreover, Esther's perceptions of the other women who, like her, win an all-expenses-paid, four-week job in New York through a fashion magazine, are inherently contradictory: they make her "so jealous [she] can't speak", and yet Doreen's matching pocket-book and dresses impress Esther, "[suggesting] a whole life of marvellous elaborate decadence that attracted [her] like a magnet" (5). Confronted with destructive inconsistency, Esther expertly reassembles her presentation of Doreen beneath

the bell jar, for here it is not Esther watching, but Elly: “Listen, Elly, do me a favour”, Doreen asks Esther, later in Lenny’s apartment, “[thinking] Elly was who [she] really was by now” (15). Esther leaves them, and briefly confronts Elly Higginbottom sliding into the self-service elevator as the doors noiselessly fold: “I noticed a big, smudgy-eyed Chinese woman staring idiotically into my face. It was only me, of course. I was appalled to see how wrinkled and used-up I looked” (17). Again, Esther’s projection of Elly reappears in Doreen’s mirror, where smoke clouds the room: the face “seemed slightly warped and much too silver ... like the reflection in a ball of dentist’s mercury” (18). Drawing a hot bath, where she “never [feels] so much [herself]”, Esther “[grows] pure again” (19). Lowered to her neck in the clear, hot water, Esther speaks to herself: “Doreen is dissolving, Lenny Shepherd is dissolving, Frankie is dissolving, New York is dissolving, they are all dissolving away and none of them matter anymore. I don’t know them, I have never known them and I am very pure” (19). The division of selves is characterised by the bell jar’s organisation of the doubled “I”: beneath the surface of the water, Esther’s disembodied voice is reassembled.

With Elly Higginbottom now unanchored, Esther, not knowing any Elly, does not answer the door when Doreen knocks to be let in. Half-conscious, Esther lies in bed as one voice murmurs “Elly, Elly, Elly”, while the second “went on hissing ‘Miss Greenwood, Miss Greenwood, Miss Greenwood’”(20). Together, the paired voices invoke Esther as “if [she] had a split personality or something” (20). However, Esther does not retrieve Doreen, but instead suppresses Doreen’s reflected “testimony to [her] own dirty nature”: As Esther later claims, “it was Betsy I resembled at heart” (21). Esther’s self-deception is noticeably ineffective, for she wakes still expecting to see Doreen’s unconscious form lying in a pool of her own vomit in the hallway. Slowly opening the door, Esther, who puts on lipstick for the occasion, sees nobody and nothing, the carpet “clean and eternally verdant except for a faint, irregular dark stain before [her] door as if somebody had by accident spilled a glass of water there, but dabbed it dry again” (21). Esther’s separative model of selfhood encourages her to seek her own image in another, to supplant her own experience with

another. Esther's simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from Doreen magnifies the internal and external disjunction of her projected subjectivity, where the non-recognition of her reflected self encourages the schizoid practice of transferring will to another.

It not until her final night in New York that Esther's rudimentary attempts to superimpose herself onto Doreen, and thereby establish a discontinuance of her false-self, ultimately fail. Half-heartedly packing to return home, Esther spreads her "grubby, expensive" clothes across the room, and sits staring at them, "utterly perplexed" (100). Reluctant to be met with such mess on her return that night, and concerned the clothes "seemed to have a separate, mulish identity of their own that refused to be washed and folded and stowed", Esther puts her dilemma to Doreen (100). Weeks earlier, Doreen missed the Ladies' Day Luncheon, leaving Esther with an empty seat beside her, staring at her place-card: "a pocket mirror with 'Doreen' painted along the top of it in lacy script ...framing the silver hole where her face would show" (23). Of course, she does not appear, and instead it is Esther's face illuminated in reflection, a sublime reconstruction of 'Doreen' as her self-projection. Now, Doreen bundles Esther's clothes "into one soft, conglomerate mass" and "[stuffs] them out of sight under the bed" (100). As a signifier of cognitive dissonance, the amalgam of Esther's separative selves as the disembodied composite of clothing gestures toward the narrative strategies of dislocation and confrontation. Alienated from her reflection and depersonalised by her clothing, Esther Greenwood is stuffed out of sight by the singularly established Doreen. Later, as Doreen disappears into the night with Lenny, Esther tells herself, watching from the quiet comfort of the doorway: "I am an observer" (100). Doreen's prolonged engagement with self-conception and non-recognition, as an extension of Esther's personality, becomes a revelation of the schizoid disturbance between self-projection and the self, reflected. Returning to her room, Esther pitches her clothing from the rooftop: "Piece by piece, I fed my wardrobe to the night wind, and flutteringly, like a loved one's ashes, the grey scraps were ferried off, to settle here, there, exactly where I would never know, in the dark heart of New York" (107).

Where Doreen earlier amassed Esther's disjointed conception of herself, unwittingly concealing the monstrous lump of her being, Esther now experiences a metaphysical death of sorts: deliberately casting off her external reflection, she disposes of her failed attempts at self-conception in the manner of a coarse cremation. Now, Esther's return to Connecticut is marked by self-division, where her uncertain place in this "hotch-potch ... world" is expressed through self-doubt: "the face in the mirror looked like a sick Indian" (108). Unmoored from both Elly Higginbottom and Doreen, Esther arrives home dressed in Betsy's clothes, an "unfamiliar skirt and blouse", and transmogrifies into an obscene reinterpretation of "Pollyanna Cowgirl" (108). Still yet plagued by non-recognition, Esther's "wan reflection", a girl of "white wings, brown ponytail and all, ghosted over the landscape" (108). Esther neither returns from Manhattan as herself, nor as a projection of Elly or Doreen or Betsy, but rather as a unknown, destabilised identity, entirely disassociated from her previous attempts of self-conception.

This metamorphosis—a gross reversal of self-realisation—is a degeneration of selfhood that prohibits Esther's psychic growth. Here, the anonymous mode's practical application to female self-consciousness assists in ameliorating the critical disjunction between using the established markers of the novel of growth, traditionally annexed by the male experience, to narrate the emergence of an exclusively feminine self. Analysing the separative self in *The Bell Jar*, Diane S. Bonds identifies two distinct approaches to self-conception in Plath's only novel. During Esther's time in Manhattan, "the pervasive imagery of dismemberment conveys the alienation and self-alienation leading to Esther's breakdown and suicide attempt" (Bonds 49). However, upon Esther's return to her mother's home, Bonds identifies the following pattern:

... a pattern of symbolic rebirth is superimposed on the narrative which in its details suggests that Esther purchases her 'new' self by the discontinuance with

any relations that might threaten ... the boundaries of a self conceived as an autonomous entity, as a separate and 'separative' self. (50)

The relocation from the hullabaloo of New York to the stifling silences of the suburbs, where Esther has never spent a summer, parallels the descent of the bell jar. It exerts a metaphysical dominion over Esther's self-conception. A creation and extension of her own personality, the bell jar encourages a dissembling of Esther's warring selves, forcing her to confront her desire to superimpose an idealised false-self onto a blank, glittering surface.

2.3 "I'm Very Fond of Balalaika Music": Pure Lesbian Panic

When French feminist writer Monique Wittig famously stated in her 1981 essay "One is Not Born a Woman", that a lesbian is "not a woman, either economically, politically or ideologically", the seemingly impossible claim was met with bewilderment, confusion and surprise (20). Wittig's pragmatism toward lesbian identity rejects the "assum[ption] that the basis of society or the beginning of society lies in heterosexuality" (10). Her identification of heterosexuality as a social construct—"a sophisticated and mythic construction, an 'imaginary formation'"—advances the premise that if heterosexuality (both patriarchal *and* matriarchal) is nothing more than an economic, political, and ideological regime, then "woman" is, by definition, only existent in its relation to "man" (11-12). Where the female homosexual exists independently of the gendered definitions and expectations of men toward women (i.e a state where woman exists solely for man's ends), Wittig states that a "lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man" (13).¹⁰ But

¹⁰ The relationship between anonymity and lesbianism in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* is particularly relevant to Wittig's extreme description of a lesbian as neither man, nor woman, but entirely unknown. Miss La Trobe as the pageant-director of *Between the Acts* is Woolf's only explicit characterisation of a lesbian; though Woolf's writing is known for directly addressing sapphic relationships between women, La Trobe is expressly lesbian. She is a source of suspect and intrigue for the villagers: "But where did she spring from? With that name she wasn't presumably pure English. From the Channel Islands perhaps? Only her eyes and something about her always made Mrs. Bingham suspect that she had Russian blood in her. 'Those deep-set eyes; that very square jaw' reminded her—not that she had been to Russia—of the Tartars. Rumour said that she had keep a tea ship at Winchester; that had failed. She had been an actress. That had failed. She had bought a four-roomed cottage and shared it with an actress. They had

it is Wittig's description of lesbianism as a "refusal" that is of particular relevance, where to be lesbian is to seek alternative categories of meaning and structure: "The refusal to become (or to remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not. For a lesbian this goes further than the refusal of the role 'woman.' It is the refusal of the economic, ideological, and political power of a man" (13). The radical marshalling of the lesbian experience by Wittig critiques oppressive politicised and naturalised categories of sex and gender, where the binary leads of Man and Woman fail to consider an individual originated outside the artificial social order of heterosexuality: a lesbian.

While the lesbian bars of the West Village don't feature explicitly in *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath's only novel is undeniably ground-breaking for producing a clear, definite lesbian plot. As Beatrice Hitchman explains in "Lesbian Writing Contexts for *The Bell Jar*", Plath's "text is unusual, for literary fiction of the time, in containing an overtly lesbian character in Esther's friend Joan Gilling" (170).¹¹ Yet the presence of lesbianism in New York during Esther's queer, sultry summer is

quarrelled. Very little was actually known about her. Outwardly she was swarthy, sturdy and thick set; strode about the fields in a smock frock; sometimes with a cigarette in her mouth; often with a whip in her hand; and used rather strong language—perhaps, then, she wasn't altogether a lady?" (*Between the Acts* 46) La Trobe's mysterious origins, her failed relationship with another actress, and the suggestion she wasn't really a woman at all, gesture toward her homosexuality: though based on crude, masculine stereotypes, La Trobe's sexual orientation crystallises her position as an outsider, recasting her potentiality as Woolf's Anon. Anon, characterised by Woolf as "sometimes a man; sometimes a woman", is re-presented in *Between the Acts* as a lesbian ("Anon [and] The Reader" 581). As Nora Eisenberg notes, "Miss La Trobe, the novel's hero, takes up Anon's part, urging her audience to shed their habitual names and words and anonymously join a life together" (256). For further reading on the relationship between Woolf's last novel and the language of anonymity, see Nora Eisenberg's "Virginia Woolf's Last Words on Words: *Between the Acts* and 'Anon'." *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, edited by Jane Marcus, Macmillan Press, 1981, 253-266; and Virginia Woolf, "Anon [and] The Reader", *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, edited by Stuart N. Clark, Vol VI., Hogarth Press, 2011, 580-608.

¹¹ Lesbian pulp fiction experienced a significant increase in publication from the mid-twentieth century, emerging as a distinct genre in the United States. But the intersection between lesbian pulp fiction and lesbian-themed literature is tense. While many pulp novels were exploitative smut (lesbploitation) written by pseudonymous male authors primarily for male readers, there were a number of exceptions (Ann Bannon's *Beebo Brinker* series, in particular). Other examples of lesbian literary fiction in context with Sylvia Plath include Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Price of Salt* (1952), which was published under the pseudonym "Claire Morgan": it is most notable for being the first lesbian novel with a happy ending. In order to satisfy censorship conditions, lesbian pulp fiction had to punish the lesbian. Most endings are infamously miserable. Generally, the lesbian character kills herself, or is correctively raped or brutally murdered; experiences a psychotic breakdown and is hospitalised indefinitely or lobotomised; dies tragically from an accident, poisoning, alcoholism, drug overdose, or previously undisclosed terminal illness; returns to her abusive husband or fiancée; or is condemned to a miserable life of loneliness and isolation, shunned by everyone. However, like Highsmith's novel, Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* (1964) features an ambiguous though positive ending. Both Highsmith and Rule experienced issues around censorship in their positive representation of a sexually intimate relationship between two women. Lesbian literature (and cinema) is notorious for its tendency to simply kill off either 'the lesbian' or her 'formerly heterosexual' lover. For example, the actor Mary-Louise Parker 'dies' in a couple of

anything but an anomaly, and, in fact, the subject of moral panic saw a number of lesbians punished under McCarthyism: homosexuality was then-classified as a psychiatric disorder, a social contagion firmly decreed by Senator Joseph McCarthy as one such Un-American Activity.¹² In this sense, Hitchman's essay provides a valuable socio-political context for considering the "lesbian question" in *The Bell Jar*. Greenwich Village has a long, established tradition in queer history as a place akin to a "pastoral lesbian Mecca", the nucleus of lesbian bar culture in Lower Manhattan; from Mona's, Sea Colony, and Bagatelle, to the upstate gay country club Cherry Grove, New York City offered for women like Joan Nestle, Audre Lorde, and Audrey Hartmann a place to "escape from day-to-day heterosexist living" and "breathe the life [they] could not anywhere else" (Hitchman 169). While Hitchman concedes that the most common reading of *The Bell Jar* is "an outraged response to heterosexism", she states clearly that Joan Gilling's sexual orientation—and, indeed, Esther's codified response—blatantly leaves the novel open to be read as a "classic 'lesbian panic'¹³ plot", citing Patricia Juliana Smith's definition:

lesbian-themed films: as Ruth Jamison in the adaptation of Fanny Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes* (dir. John Avnet, 1991) and later as Robin Nickerson, the Karen Carpenter-loving real-estate agent with AIDS in *Boys on the Side* (dir. Herbert Ross, 1995). Robin's onscreen exit occurs less than five minutes after she admits "having a crush on a woman once...a strawberry blonde", before confessing her love (from her deathbed) for Jane DeLuca, a lesbian lounge-singer played by Whoopi Goldberg: DeLuca sings her out to Roy Orbison's "You Got It". Everyone cries.

¹² The Kinsey reports—*Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953)—were best-selling books on the nature of human sexuality, written by Alfred Kinsey, founder of the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at Illinois University. Kinsey's research challenged the presumed, conventional understandings of human sexuality, although a great number of his findings have since been debunked (such as Kinsey's claim that women were less sexually active than men). His research is perhaps best known for introducing the seven-point Kinsey Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale (where 0 is exclusively heterosexual, 6 exclusively homosexual, and X (or 7) is no sexual contact). Kinsey suggested most people fluctuate along this scale across their lifetime. Kinsey's research into female homosexuality, in particular, is well-known to be flawed. Research into female sexual arousal by William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson (Masters & Johnson) considered homosexuality more explicitly: observing lesbian couples having sex, they noted their discussions around consent and mutual pleasure were equally based. While most social psychologists remember Masters & Johnson for producing the "human sexual response cycle", crucially, Masters & Johnson are well-known in the LGBTQ+ community for their pseudoscientific approach to "converting" those they erroneously classified as "homosexual" to "heterosexual": from 1968 to 1977, the Masters and Johnson Institute ran what they considered to be a successful gay conversion therapy programme.

¹³ "Lesbian panic" is read here as akin to the psychological phenomena known as "internalised homophobia", where the individual experiencing same-sex desire internalises the perceived widespread cultural shame around their sexual orientation. "Lesbian panic" is a term with a complex history; it stems from psychiatrist Edward J. Kempf's coinage of "homosexual panic", a dissociative disorder thought to be caused by anxiety of "uncontrollable perverse sexual cravings". Today, we understand that the "panic" being described by Kempf's patients was, simply, same-sex attraction, which is neither unnatural nor perverse. The psychiatric condition, which came to be known as "Kempf's disease", is understandably no longer recognised by the DSM. Neither "homosexual panic" nor "lesbian panic" refer to the homophobic and transphobic "gay panic defense" (provocation) within the legal system.

Typically, a female character, fearing discovery of her covert or unarticulated lesbian desires ... lashes out directly or indirectly at another woman, resulting in emotional or physical harm to herself or others.¹⁴ This destructive reaction may be as sensational as suicide or homicide, or as subtle and vague as a general neurasthenised malaise. (169)

The Bell Jar undoubtedly follows what Hitchman describes as a “narrative of failed heterosexuality”: in this sense, it is possible to read a “second story about lesbian sexuality” where Esther’s “neurasthenised malaise” gestures toward the broader discourse of homosexuality in Cold War-era America (170).¹⁵

What is critical here, however, is the relationship between this second story of lesbianism and anonymity; that the tense relationship between Esther and Joan demonstrates a fragmentation of selfhood that is exclusive to the process of developing a distinct female sexuality *outside*

¹⁴ While most young queer people resolve internalised homophobia (“lesbian panic”) by “coming out” and living a fulfilling, healthy sexual life, this is not always possible (as is the case for Joan Gilling). For example, women on average take far longer to realise and act on same-sex desire than men, with lesbians often marrying men before “coming out”. This accounts for the rising number of “late-bloomer lesbians” among women over the age of 30, where men coming out later-in-life notably have no equivalent epithet attached (Cochrane). For further reading women’s sexual fluidity, including first-person accounts of women who self-report a shift in sexual orientation, see Lisa Diamond, *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women’s Love and Desire*, Harvard UP, 2008.

¹⁵ American playwright’s Tony Kushner’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1991) is a two-part play that explores AIDS and homosexuality in 1980s America. Set in Manhattan, the play is divided into “Millennium Approaches” and “Perestroika”, where a number of characters are spiritual beings: angels, seraphs, and ghosts of the deceased. Similarly, characters are doubled: actors perform roles across genders, living and dead. The play has a fictionalised version of Roy M. Cohn, Senator McCarthy’s chief counsel; Cohn was a prosecutor for the U.S Department of Justice, at the espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. As *The Bell Jar* states in its opening line, the trial concluded with the Rosenbergs’ execution (by electric chair) in 1953, at New York’s infamous Sing Sing prison. Kushner’s notes for the play explain that while Cohn “was all too real”, his words are Kushner’s invention, “and liberties have been taken.” Cohn died from AIDS in 1986. The scene where Cohn’s doctor Henry informs him that he has AIDS marked a turning point in the mainstream representation of the condition. In Kushner’s play, Roy challenges his doctor to call him a homosexual: “No, say it. I mean it. Say: ‘Roy Cohn, you are a homosexual’, and I will proceed, systematically, to destroy your reputation and your practice and your career in New York State, Henry. Which you know I can do.” When his doctor argues that Roy has “had sex with men, many many times”, Roy retorts: “Your problem, Henry, is that you are hung up on words, on labels, that you believe they mean what they seem to mean. AIDS. Homosexual. Gay. Lesbian. You think these are names that tell you who someone sleeps with, but they don’t tell you that...” As Roy tells his doctor, “*what* I am is entirely defined by *who* I am. Roy Cohn is not a homosexual. Roy Cohn is a heterosexual man, Henry, who fucks around with guys...AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer.” (emphasis original, Act One, Scene Nine, “Millennium Approaches”, *Angels in America*). In the 2003 miniseries, adapted by HBO, the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg (Meryl Streep) haunts the dying Cohn (Al Pacino), who desperately tries to get her to “sing”, as he tried as prosecutor. Cohn suggests at one point that if it wasn’t for him, Ethel would be alive, “writing some personal advice column in *Ms. Magazine*”, not unlike Esther Greenwood.

heterosexuality. To be exclusively homosexual (as is Joan's case) within the context of *The Bell Jar* is to be wholly unimaginable; there is no such thing as a lesbian. For this reason, lesbian identification between Esther and Joan cannot be read as comparable to canonical texts like Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* (1952) or Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart* (1964): if Esther is dissatisfied with heterosexual essentialism, then Joan proffers an unimaginable alternative where the pathologising of female sexuality is entirely subjective. As much as the sexual dichotomy between Esther and Joan considers the public consciousness around female homosexuality, Esther's sense of total dislocation transfigures her earlier instances of non-recognition to complete displacement. Esther's perverse and panicked rejection of the lesbian before her becomes a corollary of the schizoid self, unformed and unknown: anonymous.¹⁶

Esther's codified signalling of the lesbian imagination is undeniable: "I hated the idea of serving men in any way" (72). For Esther, who wants to "dictate [her] own thrilling letters", the approaching end of her internship in Manhattan precedes an absolute stupor of dissatisfaction (72). Instead of being the "envy of thousands of other college girls", Esther "fe[els] dreadfully inadequate": "The trouble was, I had been inadequate all along, I simply hadn't thought about it" (72). With her youthful era of winning scholarships and prizes quickly coming to an end, Esther struggles to imagine a fulfilling life for herself, beyond a reluctant marriage to Buddy Willard.

Esther's heterosexuality is entirely constitutive, completely void of any eroticism, desire, or pleasure: she "collect[s] men with interesting names" and admits to "building up a glamorous picture of a man who would love [her] passionately the minute he met [her]" (48-49). She feels "a certain satisfaction" to think that a potential suitor "would be short and ugly", and that she "would come to look down on him in the end in the same way [she] looked down on Buddy Willard" (49). When Esther is earlier told that there is "a man to see you", she immediately recoils, thinking about

¹⁶ Historically, numerous studies of Cold War-era America doubled patients with schizophrenia as homosexual subjects, considering the two conditions more or less simpatico. Moreover, patients treated for homosexuality (or Kempf's Disease) were routinely exposed to Electro-convulsive Therapy to 'cure' episodes of dissociation and psychosis, as well as hallucinations and same-sex impulses. It is implied that this is why Joan is receiving ECT.

“having some senior introduce [her] to her aunt’s best friend’s son and finding some pale, mushroomy fellow with protruding ears or buck teeth or a bad leg”: “I didn’t think I deserve it”, she quips (54). Still, Esther readily combs her hair and “put[s] on some more lipstick” to meet the man, who turns out to be Buddy Willard: a clueless Esther finds it “odd” that Buddy would hitchhike all the way from Yale to see her (55).¹⁷ But what is more pressing in this scene is Esther’s aggression toward Joan:

Joan Gilling came from our home town and went to our church and was a year ahead of me at college. She was a big wheel—president of her class and a physics major and the college jockey champion. She always made me feel squirmy with her starey pebble-coloured eyes and her gleaming tombstone teeth and her breathy voice. She was big as a horse, too. (55)

Buddy, however, really enjoys Joan’s company, describing her as an outdoorsy-type girl who never needs to be pushed up the hills on their bicycle trips to East Rock. His approval of Joan enrages Esther and she tells him to leave, claiming she is soon going on a date with not one but two (fake) men from Dartmouth: Peter the Hermit and Walter the Penniless.

Esther’s entire relationship with Buddy hinges on the imaginary; that she “[spends] a lot of time having imaginary conversations with Buddy Willard” (53). When he kisses her for the first time after the Yale Junior Prom, she recalls being asked to attend with him, again repeating her confusion as to why any man would “run over ... two miles between our houses” just to see her (54). When he finally kisses her, she admits “pretending to admire” the beautiful view that Buddy has chosen to show her: “While he kissed me”, she says, “I kept my eyes open” (57). Rather than

¹⁷ This is a universally common response from queer women who, in hindsight, recognise that their aversion (or obliviousness) to male attention and affection stems not from dissatisfaction and boredom, but a complete and utter lack of genuine attraction and sexual arousal.

focusing on their first kiss, Esther, who feels “dull and flat and full of shattered visions”, is more concerned about memorising “the spacing of the house lights so [she] would never forget them” (57). The kiss itself is described by Esther as “dry, uninspiring, little”, and she remembers “thinking it was too bad that both [their] mouths were so chapped from walking five miles in that cold wind” (58).¹⁸ Buddy, however, as a hot-blooded heterosexual man, feels much differently: “Wow!...Wow, it makes me feel terrific to kiss you” (58). Esther’s expectation of her relationship with Buddy—and, in turn, the self-conception of her sexuality—occurs in stasis, where her wants and desires are unspecified. Esther’s passive reception of Buddy comes at the absence of her own sexual agency, signalling Esther’s will to inhabit a false identity.

Esther cannot reconcile herself to heterosexuality. Buddy’s suggestion that Esther must go out with lots of boys has the effect of making her feel “much more sexy and experienced” than she really is (65). But where Buddy has slept with other women, Esther is a virgin: she is angry to discover Buddy’s “hypocrisy”, associating the loss of his “virginity” with a lack of pureness and innocence, and considers going out and sleeping with somebody herself “just to even things up... ditch[ing] Buddy Willard once and for all” (67). Intriguingly, when Eric, a local fratboy, disparages the knowledge of a woman—“known in the Biblical sense”—Esther suggests that sex might not be as boring “if you loved a woman” (75). Meeting Constantin, a UN interpreter, Esther decides she will let him seduce her: “I felt moved and tender and perfectly certain about what I was going to do” (76). When Constantin invites Esther up to his apartment to listen to his records, she knows “it could mean only one thing”: “I’m very fond of Balalaika music” she lies to him (76). Instead,

¹⁸ I read *The Bell Jar* a few months after I kissed a boy for the first time. I was 16, but I self-disclosed that I was a lesbian when I was nine-years-old. My experience in 2006 is an echo of Esther, who, like me, kept her eyes open throughout the dry, uninspiring moment. I remember walking up through the Botanic Gardens with him, puffed and thirsty and irritable. It was a Sunday afternoon in early February, the weekend before sixth form started. He worked summers as a lifeguard at a local pool and my friends thought he was hot. I was ambivalent. That Sunday he was wearing a pair of knee-length Ripcurl boardshorts, which I couldn’t bring myself to overlook. Was he hot? I still didn’t know, but he thought I was (“and that’s the same thing, right?”, I repeatedly asked myself...) We sat on a park bench, now-dedicated to a songwriter and musician, a lover of trees and the gardens. After it was over, I said nothing to the poor boy sitting next to me, who was blushing. I already knew. I felt so ashamed of myself. Andrew Owen, if you’re reading this, the mistake was mine.

they fall asleep beside one another, and Esther struggles to imagine the “dreary and wasted life” of marrying a man at all (80). In fact, with all of Esther’s men—Buddy, Eric, Constantin, Irwin—the “same thing happened over and over”: “I would catch sight of some flawless man off in the distance, but as soon as he moved closer I immediately saw he wouldn’t do at all” (79). Esther’s separative model of selfhood, which encourages her to seek her own image in another, to supplant her own experience with another, is rudely interrupted by inability to adjust to heterosexuality. Where Esther’s earlier attempts to recalibrate herself as Betsy, Doreen, and the girls at the magazine, she is thwarted by her remorseless plumbing of “flawless” men.

It is Joan Gilling who is Esther’s true double, where Joan’s narrative experiences both attract and repel Esther. After Esther’s suicide attempt, she wakes up in dark oblivion on the psychiatric ward, unable to see anything or anyone. When she requests a mirror from the nurse, she does not see her reflection but a picture, static:

You couldn’t tell whether the person in the picture was a man or a woman, because their hair was shaved off and sprouted in bristly chicken-feather tufts all over their head. One side of the person’s face was purple, and bulged out in a shapeless way, shading to green along the edges, and then to a sallow yellow. The person’s mouth was pale brown, with a rose-coloured sore at either corner. (168)

This instance of non-recognition is the novel’s clearest example of textual absence, where Esther’s lack of identity literally reflects her metaphysical disintegration. When Esther smiles at her supernatural reflection, the mirror cracks by her own hand; she is sent for Electro-convulsive Therapy at Caplan. Eventually, she is reunited with Joan, who provides an elaborate yet ambiguous reason for her own hospitalisation. It is Joan who finally shows Esther pictures of her self-as-observed, cut from newspapers when Esther went missing during her suicide attempt. With fistfuls of clippings, Joan admits to Esther that she, too, considered suicide; that she had read about Esther

and flown to New York to kill herself, shoving her fists through a room-mate's window: "You keep them", Joan tells Esther of the clippings, "You ought to stick them in a scrapbook" (192). That night, after seeing Joan, Esther has a terrible reaction to her medication, cries out and hallucinates in her sleep until she is soothed like a babe with warm milk: prompted by the presence of her double, Esther immediately enters an unspecified state of being, her sense of self increasingly unsettled by the fact of Joan Gilling.

When Esther is told she is moving to Belsize, she immediately responds "I can't go there": "Joan would be at Belsize. Joan with her physics books and her golf clubs and her badminton rackets and her breathy voice. Joan, marking the gap between me and the nearly well ones ... Joan had walk privileges. Joan had shopping privileges, Joan had town privileges" (197). Where Joan collects clippings of Esther with a quiet tenderness, Esther reports that she "gathered all [her] news of Joan into a little, bitter heap", where she "received it with surface gladness" (197). Later, when Joan again shows Esther an image of herself, in a new issue of a fashion magazine, this time Esther denies it is her in the photograph. Like Golyadkin's Golyadkin Jr. in Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1846), Esther's affiliation with Joan is self-destructive: "Joan was the beaming double of my old best self, specially designed to follow and torment me" (197). And, much like *The Double*, it is not until Joan's forced removal that Esther is able to flourish.

It is Esther's uneasy discovery of Joan in bed with DeeDee that prompts her spiralling discomfort towards compulsory heterosexuality. When Esther enters DeeDee's room looking for sheet music, she finds in the musky dark an uncertain shape: "two pale, pebble eyes regarded me through the gloom. DeeDee lay back on the pillows, bare-legged under her green wool dressing-gown, and watched me with a little mocking smile" (209). DeeDee's post-coital cigarette "glowed between the fingers of her right hand", and Joan, with "her cornhusk voice", made Esther "want to puke" (209).¹⁹ But in spite of her physical revulsion, Joan still "fascinate[s]" Esther: "It was like

¹⁹ In *Romy and Michele's High School Reunion* (dir. David Mirkin, 1997), Romy (played by Mira Sorvino) and Michele (played by Lisa Kudrow) are two 28-year-old women living in Los Angeles. Like Esther Greenwood, they seem to

observing a Martin, or a particularly warty toad. Her thoughts were not my thoughts, nor her feelings my feelings, but we were close enough so that her thoughts and feelings seemed a wry, black image of my own” (210). Esther sees Joan as someone to “carry on her own separate but similar crisis under her nose”, an open admission that as much as Esther cannot “see what women see in other women”, she cannot imagine—the way she imagines her flawless men—women having sex with one another: “But what were they *doing*?” Esther asks of a minor lesbian scandal at her college, for “whenever [she] thought about men and men, and women and women, [she] could never really imagine what they would be actually doing” (emphasis original, 210). For Esther, who “wonder[s] if all women did with other women was lie and hug”, she ultimately rejects Joan affections: “That’s tough, Joan ... because I don’t like you. You make me want to puke, if you want to know” (211).²⁰ When Esther finally sleeps with a man—Irwin—she haemorrhages and rushes

have failed to live up to their great expectations of adult life. When Romy and Michele are invited to their high school reunion back in Tucson, they agonise over being seen as losers: unemployed, unmarried, and childless. When dancing together one night in a club, disappointed by the fact there are “absolutely no guys” around them, Romy complains to Michele: “I swear to God, sometimes I wish I were a lesbian.” Michele brightly asks if Romy wants to try having sex sometime “just to see if [they] are.” Like Esther, Romy recoils: “What? Yeah, right, Michele. Just the thought of having sex with another woman creeps me out.” After a momentary pause, Romy seriously reconsiders the offer: “But if we’re not married by the time we’re 30, ask me again.” At the reunion, Lisa Luder, former Alpha Bitch turned fashion editor at *Vogue*, is explicitly coded as a “lipstick” lesbian. In fact, her character is not too dissimilar from *The Bell Jar*’s own magazine editor, Jay Cee. When Lisa publicly defends Romy and Michele, she is called out by her old friend Christie Christianson (nee Masters), an obnoxious copy of Dodo Conway. “You’re just jealous”, snaps a heavily pregnant Christie, “because unlike a certain ball-busting dried up career woman, I might mention, we’re all happily married!” But Lisa strikes a bolder figure in her bone-white pantsuit: the swaggering dyke calmly eviscerates Christie’s heteronormative sham, before exiting the building.

²⁰ As a feature of a lesbian panic plot, Esther’s angry reaction after finding Joan Gilling in bed with another woman is particularly interesting, especially when compared with Esther’s response at seeing Buddy Willard’s flaccid penis for the first time. After watching a woman give birth, Buddy brings Esther back to his room and attempts to seduce her: he lights a few candles, uncorks a sweet wine, and lies down by Esther’s side (63). Esther, oblivious, reads poetry aloud to him. He asks Esther, who has never seen a man naked except for statues, if she would like to see him undressed. Esther shows no interest or excitement, let alone any eroticism or sexual arousal, toward the promise of Buddy in the flesh. At no point does she equate his want to undress in front of her as an invitation for sex. When Buddy is finally naked, Esther does nothing. She makes no movement towards him. Crucially, she has no thought of removing her *own* clothes to join him [my emphasis]. When met with full nakedness, Esther stares at Buddy’s penis in excruciating silence: “The only thing I could think of was turkey neck and turkey gizzards and I felt very depressed” (64). When Buddy suggests Esther take off her clothes—“Now let me see you”—she blithely responds, “Oh, some other time” (65). Later, Esther tries to absent herself from Buddy’s sight: drinking the rest of the wine, Esther uses a comb to brush her “hair down over [her] face so Buddy couldn’t see it” anymore (65). With Joan, Esther’s rejection is not marked by depressive resignation and non-recognition, but an aggressive revulsion; just the thought of another woman makes Esther’s want to retch. Esther’s anger for Joan sleeping with another woman is equivalent to her rejection of Buddy after learning of his affair with a waitress. For Esther, who spends more time imagining what women and women do together than she does lying and hugging with Buddy, or Constantin, or Irwin, it her therapist’s one-word answer that finally silences her abjection. “I don’t see what women see in other women” Esther lies to Dr Nolan, “What does a woman see in a woman that she can’t see in a man?” (210) After a brief pause, Dr Nolan replies with

to find Joan, who has since left Belsize and is living with Nurse Kennedy. That Esther would go to bed with Irwin is “utterly incomprehensible” to Joan, his “appearance a mere prick to her pleasure at [Esther’s] arrival” (221). Esther initially resolves never to visit Joan at her new place, where “in spite of [her] profound reservations”, Esther still believes that she “would always treasure Joan”: “It was as if we had been forced together by some overwhelming circumstance, like war or plague, and shared a world of our own.” (215) But Esther, by sleeping with Irwin, immediately rejects the world she shares with Joan. The resolution of the “lesbian panic” plot, where Esther and Joan diverge, leaves Joan to fulfil the void of Esther’s unseen refashioning as wife and mother.

Esther’s realisation of her own sexual difference and biological determinacy forces her into a state of non-recognition, where Esther’s past iterations—Ee Gee, Elly Higgenbottom, Miss Greenwood—seemingly fracture among themselves to be reconfigured as Mother to an unknown child. Esther’s absent baby, the result of an unnarrated conception and pregnancy, comes as a result of her failure: with Esther’s child, it is presumed, naturally, that the diaphragm she was fitted with to prevent the inevitable has, inevitably, failed. As Esther’s double, Joan is wholly unimaginable outside of Esther’s self-perception. Esther’s inability to recognise her own form is signified by Joan. If the female body is fundamentally anonymous, then the presence of lesbianism in *The Bell Jar* accounts for Esther’s contradictory regression of self. To be lesbian is to be anonymous, to exist without agency, autonomy or actualisation. Joan’s thoughts are not Esther’s thoughts, nor her feelings Esther’s feelings, but the symbiosis between them suggests a narrative patterning of self-determination that gestures towards both the separate and separative self.

Plath’s multimodal, schizoid strategies in *The Bell Jar* cause the total narrative collapse of her doubled, self-reflexive voice, but her treatment of female sexual agency—her attempt to separate reproductive function from an idealised femininity—is representable as the division between the cultural discourse on female desire and feminist self-authorisation. This chapter’s exploration of

an easy, “Tenderness”: “That shut me up”, says Esther (210). She immediately goes to be fitted for a diaphragm. “I was my own woman”, Esther claims afterwards, “The next step was to find the proper sort of man” (213).

the anonymous mode demonstrates the critical value of textual absence. Esther's engagement with non-identity suggests that the patterns of gendered anonymity are organised around a central conceit: the doubled, or duplicate, self. Furthermore, Esther's constitutive performance of heterosexuality comes at the expense of her sexual agency, where the proximity of lesbian potentiality threatens the heteronormative order. Esther aggressively rejects lesbianism as a means of self-determination under heteronormativity, where heterosexuality is compulsory. In this way, Plath's treatment of female sexual agency illustrates a specific relationship between lesbianism and anonymity within the anonymous mode: a fragmentation of selfhood that is exclusive to the process of developing a distinct female sexuality *outside* heterosexuality.

“La tristesse durera toujours.”

—*Vincent van Gogh*

Chapter Two: Anatomy is Destiny

This chapter will examine how the anonymous mode develops as a means of examining the subject of female sexual agency in literature. Angela Carter’s moral positioning of feminism and pornography in *The Sadeian Woman* (1978) and her rhetorical exegesis of Eve in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) both demonstrate the difficulty of articulating an exclusively female experience, and the resultant fragmentation of self and identity. Carter’s use of textual absence in these two texts (the techniques employed to illustrate the complexities of selfhood, such as doubled-selves, pseudonyms, unnamed narrators, instances of non-recognition, or dissociation) securely roots itself within her appropriation of the creation myth and pornographic forms.

The pornographic form does not facilitate psychic transformation: characters do not mature to full-bodied beings, but function as abstract metaphors for their own sex within a perfunctory narrative, one where sexual congress is essential, consolatory. At its most basic expression, “pornography involves an abstraction of human intercourse in which the self is reduced to its formal elements”, male as “probe” and female as “fringed hole” (*The Sadeian Woman* 4). Similarly, while not so obviously “anonymous”, the creation myth relies on pre-established archetypes of male and female—Adam, Eve—to reinterpret the complexities of a developing, primordial consciousness. Therefore, for her, “since all pornography derives directly from myth, it follows that its heroes and heroines ... are mythic abstractions” (6), and in Carter’s texts, the two are brought together in the anonymous mode. Where Plath’s multimodal, schizoid strategies in *The Bell Jar* (1963) cause the total narrative collapse of her doubled, schizoid “I”, Carter’s model of the anonymous mode, as it functions within the creation myth and pornographic form, distorts the presence of a singular narrative identity. Carter’s tactical use of textual violence—her characterisation of the grotesque and abject—to reshape and refine a feminized sexuality resists

the psychic degeneration of the individual. Therefore, in her use of the anonymous mode, Carter's writing instructs a collective understanding of the feminine experience.

Carter's use of textual violence within the anonymous mode shifts towards a more dynamic organisation of contemporary feminist consciousness in narrative. That the individual is an unresolved, unanswered figure within myth and pornography suggests that they are emblematic of social circumstance and political conditioning: pawns of the highest hegemonic order. Within the microcosm of their specific narrative, these individuals are therefore archetypal representations of an idealised aesthetic. An archetype, as it functions in pornography, according to Carter, "[diminishes] the unique 'I' in favour of a collective, sexed being which cannot, by reason of its very nature, exist as such ... and bears, at best, a fantasy relation to its reality" (6). Carter's argument then, that "any glimpse of a real man or a real woman is absent from these representations of the archetypal male and female", suggests that in reducing the sexual act and its participants to metaphor, the "present business of the pornographer is to suppress the metaphor ... and leave us with a handful of empty words" (17). It is these empty words and absences that this chapter will examine.

If "pornography is a satire on human pretensions", the individual's personality and history, desires and dreams are subsumed into false universals—pricked probes, empty holes (8). According to Carter, this "operation of alienation takes place most visibly" in the pornographic form: photographs, films, narrative fictions of sex and eroticism (18). But while Carter's non-fictional *The Sadeian Woman* seeks to transmit a new kind of cultural knowledge, her novel *The Passion of New Eve* is paradoxically structured on the gendered conditions she is attempting to transgress: that is to say, the characterisation of female sexuality still fluctuates between vice and virtue, self-preservation and self-pity, freedom and confinement. For this reason, the anonymous mode enables Carter effectively to negotiate the at-the-time culturally prohibited expression of female sexuality. She thereby mediates the critical exchange between absence and presence, where

the separation of reproductive function from an idealised femininity is representable as the division between the cultural discourse on female desire and agency, and feminist self-authorisation. To what end does gendered violence in Carter's writing intersect with feminist methodologies in women's sexual agency, and what is the critical value in the feminist representation of sexual aggression? How does Carter use her positioning as a moral pornographer to challenge conventional ideals of femininity, and what does this suggest about the established notion of male aggressors and female abjection? And how does Carter's characterisation of textual absence in her appropriation of the myth and pornographic form subvert these frameworks of textual violence?

3.1 "The Anonymity of the Lovers": Violence and Method in Sexual Agency

Carter's *The Sadeian Woman*, a radical intervention into the critical and cultural assumptions of female sexuality, combines imaginative, hypothetical reasoning with an oxymoronic use of the Marquis de Sade's pornographic writing. It is an antithetical treatise on women's complicity in their sexual subjection. Responding to the sex wars and second-wave feminist cults invoking the image of the goddess, and other archaic symbols of new-wave proto-feminism, Carter argues that women "are simply flattering themselves into submission", and do so "at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life" (5). The text's "Polemical Preface" crystallises Carter's thesis: that woman has betrayed herself, departicularised her own sexual experience; and, though she "may manage, in luxurious self-deceit, to feel herself for a little while one with great, creating nature, fertile, open, pulsing, anonymous and so forth", ultimately "she loses herself completely and loses her partner also" (8). Woman's great loss of herself comes at the expense of self-determined sexual expression, where the heterosexual couple "[succumbs] to this anonymity" and "[engages] at once in a spurious charade of maleness and femaleness" (8). For Carter, the "anonymity of the lovers ... does not transcend but deny reality", and it is one in which a woman's sexual preference is culturally pre-determined (8-9). For this reason, Carter disputes that men and women "fuck stripped of social

artifice”: the paradox of the self-conscious heterosexual relationship is that their infinite “sexual and emotional expectations” must be fulfilled by the very conditions that “[limit their] choice of partners before [they] have even got them into the bedroom” (9). Carter continues:

If Catherine Earnshaw, in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, wants to sleep with Heathcliff, who has the dubious class origins of the foundling, she must not only repress this desire but pay the socially sanctioned price of brain-fever and early death for even contemplating it. Our literature is full, as are our lives, of men and women, but especially women, who deny the reality of sexual attraction and of love because of considerations of class, religion, race, and of gender itself. (10)

That heterosexual women should renounce their (pre-determined) passive femininity by “[fucking] as actively as they are able to” is understandably as defeatist as it is impossible if their “choices” merely reinforce the socio-economic circumstances of her sexual relationships (27). In this way, Carter argues that “women do not normally fuck in the active sense”, for they are instead “fucked in the passive tense and hence automatically fucked-up, done over, undone” (27). A free woman then, according to Carter’s polemical preface, is one who can use her “sexuality as an instrument of aggression”, treading an avenue previously forbidden to her; but she concludes that “a free woman in an unfree society will be a monster”, her sexuality therefore a moral dilemma and not a political reality (27).

Debate on the relationship between pornography and sexual agency in feminist criticism reached a junction at the cusp of second- and third-wave feminism. The aptly-named “sex wars” loosely divided theorists, critics, writers and artists into two camps: anti-pornography and pro-sex

feminists.²¹ Anti-pornography feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine Mackinnon, contend that all pornographic representation of heterosexual intercourse is necessarily predicated on male aggression and female submission. While Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981) and *Intercourse* (1987) are often taken out of context (in particular, the erroneous claim that Dworkin suggested that all heterosexual sex is rape), her characterisation of violence and method in sexual agency is critical when considering the feminist sexual imagination.²² In *Intercourse*, Dworkin examines the effect of maleness, and its inherent aggression; through his possession, woman experiences his maleness and pleasure, rather than her own, therein ceasing to exist:

... maleness is aggressive and violent; and so fucking, in which both the man and the woman experience maleness, essentially demands the disappearance of the woman as an individual; thus, in being fucked, she is possessed: ceases to exist as a discrete individual: is taken over. (80)

In "Reading Feminism's Pornography Conflict", Nicola Pitchford isolates the pornographic as "the site at which feminism and postmodernism diverge" (153). Additionally, the emergence of lesbian feminism similarly complicates the sex wars debate, with lesbian feminists excluded from and dissatisfied with both the gay liberation movement and second-wave feminism between the 1960s and 1980s. Lesbian sexual practices, particularly conversations around sadomasochism, became a focus of the sex wars, where lesbians found themselves in a paradox: being a

²¹ The debate can largely be read as the divide between radical and liberal feminism, respectively. For further reading on the cultural emergence of the sex wars in feminist theory, see *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, edited by Carole S. Vance, Routledge, 1984. Vance's text brings together the infamous "Towards a Politics of Sexuality" gathering of feminist scholars and intellectuals: the Barnard conference, held on April 24, 1982. The conference invited delegates to consider the suppression of female sexuality, and the marginalisation of female pleasure. The Barnard conference was picketed by members of Women Against Pornography (WAP). The papers in *Pleasure and Danger*, which examine diverse subjects such as sexuality as public discourse, sexuality as cultural hierarchy, and lesbian sadomasochism, are predominantly from a pro-sex feminist perspective.

²² Andrea Dworkin, in *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981), criticised the use of the Marquis de Sade to analyse women's sexual agency, infamously describing Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman* as a "pseudofeminist literary essay" (84).

pornographic subject, and objective critic.²³ Dworkin's reading of the Marquis de Sade in *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* notes that his literary focus privileges the male heterosexual experience, where women are flogged, dismembered, raped, and tortured; and it is "lesbian acts [that] decorate the slaughter; they are imagined by a man for men; they are so male-imagined that the divine fuck imbued with murder is their only possible resolution" (93). That male sexual gratification hinges on female physical and mental degradation is understood by anti-pornography feminists as a cultural logic of a society which seeks to destroy and punish women; and, where all representation tends toward compulsory heterosexuality, Dworkin contends that "the lesbian is colonized, reduced to a variant of woman-as-sex-object, used to demonstrate and prove that male power pervades and invades even the private sanctuary of women with each other" (47).

It is Tristessa, a character of ambiguous gender and sexuality, whose suffering arouses Evelyn in *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter's violent reimagining of the myth of Tiresias. The novel centres on Evelyn, whose exploitative treatment of women in a post-apocalyptic United States, and his complete denial of their femininity as both subjective and self-conceived, orchestrates his capture by a radical band of feminist outlaws in the desert, as well as his subsequent castration, rape, and transformation into a woman—Eve—in Beulah²⁴ at the hands of an ambiguous goddess, known only as Mother. As a child, the male protagonist Evelyn writes to Tristessa, Hollywood icon at MGM, and receives, unsolicited, a series of photographs of her in trousers, swinging a golf club: it "marked the beginning of [his] disillusion with Tristessa" (7).²⁵ In fact, he dreams of meeting her

²³ For a critical examination on sadomasochism in lesbian communities, and the politicising of lesbian sexual practices, see Susan Ardill and Sue O'Sullivan's "Upsetting the Apples: Difference, Desire and Lesbian Sadomasochism", *Feminist Review*, 80, 2005, 98-126.

²⁴ Taken in Hebrew from the common noun *baal*, meaning "master" or "owner", Beulah is a feminine given name. The King James Bible translates Beulah to "espoused" or "married", and first appears in the Book of Isaiah as one prophesied of the land of Israel. In William Blake's mythology, Beulah is conceptualised as a feminine, dream-like state—the ideal, eternal realm of the creative subconscious, where erotic fulfilment gives way to a heavenly vanishing of the sexes. In "Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion", Blake refers to his divine vision of negating the contraries of sex in Beulah: "Humanity knows not of Sex: wherefore are Sexes in Beulah?/In Beulah the Female lets down her beautiful Tabernacle;/Which the Male enters magnificent between her Cherubim:/And becomes One with her mingling condensing in Self-love/The Rocky Law of Condemnation & double Generation, & Death". For further reading, see Morton D. Paley, *The Continuing City: William Blake's "Jerusalem"*, Clarendon Press, 1983.

²⁵ It is possible here that Carter has in mind Katharine Hepburn, famous for her athleticism as well as her preference for trousers. Hepburn, who went by "Jimmy" as a young woman, was an avid golfer, and once placed in the

in a state of distress, “stark naked, tied, perhaps to a tree in a midnight forest under the wheeling stars” (7).²⁶ Evelyn’s desire for Tristessa is characterised as being inherently reliant on her debasement or humiliation: for the male protagonist, female sexuality is expressed through shame and suffering. When he arrives in New York from London, he meets Leilah in a midnight drugstore, and immediately imagines her long, slender legs in black mesh stockings “coiled or clasped around [his] neck” (19). “Determined to have her”, Evelyn stalks Leilah back to her apartment, his “cock ... already throbbing” when initially Leilah drops her fur coat, exposing her unbuttoned dress and painted breasts (20). Evelyn’s sexual entitlement reduces Leilah to the archetype of the whore, erotic and unresisting; but his abuse of her—falling on her as a “bird of prey”, but abandoning her daily, tying her to the iron bed with his belt and subsequently beating her if she fouled the bed—ends when he “[grows] bored of her” (31). Evelyn’s “sickness [runs] its course” and he concludes that he had “enough of her, more than enough”: Leilah becomes “an irritation of the flesh, an itch that must be scratched; a response, not a pleasure” (31). After Leilah returns from a botched abortion, haemorrhaging, mutilated, Evelyn abandons her at a clinic: she loses her womb. He flees to the desert, “the abode of enforced sterility, the dehydrated sea of infertility, the post-menopausal part of the earth” (40).²⁷ Exploited by Evelyn, Leilah’s expression

Connecticut Young Women’s Golf Championship. Additionally, she maintained a lifelong interest in running, cycling, and tennis, and regularly swam well into her 80s.

²⁶ Carter is undoubtedly familiar with the trope of bondage in contemporary sadomasochistic literature and cinema. For example, a recurrent fantasy of Séverine, the female protagonist of *Belle du Jour* (dir. Louis Bunuel, 1967), is to be tied to a tree or post while she is raped, flogged, murdered. More recently, in *Secretary* (dir. Steven Shainberg, 2002), the submissive Lee Holloway and the dominant E. Edward Gray consummate their marriage while Lee is tied to a tree, still in her black wedding dress. Conversely, in Anaïs Nin’s collected erotica—*Delta of Venus* (1977) and *Little Birds* (1979)—no figure is tied to a tree; rather they “[lie] naked on the moss” (“Saffron”), “[roll] on the grass” (“Marianne”), or “[grasp] earth and grass together” (“Elena”).

²⁷ A parallel to Esther Greenwood, Leilah’s haemorrhage marks her desertion by Evelyn, abetting Leilah’s separative self: the botched abortion renders her infertile. Used and abused by Evelyn, Leilah retreats to the desert. However, she reappears as Lilith at the end of the novel. Now-Eve, Leilah guides her former antagonist to return to a primordial maternal consciousness, where Eve will be reborn. Travelling through “a labyrinth like Ariadne’s”, Eve emerges from a crevasse in the earth that is both “the beginning and the end of time” (*The Passion of New Eve* 185). Lilith tells Eve that she is pregnant, and therefore cannot travel with Lilith; Eve is left behind. The visceral destruction of Leilah’s fertility is the apotheosis of Evelyn’s patriarchal violence, beginning Leilah’s re-animation as Lilith. In Jewish mythology, Lilith refused to submit to Adam as his wife. As they are both made of clay, Lilith argues that in the eyes of God they are equal; Adam believes he is superior, and therefore assumes a physically dominant role during sexual intercourse. Lilith tells Adam that she will not lie beneath him. Much like Esther’s bloodied initiation to a phallogocentric sexual identity, Leilah’s botched abortion gestures toward the wider superficiality of the heteronormative. The gynaecologic haemorrhage experienced by Esther and Leilah reflects Lilith’s symbolic rejection of her husband. Like

of her femininity is pure cultural production, where the misogynistic representation of female sexuality centres on the fetishistic, possessive male gaze. As a man, Evelyn becomes increasingly obsessed with the image of Tristessa and Leilah in submissive distress. Evelyn's male-gaze reflects Susan Sontag's suggestion in "The Pornographic Imagination": that the viewer is fundamentally unable to recognise any "realistic or human function or distinction" of sexualised individuals as objectively autonomous. For the male Evelyn, femininity is at its most arousing when disposable, suffering, and passive.

Carter's characterisation of violence and method in sexual agency dramatically shifts when Evelyn undergoes a violent surgical transformation to Eve, at the hands of a monstrous, multi-limbed goddess, Mother. The physical transmogrification from male to female instructs Carter's reading of femininity as artificial, engineered, and, ultimately, a deformed illusion. When Eve, now a woman, escapes Beulah, "a profane place", she declares:

I know nothing. I am a tabula rasa, a blank sheet of paper; an unhatched egg. I have not yet become a woman, although I possess a woman's shape. Not a woman, no; both more and less than a real woman. Now I am a being as mythic and monstrous as Mother herself; but I cannot bring myself to think of that. (83)

As a woman, Eve has no identity, and becomes "an abject state": she possesses no money, no clothes, no passport, no travellers' cheques, no credit card, "no means of identification" (83). Eve views her newly-born self as nothing more than an "elaborate female apparatus", unsexed and without knowledge, an interventionist refiguring of her identity (83). However, Eve's "artificial virginity" and "notional unfemininity" is short-lived, quickly violated: she is raped by the "one-

Lilith, Esther and Leilah are martyrs of feminist sexual agency, signifiers of the demonising of women's sexual identities outside heterosexuality.

eyed, one-legged monomaniac” Zero, the “first man [she] met when [she] became a woman” (84-86). Zero, who demands absolute subservience, believes “women were fashioned of a different soul substance from men, a more primitive, animal stuff, and so did not need the paraphernalia of civilised society such as cutlery, meat, soap, shoes, etc.,” (87). He controls a small harem of women in the desert. The seven women, reminiscent of Snow White’s seven dwarves, are refused speaking rights, but happily communicate with each other in garbled gibberish. They are dressed identically in denim dungarees and renamed by Zero: Marijane, Betty Louella, Betty Boop, Sadie, Tiny, Emmeline, and Apple Pie. These grunting women, disciples in the Church of Zero, have matching Dutch haircuts, sleep among the pigs, and revere their Master, Zero: they compete for his affection, and relish their “weekly injection of Zero’s tool”, expressing jealous rage if they are thus deprived (95). To Eve, these girls are “case histories, rather than women”, and exist in a perpetual state of suspended animation, non-identity: though Eve views herself as “passing for a woman”, Marijane and the girls are instead “[spending] their whole lives in ... imitations” (101). Carter’s politicised representation of the violent conditioning and, indeed, reconditioning of sex and gender draws instinctively on de Sade’s *Justine*, where the passive, submissive sexuality of the girls is entirely constructed by Zero: they are without name, without history, and without cause.

The intersection of myth and pornography in *The Passion of New Eve* recapitulates the relationship between Zero, his Women, and Eve: Zero, in a Tarzan-esque exchange, identifies himself as “Me, Adam”, and renames “You, Eve” as “Mrs. Zero”, thereby instructing a further distancing between female desire and agency, and feminist self-authorisation (91-92). Eve’s experiences with the Church of Zero are consistent with Sontag’s critique of the pornographic imagination, where Zero and his concubines become interchangeable with the most basic, perfunctory structures of Male (Me, Adam) and Female (You, Eve). Unflattering and destructive, these characterisations are undeniably satirical; but they effectively mediate the critical exchange between absence and presence in the anonymous mode. Carter’s expression of female sexuality

within the Church is primitive and repressive, reliant on established tropes of dominance and submission within an exclusively, hetero-patriarchal discourse. What criticism has ambivalently ignored, then, is the continuation of this damaging rhetoric toward female homosexuality: Zero, maleness as its most spurious, is unable to coherently respond to a self-conceived female—voice and body, sexuality and experience—without resorting to violence. Zero’s obsession with Tristessa, “the prime focus of his hatred of the [female] sex”, instructs her characterisation as the “ultimate dyke”, a “tribade”, “dyke; she’s a dyke”, “a sluice of nothingness”, “the lousiest lady in the world”, an “evil bitch”, a “witch” who “eats souls” (91). Zero’s response, as emblematic of maleness, clearly establishes female homosexuality, symbolised by Tristessa, as the extracted impotence of the heteronormative, entirely separate from male sexual function, and therefore the feared and hated locus for its demise (91). Zero’s emphatic belief that Tristessa—“PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE”—has made him infertile, “magicked the genius out of [his] jissom”, charges his obsession with raping her to destruction (91). Earlier in the novel, Tristessa, as celluloid iconography, is visually stimulating for Evelyn: at the cinema, he ejaculates in a girl’s mouth while he watches Tristessa (performing as Catherine Earnshaw) die by brain-fever in an adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*. Evelyn’s gasps of pleasure are “drowned” by Heathcliff “roar[ing] his grief over the cardboard moor in a torrent of studio rain” (9).²⁸ Where Tristessa, as the ultimate dyke, derives no sexual pleasure in her interactions with men, men, without Tristessa’s explicit knowledge or consent, crudely seek repeated sexual gratification in her conventional presentation of the ideal, unattainable feminine.

²⁸ It is particularly interesting that Tristessa, Queen of Dykes, is at her most erotic for Evelyn when performing as Catherine Earnshaw. Culturally speaking, just like Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is a popular text among lesbians the world over: it has, over the years, gained a ‘cult’ following among well-read dykes of a certain kind. For further discussion on the codified representation of female homosexuality in *Wuthering Heights*, which considers the presence of a lesbian panic plot between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw (as doubles of the other, the mirror of Heathcliff-Catherine a well-established truth in literary criticism—“I am Heathcliff”), see Jean E. Kennard, “Lesbianism and the Censoring of *Wuthering Heights*”, *NWSA Journal*, 8.2, 1996, 17-36. To read the dynamic between Heathcliff-Catherine as a lesbian narrative, coupled with Evelyn’s explicit arousal and ejaculation, mirrors the same dynamic of heterosexual men and women watching lesbian pornography for sexual gratification.

Carter's polemic on modern female sexuality and self-determination, which informs the characterisation of Evelyn/Eve and Tristessa/Tiresias, centres on two of Marquis de Sade's writings, *Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue* (1791), and *Juliette, or Vice Amply Rewarded* (1797).²⁹ De Sade's texts concern two sisters, Justine and Juliette, and their recurrent, incessant misfortunes, at the hands of men and women, which establish them as archetypal, martyred femininity. Justine is characterised in *The Sadeian Woman* as "a gratuitous victim...always the object of punishment", whose steadfast, stubborn virtue secures her only pain, humiliation, and suffering (46). In her dedicated servitude, de Sade's Justine is arrested, tormented, tortured, condemned to death, raped, attacked by dogs, seduced, branded, whipped, captured, imprisoned, lashed, beaten, suspended above a pit of rotting corpses, kidnapped, and, finally, after her brand is kindly removed, Carter notes that she is "struck through the heart by a thunderbolt, and so dies" (46). Justine, "the broken heart, the stabbed dove, the violated sepulchre, the persecuted maiden whose virginity is perpetually refreshed by rape" is revised by Carter to illustrate an absurdity within idealised femininity: locating virtue within one's vagina (48). In suppressing her sexuality, Carter demonstrates that Justine's bizarre "[nourishment of] her own self-respect [...] involves the cruellest repressions and a good deal of physical distress" (48-49). Therefore, Justine's sexual freedom is in spite of herself: she is confined by her own desires.

Though Justine commits no crime in her life, her suffering in servitude "becomes a ... masochistic mastery over herself", where repressing her desires amounts to self-flagellation (62). Carter likens her plight to the martyred Hollywood blonde bombshell—Marilyn Monroe—further demonstrating how the public imagination equated "female virtue ... with frigidity and a woman's morality with her sexual practice" (62). But Carter's coinage of "the Monroe syndrome", a woman everyone loves but no one seems to know, seeks to articulate a more pernicious effect of female sexuality and perceived beauty than alienation, isolation, and loneliness. For Carter, there is a great

²⁹ Lawrence Durrell's novel *Justine* (1957), the first in the *Alexandria Quartet*, similarly characterises a modern Justine as an exotic, sexually complex woman of misfortunate virtue and mystery.

disconnect between woman as she exists in herself, and woman as she pertains to public imagination. To consider women as “imaginary prostitutes”, public figures with no personal history, Carter’s Monroe syndrome argues that “this lovely ghost, this zombie, or woman who has never been completely born as woman, only as a debased cultural idea of a woman, is appreciated only for her decorative value” (70). For Monroe, as for Tristessa, the “final condition of the imaginary prostitute”, Carter continues, is that “men would rather have slept with her than sleep with her”, and she is, therefore, “most arousing as a memory or as a masturbatory fantasy” (70).³⁰ Though Carter’s writing consistently engages with the “imaginary prostitute” as the heterosexual conditioning of female experience, this contradiction—to be more arousing as memory or fantasy than as flesh and blood—is more readily perceived within female homosexuality: the endless observation and, indeed, fetishising of lesbianism by the archetype of the spectator, the faceless, heterosexual male.³¹

³⁰ Monroe, born Norma Jeane Baker, bears some resemblance to both Tristessa, as a Hollywood icon, and Evelyn/Eve, as Monroe, at the request of studio executives, underwent extensive plastic surgery prior to her roles in cinema. Famed for playing the “Blonde Bombshell” in films such as *All About Eve* (dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1951), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (dir. Howard Hawks, 1953), and *The Seven Year Itch* (dir. George Axelrod, 1955), Monroe was also the first nude centerfold in *Playboy* (1953), a publication responsible for the systemic prioritizing of the heterosexual male gaze, thereby directly shaping the modern pornographic imagination in the late half of the 20th century. Monroe is Carter’s representative for the emergence of the public sex symbol, and Tristessa’s characterisation is reminiscent of earlier icons such as Jean Harlow, Greta Garbo, and Rita Hayworth, publicly known as “Platinum Blonde”, “The Face”, and “The Love Goddess”, respectively.

³¹ According to yearly analytics from Pornhub, for the years 2014-2018, “lesbian” was the most-searched, most-watched genre of pornography, worldwide. Dr. Laurie Betito, sex therapist and director of the Pornhub Sexual Wellness Center, argued in 2017: “Lesbians have been the #1 fantasy of men since the beginning of time.” (www.pornhub.com/insights, accessed November 11, 2018). As of June 2019, according to Pornhub, New Zealand’s most popular search term was “Māori”, followed by “lesbian”. Visitors from New Zealand are 46% more likely to view lesbian videos. Furthermore, compared to the rest of the world, New Zealand has a large proportion of female visitors: Pornhub states that it is, therefore, unsurprising “that the Popular With Women category is 29% more likely to be viewed in New Zealand”. Nearly 40% of visitors from New Zealand are identified as female, well ahead of the world average of 26%. The average age of New Zealand’s visitors is 39 years old, compared to the worldwide average of 35. Nearly one-third of New Zealand’s visitors are aged 25 to 34. The average visitor from New Zealand spends 10 minutes and 30 seconds each time they visit Pornhub, about 30 seconds longer than the average visit time worldwide. (www.pornhub.com/insights/new-zealand, dated accessed: January 5, 2020). This means that the primary consumption of lesbian-themed media by New Zealand men and women is through online pornography, which undoubtedly has an effect on the continued fetishisation, objectification, and degradation of women who identify as lesbian in New Zealand. Mainstream pornography has a long-established tradition of hyper-feminised lesbianism—actors who perform lesbian sex acts are, generally speaking, not actually lesbian, but described as “gay for pay” in the adult film industry. These are heterosexual women performing on demand for heterosexual men: “lesbian” is a genre, not a cultural identity, in pornography. In September 2020, in association with Calendar Girls and CGsLive, men in New Zealand were invited to pay a weekly subscription for 24/7 access to a live-cam streaming a group of 10 girls living together in Playboy-style mansion: “From pool parties to pillow fights, what could possibly go wrong?!” The girls’ weekly schedule includes: “Lingerie pole dancing”, “Shower & bubble bath”, “Topless treadmill”, “Naked twister

Speaking of classical pornography, Sontag addressed the relationship between the subject and the object in pornographic literature. In a lecture delivered at 92nd Street Y on November 2, 1964, Sontag suggested that the subjective, as it pertains to the pornographic form, undergoes a radical recalibration:

...what replaces the ordinary gaze, or the realistic gaze, is a kind of fetishistic, glazed fascination, whereby things take on all sorts of weird qualities, and intermix and overlap with each other. There's a kind [...] of fascination toward the object; and at the same time a stripping away of any kind of realistic or human function or distinction that the object has.

The fetishistic gaze, according to Sontag, embodies “the ultimate fantasy” in pornography, which “is in fact not at all participating, but watching; because only in the watching can you preserve this absolute distance, this fantasy of distance, and of non-involvement” (“On Classical Pornography”, transcribed from www.youtube.com). Returning to these concepts in “The Pornographic Imagination”, her 1967 essay based on this lecture, Sontag critiques the exclusion of pornography from literary criticism, and “the sense that pornographic works are tokens of a radical failure or deformation of the imagination” (38). To read pornographic literature as nothing beyond its complex function to sexually arouse and excite the reader is to confuse the “tranquil, detached

game”, and “Viewer requests”. Furthermore, the viewer is invited to “catch” the girls—“Crybaby”, “Cookie”, “Peaches”, “Poppy”, “Frankie”, “Macey”, and “Carmen”—“putting on a show together in the common rooms... The more the merrier they say.” The seven girls’ names are, of course, reminiscent of Zero’s desert harem. (www.cgsmansion.com, accessed September 8, 2020). More research is needed to determine the particular effect of this dynamic on feminine-presenting lesbians in New Zealand: Do they feel they are accurately represented, in a society where the main genre of lesbian-themed media consumed by members of the public is pornography? And what particular forms of sexual harassment, violence and coercion do they experience as a result of this dynamic? What are the social effects of the sexual violence and harassment they experience from their own gender? And how do they respond to sexual violence and harassment from members of the LGBTQ+ community? What are the short- and long-term effects on the professional and personal relationships of feminine-presenting lesbians in New Zealand, amid increased ease of access to online pornography, where “lesbian” is both subject and object?

involvement evoked by genuine art” as being the only intentions of both the erotic and the aesthetic (39). This “oversimplif[ication]”—applying standards of ordinary life to art—stymies any critical approach to pornography; and, by removing pornography from artistic consciousness, Sontag determines that the cultural discourse on sexual experience fails adequately to consider how parody as a medium articulates the major conventions of the pornographic imagination, and “tends to make one person interchangeable with another and all people interchangeable with things” (45; 53). According to Carter, the sexual theatres of de Sade structure erotic consciousness on a perpetual engagement with an affectless archetype; and the moral paradox of pornography is therefore the explicit repositioning of the reader as an implicit voyeur, unable to maintain their state of non-involvement where the text necessitates a sexual response.

Evelyn’s transmogrification from male to female in *The Passion of New Eve* is reversed and reflected by her similarly ambiguous, Monroe-esque counterpart, the Hollywood ghost Tristessa, “Queen of Dykes” (101). When Zero and his harem finally discover Tristessa, deep in reverie in an abandoned glass house, she is revealed to be male, his femininity a public performance. As a corrective, Tristessa is wed to Eve by a hysterical Zero, with Apple Pie, Betty Boop and the others as witnesses, and raped: “So I was seduced by the notion of a woman’s being,” Tristessa tells Eve, “which is negativity. Passivity, the absence of being. To be everything and nothing. To be a pane the sun shines through” (137). Tristessa’s characterisation as the “allegory of chastity in a medieval romance” demonstrates the deception of idealised femininity. “I wanted to be a whore, a cheap one”, Tristessa tells Eve, “but they could do nothing to me I had not already imagined” (144). As a spectacle, Tristessa’s sequestering to the male sexual imagination, characterised by Zero, is synonymous with suffering. Speaking of his life as Tristessa, he describes his deceptive femininity as a lonely, endless life dominated by beauty, solitude, and melancholy: “For hours, for days, for years, she had wandered endlessly within herself but never met anybody, nobody ... She had given herself to the world in her entirety and then found nothing was left” (144). Eve considers that

“masculine and feminine are correlatives which involve one another”: therefore, as a means of rectifying the loss of a corporeal self, Tristessa and Eve fuck as one, neither man nor woman, but each other, “the concentrated essence of [their] being ... [their] interpenetrating, undifferentiated sex ... the Platonic hermaphrodite” (148).³² That Tristessa and Eve finally recognise in each other a single identity (Tiresias) “[brings] into being the being who stopped time in the self-created eternity of the lovers” (148). Their respective dematerialising, consumption and annihilation—a loss of the self—through the act of intercourse is therefore annulled by the other’s presence: “He and I, she and he, are the sole oasis in this desert” (148). They are one and the same, and Eve’s immediate sense of fragmentation is vanished by the actuality of Tristessa.

Carter’s reversal of the archetypes of man and woman in Eve and Tristessa, where the individual also functions as its opposite, illustrates the margins of idealised femininity and sexual agency, as much as it gestures toward the relationship between sexuality and mythology. Where Carter’s criticism of the pornographic form argues that there is stripping away of one’s identity in the act of heterosexual intercourse, the deliberate juxtaposition of Tristessa’s sexual ambiguity and Eve’s violent transmogrification explores the potential of sublimation to one’s own self as a corollary to absence, suffering and degradation. Carter’s martyred women—Justine, Monroe, and the Lesbian—“present the enigmatic image of irresistibility and powerlessness, forever trapped in impotence” (*The Sadeian Woman* 71). That these concepts of women “model ... the denial of femininity as praxis, the denial of femininity as a positive mode of dealing with the world”, demonstrates the final humiliation of female sexuality as one of indignant vulnerability and symbolic sterility (71). Through the use of archetypes, and the anonymised men and women they forge, Carter’s portrayal of the creation myth and pornographic form fundamentally redresses the sequestering of female sexuality, as much as it gestures toward a great absence in public

³² Eve, created in Beulah, returns to an eternal ideal; according to Blake’s mythology in “Jerusalem”, where the Female (Eve) and Male (Tristessa), neither one sex nor the other, are each “becom[ing] One with her, mingling, condensing in Self-love” (Miner 60). For further reading on the androgyne in Blake, see Paul Miner, “William Blake’s ‘Divine Analogy’”, *Criticism*, 3.1, 1961, 46-61.

imagination: agency in female homosexuality. Within *The Passion of New Eve*, women as agents of sexual and textual aggression redress existing representations of the female experience, the social conditions of patriarchal oppression; but the experience of female homosexuality, though intimated in both texts, is afforded no agency or authority, and therefore remains the victim, never the aggressor. The privileging of the heteronormative experience within Carter's writing renders the lesbian as the anonymous lover: exploited and censored, and experienced only through male voyeurism.

3.2 Unmentionable Pleasure and the Moral Pornographer: Absence and Abjection in Angela Carter

Within patriarchal discourse, heterosexuality is presupposed and compulsory, and female perversions and stereotypes are therefore unconsciously representative of patriarchal conventions and gender difference, where man and woman become man and wife; father and mother; son and daughter. Unlike the heterosexual experience, female homosexuality is characterised as a female perversion: it requires no external masculine figure to authenticate its expression.³³ Of the concept of forbidden masculinity in women, Louise J. Kaplan's *Female Perversions* (1991) provokes the idea of womanliness as a masquerade: that "feminine gender stereotypes may be used to hide the sexualities and intellectual ambitions that women have learned to fear in themselves" (200). Citing Joan Rivière's 1929 essay, "Womanliness as a Masquerade", Kaplan critiques the notion of a "complete feminine development", noting that this sense of profound achievement is underpinned by "a collaboration between a woman's infantile ideals of femininity and masculinity and her social order with its primitive stereotypes of gender" (270). To engage with gender ambiguities and aberrant sexual behaviours is to consciously disavow the Freudian anatomical fantasy of destiny; yet to compromise one's own femininity for the sake of upholding social institutions, namely the

³³ The same can also be said of male homosexuality as converse to the male heterosexual experience, the latter of which is culturally validated by a female figure.

domestic, is to succumb to the myth of an idealised femininity. But Kaplan's intellectual approach toward an especially female-specific perversion, seen to "[disguise] vengeful sadistic aims beneath a cloak of feminine masochism", is entirely heteronormative; and Kaplan's brief discussion of lesbianism describes homosexual women as "sublimating" the position of men, referring to the historical positioning of tribades and female husbands who elected to dress and live as men (200, 179, 245). If womanliness is indeed a masquerade, and Eve's and Tristessa's characterisation in *The Passion of New Eve* merely a performative example of gender as a cultural production, then what can be said of the potential for female self-conception outside the patriarchal inscriptions of the perpetually idealised feminine?

In her analysis of Carter's depiction of sexual violence and women as aggressors, Merja Makinen argues that Carter's "fictions overturn conventional expectations of how 'women's writing' responds to violence" by "assaulting the reader with upfront aggression" (150). By using female sexual violence to undermine sexual essentialism, Carter's texts themselves become violent, "engaging, inclusive and cathartic" (153). Carter's engagement with textual violence illustrates the dangers of female sexual passivity, and examines the heterosexual experience; and the characterisation of Evelyn/Eve as the double of Tristessa/Tiresias make clear "that passive femininity is nothing but a male creation" (157). Furthermore, Makinen argues that catharsis in Carter's texts lies in the expression of violence itself, a transgressive authorial response to traditional depictions of women as victims; but "textual violence is very different from actual violence, both in terms of the delineation of violence and the often aggressive assaults on the readers' expectations" (151).³⁴ The violent acts of women in these texts are "carefully contextualised as a meaningful retaliation to a whole string of abusive male treatment, both sexual

³⁴ Here, Makinen explains catharsis, and the difference between textual violence and actual violence, by referring to cinema audiences cheering and applauding during screenings of *Thelma and Louise* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1991), "when the women protagonists set fire to a truck", which belonged to an interstate trucker who had been sexually harassing them from his 18-wheeler (151). When asked by Louise to apologise for his behavior, he refuses; they shoot up his tanker, and steal his hat.

and social” (152). Carter’s use of textual violence gestures towards the forcible shift in narrative context: within her anonymous forms, creation myth and pornography, any act of violence responds not to an explicit presence, but an implicit absence; for, if the characters themselves are reductive abstractions of their most basic self, the violent acts which they commit challenge the unseen critical and cultural assumptions of their gender and sexuality. For this reason, textual violence is read in this chapter as an example of textual absence, and therefore a specific marker of the anonymous mode.

Carter’s discourse on the false universal of female sexuality describes its expression as a fundamental anonymizing of the female self; and pornography similarly acknowledges and, indeed, relies upon this self-deceit: the false universalising of female experience. But it is the pornographic form which Carter uses to dispute the cultural position of woman as conquered, man as conqueror; femaleness as submissive and masochistic, maleness as dominant and sadistic. The Marquis de Sade’s aestheticizing of an exploitative expression of female sexuality, organising experience in terms of polar extremities: the holy virgin Justine’s rape and humiliation, the profane whore Juliette’s sexual self-reliance. This provides for Carter a speculative, satirical function. Considering *The Sadeian Woman* as a sexual polemic, Sally Keenan points to Carter’s deliberate use of an anonymous form of communication, pornography. Citing Lorna Sage, Keenan acknowledges Carter’s application of a “multivoiced, dialogic, hybrid” voice, which “blends together author and community” (137). Moreover, Keenan notes that producer of pornographic literature is anonymous, and “his very anonymity [lends] power to the suggestion that the pornographic scenario is invoking universal fantasies” (137). However, the “tripartite” dynamic of pornographic literature, the relationship between “master/producer, the object (typically woman/victim), and the onlooker (the producer’s guest” is “[disguised]” by this presumed anonymity (Kappeler, cited in Keenan 137). In this way, Carter uses de Sade to doubly disclose the actuality of pornography as historically anonymous and expose the unease with which female sexuality is expressed.

Conversely, de Sade is “synonymous with the sexual practices he describes”, and Carter exercises this critical function (Keenan 138). Therefore, if, as Carter suggests, “male is positive” and “woman is negative”, then this metonymic mirroring of sexual essentialism has established a universal language through which literature voices the heterosexual experience. And, if, as Carter suggests, pornography contributes to the departicularisation of intercourse, then to what extent can the anonymous mode facilitate a disengagement from that “spurious charade of maleness and femaleness”(8)?

Carter’s response to the “emphasis of women as victims” is to essentially challenge the production of idealised femininity, thereby shifting the “dominant Anglo-American feminist dichotomy of male aggressors and female victims” to instead “explore violence and violation *by* women” (emphasis original, Makinen 149-150). In Lacanian terms, Carter’s “affirmative representations of sexually violent women” utilise the pre-established symbolic, sexual imagery of femininity as docile and vulnerable, subordinate and abused, thereby nullifying the tripartite structure of the pornographic (Makinen 149). By recasting women as aggressors, Carter confronts the delicate narrative structures of womanliness not as a masquerade, but as a responsive brutality. This inversion of stereotypes is mediated through the anonymous mode, where mythic and pornographic narrative intercede on behalf of female experience to illustrate the unspeakable and unmentionable: female textual violence.

As Carter indicates in *The Sadeian Woman*, Justine’s sexuality is both submissive and sentimental, whereas Juliette conditions her pleasure as aggressive and rational: if Justine is the thesis, the accepted model of femininity, then Juliette operates as antithesis. The irony of Carter as the moral pornographer evaluating de Sade’s writing, dismissed as puerile, affectless smut by second-wave feminism, lies in its attempts towards a synthesis between masquerading sexualities and an adequate representative model of femininity. Existent myths of femininity—Eve, in particular—are themselves a violent conditioning of womanhood, and de Sade’s Juliette actively

seeks sexual pleasure divorced from procreation. Her characterisation as a phallogentric woman is one of destruction, not rebirth. Moreover, Juliette delights in sodomy, further establishing the subversive use of her reproductive organs, rejecting what Carter describes as the “rhetoric of the womb”: Juliette cultivates a sexual autonomy that is not exclusive to penetrative vaginal intercourse, and therefore transcends the notion of feminine impotence as her actions are neither profane but nor are they traditionally expected of her gender. Carter notes that from Juliette’s youth, “she has already a well-developed taste for anal intercourse; she is proud of her superb arse and the outrageous, unnatural uses to which she puts it” (84). Whereas Justine fails to transgress her female sexuality, and is therefore punished for her obscene adherence to her own beauty, subjection, and humiliation, Juliette’s refusal to adhere to a biological imperative—the rhetoric of the womb—sees her rewarded, her body sanctified. Carter’s representations of the female body are contrary and contentious, both tender and monstrous, passive and violent; and her explicit reading of sexual function transmogrifies the feminine instability of self as a malleable, desirable state of creativity.

Carter’s writing in *The Sadeian Woman* and *The Passion of New Eve* capitalises on the accepted anonymity of both the myth and pornographic form. Evelyn’s transformation to Eve subverts and politicises the creation myth to illustrate the obscene organisation and, indeed, literal construction of performative gender roles; and her idiosyncratic writing on the negative implications of the pornographic form for female pleasure explores the positive construction of the moral pornographer. But if female sexual agency is itself removed from mythic and pornographic representations of the heterosexual experience, then interrelated is the fact that women have been removed in “male-imagined sexual desire” (Pitchford 164). Though the critical position of Carter’s moral pornographer is an attempt to recalibrate the function of the pornographic form for women, it fails to acknowledge women’s inherent removal from the discourse: male heterosexuality is

perpetually validated, while woman, in her absence, is repeatedly subject to abject representation for endless gratification.

3.3 The Sorceress and the Hysteric: The Invention of Artifice and Anonymity

In *The Newly Born Woman* (1975, translated by Betsy Wing in 1986), Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément consider how women's sexuality instructs an explicitly gendered consciousness; capitalising on Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine* (initially introduced in her 1975 essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa"), *The Newly Born Woman* examines a clear historiography between women's cultural experience of their gender and how this dynamic informs their language and literature. Sandra M. Gilbert, in her introduction to the English translation, argues that the voice of woman (whether collective or individual) is, according to Cixous and Clément, a paradox: "newborn, and yet archaic", emerging from within a patriarchal culture, where the polarising image of women in literature, orchestrated by man, manifests as the Sorceress and the Hysteric (ix). A critical reading of the Sorceress and Hysteric as "a displaced person" considers that both the gendered body and consciousness experience a "sense of metaphysical alienation, symbolised by a geographical dispossession" (xvi). Cixous and Clément separate the gendered body from the mind, and argue that to be woman is an "incompatible synthesis", thus begetting a sense of physical displacement: culture, "no longer to exchange women, to live without women, is outside history: without history" (29) To live without a history, then, is for women—whether Sorceress or Hysteric, Justine or Juliette, Virgin or Whore—a state of gendered anonymity; the physical displacement of women in society thereby translates to a metaphysical absence.

The critical exchange in *The Newly Born Woman* between "guilt" (as reactive) and the "subject" (as active) symbolises the disjunction between artifice and anonymity: the cultural invention of the Sorceress and the Hysteric displaces female consciousness, giving way to gendered anonymity. If, as Cixous and Clément suggest, "organisation by hierarchy makes all conceptual organisation

subject to man” (64), in what sense do Evelyn/Eve and Tristessa/Tiresias in *The Passion of New Eve*, and Juliette and Justine in *The Sadeian Woman*, represent an abject response from Carter to this hierarchical organisation of self-conception? Carter’s antithetical treatise of female sexuality in *The Sadeian Woman* examines the cerebral instability of pornographic representations of female heterosexuality. However, *The Newly Born Woman* posits the nature of woman’s “self-determined” sexuality as inherently bisexual, an explicit means of separating desire from the heterosexual philosophy of reproduction, where the “subordination of feminine to masculine order” is founded on female abasement (65). If the function of the female orgasm exists as entirely separate from heteronormative reproduction, then female desire is free and independent from male sexual function. As Cixous and Clément suggest, the two rhythms (masculine and feminine) therefore oppose each other; where “feminine periodicity” and the “periodicity of culture” are “imposed by men on nature” (29). What, then, is the critical purpose of Carter’s (ambiguous) reappraisal of the Marquis de Sade’s critique of female sexual essentialism? And, if Male (active) and Female (passive) are still oppositions of the other, what does it mean to conceptualise the figure of a newly born woman as both displaced and bisexual?

Cixous’s écriture feminine fundamentally destabilises the notion of a fixed sexual identity. Ami Anej, writing on Cixous’s *Vivre l’Orange*, addresses this “Mythic Aspect of L’écriture feminine”: Cixous’s text, which repositions the spiritual body of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector as an interlocutor of sorts, “[rejects] the masculine economy of investment and return” with respect to female sexuality (189). “Love”, writes Anej, “as the erotic dialogue of bodies through language, is reinscribed as intertextuality”:

Where Cixous’s *Le Nom d’Oedipe* provided a fragmented narrative in its positing of dual voices and roles, fragmentation is [in *Vivre l’Orange*] carried to its acme,

resulting in a multiple splintered voice which refuses the singular phallic unity of separate personae and advances a different type of harmony. (190)

This splintering of feminized voices by Cixous is critical to understanding the (inter)textual space allocated to the gendered body in the anonymous mode, where female sexuality is neither unresolved nor indeterminate, but flourishes in a boundless state of fluidity.³⁵

Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" introduces the concept of a "vatic bisexuality" for women's writing, to counter the notion of a "self-effacing, merger-type bisexuality"; however, the subject is still yet enclosed in the "false theatre of phallogocentric representationalism" (884). In writing women's sexual difference, Cixous identifies the limits of a bisexual orientation that supplants the feminine for the masculine, and vice-versa; where woman's self-disdain is undone by the secret act of writing itself. Cixous further claims that just as women masturbate in secret under phallogocentric hegemony, their uptake of their own pen becomes the erotic act by which woman self-determines her own desires and pleasures. Cixous's merger-type bisexuality is precisely the hypothesis of Carter's suggestion in *The Sadeian Woman*, where "male is positive" and "woman is negative", and, therefore, her "spurious charade of maleness and femaleness" is only resolved by establishing a new system of meaning that reflects Cixous's vatic bisexuality.

When Tristessa and Eve in *The Passion of New Eve* fuck as one corporeal being, neither masculine nor feminine, but as the "undifferentiated...Platonic hermaphrodite", they re-emerge from the other as a single identity: Tiresias (148). As a true vatic bisexual, the potentiality of Tiresias to dematerialise and reconstitute their sexuality outside a patriarchal hegemonic order reinforces the paradox that anatomy is destiny; engendering the textual body as a prescient site of unknowable difference. While Carter asserts in *The Sadeian Woman* that the mythic form appropriates false

³⁵ The idea of humanity's inherent capacity for bisexuality is not new: Carolyn G. Heilbrun argued toward a state of androgyny as the base normal of human sexuality, where a person only acquires a fixed sexual identity via their socio-political milieu. For further reading, see Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward A Recognition of Androgyny*, W. W. Norton and Company, 1973.

universals for its own gain, where one's sexuality "is never expressed in a vacuum", the (queer) paradox of the pornographic representation of female same-sex desire insists on a return to hetero-patriarchal hegemony: it makes all conceptual organisation of female sexuality subject to man. In this sense, lesbian and bisexual identities exist without function or language, and lack a true universal: their voice, body, and sexuality are self-conceived, entirely separate from phallogentric sexual function, the extracted impotence of the heteronormative. Carter's use of textual absence in *The Passion of New Eve* reproduces the doubled image of a single self as both convex *and* concave: the gendered selves of Evelyn/Eve and Tristessa/Tiresias (and their associated sexual agency) are re-organised as inherently fluid. By rewriting the symbolic wounding of the gendered body through textual violence, Carter's writing responds to Cixous's concept of *The Newly Born Woman*, with Evelyn/Eve, Tristessa/Tiresias, Justine and Juliette each characterised as both Sorceress and Hysteric. Furthermore, the fracturing of these voices—the splintered experience of Eve, the parsing of Justine's virtue from Juliette's vices—privileges a reading of self-determined agency in sexual and gendered fluidity; textual violence in Carter's writing responds to the perception of sexual difference; that our anatomy is still yet our destiny.

Angela Carter's writing responds to the cultural discourse on female desire and agency, and feminist self-authorisation. Where chapter one analysed separative models of selfhood in Plath's only novel, demonstrating the critical value of textual absence in the anonymous mode, this chapter explored how gendered violence in Carter's writing intersects with feminist methodologies in women's sexual agency. Carter's post-feminist exposition of the representation of women in pornography recasts the textual conditions of gender and sexual aggression: by repositioning herself as a moral pornographer, Carter challenges the conventional ideals of a passive, femininised sexual identity. But the question of sexual agency outside heteronormativity remains unresolved. While Carter gestures towards the expansive potential of vatic bisexuality, Cixous's concept fails to account for an exclusively heterosexual identity as much as it erases lesbian potentiality. Carter's

model of textual absence establishes a clear relationship between agency and sexual identity for the gendered self. Her particular model of redemptive violence further exposes the narrative potential of self-destruction as self-production in the anonymous mode.

“Dear Susan Sontag, Would you please read my books and make me famous?”

—Kathy Acker, *Great Expectations*

Chapter Three: Ode to Anonymity

This chapter will examine the codified relationship between silence and erasure in Kathy Acker’s texts, where one’s personal historiography illustrates the anonymous mode’s archetypal self-production-as-destruction. Acker’s experimental writings show a determined interrogation of the relationship between language and selfhood, and the subsequent emergence of a distinct, self-reflexive identity in a feminist text. Hers is an outrageous prose, absurd and illogical; the abstract spaces her sexually explicit narratives create are as unsanitary as they are incoherent. But for all her visceral anti-narratives, such as *Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula, by the Black Tarantula* (1973), *I Dreamt I Was a Nymphomaniac: Imagining* (1974), *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984), *Hannibal Lecter*, *My Father* (1991), or her last novel, *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996), her treatment of the indeterminate, unknowable self is tempered, inventive. Departing from conventional form, Acker’s compositions examine the paradox of self-production as self-destruction, therein incorporating a technical use of textual absence; the features of a text that illustrate the complexities of selfhood, such as doubled-selves, pseudonyms, unnamed narrators, non-recognition, depersonalisation, derealisation, or dissociation. Similarly, Acker’s writing engages with textual violence, as a further example of gendered anonymity: Acker’s violent characterisation of the grotesque and abject, particularly in regards to female sexuality *outside* the scriptures of a hetero-patriarchal discourse, re-inscribes the gendered body as an unknowable site of transgression.

Additionally, this chapter canvasses the anonymous mode’s expansion to include hybrid texts and postmodern writers such as Acker and, later, Chris Kraus. Kraus’s *I Love Dick* (1997) is a subversive performance of female desire and abjection, her writing directly influenced by Acker. Moreover, Kraus’s 2017 biography of Acker demonstrates how the anonymous mode continues

to shift to incorporate the self (and self-identification) as an explicit subject. Sylvia Plath's particular use of textual absence presents itself as the decentralised, schizoid self at the centre of *The Bell Jar* (1963), whereas Angela Carter's characterisation of the same securely roots itself within her appropriation of the creation myth and pornographic forms. Moreover, Carter's use of textual violence recalibrates a feminised sexuality that resists Plath's model of the psychic degeneration of the individual: Carter's texts reposition women as aggressors, rather than passive receptors. Plath and Acker therefore strike an interesting parallel within the anonymous mode, in the sense that textual violence is characterised as being done by the self, unto the self: Plath's protagonist, Esther Greenwood, attempts suicide, and Acker's narratives frequently address the volatile relationship between self-hatred and self-homicide. Accordingly, one violent exploit of the anonymous mode is a tense negotiation of the unspeakable memorialising of one's own consciousness. Self-destruction is the penultimate expression of self-production, where, in order to be continuously re-producing a self-made text, the centralised voice engenders their own degeneration into anonymity. This volatility is the fulcrum of Acker's experimentation between self and other, form and content, voice and text.

4.1 I am an Other: Textual Absence and the Volatile Self in Kathy Acker's *In Memoriam to Identity*

Kathy Acker's experimental, intertextual practices—patchwork narratives of pastiche and parody, poetry and plagiarism—actively displace the subject within a text: by introducing a multiplicity of selves, she expertly deconstructs the centralised “I”, thereby destabilising a fixed identity. As the title would suggest, Acker's *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990) draws attention to the narrative's preoccupation with dissociation, depersonalisation, and derealisation, to demonstrate a figurative loss of singular, gendered selfhood. The novel is divided into four sections: “Rimbaud”, a fantastic reimagining of libertine poet Arthur Rimbaud (“R”) and his relationship with Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine (“V”); “Airplane”, which narrates the virginal Airplane's relationship with “R”,

her rapist “boyfriend”; “Capitol”, a pastiche of William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), where Acker’s Caddy Compson inverts herself as the Quentin-obsessed Capitol, a whore who “fuck[s] every man in sight” as a physical “ODE TO ANONYMITY” (154, 194); and “The Wild Palms”, which borrows the Faulknerian treatment of Quentin Compson’s mental deterioration to bring together the dual consciousness of Airplane and Capitol. These individual identities eventually coalesce into a non-specific “roam[ing]” self, deforming both the corporeal and temporal perspective of *In Memoriam* (220).

In Memoriam to Identity is Acker’s homage to a personalised reality. It is a novel about self-destructiveness and strength, collective history and the private imagination: an ode to death, memory, and the gendered body, hers is a narrative that separates sex from sexuality, the body from the voice.³⁶ Airplane and Capitol intersect throughout *In Memoriam* by their attachment to “R”, whose personal appetite for destruction begin in the novel’s first section, “Rimbaud”, with his own masochistic self-abuse. His taste for natural violence is outsourced first to his hateful mother Mme. Rimbaud, then Pain (his uncle), a teacher (“Father Fist”), and, eventually, the (anachronistic) motorcycle gang of Nazi and Peacenik Germans, led by Dubois. R is born with an innate-self hatred: Mme. Rimbaud curses his birth, blaming the homosexual R for her husband’s abandonment of them. She becomes intent on “destroying and annihilating every shred of [Rimbaud’s] will and soul while he still lived on” (4). To R, the “body is a deadland”: a useless mass, “unable to do anything. Unable to act” (18). “Rimbaud” establishes the novel’s positioning

³⁶ “In Memoriam A.H.H.” is an elegy by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, published in 1850. Tennyson dedicated the poem to his beloved friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, who died suddenly of a brain aneurysm at the age of 22. The poem is best known for introducing the maxim for modern romantics that “‘Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all.” Tennyson’s lyrical composition seemingly affirms and denies the homosexual devotional subject. Exploring male same-sex desire in the poem, Jeff Nunokawa considers that Tennyson’s “site of homoerotic desire is constituted as the negation of the heterosexual figure of marriage” (428). Much like Kathy Acker’s *In Memoriam*, as well as Joan Gilling in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* and the ever-looming threat of lesbianism in Angela Carter’s *The Passion of New Eve*, homosexuality in Tennyson is characterised as a contradiction of heterosexuality, rather than being self-conceived. For further reading on the treatment of homoerotic desire in Tennyson’s requiem for Hallam, see Jeff Nunokawa, “In Memoriam and the Extinction of the Homosexual”, *ELH*, 58.2, 1991, 427-438.

of masochism as a corollary to vulnerability and fear; an exploration of the pleasurable submit to pain.

Similarly, in the novel's second section, "Airplane", Airplane explains, "I am scared of the unknown and I love it. This is my sexuality" (106). Initially she is unsure of her desires, uncertain how the act of sex will shift her understanding of her body and, indeed, her sexuality. She decides: "I wanted my body to be mine. Deep in me I didn't want it to be theirs. Something in me was revolting. Something was screaming, 'No. No. No.' So just as I was learning about my own body, I learned this kind of revolt" (107). After she is raped, Airplane determines that her body prefers her own touch: "No one was going to touch me but me" (107). Later, while performing in a sex show at the request of her rapist, she is instructed to fake her orgasms to avoid being arrested for indecency. She dissociates from her body and consciously separates from her sexuality: "My skin started trying to leave my body while another part of me wanted to go to sleep. Until it was all over" (114).

In the novel's third section, "Capitol", Capitol is paradoxically untouchable: obsessed with her brother Quentin, she resolves to "never fuck a man whom [she] loved" (156). Capitol desires Quentin, but realises that "since a woman has to be perfect intact to be worshipped from afar (that's what Quentin wanted of [her]), a woman who needs isn't whole" (172). When Quentin asks Capitol if she has slept with several cops, she responds, "When they touched me, I died" (172). Capitol is never satisfied: when Quentin looks at her "as if he no longer saw" her, she finally admits to her unrequited condition: "I told Quentin I fuck every boy I can get hold of because I want to fuck my brother" (173). The novel's final section, "The Wild Palms", interweaves R, Airplane, and Capitol, with the latter determining that "I will not be nothing": here, there is "no memory", and the narrative consciousness of Airplane and Capitol interpenetrate and devolve in typical Faulknerian style (260). The disjointed narratives of "Airplane" and "Capitol" consider the relationship between sex and sexuality, as well as the body, the "deadland" where the two meet: *In*

Memoriam arranges sex and sexuality as constituents of the gendered body, and their chaotic assemblage fragments any singularly constructed voice in the narrative.

In this way, by dis-placing the gendered body as fundamentally unknowable, the “I” is dis-located, and the narrative therefore composes the subject of feminist self-authorisation as continuous, unending: by eschewing a fixed corporeality, it is a text where “I” never emerges. Therefore, if the bodies of Airplane and Capitol function as a memorialised site of resistance and rebellion, thereby demanding their own self-destruction, then Acker’s *In Memoriam* is not so much an obituary to identity as it is a eulogy for heterosexuality.³⁷ The outsourcing of unrealised desire and false pleasure by Airplane and Capitol excises their flesh of a sexualised self constructed under heteronormativity, where heterosexuality is compulsory.³⁸ If Angela Carter’s *The Sadeian Woman* (1977) positions textual violence and sexual aggression as a precipitate to gendered and textual absence, then what do we make of Acker’s work, where Rimbaud’s, Airplane’s, and Capitol’s masochism informs the aesthetic deconstruction of selfhood? Where Carter hypothesised the anonymity of the lovers, where the binary identities of male and female, man and woman, are

³⁷ Where Rimbaud is explicitly homosexual, Airplane and Capitol are not queer; they navigate the psychic violence of compulsory heterosexuality on the gendered self, and the relationship between sex and power.

³⁸ Jane Ward, author of *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men* (2015), recently considered the “Misogyny Paradox” in heterosexual couples in her book *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality* (2020). Ward considers how our contemporary ideas around love and romance between men and women “fit into patriarchal ideas of marriage”. Jane, who lives with her partner Kat in Los Angeles, explains that she and Kat regularly need to explain to their son why it is, exactly, “that many people think it is funny when men dislike or hurt their wives and girlfriends.” This anecdote is not unusual among queer parents, who find it difficult to explain to their children why it is that boyfriends and husbands denigrate their female partners, criticise their physical appearance, and refer to them as “the old ball and chain” (emphasis original). Ward explains that in the United States, the concept of “*mutual likability*” between women and men did not gain traction among American sexologists and social reformers until the late 19th and early 20th centuries”. Furthermore, Ward suggests that the misogyny paradox has been present for some time: “There is evidence across the globe of men’s resistance to loving their wives and other women sexual partners and of the historically and culturally varied manifestations of women’s horrific subjugation by men in marriage.” Acker’s text *In Memoriam to Identity* is read as an obituary to heterosexuality, in that Airplane and Capitol consistently reflect the misogyny paradox of heterosexuality. As Ward claims, “the idea that men’s romantic or even sexual interest in women is threatening to patriarchy, or ‘unmanly’, may strike us as quite inconsistent with current understandings of heteromascularity, yet there is ample evidence of the persistence of this view.” The sexual and physical abuse of Airplane and Capitol by the men around them demonstrate the effect of the misogyny paradox on female heterosexuality; it is a wholly unsustainable condition, forcing each narrator into a state of indeterminate identity and anonymity. For further reading, see Jane Ward, “On the ‘Misogyny Paradox’ and the Crisis of Heterosexual Coupledness” (www.lithub.com, accessed September 25, 2020).

fundamentally lost to one another during heterosexual intercourse, *In Memoriam* characterises anonymity as similarly connected to sex, a space where “everything becomes lost” (112). In the liminal “bigness”, where “the body of the world is dislocated”, Airplane remarks that “sounds and silence had become inverted” (112). If Acker’s novel instinctively ties self-knowledge to sexuality, where sex becomes a performance of the self, then Airplane’s and Capitol’s penultimate refusal to submit to the known realities of the men who fuck them shifts their consciousness into a state of non-recognition, where their sexuality—their self—is finally destroyed. The psychic disintegration of Airplane and Capitol is understood as a state of gendered anonymity, whereby both women experience a loss of a singular, fixed self.

How does the anonymous mode facilitate Acker’s violent narrative of self-production-as-self-destruction? Like Plath’s schizoid selves, Acker’s multimodal narrative violates the relationship between narrative and voice, where the interpolating dialogue between Acker’s three narrators—Rimbaud, Airplane, and Capitol—recapitulates the tension between self-knowledge and non-identity. Airplane’s narrative plurality, shifting from first to third person, is a determined collapse of selfhood, where her self-knowledge gives way to a life of “nothingness” (244). Moreover, the causal but decidedly non-linear structure of *In Memoriam* resists a singular, conscribed identity: where Plath’s Esther Greenwood experiences a psychic degeneration, and her narrative condition is therefore one of enclosed anonymity, Acker’s Airplane and Capitol are deliberately de-formed into an abstract space of indeterminate identity. But what is the critical value in Acker’s use of this sense of textual indeterminacy? And, if Acker’s *In Memoriam* serves as an obituary to selfhood, where the unconscious and disembodied, unnamed and forgotten selves emerge as their own distinct entities, then what discursive associations can we make between textual absence and the volatility of self-knowledge?

For Airplane, sex is performative, mechanical and repetitive, and her sexuality therefore absurd and unreal. In the novel, her sexual self-determinacy is disrupted, corporeally and temporally, by

her gang rape; and her assault imprints sex with an insane non-recognition of her body. “This is what sex was”, Airplane explains, “Death, then sex. I didn’t recognise it at first. This is when I learned that I can close my eyes, fight however I have to, and survive” (113). The psychic growth her character undergoes is dramatic, and her mental development is “perceive[ed] ... as separation and disintegration” (115). She “cling[s]” to her rapist “because she had decided to survive. Somewhere in her sexuality was strength. Later on, everyone would hate her for this” (114). Airplane associates her early sexual identity with her rapist, and, in doing so, her flesh (body) functions a site of memory, where its histories of violence and trauma are such that she dissociates—“my consciousness had gone somewhere”—and thus is physically unable to orchestrate her own escape (116). Its destruction is critical to her rebirth; her volatile self is cemented by the narrative’s shift from first-person to third-person, at the moment she orgasms involuntarily, simultaneously with her rapist:

... she was not animal she was thing, against him against him, I’m a machine
I’m a machine I’m out of control, and boom the orgasm came just came it
was large it made her into it. Come. Like death. The screams didn’t come
from anyone. She didn’t go where this pleasure or perfection led her because
she was each sensation totally ... pulsed in complementary time, come
come, it’s called coming, she said to herself afterwards, you can’t stop it
when it happens; you can’t do anything about it. (120)

It is the only point in the narrative where Airplane experiences an orgasm; throughout *In Memoriam* she is instructed to come on demand, at the request of men, which she obliges unquestioningly

and with alarming ease.³⁹ Airplane's sexuality is a crude reflection of male desire, demonstrating the link between Airplane's loss of self as much as it gestures towards Acker's critique of heterosexuality. When Airplane performs in FUN CITY's sex show, she works "in service to sexuality", as "a homage to sexuality or life which was no longer real"—"fake it, loudly", she is told (124-125). Airplane develops a controlled, regulated sexuality, an explicit reflection of male desire, where her decision to survive through performative, highly fantasised sex (in a public show) prohibits her sexual self-determination. In one ludicrous exchange, a John dressed as Santa Claus, who "doesn't exist", instructs Airplane (as a girl) to sit in his lap and tell him what she wants, but she finds that she is and isn't able to communicate her desires; does and doesn't want a man to fake-fuck her; can and cannot say how: "They fucked and they didn't fuck. Neither of them actually took their pants off cause they had seen a cop in the audience. In reality, the girl was desperate to fuck and scared to fuck because fucking was how she earned money" (140). If Airplane's vulnerable flesh functions in Acker's novel as the memorialized gendered body, the site at which sex and sexuality meet, then its public self-destruction is necessary for Airplane's eventual self-authorisation. As much as Acker's narrative de-forms the gendered body and female sexuality as the unrealised and unknown, Airplane and Capitol's sexual symmetry within *In Memoriam* is a deliberate critique of compulsory heterosexuality as enforced hegemony: the gross limitations on female sexuality and the ridiculous cultural inscriptions on gendered bodies. But how does Acker's particular exposition of emancipatory pain reformulate questions of gendered proprietorship?

At one point, Airplane wonders if she doesn't desire R because she is "really lesbian": "If I was a lesbian, I would have control over my life, my vulnerability, the thing between my legs, my

³⁹ Anne Koedt's 1970 pamphlet "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" comes to mind, which Acker was no doubt familiar with. In it, Koedt responds to Freud's false distinction between the vaginal and clitoral orgasm, and the erroneous assumption of frigidity with a lack of orgasm (for most women) through heterosexual intercourse. Koedt explicitly identifies the clitoris as having equivalent status to the penis in terms of sexual pleasure, and argues that clitoral stimulation is necessary for female orgasm: though they vary in frequency and duration, all orgasms are clitoral orgasms. However, in Acker's *In Memoriam*, Capitol isolates the clitoris as a source of pain, not pleasure: "If you touch my clit you hurt me", she says, "Fuck" (204).

need to be touched though not my need to touch ... If I had control over my vulnerability, I couldn't be hurt as profoundly as I was being. Sexuality must be closely tied to reality because by being a lesbian, I could make the reality I wanted. Not drugged up in a bed or in a sex show" (143). Airplane is, however, not a lesbian, recognising that "you can't lie to yourself sexually" (144). She struggles to authorise a sexual identity beyond the hegemonic regime of heterosexuality; what Airplane desires is autonomy and agency, a reality and sexuality of her own making, not a performative show. She is told "over and over" by the solicitor, a man that she "adopt[s] as her protector", that she "should like sex", but "after everything was over" she tells him, "I wanted to go to sleep": "You can do sex that way, a woman can—faking—but the problem is that at least half of you is screaming. Another problem is that you have to hide the screaming" (144). If *In Memoriam* is a critique of the heteronormative, then lesbianism for Airplane positions an alternative (dissident) recalibration of sex and sexuality—of self-authorisation and self-determination—outside the phallogentric, hegemonic order. Ultimately, she is unable to imagine this reality: female homosexuality is an unreal, inconceivable recourse for Airplane's de-formation of a prescribed sexual identity.

Writing on "Intertextuality and Constructive Non-identity" in *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*, Georgina Colby explains that her use of the term "topological ... refers to the way in which the constituent parts of the experimental text [*In Memoriam*] are arranged" (141). The narratives of Rimbaud, Airplane, and Capitol, she argues, "can be read as topological, as they are not disjunctive but fold in and intersect in such a way that creates continuity whilst the narratives remain non-linear" (141). As Colby suggests, "Acker's topological intertextuality in *In Memoriam* creates textual conditions that are able to harbour 'nonidentity'" (146).⁴⁰ It is *In Memoriam*'s fractured topology—the disjointed way in which the four sections envelope each other—that

⁴⁰ Colby's specific identification of "textual plurality", "textual mutability", and "textual indeterminacy" within Acker's writing, as features of a narrative explicitly concerned with the aesthetic practice of manipulating fixed and singular identities, validates the critical value of analysing textual absence as a technique of the anonymous mode.

disrupts the relationship between form and content. The destabilisation of Rimbaud, Airplane, and Capitol is engendered by the text's preoccupation with narrative discontinuity, as an example of textual absence. In this way, Acker's nonlinear narrative deliberately de-forms the text's central voice into a state of anonymity, or what Colby describes as "non-identity" (246). If non-identity is constructive, Acker's topological form makes possible the decentralised subject, through the interwoven indeterminacy of both temporality and narrative. Moreover, Acker's application of textual absence is rooted in her experimental representations of the self. Non-identity (or non-recognition) is the consequence of textual absence within *In Memoriam*, where Acker's excision of sexuality from sex, and her violent parsing of the gendered body from its voice, refutes the dichotomy between Rimbaud's "I" and "Another". In response to her singular de-formation, Airplane reforms Rimbaud's assertion—*je suis un autre*—and proffers a newfound state of uncertain non-existence as an ontological corollary: "I am an *other* ... perhaps there is no other to be and that's where I'm going" (emphasis original, Acker 226). Similarly, Capitol articulates her own unease over an indeterminate future state: "I will not be nothing...I am an *other*" (260-261). If *In Memoriam*'s collapse of the centralised "I" is a productive experiment of narrative non-identity, then gendered consciousness in the anonymous mode is an explicit act of both physical erasure and psychic self-destruction.

The novel's final section, "The Wild Palms", opens with Airplane's actions from an omniscient narrator (Airplane may or may not be referring to herself in third person), where her sexuality peaks at its most self-destructive, contradictory; she "liked sex as long as she wasn't being more than physically touched" (215). Airplane forces herself to be like Capitol, the "girls who like to fuck", though it is a position she takes "in order to erase [her] life" (215). It is an extreme doubling of Capitol's similarly paradoxical condition: "Sex mattered immeasurably to Capitol and it didn't matter at all. At the same time" (238). Through sex and its associated pains, Airplane continues to dissociate her sexuality from her body: when she comes, she "almost [loses] consciousness",

notices that her “mind or consciousness was going or going someplace else” (216, 222). Even though she leaves her rapist for the German, the latter still yet presents Airplane with “rejection and absence”, but “this time rejection and absence won’t kill” her (219). Airplane’s body continues to orgasm for *un autre*; at one point, the German says, “I am teaching you to come whenever I just say *come*” (emphasis original, 222). Where the fractured form of *In Memoriam* recontextualises the gendered body, and its intertextual assemblage de-constructs a central, narrative voice, Airplane’s degeneration of self ‘comes’ through her (Faulknerian) deformation into Capitol’s consciousness in “The Wild Palms”: “Airplane had decided, after considering the facts of herself, that women don’t have shifting identities today, but rather they roam. She was talking, not exactly about Faulkner, but about her own self-destructiveness and strength” (220). When the German explains that he has a “symbiotic relationship” with another woman, Airplane translates this to his metaphysical death and rebirth, where “two people want to join, become a new person” (257). Though the German “and beautiful woman had wanted to suicide together so they could be reborn”, it is Airplane’s symbiotic relationship with Capitol—their mutual exclusivity—that transcends the narrative’s disjunctive topologies, and forces them both into a state of non-recognition, reconfiguring the unknown “IN MEMORIAM TO IDENTITY” (261).

Acker’s novel utilises a multiplicity of voices—R, Airplane, and Capitol as distinct narrators—to de-construct the “I” at the centre of the text. As no distinct subject ever emerges, what materialises (through Acker’s critical interpretation of the subjective unknown) is a radical exhibition of gendered self-authorisation. Eventually the individual identities of R, Airplane, and Capitol cohere to a singular, non-specific self; *In Memoriam*’s intertextual, non-linear narrative produces an interstitial space where the corporeal and temporal perspective of each narrator is inseparable from an-other, *un autre*. That the self is a volatile composite of unknown extremes, an identity that roams without recognition of time or place, a metaphysical vacancy felt both everywhere and nowhere, is a direct result of Acker’s use of textual absence: her characterisation

of doubling and dissociation facilitates the separation of sex from sexuality, the gendered body from its voice.

4.2 Dear Susan Sontag: Anonymous Historiography in Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations*

Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations* (1982) is a fractured, experimental narrative that decentres the conscious individual as the subject of the text. A reworking of Dickens's canonical work, Acker chronicles the orphan Pip's history, borrowing extensively from her own biographical detail, particularly her years working as a stripper while writing in the underground punk (and literary) scene of New York City. Similarly, Katherine Wasdin argues that "ancient texts provide Acker with material for criticism, a source of morbid inspiration" (268). Acker's "Pip" is of unfixed identity and temporality, shifting gender and sex (a further transmogrification of Tiresias): a testament to the relationship in the anonymous mode between using the familiar to articulate the unknown history of the self.

Acker uses the literary double by re-positioning Pip as a metonym for Acker: through a postmodern manipulation of plagiarism and pastiche in *Great Expectations*, Acker deconstructs the authorial voice of the text, combining intertextual practice with personal subjectivity.⁴¹ Her use of Pip as a literary double gestures to both an extra-textual awareness of Dickens's Pip, as much as it undermines the expectation of a traditional *Bildungsroman*: Acker's text explicitly rejects a narrative reconciliation, a coming-of-age. Moreover, texts by Propertius, Marcel Proust, Ben Jonson, Pierre Guyotat, and more are directly plagiarised to articulate the paradox of Acker's *Great Expectations*: "Self-reflective consciousness is narratorial" (54).⁴² Across Acker's novel, Pip changes both time

⁴¹ As an example of the anonymous mode, the combination of intertextual practice and personal subjectivity is explored in this thesis's creative component, *The Albatross*.

⁴² In Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860), there are doublings of the orphaned Pip, to measure and facilitate Pip's rise to success: the upper class Bentley Drummle and labourer Dolge Orlick. Orlick openly dislikes Pip, as Orlick is unable to traverse the same class boundaries as the young boy. While Orlick, too, considers his own great expectations of himself, he cannot enter Satis House as Pip does: Orlick only enters in the service of Miss Havisham, who Pip still considers as his mysterious benefactress, and not the convict Magwitch. Later still, Pip finds Orlick in the service of the odious Bentley Drummle. Orlick's plans to murder Pip confirm Orlick's deliberate positioning as a narrative double: that he cannot thrive while the other survives. This is precisely the same relationship that Pip has with

and sex, totally recalibrating their identity as entirely non-corporeal, non-temporal: in “The Beginnings of Romance”, Pip (now “Sarah”) is transplanted to New York City’s punk scene, where everything is “timelessness versus time”: “If everything is moving-all-over-the-place-no-time, anything is everything. If this is so, how can I differentiate? How can there be stories? Consciousness is just: no time” (54). When Sarah’s mother dies, she recalls her memory of going in search of her unknown father, an attempt to portion a new historiography for herself: “I realize that all my life is ending. Not endings, those are just events; but holes. For instance, when my mother died, the “I” I had always known dropped out. All my history went away...Differentiation presumes time, at least BEFORE and NOW” (60). In *Doing Time: Feminist Theory And Postmodern Culture* (2000), Rita Felski addresses the discourses around both the death of history and sex, with regards to the transgendered and transsexual body in postmodern thought. It is of particular use for reading gendered history and anonymity in Acker, for Felski questions:

... how does this perception of a temporal gulf between “then” and “now,”
between the era of past history and *posthistoire*, tally with the claim that we no
longer possess a historical consciousness? Finally, what is the connection
between discourses of the end of history and the end of sex? How does our

Drummler, for Drummler’s death leaves the manipulative Estella widowed. An unhappy marriage, Estella tells Pip that Drummler “used her with great cruelty”: it is Estella’s misfortunes that facilitate her decision to finally seek Pip’s forgiveness for her own mistreatment and cruelty towards him. Pip’s final lines suggest an awareness of his doubles and their necessary removal for his success: his internal dialogue claims to see “the shadow of no parting from [Estella]”, a feat made possible only by the removal of Pip’s other shadows, Orlick and Drummler. There are three endings for *Great Expectations*, with Dickens changing the wording of the final sentences: the second ending has Pip claim “I could see the shadow of no parting from her”, while the third ending has Pip state “I saw no shadow of another parting from her”. The ending is both melancholic and ambiguous; though Estella and Pip are not bound by their previous social restraints, it is unclear whether Estella’s moral redemption and condemnation of her past actions are both yet another illusion of an unfulfilled Pip. Estella makes no clear indication that she recognises her culpability for both her own unhappiness, as well as Pip’s. When Pip comforts the dying Magwitch, he tells him of his love for the lost daughter, Estella; he does not admit to himself, let alone Magwitch, that she does not love him return. Dickens’s Pip’s final act of denial undermines the *Bildungsroman* genre by introducing the possibility that Pip’s ‘expectations’ are as self-constructed as they are dissatisfying. By using “Pip” as a literary double for her own narrative of self-production-as-destruction, Acker’s experiment with identity construction in *Great Expectations* reflects the same paradox: “self-reflective consciousness is narratorial” (Acker 53).

sense of historical time relate to changing perceptions of gender and sexual difference? (emphasis original, 139)

In the space where “history went away”, Acker’s multimodal narrators—a plethora of Pips—are entirely without story, discourse: “if you want to understand an event, always increase its (your perceptive) complexity. [...] There’s no duality so purity is a phenomena. But (relations): a story. A story plus a story plus a ... makes ... a tapestry. Human perception (relations) makes more perceptions” (Acker 75).⁴³ Lacking a history, Acker’s narrators are like Cixous and Clément’s Newly Born Woman; their gendered experience is both individual and cumulative. The polyphonic Pip develops a self-reflexive consciousness through “duality”: by creating a “tapestry” of stories, the manifestations of the centralised “I” in Acker’s *Great Expectations*—“Pip”, “Sarah”, “Rosa”, “Cynthia”—come together to produce a relative account of gendered identity, outside the hegemony of heterosexuality (75). There is no stable temporal or corporeal self in Acker’s historiography.

In “The End”, Pip (now “Cynthia”) wants to “redefine the realms of sex” with her lover Propertius, who doubles as Peter: “I am only an obsession”, she tells him, “Don’t talk to me otherwise. Don’t know me. Do you think I exist?” (115). In Acker’s *Great Expectations*, the narrator is without a singular consciousness, their historiography a collective of relational stories: “Watch out”, Cynthia warns Propertius, “Madness is a reality, not a perversion” (114-115). Responding to Donna Haraway’s “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”, and, indeed, the value of the cyborg as mutable, agendered feminist icon, Felski argues that “questioning of sexual difference does not always lead to a waning of the historical imagination. Rather, such questioning may engender powerful new

⁴³ Acker’s concept of increasing, deliberately complicating narrative perspective to get a better understanding of a central premise is, of course, reminiscent of Lily Briscoe’s desire to gain insight into the consciousness of the absent Mrs. Ramsay, in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1924): “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, [Lily] reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought. Among them, must be one that was stone blind to her beauty. One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat knitting, talking, sitting silent in the window alone; which took to itself and treasured up like the air which held the smoke of the steamer, her thoughts, her imaginations, her desires. What did the hedge mean to her, what did the garden mean to her, what did it mean to her when a wave broke?” (161).

historical stories and inspire imaginative visions of alternative worlds and possible feminist futures” (Felski 147). Acknowledging that both the death of history and the death of sex are entirely metaphorical, she explains that the postmodern trope of the transsexual body as a universal metaphor “challenge[s] our conventional distinctions between male and female, normal and deviant, real and fake. It insists that all gender is engineered rather than given, prosthetic rather than natural” (149). Though Felski certainly points out that this position undeniably elides the very real differences and associations people feel toward their gendered bodies, it is yet a productive lens for analysing the transsexual body of Acker’s Pip.

Pip’s sentiments towards their collective historiography are later echoed by Capitol and Airplane in *In Memoriam to Identity*, where the relationship between self-actualisation and self-destruction, within the context of a gendered history, is codified as a growing awareness of silence and erasure. In parentheses, Airplane muses to herself that “Men have history ... carved out history, historical periods, periods, this time of war. Since women don’t have history, they don’t have a chance to be adolescent for just one period. We make ourselves up” (219). Airplane believes that between the “rejection and absence” offered to her by the rapist and the German, her private flesh is continually “carved” with the public exploits of men:

Because she had not made any public thing, history, because she wasn’t a man, Airplane lived in her imagination. More precisely: because she hated the world and the society to which her childhood and then the rapist had introduced her and because she didn’t even know what society she lived in (because she hadn’t made it), she drifted into her imagination. (221)

The idea that Airplane “drift[s] into her imagination” because she is unable to create an external self-determined identity reflects Carolee Schneeman’s idea of art “Istory”, which rejects the ‘his’ in history: if the self-made text is story—“Istory”—then gendered anonymity in Acker directly

responds to the caveat of history-making. “Women have been taught to hate themselves”, Capitol says, “That’s history” (155). Moreover, Acker’s ironic use of both inter- and extra-textuality gestures toward the power of collective memory, and its role in developing a temporal consciousness.

In her essay “Thinking Against Oneself: Reflections on Cioran”, Susan Sontag considers the futility of historicising the unfathomable self, and, indeed, history’s decided ambivalence toward the individual. What Sontag considers to be the “demon of historical consciousness” is, in fact, now an “uncontrollable gesture ... whereby man patronises himself” (17). “We understand something by locating it in a multi-determined temporal continuum”, Sontag continues, where our “existence is no more than the precarious attainment of relevance in an intensely mobile flux of past, present, and future” (17). In this way, Sontag claims that “a single work is eventually a contribution to a body of work; the details of a life form part of a life history; an individual life history appears unintelligible apart from social, economic, and cultural history; and the life of a society is the sum of ‘preceding conditions’” (18). It is an argument put in plain terms by Capitol, who, reflecting on her brother Quentin’s new life as an artist, pointedly states that “writing is one method of dealing with being human or wanting to suicide cause in order to write you kill yourself at the same time while remaining alive” (174). In *Great Expectations*, Pip as “Rosa” writes a series of letters, to critic Sylvère Lotringer⁴⁴, musician (and Acker’s husband) Peter Gordon, art patron Steve Maas, Susan Sontag, and, the original bastion of patriarchal omnipotence, God. In her letter to “Dear Susan Sontag”, Rosa stakes her claim that “Communication Is Impossible”, and dryly pokes fun at Sontag’s universal claim for an erotics of art; as an artist, Rosa cries foul at “the half-artists the hypocrites the ACADEMICS who thinks it’s in to be poor, WHO WANT TO BE POOR ... because those CRITICS don’t know what it’s like to have to tell men they’re wonderful for money” (*Great Expectations* 24). Acker’s rally against the patriarchal art world—her characters’ inability to

⁴⁴ As Chris Kraus’s husband, the critic Sylvère Lotringer also features in Kraus’s *I Love Dick* (1997).

create except in relation to a masculine reality—acts as a microcosmic representation of collective memory’s wider absencing of women: as Capitol later claims in *In Memoriam*, “Money’s a form of absence” (174). In terms of the novel’s critique of cultural paternalism, Capitol consistently ties her own personal history to her absent father, for “being female” means that she “didn’t and [doesn’t] have to prove that [she doesn’t] exist” (203-4). Without a paternal signifier, Capitol-as-woman is “nameless at birth and already doomed to be unwed” (204). It is a sentiment that later peaks with the repeated charge, “Fatherless from birth and already doomed to be unwed”: Capitol states that she is “afterwards vanished, but no more to myself” (212). Capitol’s self-production is, however, not told in present form, but as a reconstituted event: “Fuck it”, she says, “I self-destructed, mother fucker, years ago” (174). Capitol here describes what Felski later calls the postmodern “perception of a temporal gulf between ‘then’ and ‘now’”: Capitol’s analeptic self-destruction is undoubtedly the *ne plus ultra* of her “no longer possess[ing] a historical consciousness” in the present (Felski 139). However, Acker’s protean Pip-as-Rosa is more direct, demanding the collapse of collective memory as a solution to the de-constructed self: “I hope this society goes to hell. I understand you’re very literature, Susan Sontag” (*Great Expectations* 24).

But perhaps the most valuable expression of an anonymous historiography is Capitol’s final diatribe on her condition in *In Memoriam*. Pip completes their narrative disjunction with “Conversations To People Who Aren’t Here”, but Capitol explicitly infects her narrative consciousness with a blunt refusal toward memorialising. She beheads her dolls and considers a metaphysical “suicide” as a way “to lop off the consciousness of memory”, where “memory is deathless and inescapable as long as alive” (264). The hysterical histories of Pip in *Great Expectations* are a precursor to the anonymising of Airplane and Capitol. If Pip’s final form is a remembrance of all prior experiences, then Capitol’s final act of self-destruction is to sacrifice her temporal consciousness, an excision of sexuality (memory) from the gendered body (territory):

The roads carved in the territory, the only known, are memories. Carved again and again into ruts like wounds that don't heal when you touch them but grow. Since all the rest is unknown, throw what is known away.
"Sexuality," she said, "sexuality." (264)

As an example of the anonymous mode, Acker's *Great Expectations* uses the literary double to demonstrate the connection between textual indeterminacy and self-production-as-self-destruction. Much like Airplane and Capitol in *In Memoriam*, the anonymous historiography of Acker's Pip creates a sense of "timelessness versus time" (53). The intertextual practice of plagiarism and pastiche raises questions of female subjectivity, creativity, and narrative non-identity. But what are the critical ends of Acker's ribald reconfigurations of female heterosexuality? And, if Acker's experimental writings seek to obliterate the boundary between self and text, then how does the anonymous mode destabilise the authorial voice, and inform what Chris Kraus describes as "the reality of unreality"? (*I Love Dick* 31). Acker's writing directly influenced Kraus's exhibitions of the gendered self, where Acker's multimodal narrators speak for both the individual and cumulative experience of memorialising.

4.3 The Dumb Cunt's Exegesis: Subjectivity and Authorship in Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*

Like Acker, Chris Kraus's cult text *I Love Dick* (1997) similarly departs from traditional narrative structures, and relies on an extra-textual awareness of characters' lives and social connections, though the characters are fictional representations of real people. A lacerating memoir on female psycho-sexual desire, *I Love Dick* is, fundamentally, a work of fiction. The formal connections between Acker and Kraus are readily clear: Kraus utilises the epistolary—diaries and letter—and thickens the textuality of her work by introducing transcripts of conversations, faxes and interpersonal dialogues as interpolating "exhibits", where the narrative voice shifts from first-

to third-person. But how does Kraus's text engage with the anonymous mode? Intertextuality in *I Love Dick* facilitates the same de-formation of the singular, fixed identity that underpins Acker's experimental writing: Kraus anonymises her experiences through the void of "Chris Kraus". As an exegesis of gendered selfhood, the hybrid topology of Kraus's exhibits—scenes, letters, faxes, conversations, diaries, and phone-calls—refutes both temporality and identity as singularly fixed: her text therefore insists on an ultimate state of non-recognition. *I Love Dick* is Kraus's "schizophrenic project"—the expert re-construction of herself as "Chris", her husband Sylvère Lotringer as Sylvère", and art critic Dick Hebdige as "Dick". Hers is satirical reproduction of Sylvia Plath's schizoid strategies in *The Bell Jar*, for where "Sylvia Plath" has itself become a radical prosopopoeia, *I Love Dick* similarly relies on an imagined 'Chris Kraus' as the "dumb cunt", and 'Dick Hebdige' as "Dear Dick". Her renegotiation of a single subjectivity is therefore an intriguing recalibration of Carter's charge of the pornographic, in that Kraus reduces the individual to a strict, predetermined expression of gendered desire. As an exegesis of Carter's "spurious charade of maleness and femaleness", where *The Sadeian Woman* dryly offers a choice of pricked probes or fringed holes, *I Love Dick* earnestly presents the same: dick and cunt as heteronormative and, therefore, inviolate. Kraus's characterisation of textual absence calls to attention the false conceit of gendered anonymity: eliding a gendered self ("Chris") from subject ("dumb cunt") and object ("Dear Dick").

Experimental feminine narratives produced in the wake of second-wave feminism have ruptured traditional forms of literature through the practiced methodology of subversive, radical politics. The creation of conceptual writing, hybrid forms that intersect at the level of fiction, critical theory, art and aesthetics, non-fiction and autobiography, provides for writers like Chris Kraus an alternative space in which to produce. While texts like *I Love Dick*, are clear examples of the ways in which the "academic and creative disciplines cross-pollinate", they also, as Rachel Carroll has argued, "seem increasingly estranged in the literary world", to the point where "the

influence of experimental and avant-garde fiction waxes in the world of art while it wanes in the world of publishing” (19). Kraus’s subjective performance of female abjection negotiates a relationship between the dialectical history of modern literary criticism, and the theoretical paradox of female artists. To read textual absence within *I Love Dick* is to approach the narrative from both a literary perspective, and through the concept of experimental feminist art writing, where the questions raised about authorship and subjectivity understandably “cross-pollinate” with literary theory, feminist ideology, and the aesthetics of female creativity.

The anonymous mode positions *I Love Dick* as a sublime performance of individual subjectivity, where self-erasure is conceptualised through Chris’s apersonal account of her own abjection. *I Love Dick* follows a fictionalised Chris Kraus through her obsession with the eponymous Dick, later identified as the art critic Dick Hebdige. Here, the objective Kraus who authored the text, and the subjective Chris who loves Dick, are merely continuations of similar interrogations of the hostile relationship between writer and text in other conceptual writings, such as Jorge Luis Borges’s short piece “Borges and I”, and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. In each instance, both Borges and Barthes displace the subject, and deconstruct the centralised narrative voice. As Barthes explains in his section, “La Personne Divisée”: “When we speak of a divided subject today, it is not to recognise its inherent contradictions, its double postulations, and so on; it is a diffraction which is observed, a scattering, jettisoned, in which there remains neither an underlying principle nor a structure of meaning: I am not contradictory, I am dispersed” (Barthes 146). The use of the epistolary form configures a performance exchange of textual absence that is self-reflexive: the framing of the autobiographical furthers the theoretical dispersal of subject and voice recognised by Barthes.

Kraus’s narrative relies on the reader having some form of extra-textual awareness of the individuals beyond their fictive representations. In the novel’s first section—“Scenes from a Marriage”—Chris is identified as a 39-year-old experimental filmmaker from New York, who spent

a patch of her youth in Wellington, New Zealand. Sylvère is both attentive husband and Sylvère Lotringer, the cultural critic and literary theorist who studied with Barthes at the Sorbonne, and produced the essay *The Function of Narrative Throughout History*: “Sylvère, Sylvalium”, he is described by Kraus as a “specialist of narrative, not a creator of it” (35). However, the narrative consistently invites the reader to presume Sylvère is complicit in Chris’s infatuation with Dick: Chris and Sylvère are long-married, but no longer have sex together. Instead, they engage in “DICK-tation” (38), read their letters to one another, assume the other’s voice. Similarly, Sylvère identifies himself as the “Dumb Dick” (51), where Chris reorients herself as the “Dumb Cunt, a factory of emotions evoked by all the men” (27). In one letter, where Chris issues a desire for a mutual self-consciousness with Dick, she charges Sylvère with its transcription: “Sylvère, who’s typing this, says this letter lacks a point” (28). Kraus’s narrative, according to Anna Watkins Fisher, “[explores] the motif of the heterosexual epistolary exchange, read here as a literary performance” (224). As Watkins Fisher has argued, in mobilising these conventions, Kraus challenges the heteronormative “complicity of women’s abjection” by “seizing upon the gendered analogy of correspondence” (223). Moreover, she suggests that the narrative’s engagement with the “impositions, parodies, and caricatures said to represent feminism” sees Kraus “[perform] feminism back to itself” (223). This confrontational performance is initially observed in “Scenes from a Marriage”. As Chris explains, and “since Sylvère wrote the first letter”, she is forced to be a “reactive” agent in her own “abstract romanticism” with Dick (Kraus 27). She hopes “there might be something to be learned by both [she and Dick] playing out this romance in a mutually self-conscious way”, but such an awareness does not occur (27). Despite over 200 instances of confessional correspondence between Chris, Sylvère, and Dick—letters, emails, voicemails, faxes—Dick never responds. Like a myna bird, Chris sings her unrequited lamentations through Dick, casting her own erasure back on herself:

“Who’s Chris Kraus?” she screamed, “She’s no-one! She’s Sylvère Lotringer’s wife! She’s his ‘Plus-One!’” No matter how many films she made or books she edited, she’d always keep being seen as a no one by anyone who mattered so long as she was living with Sylvère ... She remembered all the times they’d worked together when her name had been omitted, how equivocal he’d been, how reluctant to offend anyone who paid them. She remembered the abortions, all the holidays she’d been told to leave the house so Sylvère could be alone with his daughter. In ten years, Chris concludes, she erased herself.

(117)

By using the epistle, the novel presents an experimental performance of female abjection, where Chris’s identity as nothing and no-one, a “plus-one”, is solidified through her association with another (Sylvère), just as the (heteronormative) dumb cunt is authorised by the dear dick. If Chris cries that “history isn’t dialectical” (117), then the personal oral histories of *I Love Dick* are arguably re-formed as the semiotics of self-erasure, non-identity: the question particular to the genre is therefore not who, or what, is speaking, but rather who is the addressee. In Chris’s compulsion to “tell the Dumb Cunt’s Tale”, not to Sylvère Lotringer or Dick Hebdige, but to “Dear Dick”, “DD”, she chooses not to anonymize herself, but her symbolic vehicle (27). In Watkins Fisher’s reading of the novel, the manipulation of Dick into an unknown, unseen object of lust allows Chris to reduce “Dick’s identity into a faceless, patriarchal screen ... onto which she projects her sexual fantasies, personal anxieties, and critical interventions” (226). Dick’s journey to the symbolic, “through a process that Derrida terms ‘emajusculation’”, feasibly creates the blank canvas that Chris uses to critique her own exclusion from the art world, and the wider absence of women from art theory.⁴⁵ This, too, is read against her marriage to Sylvère, where the “insults,

⁴⁵ Citing Sean Gaston, Watkins Fisher explains that Dick’s symbolic progress from Dick to dick, and vice-versa, is achieved through Derridean capitalisation and decapitalisation, where the capital letter is the *majuscule*; the act of

slights, and condescension” that she endures as his wife are played out on Dick, a phallic-shaped void, who is “made to stand for the very idea of men in Kraus’s litany of disappointments in the spheres of love, sex, and art” (Watkins Fisher 226). “The fact you don’t return messages”, Sylvère tells Dick, “turns your answerphone into a blank screen onto which we can project our fantasies” (29). Kraus’s abrupt shift between modes of narration re-formulates the personal as a “PARALLEL SOURCE OF INFORMATION” against the political, where an awareness of the *other* (here, Dick) discards the notion of the novel’s “fullest possible expression of a single person’s subjectivity” (71). The mental fugue of *I Love Dick*, its intertextual self-referentiality, is obvious: “When you’re living so intensely in your head there isn’t any difference between what you imagine and what actually takes place. Therefore, you’re both omnipotent and powerless” (61). It is a line ‘spoken’ by Chris in conversation with Sylvère, only to be later ‘written’ in letter from Chris to Dick. Everyone is paradoxically object and subject, known and unknown: Chris Kraus both is and isn’t Chris Kraus, just as Sylvère Lotringer both is and is not Sylvère Lotringer, and Dick Hebdidge is and isn’t Dick—they are each themselves, and *other*.

Chris Kraus is both the author of her work, and the subject; her performance of female subjection explicitly engages with feminist artistic practises. To read *I Love Dick* is to engage with women as both artists and authors, where the question of “who is speaking?” transforms into an interrogation of the self: “who am I?” Responding to the death of the author, Linda S. Klinger argues that Barthesian theory “cannot accommodate ... feminist artistic practice”, and poststructuralist understandings of authorship formulated by Barthes and Foucault “[deflect] the trajectory of feminist cultural production” (39). And though the critique of authorship “may not completely erode a feminist position”, Klinger identifies that the discourse of the author-function

decapitalisation is *emajusculation* (my emphasis). It is, of course, a play on the word emasculation. “Not only is there no kingdom...of difference, but difference instigates the subversion of every kingdom”, argues Derrida (Gaston 111). In this way, Dick (Dear Dick) comes to represent both Chris’s specific abjection, as much as it comes to “instigate the subversion of every” other phallocentric performance of female heterosexuality: the Derridean anonymising of Dick-as-dick means they are both one and the same, Nothing and Nobody. For further reading see Sean Gaston, *Derrida and Disinterest*, Continuum, 2005.

“carries enormous potential for stymieing the full participation of women artists in contemporary culture at the point where critical practice and artistic production meet” (39). Moreover, Kraus’s anecdotes on Hannah Wilke, Miriam Shapiro, and Judy Chicago support the portrait *I Love Dick* paints of the marginalisation of the feminine creative impulse. Similarly, Clarissa Sligh’s work *She Didn’t Know Who She Was* is identified by Klinger alongside the works of Cindy Sherman as being intimately associated with the questioning of the gendered self, and its equivocal sense of agency: “The ‘I’ at stake is clearly designated by gender, but her identity slides in and out of focus, depending on whether ‘she’ is a woman whose knowledge and experience are bodily and innate ... or a woman trapped by gender and race” (Klinger 41). By transforming the known into the unknown, shifting from real to unreal, the epistolary “[transforms] Dick from subject to *object*, writer to *text*, critic to *critique*” (emphasis original, Watkins Fisher 228). Moreover, the novel’s insistence on a “stuffy, referential delirium”, the “reality of unreality”, suggests that Dick is for Chris a metonymic mirror, a narratological, arguably impotent vacuum where her own gendered absence is reflected and articulated (Kraus 31).

In this way, where Kraus anonymises her experiences through the void of Chris, she similarly absents male-focused desire from her exegesis of the gendered self; she enters the “psychosis” of a late-blooming adolescence, her second chance at a self-authorised sexuality described as “living so intensely in your head that boundaries disappear” (65). Chris’s “globally embarrassing” confessions to both Dick and Sylvère mean that the latter “can’t avoid the reality of this anymore ... HIS WIFE LOVES ANOTHER MAN” (67). It is here that the material form of “Sylvère” melts into the figure of “Chris”: where Sylvère begins to tell his “story” of infidelity, it is Chris’s idiosyncrasies that chime through, for where the sentimental, heterosexual “form dictate[s] that Chris end[s] up in Dick’s arms”, Sylvère “couldn’t help ... thinking that Chris had betrayed the form they’d both invented by excluding him” (67). At this point of realisation, the narrative perspective suddenly shifts in brackets: “[And here Chris picks up the story, hoping to make Sylvère

understand—]” (67). The gap between the dumb cunt and the dear dick “widens” when Sylvère and Chris begin to write letters together, their voices indistinguishable from each other: “I, we’re, writing you this letter that we will never send ... We can’t bring ourselves to finish this letter” (68-69). If *I Love Dick* is a “Billet Doux, Billet Dick: A Cultural Study” on abject female desire, the text readily admits to its own failures of self-abnegation: as Chris (in third person) remarks, “it’s considered crass and amateurish not to ‘fictionalise’ the supporting cast of characters, changing names and insignificant features of their identities” (71).

The ontological question of the dumb cunt’s desire judders against the epistemology of her dear dick, where Dick tells Chris, in response to her vivid dreams of having “intentional and deliberate” sex with him, “but you don’t even know me” (157). Shifting in “a jumpcut from the cryptic to the literal”, Chris’s initial titillation at her “conceptual fuck” with Dick (a psycho-sexual one-night stand) instructs her act of writing an “existential dream”, where she and Dick fuck in “the Kierkegaardian third remove” (161). Kraus parodies the ambitions of female heterosexual desire un-validated by the masculine, where the amorous cunt becomes “a Thing Observed”: “Sex with you”, Chris ironically tells Dick, “is so phenomenally ... sexual” (161). Of course, the extra-textual joke is that Chris and Dick are like Schrödinger’s Sex: they both did and did not fuck. Subjectivity descends into shame, and Chris sets herself the task of “solving heterosexuality (i.e., finishing this writing project) before turning 40”, in order not to feel “hopelessness, regret” at the fringed hole’s rejected pursuit of the unknowable, elusive pricked probe (170). Like one of Judy Chicago’s “Great Cunts in History”, Kraus uses Chris as a surrogate for the re-presentation of female heterosexual desire. Where Acker de-forms the centralised voice of a text to eschew self-reflexivity, forcing the narrator(s) into a state of perpetual non-recognition, Kraus similarly combines intertextuality and schizoid narrative strategies to both isolate the gendered voice across multiple realities in a text, re-configuring the self-fulfilling ‘psychosis’ of female heterosexuality and

phallocentric desire. “Dick, you’re so vain”, sings the “conceptual chorus”, “I bet you think this book is about you” (Watkins Fisher 228).⁴⁶

Kraus’s use of the schizoid self—the “schizophrenic project” of loving Dick “consciously”—is an extreme representation of the “reconstruct[ion]” of Chris’s sexual identity: “If I could *love you consciously*, take an experience that was so complete female and subject to an abstract analytical system, then perhaps I had a chance of understanding something and could go on living” (emphasis original, 19). But, as Eileen Myles points out in the foreword to the 2006 edition, Chris’s “*living* is the subject, not the dick of the title”, and her editing of the intertextual form is “the best performance of all. To go everywhere imaginable in a single work *and* make it move. All to the service of writing an entirely ghastly, cuntty exegesis” (emphasis original, 15). In the novel’s afterword, Joan Hawkins raises the notion of the unrequited text as a theoretical fiction, neither genre-bending nor “some new kind of literary form”, “something in between cultural criticism and fiction” (263). That a text is unrequited suggests a lack of reciprocity, where the relationship between author and text, text and reader is disturbed: a text that is unrequited consciously rejects the narrative consolation of the subject. According to Hawkins, Kraus’s text and use of language is “self-cannibalizing, self-reproducing, viral and ludic”: though Chris “metaphorically ‘killed’ Dick by turning him into ‘Dear Diary,’” Dick—when he finally writes back—erases Chris” (267). In the novel’s final section (“Dick Writes Back”), Dick’s Fedex—two white envelopes, one addressed to Chris, and the other addressed to Sylvère—arrives on the day of Chris’s film screening; though she promises herself that she will not read Dick’s only response before her premiere, she “change[s]

⁴⁶ When singer/songwriter Carly Simon’s “You’re So Vain” was released in 1972 it quickly became a hit single. The song paints the portrait of a self-absorbed lover, but Narcissus is never named: he walks into a party “like [he was] walking onto a yacht”, with “one eye in the mirror as [he] watched [himself] gavotte.” When Simon suggests that “all the girls dreamed that they’d be [his] partner”, she is channeling his arrogance and pride. Simon admits to once being one of those “girls”, but she has long-tired of his pretensions and hypocrisy, instead observing him from a place of absolute authority: “You’re so vain”, she tells him, “you probably think this song is about you, you’re so vain (you’re so vain), I’ll bet you think this song is about you, don’t you? Don’t you? Don’t you?” Simon has never said that the song is about one person, but rather her combined experiences with several men. Like Chris Kraus, she uses the anonymous lover as a medium, a performative erasure that subverts the self-denigration of women’s desire and sexual agency. But there are those who disagree: “Let’s be honest,” actor Warren Beatty told Britain’s Daily Express in 2007, “the song is about me.”

her mind and rip[s] it open” (259). She reads her husband’s first, where Dick expresses concern for the damage done to his and Sylvère’s friendship, resigning himself from the “unwarranted and uninvited aftermath” of Chris’s notion of their conceptual fuck:

I can only say that being taken as the object of such obsessive attention on the basis of two genial meetings spread out over a period of two years was, indeed still is, utterly incomprehensible to me. I found the situation initially perplexing, then disturbing and my major regret now is that I didn’t find the courage at the time to communicate to you and Kris how uncomfortable I felt being the unwitting object of what you described to me over the phone before Christmas as some kind of bizarre game. (260)

When she opens the envelope addressed to her, she finds a “xerox copy of Dick’s letter to Sylvère” (261). For all Dick’s silence and awkwardness, “it’s a breath-taking act of humiliation, an unambiguous Fuck You”, writes Anne-Christine d’Aesky: “he misspells her name as Kris ... expresses regret, discomfort, and anger at being the **objet d’amour** in their private game” (d’Aesky, cited by Hawkins, *I Love Dick* 268). Moreover, that “Kris” receives a copy demonstrates that Dick’s letter is composed with the intention that the interlocutor—or, as Hawkins suggests, “the reader-voyeur”—is still yet the dumb cunt: Chris “gasped and breathed under the weight of [the xerox letter] and got out of the cab and showed her film” (265, 261). “When Dick finally writes”, Hawkins notes, “he reinforces Chris’s peripheral position” by “ignoring everything that has passed between Dick and Chris” and “respond[ing] to Sylvère’s initial letter to him” (269). If Dick is the object, then Chris—Kris, the dumb cunt—is the theoretical experience of the subjective, fragmented self.

By isolating the exploitative, self-determined narrative voice in Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick*, Kraus not only examines the critical conditions of gendered authorship within post-structuralist discourse, but the ideological and aesthetic properties of textual absence. As both the subject and object of

her writing, Kraus's foray into female abjection defies the conventional stratagems of a confessional text and formulates a new exegesis of self-expression, subverting what Eileen Myles describes as the "endless self-abnegation" of writing by women, or about them (Kraus 13). Moreover, Kraus reconditions Plath's schizoid self as a productive exercise of self-development, where the narrative voice doesn't experience a psychic degeneration: as a self-made prosopopoeia, Chris is neither Kris nor Kraus, but a full expression of the narrative voice as everywhere and nowhere, nothing and nobody. While Kraus echoes Carter's over-simplification of the pornographic as entirely heteronormative pricked probes and fringed holes, she ultimately remodels a dialectic of female heterosexuality where history and identity are no longer irrevocable. But Kraus's particular use of techniques practised by Acker to address questions around self-representation in narrative makes her critical and, indeed, cultural connection to the latter a particular source of interest. Kraus's objective restructuring of her own identity in *I Love Dick* is a powerful embrace of gendered narcissism, where the self-portrait is neither flattering nor obscene but revelatory: where Acker's identities roam, so too do Kraus's—the narrative voice unhinged by form, their mutual characterisation of non-recognition is uncanny.

4.4 This is Literary Friction: Anonymity after Acker

Chris Kraus's *After Kathy Acker: A Biography* (2017) explicitly addresses the malleability of an individual and personalised history, opening with the suggestion that "like everything in the past, everyone remembers it differently, and some of the people involved hardly remember it at all" (13). Furthermore, Kraus concedes "Acker's life was a fable", and notes that her text "may or may not be a biography of Kathy Acker", for "although she wrote first-person fiction and gave hundreds of interviews in which she was asked to recite the facts of her life over and over again, these facts are hard to pin down in any literal way. Because in a certain sense, Acker lied all the time" (14). Here, Acker is presented as a self-made text, a mutable subject of unfixed madness, an

estranged figure whose writing “break[s] down the boundaries between waking and dreaming” (29). By borrowing from Acker’s fiction, her personal correspondence, and her notebooks, Kraus’s composition seemingly mythologises Acker by gesturing towards the textual indeterminacy of Acker’s work: it is not a biography of Acker in any literal sense, but an account of Acker “creat[ing] a position from which to write” (14). Though Kraus charges against “sketch[ing] an apocryphal allegory of an artistic life in the late twentieth century”, that is precisely how Acker’s personal subjectivity is configured in Kraus’s *After Kathy*: Kraus’s literary portrait transforms into actuality the calculating trauma of Acker’s experimental writing.

In an interview with Larry McCaffrey in 1990, Acker situates her texts securely within postmodernism, repositioning her direct plagiarism of high and low literature as a sort of narrative schizophrenia. While writing *Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula, by the Black Tarantula* (1973), Acker states that in reading psychologists R. D. Laing and David Cooper, she “took the model of the centralised ‘I’” and reapplied it to the narrator of her writing: “rather than trying to integrate the ‘I’”, Acker wondered if the ‘I’ could be “*dis-integrated*” to “find a more comfortable way of being” (emphasis original, 88). Her concern lay not with “the ‘I’ of the text” but “the ‘I’ of *me*”, and she swiftly rejects its construction within traditional genres: “I wasn’t interested in autobiography or in diary writing, but what the textual ‘I’ looked like” (emphasis original, 88). It is not form that dictates content for Acker, but content that reconfigures form:

...what I did was set a real autobiography next to fake autobiography—that is, I took some biography and made it into an autobiography. I took what I figured out ‘I’ wasn’t...After working some of these ideas through in several books, I found I wasn’t so interested in that anymore. What was much more interesting was the actual text itself. It was right about that point when I started *Great Expectations*. (88-89)

McCaffrey suggests to Acker, that her literary “experiments [express her] intuitive sense that personal identity (either your own or that of others) is unfixed”, where “they’re using some ... semiotic slippage of textual transformations to literalise the notion that identity is unfixed, or to question the whole concept of stable female and masculine identity”; though she confirms the lack of a centralised meaning in her texts was not “consciously involved” in her composition process (89-90). Her texts are as controversial as they are experimental, and their de-centralised narrative voice precisely questions the epistemology of the self as an appropriation: Acker’s constellation of selves, the explicit experience of emotional outrage and sexual masochism, are a grotesque reimagining of the relationship between sexuality and power, the other and the self.

Acker cultivated her own mythologizing, a facet of her personality that Kraus isolates in the only authorised biography of the avant-garde punk heroine. Acker was “disinclined toward a conventional narrative”, and “worked and reworked her memories until, like the sex she described, they became conduits to something a-personal, they became myth” (Kraus 58). It is a feature of Acker’s writing that acts as both a “strength” and “weakness”, where Kraus more or less argues that Acker’s determined re-engagement with her memorialised self—her writing, her *identity*—single-handedly cemented the self-made fable of Acker: when writing about the narrator of *Great Expectations*, Kraus states that “Acker found herself awash in dreams and limitless time” (58, 166). When Kraus-as-biographer considers that, within *Great Expectations*, “the experience of time is completely internal, bound by emotion and thought”, she implicates Acker in the unbalance, embedding the narrative’s disequilibrium within its immediate proxy (167). “Driven by grief, ambition, and fear, after positioning herself in present-day time, the narrator launches herself on an epic traversal through memory, literature, culture, and alien worlds”, writes Kraus (168). But the “narrator” doubles as both an exposition on Pip as much as Acker; Kraus’s re-configuring of herself as biographer and Acker as subject prevents an objective presentation of the facts of Acker’s life (168). However, Kraus’s consistent engagement with a *posthistoire* of Acker—the “after”

of *After Kathy Acker*—at once memorialises her contemporary and abstracts the inescapable affect of Acker, where the biographer demolishes the subject of her text by meticulously re-presenting the exhibits of Acker’s literary self-authorisation: reduced to an archive of letters, diaries, fictions, and interviews, Kraus inverts the distance between Acker and her body of work.

For Acker, there is power in self-sublimation to a collective identity. By rejecting a centralised narrative and self-reflexive narrator, Acker and Kraus both illustrate an internalising of the structure of consciousness. Their writing each reconfigures the larger investigation of gendered self-authorisation and identity. *In Memoriam to Identity* careens between the known and unknown, where the actuality (not reality) of the self is bound by context: the intertextual features of the novel de-form both the temporal and corporeal surfaces of the text, where the refracted identities of *Airplane* and *Capitol* bracket each other and, ultimately, violently self-destruct. Moreover, *Great Expectations* appropriates common historiography with personal urgency, supplying the imagined Pip with a torrent of multiple emotions and experiences as collateral. Where Acker collapses the boundary between her body and the text, she fortifies the absence at the centre of her works: there is no ‘I’, no singular perspective. In order to perceive the many as one, Acker dis-places an absolute reading of her writing by continuously fragmenting her personal memories with a collective history. Acker’s persistent questioning of the circumstances that facilitate identity production has left a body of work that constantly reinvents the existential loss of self: her writing is disjunction and madness, division and delusion. For Kraus, Acker’s template of textual absence—her characterisation of non-recognition—directly influenced *I Love Dick*, a narrative psychosis of female heterosexuality and abject desire. As postmodern feminist writers, Kraus and Acker reconfigure the anonymous mode as contextually reactionary. Responding to the dichotomy between the Barthesian author-function in mainstream criticism and second-wave feminist practice, their particular utilisation of textual absence marks a shift in the mode’s expression of identity, where the “I” never emerges.

With their texts read as examples of the anonymous mode, both Acker and Kraus illustrate the mode's capacity to incorporate hybrid and emerging forms of literature. Acker's particular experiments with narrative non-identity separate sex from sexuality, the body from the voice: like Angela Carter, Acker's violent characterisation of an abject female sexuality *outside* the hegemony of hetero-patriarchal discourse re-inscribes the gendered body as an unknowable site of transgression. The codified relationship between silence and erasure in Acker's texts, where one's personal historiography illustrates the anonymous mode's archetypal self-production-as-destruction, de-forms the gendered self at the centre of the narrative. Similarly, Kraus's deliberate self-representation is profoundly revelatory: *I Love Dick* remodels a dialectic of female heterosexuality, eliding a gendered self ("Chris") from subject ("dumb cunt") and object ("Dear Dick"). Acker's and Kraus's direct influence on emerging genres of literature—autofiction and autotheory, in particular—will be the focus of the following chapter, shifting the theoretical lens from fiction to non-fiction. Both Acker and Kraus combine intertextuality and Plath's schizoid narrative strategies to isolate the gendered voice across multiple realities in a text. Their particular narrative engagement with subjectivity and biography insists on a perpetual non-recognition. The final chapter of this thesis will explore the intersection between the anonymous mode and autotheory, where the first-person narrator is explicitly re-cast as the schizoid self: observer and observed, subject and object.

“Susan, I’m gay.”
—Ellen: *The Puppy Episode*

Chapter Four: (Re)Producing Anonymity

This chapter will examine the discourse of gendered anonymity in autotheory, in order to consider how the anonymous mode characterises self-production as feminist practice in narrative non-fiction and experimental writing. Taken from Paul Preciado’s body-essay *Testo Junkie* (2008), the term autotheory, often used interchangeably with “autocriticism”, describes a genre of writing that blends theory and autobiography. These are writings that consolidate the first-person experience through an encounter with critical theory, where subjectivity is recontextualised as *praxis*: to be critic and critique, subject and object. As a new genre, autotheory uses the framework of philosophy and critical theory to reconcile the self in autobiography and memoir. In her article “Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice”, Lauren Fournier considers autotheory as a distinct genre, separate but emerging from critical memoir (as post-memoir), autobiography, theoretical fiction, and autobiographical fiction:

In autotheory as a conceptual and performative feminist practice, artists, writers, and critics use the first person, or related practices of self-imaging⁴⁷... to process, perform, enact, iterate, and wrestle with the hegemonic discourses of “theory” and philosophy, extending the feminist practice of theorizing from one’s subject positioning as a way of engendering insights into questions related to aesthetics, politics, ethics, and social and cultural theory. (658)

⁴⁷ Fournier takes her use of the term “self-imaging” from Amelia Jones’s description of conceptual art practices, such as self-portraiture by Cindy Sherman and Hannah Wilkes, in Jones’s *Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject* (2006). While Fournier explicitly identifies the emerging genre as “feminist practice”, I will not be addressing this aspect of autotheory in this chapter: I am explicitly interested in the relationship between the anonymous mode and autotheory as a genre.

As a genre, autotheory offers for the first-person critic a doubling of their subjective position; within the anonymous mode, in particular, autotheory expressly characterises the self-as-other, facilitating a dual perspective in narrative.

This final chapter shifts its theoretical lens away from fiction towards autotheory, as an important genre within the anonymous mode, where the textual position of a decentralised narrator renegotiates the same paradox of self-production as self-destruction: the figure of the mother in Rachel Cusk's *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* (2002) and Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2014). Across this thesis, patriarchal motherhood echoes in each chapter as a source of unease, a threat to gendered selfhood. The unspoken maternal negation of Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) is responsible for her psychic degeneration, her failed diaphragm and consignment to an absent, proleptic baby. In *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), Angela Carter's monstrous, multi-limbed goddess of Beulah, known only as Mother, reconstructs the male aggressor (Evelyn) as a woman (Eve), where her mythic offspring has no identity, thinks of herself as "an abject state...no means of identification" (83). Similarly, Kathy Acker's multimodal narrators—Pip, Airplane, Capitol—are formed in response to maternal absence, codified as a growing awareness of silence and erasure, where one's gendered historiography is metered by the tension between self-actualisation and self-destruction. Pip, Airplane, and Capitol reproduce the claim in Acker's *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990) that "women don't have history...we make ourselves up" (219). In Plath, Carter, and Acker, the matrifocal voice of patriarchal motherhood does not retreat into maternal ambivalence: the figure of the mother is positioned as a site of functional anonymity, where gendered selfhood is doubly frustrated by both physical and psychic confinement.⁴⁸

But how does textual absence manifest in autotheory? And in what way does the relationship between content and form, subject and object, recontextualise the figure of the mother—and,

⁴⁸ My use of the word "confinement" gestures toward its synonymous use for childbirth: the historical tradition of pre- and post-partum "lying-in" during pregnancy.

indeed, motherhood—in fragmented, narrative non-fiction? Rachel Cusk's *A Life's Work* characterises the maternal self as an abject state of functional anonymity, an extreme (re)production of Esther Greenwood's unseen procreative self. Cusk's use of narrative passivity outlines maternal subjectivity as externalised, established in the objective conditions of her environment: mother formalised by child. In this way, the speaker's relationality is defined by the shift between self and other, where the subject expands from singular to double perspective. Cusk's self-identification as the Motherbaby, her disjointed dualism at being both somebody's mother and simultaneously still somebody's child, reproduces Esther's passive resignation of a gendered self. Cusk discovers in motherhood that she "easily ... split in two", now a mother and a self, where "to succeed in being one means to fail at being the other" (63). The psychic division of the maternal figure occurs in a postpartum stasis, where the disreality of gendered selfhood acts as a corollary to the realities of motherhood—a matrifocal depersonalisation, Cusk's self-possession as the Motherbaby comes at the dis-possession of her former self. In *A Life's Work*, patriarchal motherhood still yet solicits woman and mother as mutually exclusive, where motherhood displaces womanhood.

Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015) offers to patriarchal motherhood a comparative reading of queer parenthood, where the speaker of the text—the figure of the mother—is recontextualised by the figure of the anonymous lovers.⁴⁹ While both Cusk and Nelson frame their pregnancies as

⁴⁹ Writing on the heterosexual lovers, Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman* considers that the "anonymity of the lovers ... does not transcend but deny reality", and it is one in which a woman's sexual preference is culturally pre-determined by "class, religion, race and of gender itself" (8-9). For this reason, Carter disputes that men and women "fuck stripped of social artifice": the paradox of the self-conscious heterosexual relationship is that their infinite "sexual and emotional expectations" must be fulfilled by the very conditions that "[limit their] choice of partners before [they] have even got them into the bedroom" (9). As I stated earlier in chapter two (page 34), woman's great loss of herself comes at the expense of self-determined sexual expression, where the heterosexual couple "[succumbs] to this anonymity" and "[engages] at once in a spurious charade of maleness and femaleness" (8). Carter hypothesised the anonymity of the lovers in *The Sadeian Woman*, where the binary identities of male and female, man and woman, are fundamentally lost to one another during heterosexual intercourse, and Kathy Acker characterises anonymity as similarly connected to sex, a space where "everything becomes lost" (*In Memoriam* 112). It is concept of particular relevance to *The Argonauts*, where the lovers are not heterosexual or heteronormative, but explicitly queer. In Nelson's text, sex is not a performative absenting, nor is it procreative, but rather it is an exchange of renewal, an entrance to another self that does not come at the loss of one's own.

a reconstruction of selfhood, only Nelson's fragmented narrative dismantles the problem of gendered self-identification. Nelson's examination of gender, desire, pregnancy, and queer parenthood implicitly rejects Cusk's conceptualisation of the Motherbaby, insisting instead on an uncompromising, unflinching renewal of self—what is so “hard to get” about the self consciously shifting synchronous with the body to accommodate *un autre*? Nelson's inexpressible fear of losing herself, “my own me”, to her infant son, is mollified by her active renegotiation in the text to an observer, a witness to her partner Harry Dodge's gender transition. With gender as a detachable form of self-identification, Nelson's engagement with textual absence reflects the boundary between the body and the self, that form and content are continuously mingling to new effects and changes. As a work of autotheory, *The Argonauts* carefully constructs a state of eternal anonymity for the figure of the mother: the speaker of the text produces as she reproduces, a duality of incoherence that radically reformulates Roland Barthes's ideal, simultaneous declaration of love (as a perpetual renewal). Like Barthes, Nelson's fractured, formless narrative performs the anonymous lovers' discourse as a rhetoric of disreality and absence, where gendered selfhood is continuously remade: unknowable, unconditional, infinite.

5.1 Autotheory and Functional Anonymity: Narrative Passivity and the Abject Self in Rachel Cusk's *A Life's Work*

Narrative passivity is a technique in literary theory; a neoteric shift in narration, where the subjectivity of the speaker is established in the conditions of their environment. My coinage of the term “narrative passivity” lends itself to Luce Irigaray's discussion of female eroticism in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985). Considering Lacan's and Freud's categorization of female heterosexuality to be oppositional, “conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters”, Irigaray criticises female eroticism as a “consignment to passivity”: female heterosexuality as “self-embracing”, defined by absence, “lack” and “atrophy” (23). The “individualization of form ... is particularly foreign to female eroticism”, according to Irigaray, where “her entry into a dominant scopic

economy signifies ... her consignment to passivity”, as much as it confirms her sexuality as an “incompleteness of form” (25-26). Irigaray ultimately puts forward a theorising of female sexuality that is both self-referential and self-determined, established outside the heteronormative confines of an “active” masculinity and feminised “passivity”. It is therefore of particular interest to examine narrative passivity, as it is used by Cusk to narrate her experience of patriarchal motherhood, where the relationality of the speaker becomes intersubjective: the relaying of action (often by another character) mediates the “I” at the centre of the text. In the shift between subject and object, self and other, the speaker channels (as if a medium) a doubling of perspective. Narrative passivity invites a re-evaluation of the relationship between the theory and practice in narrative, which deliberately vexes the question, “who is speaking?” Indeed, who, if not the narrator? And how does this idiosyncratic exchange recontextualise the central speaker as unknown, unrealised? More recently, the technique has been used by Cusk in her *Outline* Trilogy (2014), where, in the process of allowing characters to narrate themselves, the subjectivity of the narrator (Faye) is carefully conveyed.⁵⁰ It is an observational style of narration, distinct from the narrative ventriloquism of Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick*, that directly facilitates an absencing of self-determination: the interlocutor is repositioned as the (active) agent of the narrative, with the narrator as its (passive) receptacle. As a more precise renegotiation of Plath’s schizoid narrative strategies in *The Bell Jar*, Cusk’s use of narrative passivity nevertheless allows a multiplicity of voices to be focalised through a central narrator, ultimately shaping the same state of functional anonymity in *A Life’s Work*.

⁵⁰ Rachel Cusk’s *Outline* (2014), the first in the *Outline* Trilogy, which includes the novels *Transit* (2016) and *Kudos* (2018), features an ostensibly nameless narrator, and a narrative built through a series of one-sided dialogues with other people: a Greek divorcee, a colleague, an old friend, and so on. Between these conversations on their fantasies and anxieties, intimacies and regrets, the narrator’s condition slowly emerges, though the central action of the text is never seen. It is the most expressive, clear example of narrative passivity, a deliberate recalibration of the presumed contract between reader and text, subject and object. In each novel, Faye is named but once, and only in passing by another character: in *Outline*, she is named in a devastating exchange with a mortgage broker, while in *Transit* her lover uses her name both as a full sentence and a full-stop. In *Kudos*, her son calls her by her first-name as a slight (his father remaining “Dad”). Like Cusk as the Motherbaby in *A Life’s Work*, Faye lacks an exterior identity, her historiography established by those around her. It is similar technique to the stream-of-consciousness narrative in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* (1931), where the subjectivity of the multiple perspectives—the interpenetrating voices of the novel’s six main characters—is established in their environment. Woolf’s most experimental work achieves the same result as Cusk’s *Outline* trilogy: each character is responsible for composing a singular consciousness.

As I have established, autotheory in the anonymous mode recontextualises the autobiographical subject to produce an idiosyncratic form of textual absence. But what is the effect of narrative passivity in autotheory, where the speaker of the text, as Fournier's coda points out, "expos[es] the problematics of maintaining conceptual separations between self and theory" (659)? If Cusk's experience of motherhood is juxtaposed with the autobiographical subject, in what way does this affect the discursive relationship between mother and child? In other words, how does maternal subjectivity complicate object-relations for the Motherbaby in *A Life's Work*? What is the significance of Cusk's interpenetrating selves—the splitting she experiences as a new mother, and the phenomenological (re)production of a consciousness not her own? And does the figure of the mother therefore require a unknown, undetermined state of being, separate or otherwise, to be both self and other?

A Life's Work, as a memoir of motherhood, makes much of the "biological destiny of women" (25). In her "Introduction", Cusk explicitly identifies pregnancy and childbirth—not motherhood—as that which "divides women from themselves, so that a woman's understanding of what it is to exist is profoundly changed" (13). It is the same paradox of being that frustrates the development of Esther Greenwood, silenced by her profound disturbance at witnessing an episiotomy performed on drugged Mrs. Tomolillo. Esther recounts the birthing scene as "some awful torture table", the woman's face unseen except for her "enormous spider-fat stomach and two ugly spindly legs", the "unhuman whooping noise" (*The Bell Jar* 61). Cusk, too, similarly departs from pregnancy and labour—in childhood, she "worried about childbirth...a great and mysterious agony" (*A Life's Work* 18-20). In her first section, "Forty Weeks", Cusk recounts at time at school where she "[was] shown" a film of a woman giving birth: according to Cusk, the woman "was naked, with thin, powerful arms and legs that waved out from the vast, afflicted hump of her belly, and her hair was long and tangled" (19). That Cusk was "shown" the film, rather than watching it herself, is a direct example of narrative passivity, where the narrator (here, Cusk) is explicitly

repositioned as an unwilling witness, one who is acted upon. The “unhuman” quality of Mrs. Tomolillo is here recapitulated by Cusk’s quiet discomfort: “The camera gave out a dim, nocturnal picture, and the viewer’s impression was of watching voyeuristically through a hole in the wall something terrible and secret, something doomed to travel beyond our comprehension and desire to look” (19). While in labour, the “naked woman” in the film “paced the room groaning and bellowing, like a lunatic or an animal in a cage”, or she would “occasionally...lean against the wall for some minutes, her head in her hands, before flinging herself away with a cry to the opposite wall”; before giving birth, Cusk notes that “the naked woman tore at her matted hair and roared” (20). Describing her arrival to the “boot-camp” of pregnancy, Cusk characterises patriarchal motherhood as “a career in conformity from which no amount of subterfuge can liberate the soul without violence” (21). An intermediary, solid state for Cusk, pregnancy is where “the life of the body and the life of the mind abandon the effort of distinctness and become fatally and historically intertwined” (21).

Where Cusk describes the baby as the “victim and autocrat” of pregnancy, the “expiation” of childbirth, she laments her own absenting in pregnancy: the numerous leaflets she is given repeatedly suggest “preparation” is the best defence against pain, and yet they contextualise pregnancy as a “curious communality”, therein “stripping the process of any personal significance at all” (33). Cusk uses narrative passivity to critique the homogeneity of patriarchal motherhood and removal of her subjective experience, where “pregnant women in the English-speaking world” are “governed by a regime breathtaking in the homogeneity of its propaganda, its insignia, its language” (30). She receives a copy of *Emma’s Diary*, a fictional account of patriarchal motherhood, created by the National Health Service: Emma has a husband named Peter, who wears pleated trousers and hovers around the sofa on a Saturday morning “to give her a break” (31-32). Meanwhile, Emma’s unmarried pregnant friend is fighting with her boyfriend, while Emma’s second pregnant friend, an older Black woman, has a husband who is avoiding child support.

According to Cusk, these “friendships” (classist, racist stereotypes) offer for white, middle-class, heterosexual Emma a chance to examine imagined difficulties of mothering outside of her own reality.⁵¹ These leaflets—the propaganda, insignia, and language of pregnancy—all recommend that Cusk more or less “make [herself] into a different person” in order to lessen the pain of childbirth, where she can “at least...[believe] it is happening to someone else” (34). Cusk’s matrifocal perspective encompasses the generalised homogeneity of *Emma’s Diary* while it erases her own subjectivity.

Narrative passivity demonstrates the interconnectedness of the pregnant subject to its socio-political environment. Through using this technique, Cusk makes visible the abject matrifocal self: for Cusk, if her baby is both “victim and autocrat”, then it comes at the “splitting” of her known self into an unknown, or what she describes as the “transfer of significance” (48). In her essay “Stabat Mater”, Julia Kristeva addressed the idealisation of the mother, where “femininity is absorbed by motherhood” (161). Kristeva further claimed of heteronormative pregnancy that “a mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language—and it has always been so” (178). Of childbirth and the “incommensurable, unconfined maternal body”, Kristeva continues, suggesting that “another abyss opens between this body and the body that was inside it: the abyss that separates mother and child” (178). Women’s alienation from her own body, Kristeva argues, is the direct result of her conforming to the biological imperative of motherhood, where woman must produce another’s body and consciousness within her own, before it is removed from her. Cusk’s particular description of her own pregnancy and childbirth reflects the Kristevan abjection of maternity.

⁵¹ It is an interesting moment in *A Life’s Work*, for surely Cusk is undoubtedly in the same socio-political position as Emma of *Emma’s Diary* and, therefore, the intended (or ideal) reader. For Cusk this is part of the problem: the notion that there is an ideal pregnancy under patriarchal motherhood, which absents her subjective experience. But Cusk is herself a victim of homogeneity, for while she gamely suggests in the Introduction that in her case “a decision was made to demolish traditional family culture altogether”, her only “unconventionality” was that her “partner left his job and [they] moved out of London” (13).

As birth approaches, Cusk describes herself as retreating “further into a deluded solitude”, where “in the dense, concentrated blackness, like a bomb, [she] see[s] a long moment of forestalled horror, of disbelief, of dammed-up but pressingly, explosively imminent reality” (44). In the shift from the putative to the real, birth transforms for Cusk a baby into a daughter, a person; her former self into a mother. Scheduled for a Caesarean section, Cusk initially confirms without hesitation her wish for a general anaesthetic, her desire to be completely unconscious and return in a new state of being; she is persuaded and submits to a double local. Cusk narrates her experiences of a Kristevan childbirth, where she is acted upon, again and again, unable to resist: ministered, prepped, pressed, pronged, pushed, injected, heaved, erected, blasted, held, tugged, Cusk is “immediately...assailed from all sides” as she enters the operating theatre, its appearance reminiscent of an “execution chamber” (47). At the point of birth, Cusk describes her voice as “preternatural coming out of [her] dead body”, where she feels “dismantled” and fears that her “soul is being uncaged and allowed to fly away” (48). It is at this point that the a “transfer of significance” occurs: her daughter’s life begins while Cusk and her world reorient, adjust (48). But what is the significance of Cusk’s interpenetrating abject selves—the “splitting” she experiences after birth as a new mother, and the phenomenological performance of the (re)production of a consciousness not her own? And if Cusk’s use of autotheory reconditions the experience of mortality, how does this affect the discursive relationship between the figure of the mother and the child?

Cusk’s use of autotheory politicises her subjective experience of motherhood, where the figure of the mother becomes a signifier for the abject (matrifocal) imagination. *A Life’s Work* complicates the experiences of mothering as re-examination of self-knowledge, where Cusk’s ontological foundation of the abject self-as-mother begins in a state of anonymity; it is her use of narrative passivity that exposes the entanglement of public and private, visible and invisible, the absent (abject) self and its present relationality. By using narrative passivity to demonstrate the

interconnectedness of the subject to its socio-political environment, Cusk's splitting of her known self occurs in a passive stasis: labour. It is this precise transformation, the "transfer of significance", that marks Cusk's post-partum transition to functional anonymity.

Cusk's charge in *A Life's Work* is that the experience of pregnancy under patriarchal motherhood is cumulative and comes at the expense of the individual: the confinement of one's subjective reality is the source of Cusk's specific, matrifocal violence. As Alice Braun argues, Cusk represents "pregnancy as an ideology ... compared to a fascist regime, and the experience of it akin to a violent, arbitrary form of confinement", appropriating images of "labour camp-like ... imagery of totalitarianism" (8).⁵² Interestingly, Braun perceives that "the experience of bare life as surrender of one's rational self is the common denominator between the experiences of motherhood and of totalitarian internment" (15). As Cusk comes to care for her infant child, Braun argues that Cusk is "colonised, her free will obliterated and her story erased as she becomes 'Motherbaby'" (17). And though Braun does not identify narrative passivity explicitly as the technique that facilitates Cusk's textual absence, she nevertheless poses the singular question that reveals the strategy's underlying presence: "Why can't [Cusk] speak in her own voice and not just as a part of an unbroken continuum of mothers?" (26).

Through a reconsideration of childbirth and its resultant splitting of a former self into an unknown, as an example of textual violence, Cusk's use of narrative passivity occasions her loss of autonomy. Explicitly re-reading the text as a trauma narrative, Braun offsets Cusk's submission to motherhood by suggesting her experience can be "re-individualised", her "carefully constructed identity shattered by the experience of motherhood" (26). However, in my reading as an example

⁵² Braun identifies this specific charge against Cusk's memoir of motherhood, where pregnancy and childbirth are associated with imagery of internment camps and mass execution. While Cusk's memoir of motherhood echoes threads of gendered anxiety first articulated by Sylvia Plath in *The Bell Jar*, the misappropriation of holocaust imagery is similarly levelled against Plath's poetry. For further reading: James E. Young, "I may be a bit of a Jew': The Holocaust Confessions of Sylvia Plath", *Philological Quarterly* 66, 127-147, 1987; Al Strangeways, "'A Boot in the Face': The Problem of the Holocaust in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath", *Contemporary Literature*, 37(3), 370-390, 1996; and Susan Gubar, "Prosopopoeia and Holocaust Poetry in English: Sylvia Plath and Her Contemporaries", *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14(1), 191-215, 2001.

of the anonymous mode, Cusk's "Book of Repetition" is, in fact, a gesture toward the wider non-linearity of *A Life's Work*, where the figure of the mother perpetually re-encounters her absence.

Described as a metaphysical stasis, Cusk's post-natal consciousness continues as a site of functional anonymity: Cusk describes her daughter's "separateness", where, after her physical removal, her baby is in a perfect state of being, "autonomous and self-possessed" (58-59). If the Motherbaby is a state of indeterminacy, then Cusk's "bauble of motherhood" is the environment in which the figure is contextualised; as Cusk narrates her environment, she perceives her own self-destruction and self-denigration, where "its constituents, visually hostile, are equally unruly" (62-63). Narrative passivity allows the subject to represent a negative disequilibrium as a source of consolation. Cusk precisely locates the shattering of her former life, and the resultant sense of disorder and chaos as formative, undifferentiated—Cusk's repossession by her child, her constant presence, comes at the absence of her "unified, capable" former self (62). When Cusk returns home from the hospital with her baby she is greeted with a paradox; the house now contains an *additional* person in the form of her child, but Cusk can only abstract the silent absenting of her former self. She comments that her home has the haunting feeling of someone who has just died, while at the same time acknowledging that she left as one, and, "like a Russian doll" she has "come back as two" (60). The physical dysphoria experienced by Cusk is twofold: where childbirth, as an example of textual violence, has left her "voided and sutured", it additionally forces Cusk to "[solder] together [her] past and present, to be both [herself] and mother": "...the fact is that I know neither what it is to be myself nor to be a mother." (60-61). But does the figure of the mother require a unknown, undetermined state of being, separate or otherwise, to be both self and other? Cusk's articulation of the severance of the Motherbaby, a splitting between mother and child at birth, seems a violent paradox, marked by the addition of *un autre* and subsequent psychic loss of Cusk's former self.

Narrative passivity facilitates Cusk's abject sense of self-shame, her lack of knowledge: "as a mother I do not exist within the forgiving context of another person. I realise that this is what being in charge is" (86). No longer known to herself, safe within the context of *un autre* ("as a mother"), Cusk is able to engage with the limits of self-determinacy; where it exists, and where it does not: "I am surprised to discover how easily I have split in two ... Like a divided stream, the person and the mother pay each other no heed, although moments earlier they were indistinguishable: they tumble forwards, each with its separate life, driven by the same source but seeking no longer to correspond" (62). Cusk composes the figure of the mother under patriarchal maternity as a divided individual, whose separate parts no longer intersect and intermingle, but exist independent of one another: a splitting, complete and resolute. Against the perceived realities of patriarchal motherhood, Cusk experiences a reformatory anonymising. The stasis of her former self acts as a site of non-recognition, where the dispossession and rootlessness of her intimate, non-negotiable portrayal of a psychic splitting exposes to their full potential the maternal frustrations first echoed by Esther Greenwood: the pre-determined parameters of female sexual agency, self-determinacy, and autonomy under heterosexual social order.

In *A Life's Work*, narrative passivity contextualises personhood as cumulative experience; Cusk's eventual submission to childbirth is equated as a violent acquiescence to biology and sexual essentialism: the same conundrum that prevents Esther's psychic development. If Cusk's experience of childbirth is the signifier of a sinking into one's own former self, whereby motherhood is signified, then the Motherbaby is a sign of an impossible assimilation: the unrealised potential of an absent former self, seceded from self-recognition. But outside of patriarchal motherhood, how does the anonymous mode recontextualise the autobiographical subject and the matrifocal experience?

5.2 Falling Forever, Over and Over Again: Maternal Subjectivity and the Incoherent Self in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*

Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2014) reconfigures the expectations of motherhood and pregnancy: where Cusk's *A Life's Work* establishes patriarchal motherhood as a state of undesired anonymity, with childbirth as textual violence making visible the psychic death of her former self, Nelson undermines heteronormative maternal subjectivity by framing the taxonomy of pregnancy as a queer experience. While Cusk reports a "splitting" of her self in two—a before, and an after—Nelson shifts towards a "thinning" of her selves, revising the concept of the self "shattering" from Leo Bersani's "Is the Rectum a Grave?" Writing on Nelson's use of Bersani, Katie Collins considers that Nelson "fram[es] pregnancy as an engagement with death", both states of being entirely subjective (312). However, Nelson's re-presentation of Bersani's splitting self in her own pregnancy directly locates the symbolic order of incoherence in an experimental, nonlinear narrative. According to Collins, "Nelson reveals that pregnant women encounter the risk of 'shattering' the ego through relationality, but these risks are often veiled by procreative discourses that displace the threat of morbidity onto non-procreative bodies" (312). Nelson's memoir on motherhood, desire, and gender is explicitly queer: in *The Argonauts*, the self-thinning process is one of both literal and figurative re-production, expanding rather than inwardly retreating.

As Collins explains, Nelson's "pregnancy introduces violence against the coherence of self through the infiltration of another, and her textual citations lead to her interpenetration by others' writing and reduce the coherence of her authorial self" (311). The intertextuality of *The Argonauts*—its engagement with a multitude of voices—reveals that maternal subjectivity is rooted in relationality to others, where self-identification is continually being re-established: "You are making the baby", Nelson writes, "but not *directly*" (emphasis original, 114). If the lover's discourse in *The Argonauts* is a language of disreality and absence, then the gendered self is unknowable and unconditional, perpetually reproduced, "a becoming in which one never becomes, a becoming

whose rule is neither evolution or asymptote, but a certain turning, a certain turning inward” (Nelson 66). As Nelson grapples with her twofold state of being—both Self and Other—she quietly positions her partner, the artist Harry Dodge, as her interlocutor: “Is there something inherently queer about pregnancy itself”, she asks, “insofar as it profoundly alters one’s ‘normal’ state, and occasions a radical intimacy with—and radical alienation from—one’s body?” (16) To feel alienated, absent even, from one’s own body is precisely the locus of gendered selfhood: what happens to the self, when content and form shift together for *un autre*?

That the speaker of *The Argonauts* is producing as she is reproducing is a duality of incoherence that radically reformulates Roland Barthes’s penultimate claim in *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* (1977). For Barthes, a simultaneous declaration of love is the most pure statement, entirely untainted: love requited by the echo—not the reiterative response—of an *un autre*. Nelson’s work of autotheory is a synthesis of the matrifocal voice and the symptomal subject of *A Lover’s Discourse*: the figure of the mother is also the figure of the anonymous lover. Barthes declares in his preface that the principle of his book demands “that the lover is not reduced to a simple symptomal subject, but rather that we hear in his voice what is ‘unreal’”(3). As much as Nelson is her partner’s lover she is also their child’s mother—she cannot be reduced to her constituent parts. She must be everywhere and nowhere.

The Other in *A Lover’s Discourse* is positioned as Barthes’s description of “The Absent One”, where “any episode of language which stages the absence of the loved object...tends to transform this absence into an ordeal of abandonment” (12). Nelson and her constant refrain in *The Argonauts* that “maybe there will be a baby” demonstrates the dual conceit of the “Absent One”. While Barthes notes that “the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman”, for Nelson the incoherence of pregnancy is the paradox of mortality, where her violent reimagining of absence is, in fact, the potentiality of the unborn (Barthes 13). If *The Argonauts* reflects the impossibility of “flickering” gendered self-consciousness, where, citing Judith Butler, Nelson presumes the

inability to “live twenty-four hours a day soaked in the immediate awareness of one’s sex”, then queer pregnancy is a contradiction to this rule, an interruption of forced awareness. It is a 40-week exercise of incoherence, where despite the present visibility of form, the content may yet prove absent—“there might be a baby.”

Matrifocal incoherence in *The Argonauts* recapitulates the tension observed in Cusk’s non-linear narrative of motherhood, but curiously Nelson “feel[s] no urge to extricate” herself from what Cusk described as the “bauble of motherhood” (45). Citing both psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott and poet Alice Notley, Nelson verbalises the collective maternal fear for those beholden to the patriarchal model of motherhood: the undoing of one’s self. Like Cusk, Notley’s experiences of patriarchal motherhood arouse in her feelings of obliteration and self-removal, where “for two years, there’s no me here”, echoing Cusk’s neurosis of a “death” of her former self (*The Argonauts* 45). Nelson, however, as a model of queer parenthood, has “never felt that way”: “I had nearly four decades to become myself before experimenting with my obliteration” (46). For the queer parent, pregnancy functions as a lacuna that “assures discursive coherence”, facilitating what Nelson later describes as “an eros without teleology” toward her child (46, 55). Like Anne Carson’s “concept of leaving a space empty so that God could rush in”, maternal subjectivity outside of patriarchal motherhood is a necessary ontological deconstruction of identity—a desired disidentification with the self (61). The metaphysical loss of one’s former selves does not function as a source of fear or resentment for the queer parent as it does for the maternal figure under the structural violence of patriarchal motherhood.

Nelson uses Barthes’s repetition in *A Lover’s Discourse*—the lover returning, leaving, returning—to articulate the incoherence of maternal subjectivity and the revelation of self: she endures artificial “insemination after insemination” sessions, returning, leaving, returning, “climbing up on the cold exam table, abiding the sting of the catheter thread through the opal slit of [her] cervix, feeling the familiar cramp of rinsed, thawed seminal fluid pooling directly into her

uterus” (96). To revisit Cusk’s textual violence, that the metaphor of childbirth under patriarchal motherhood signals a woman’s physical obliteration as much as it occasions her psychic destruction, Nelson’s paragon of queer motherhood positions conception as an exercise of trauma: months and months pass with Nelson “wanting [their] baby to be”, beginning the “tortuous examination of every ‘spin-like’ excretion that exited [her] body, the sharp despair wrought by the first smudge of menstrual blood” (96). Reading descriptions of childbirth, Nelson quips that “labor did not strike [her] as exceedingly distinct from what happens during sex, or at least some sex, or as least much of the sex [she] had heretofore taken to be good” (104-105). Nelson’s anticipation of labour is not met with fear or anxiety, or deep mystery: as a queer woman, she experiences her “falling forever” not as a “hermeneutics, or an erotics, or a metaphors, of [her] anus”, but as a changing plausibility of form (106). Moreover, she argues that while “it has been politically important for feminists to underplay the erotics of childbearing in order to make space for erotics elsewhere”, she unflinchingly admits that she “had always presumed that giving birth would make [her] feel invisible and ample, like fisting” (108). Queer sexual practices, for Nelson at least, fill a void in female eroticism around pregnancy and childbirth, where the queer body is the site of reverence.

Citing Julia Kristeva, Nelson implicitly suggests that conception—not childbirth—as trauma is an explicitly queer rejection of the symbolic order: “[Single or lesbian motherhood] can be seen as [one] of the most violent forms taken by the rejection of the symbolic...as well as one of the most fervent divinizations of maternal power—all of which cannot help but trouble an entire legal and moral order without, however, proposing an alternative to it” (97). Here, Nelson notes that while one-third of families in America are headed by a single mother, “the census doesn’t even ask about two mothers or any other forms of kinship—if there is anyone called mother and no father, then your household counts as a single mother” (97). As an example of textual absence, the census acts as an official erasure of lesbian parenthood—the deliberate vanishing of one’s lover. The

absence of lesbianism, and other forms of queer kinship beyond mother and father, is also noticeable in Cusk's memoir of patriarchal motherhood. Although Cusk rails that her individuality has been superseded by the cumulative narrative of pregnancy and motherhood, at no point does she invite the reader to consider any experience, beyond a heterosexual, white, upper middle-class subjective position, such as same-sex couples or working-class single mothers repeatedly, unsuccessfully trying to conceive via reproductive technologies. The traumatic experience of regular violence for Nelson, each month a demonstration of an internalised loss—where there might be a baby—forces a “question from the inside”: “How does one submit to falling forever, going to pieces” (105). In order that there might be a baby, Nelson must willingly (or at least wilfully) put herself through the invasive and uncertain process of being impregnated through assisted reproductive technologies, a violent and traumatic experience she endures over and over and over. She does it all without ever being assured that there will be a child. It is a violation of biological difference that Cusk does not consider in her memoir.

For this reason, conception, successful and unsuccessful, is to the queer parent what childbirth is to the patriarchal mother: the source of transformative violence. Nelson still considers the presence of death as she gives birth, noticing it shuffling past, repeating the refrain that there might be a baby. If violence is the source of metaphysical transformation, and the body is a site of change, then, in Nelson's words, gendered selfhood is “a narrative full of false choices” (102). She experiences a discontinuity of self-identification, articulates the fear of losing “my own me” to her child, but the figure of the lover, like the mother, is ever-present, detachable. “And so we go on”, Nelson tells her lover, “our bodies finding each other again and again, even as they—we—have also been *right here*, all along” (emphasis original, 108). For Barthes, “the loved object ... does not move; it is the amorous subject ... who, at a certain moment, departs”: “Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present *I* is constituted only by confrontation with an always absent *you*” (13, emphasis in

original). Here, Nelson's maternal thinning reflects Barthes's sense of Disreality between the lovers' discourse, the "sentiment of absence and withdrawal of reality experienced by the amorous subject, confronting the world" (87). The "principal difference" for Nelson as the figure of the mother, not the lover, is "that the body [she] made would eventually slide out of [her] and be its own body" (109). This sense of "radical intimacy" is conflated with a "radical difference", for Nelson's child is "both in the body, both in the bowl" (109).

Where Barthes considers the lover's anticipation of absence from each other, Nelson refracts this dynamic to reflect her relationship with her child. Nelson adopts a Barthesian retelling of a discourse between lovers to represent the unavoidable dualism of motherhood, simultaneously self and other, where one falls forever and ever in the boundary between the known and unknown. Nelson's description of her own labour with her son demonstrates the "ontological merits" of self-thinning, where the "impenetrable wall" of her cervix will dilate to allow what might be a baby to come (155). Nelson revokes Bersani's claim, arguing that dilation "is not a shattering, but an extreme thinning. (*O so thin!*)" (emphasis original, 155). Nelson explicitly connects the physical effects of effacement to the ontological argument of motherhood and maternity: the thinning of her bodily tissue quite literally facilitates her child's birth, as much as it demonstrates her metaphysical obliteration. As Nelson states, "to let the baby out, you have to be willing to go to pieces" (155). When her son is born, "in a kind of happy panic", Nelson's "first feeling is that [she] could run a thousand miles": "I feel amazing, total and complete relief, like everything that was wrong is now right" (165). As a mother, Nelson recognises that she will need to "withstand ... [her] undoing", already cognisant that her "temporal proximity" to her son's infancy is quickly fading as he rapidly grows (174). Motherhood, for Nelson, offers both the creative possibility of unmitigated happiness as much as it demands her complete, "ongoing" surrender to "nothing ... nothingness" (178). Nelson's submission to her body allows a conscious—physical and

metaphysical—effacement (thinning) of her self: “If all goes well, the baby will make it out alive, and so will you. Nonetheless you will have touched death along the way” (167).

The Argonauts presents childbirth as a conscious undoing of selfhood, where Nelson quips that “you don’t do labor. Labor does you”: it is very nature of “being in labor” that “demands surrender”, where it “runs you over like a truck” (167). Nelson readily admits her dependence on another and relinquishes control, ushers in her undoing, trusting that labour is inevitable, and her body will reform itself as a receptable to the needs of *un autre*. As she explains, “in place of an exhausting autonomy, there is the blunt admittance of dependence, and its subsequent relief. I will always aspire to contain my shit as best I can, but I am no longer interested in hiding my dependencies in an effort to appear superior to those who are more visibly undone or aching” (127). This is precisely what occurs during labour, where Nelson feels her son’s body visibly emerge, “all of him, all at once” along with “the shit that had been bedevilling [her] all through pregnancy and labor” (165). If Nelson’s “baby literally *makes space* where there wasn’t a space before”, then pregnancy and motherhood for the queer parent offers a reimagination of form, where the classifications and parameters of selfhood are undetermined and reanimated outside the heteronormative symbolic order (emphasis original, 128).

The “finite or sodomitical mother” is the maternal figure who accepts the possibility of new consciousness while simultaneously acknowledging the inevitability of its mortality (174). As a mother, Nelson’s reformulation of textual absence is contaminated by her eternal presence, in that her anticipated departure from her son evinces a return. This is what Nelson means by “falling forever, over and over again”: the figure of the mother, like the lover, is constantly remade, separate and interconnected—she departs and returns, is made and unmade, endlessly. It is a perpetual state of incoherence. “I’ll let my baby know where the me and the not-me begin and end”, Nelson declares, but she concedes that this will come at her own “undoing”, repeating Winnicott’s claim that “what is good is always being destroyed” (174-175). As a memoir of

motherhood, *The Argonauts* interrogates the proximity of the mother to the child, as much as it explicitly positions the queer parent as a referent for the figure of the absent lover.

Nelson's eroticism toward labour and the delight of her body's ability to accommodate what might be a baby is contrasted with Cusk's fear, the same fear first articulated by Esther Greenwood and Mrs Tomolillo: women who are drugged to forget, to absent the memory of birth, leaving only the physical pain in recovery. Esther's perception of the animalism of labour (as a silent witness to the bovine Mrs. Tomollilo) reflects Cusk's mammalian fear of childbirth as trauma. While Cusk and Esther feel unmade by childbirth, Nelson's self-identification is affirmed, over and over again, by the sheer fact of her child's body, her own, and that of her lover's. "There is no such thing as reproduction", Nelson concludes in her memoir, "only acts of production" (178). Nelson's examination of the incoherent self in queer pregnancy (and the homonormative) characterises the pregnant body as the unknown argo, a constant state of creative production. Nelson's engagement with absence and maternal subjectivity reflects the boundary between the body and the gendered self, that form and content are continuously mingling to new effects and changes. Her memoir recounts the potentiality of queer parenthood as a metaphysical site of (re)production outside the framework of the heteronormative.

5.3 Inappropriate Objects: The Maternal Body

Writing on desire, bell hooks considers that a "woman who talks of love is suspect": echoing Luce Irigaray's criticism of the inherent "lack" that characterises an exclusively feminine sexuality, hooks points out, still, that on the subject of love and desire, "Women, more often than not, speak from a position of lack, of not having received the love we long for" (*All About Love* 15). hooks is resolute that "the strength of our desire does not change the power of our cultural uncertainty" around love; but it is a binary culture "driven by sexual obsession", one that purports to study and teach every aspect of sexuality and yet "offers so little opportunity for us to understand love's meaning or to know how to realise love in word and deed" (16). It is this tenet of lack that Paul

John Eakin isolates as belonging to that “Barthesian autobiographical subject”, where one’s desire, the “expression of love...and of loss, inextricably intertwined, are equally attended by a profound sense of lack, of the insufficiency of expression itself” (20). In the subject’s declaration of love for the object of their desire, Eakin correctly identifies that the “motive to conceal is not the contrary or counterimpulse of the motive to display but its double and complement: the words, the language, all the ink, are the only sign we have for what we cannot say” (20). However, the “jubilatory discourse” of Barthes’s pronouncement of absolute desire (by the subject for its absent referent) is not the simultaneous declaration of love-as-reciprocity in the purest sense, but rather an act of silence. Across Rachel Cusk’s and Maggie Nelson’s respective narratives of motherhood, maternal subjectivity is expressed by absence. In Nelson’s memoir, in particular, the language of desire corresponds to the discontinuity and dislocation of the subject. If maternal desire is expressed through the disappearance of the subject, then the “whole paroxysm of love’s declaration”, the Barthesian repetitive, reiterative “I love you, I love you!” cannot hold under maternal subjectivity (Barthes, cited in Eakin 11). Critically, a newborn cannot audibly betray the most primary expression of love, and yet the structure and ordinance of a child’s love is irreconcilable to the maternal subject. Therefore, if the language of maternal desire is defined by one’s subjective experience, and if that experience is necessarily founded on lack and absence, then the most ineffable embodiment of love is silence: a perfect union between subject and object, mother and child, lover and *un autre*.

The body acts as the site of transference between subject and self, where Eakin notes, too, that this Barthesian shift in discourse complicates the relationship between body and language. “It is almost as though the characteristic attributes of the ‘self’ of classical autobiography have been displaced onto the ‘body’”, Eakin writes, arguing that “Barthes speaks elsewhere of the body as ‘the irreducible difference’” (12). Citing Barthes, Eakin goes on to suggest that while the “self of subject may lack a central core...the body with its ability not only to desire insatiably but (as word)

‘to answer for everything’ in discourse seems to go far toward filling the absent centre of the subject” (12). This argument is particularly relevant to Nelson’s suggestion of a baby making a space—physical, metaphysical—within the maternal figure, and the subsequent discontinuity of body and identity in maternal subjectivity. Therefore, if we take the baby as filling the absent centre of the maternal subject (for Cusk, the Motherbaby), then as much as the maternal body produces a new, unknown consciousness separate from its own, it must also function as a site of displacement and separation.⁵³ Moreover, Barthes’s discontinuity of language—of subject, body, and self—is best expressed in his characterisation of a maternal utopia: the topological relationship between Barthes (“R.B”) and his mother in *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*. Barthes’s “mother tongue”, his “umbilical language” provides for the subject R.B “a perfect union of body and speech” (Barthes, cited by Eakin 13). Furthermore, Paul Smith in *Discerning the Subject* (1988) considers that the Barthesian body in autobiography requires “a new plot, a new *discours* which enacts the agent’s relation to the ‘I’ that speaks and to the imaginary”: “There is no referent to be historized ... but there is a continual process of historicization, the ever renewable representation of instances of subjectivity and situation across time” (Smith 111). Taking up Jean Louis Schefer’s theoretical union of the “extension of time across the body”, Smith, like Barthes and Eakin, concedes that the “only authentic history of a human being that might possibly be grasped, but only insofar as time and body can be grasped momentarily” is a dialectic of the body, where the

⁵³ During pregnancy, the internal organs of a person will be displaced to accommodate the growing fetus and placenta. As the uterus thickens in early pregnancy, it enlarges, pressing behind the lower abdominal wall. Firm abdominal muscles will mean that the uterus presses further back toward the spine, creating a smaller, though visible, ‘bump’. The bladder rises slightly, while the small intestines and pelvic colon are lifted backward. As the uterus stretches, it presses on the lower colon, no doubt causing the constipation that bedeviled Nelson throughout her pregnancy. Many individuals similarly report heartburn throughout their pregnancy as the uterus presses against the stomach and lower breastbone. Breasts will begin to change as they prepare to feed, producing colostrum then milk within the breast tissue. The areola widen and darken as the ducts extend toward the nipples. In the final stages of pregnancy, the heart will be pushed from its cradle, while the intestines and stomach are cramped beneath the diaphragm, squished tight with the spine. It is not uncommon to report physical discomfort and difficulty with breathing, eating, sleeping. As the body prepares for labour, the cervix, vagina, and urethra lengthen, and the tissue surrounding the perineum swells. Because of the position of and resultant pressure from the uterus, many report varicose veins in their vulva and rectum. Additionally, hormonal changes during pregnancy will cause a loss of muscle tone and increased blood flow as the body prepares itself for birthing. An extremely rare example of physical displacement in the maternal figure, I am aware of one woman along my matrilineage with complete *situs inversus*, who carried twins.

temporality of form isolates subjectivity (Smith 111). Therefore, to reimagine the subject-position of the figure of the mother as a homeostasis with the imaginary or ideal child reconstructs the maternal body as a site of indeterminate identity: desire transforms the maternal body, like the Argo, into “an object with no other cause than its name, with no other identity than its form” (*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* 46)⁵⁴

Nelson’s maternal body is Barthes’s Argo. Her pregnancy acts as the visible extension of time, “afford[ed] the allegory of an eminently structural object, created not by genius, inspiration, determination, evolution, but by two modest actions: *substitution* (one part replaces another, as in a paradigm) and *nomination* (the name is in no way linked to the stability of the parts)” (emphasis original, Barthes 46). When the words “I love you” come “tumbling out of [Nelson’s] mouth in an incantation” to her lover, she uses their mutual desire to reposition the lovers as the argonauts, their bodies as the Argo (1).⁵⁵ In doing so, Nelson responds to Eakin’s claim that “if nomination

⁵⁴ A comparative reading of “father” and “mother” as transitive verbs demonstrates the significance of the relationship between name and cause, identity and form. Here, to father means to “to be or become the father of; to beget”, and “to originate, bring into existence; to be the author of (a doctrine, statement, etc.)”. Additionally, another application of “father” is “to acknowledge oneself as the originator or author of; to take responsibility for; to adopt”. An obsolete meaning is “to impose (something) on something else”. (“father, *v.*” www.oed.com, accessed 01 October 2020). The general meaning, however, is one of ownership, legacy, dominance, and possession: father is a pronouncement, a public acknowledgment of one’s continued lineage. To mother strikes an altogether different tone. It means “to be the source or originator of, give rise to, produce”, and its application to authorship is used in the passive: to mother is “to attribute the authorship of (a work) to a woman; (also) to ascribe the origin of (something) to a person, a cause, etc.” It is similarly passive in its meaning “to bring up, take care of, or protect as a mother; to look after in a (sometimes excessively) kindly and protective way”. (“mother, *v.*” www.oed.com, accessed 01 October 2020). Mother differs in both meaning and application when compared with father as active; to mother is to be passive, to profess, ascribe and attribute. Though it is increasingly common for heterosexual women to retain their maiden names after marriage, there is still a widespread tendency for any children of that marriage to assume their father’s surname. The continued practice of children carrying their father’s surname, and not their mother’s, is an example of what Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell considers in *Masculinities* (2005) as the “patriarchal dividend”: the unspoken advantages and privileges that men gain from the social organisation and preferencing of paternalism and masculinity. Furthermore, it has been recently argued that “gendered power relations among heterosexual couples appear to favour the visibility and continuity of men’s surnames”, whereas naming practices among lesbian couples are primarily concerned with selecting a surname for their child that displays recognition and legitimacy of the same-sex partner, such as using the non-birth mother’s surname. For further reading, see Deborah Dempsey and Jo Lindsay, “Surnaming Children Born to Lesbian and Heterosexual Couples: Displaying Family Legitimacy to Diverse Audiences”, *Sociology*, 52-5, 1017-1034. In New Zealand, to mother (or mothering) means to match-up an orphaned lamb to another ewe; the long winter I lived in Canterbury, I mothered an orphaned lamb. He was mostly black, mottled with white. When he took the bottle, his undocked tail whipped like a Catherine wheel.

⁵⁵ Nelson utters this incantation when her lover fucks her in the ass for the first time, her “faced smashed against the cement floor of [Harry’s] dank and charming bachelor pad” (1). Nelson’s admission that she is “not interested in a hermeneutics, or an erotics, or a metaphysics, of [her] anus”, that she is simply “interested in ass-fucking”, is an extreme gesture toward the sodomitical mother as an extension of maternal subjectivity developed outside a heterosexual hegemony (106). Nelson’s discussion around anal intercourse is reminiscent of Angela Carter’s reframing

and substitution in language mask the fundamental discontinuity of experience, the subject, unreconciled, demands nevertheless that language represent the continuity of desire” (Eakin 15). The maternal body in *The Argonauts* is endlessly remade (and unmade) through the language of desire, an elliptical reconstruction of the gendered self as separative and unknown.

The representation of pregnancy and the gendered body in *The Argonauts* comes from a critical position outside heteronormativity. As a queer woman, Nelson’s perception of her own body, and the bodies of those around her, differs from Cusk’s memoir of patriarchal motherhood. *A Life’s Work* opens at “Forty Weeks”, where Cusk describes the naked, narrative quality of unclothed women “grouped anonymously, by gender” at the local swimming baths (17). It is a sight that “still briefly arouses” in Cusk “a child’s fear, a mixture of revulsion and awe for these breasts and bellies and hips” (17). At her most heteronormative, Cusk’s perspective of the “unidealised, primitive flesh, forgetful here of its allure, seems composed purely of reproductive purpose”; that women here are naked and bulbous, grotesque and unknown objects of a singular purpose—reproduction, reproduction, reproduction. Moreover, sitting in the changing room, Cusk willingly admits that she still retains her babyish and inexperienced perspective from childhood, to “stare in the way [she] used to stare” at naked women: “in illicit wonder and terror at the suggestiveness of the adult physiognomy, its frank protrusions and fur and patina of age or experience bespeaking untold mysteries of pleasure and pain, of copulation, gestation and birth” (18). Describing a naked

of Marquis de Sade’s Juliette as paradigmatic of female sexual agency outside patriarchy: Juliette “has already a well-developed taste for anal intercourse”, argues Carter, “she is proud of her superb arse and the outrageous, unnatural uses to which she puts it” (84). Nelson’s additional descriptions of her partner’s apartment invite further analysis. “You had *Molloy* by your bedside and a stack of cocks in a shadowy unused shower stall”, writes Nelson, “Does it get any better?” (3) The final novel in Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy* trilogy is *The Unnamable* (1953), a disjointed, delusional narrative told from the perspective of an unnamed and physically immobile protagonist. Lacking a clear plot, and with no discernible setting, *The Unnamable* is unhinged from both time and place. The narrative is entirely without temporality. Moreover, the unnamed narrator eventually claims authorship of the trilogy’s previous novels, *Molloy* (1951) and *Malone Dies* (1951). “Where now? Who now? When now?” the narrator opens; the novel is a nonsensical word-salad of recollections that seem to belong to nowhere, no one. It is the idiosyncratic language of *The Unnamable* that constructs the absent figure at its centre. In the opening of *The Argonauts*, the presence of anonymous lovers (as the unnameable) alongside the detachable forms of desire (“a stack of cocks”) speaks to what Nelson’s lover considers to be true: that “once we name something...we can never see it the same way again” (4). What is “hard to get” about the “possible fruits” of love’s pose is precisely this: love is surely as interminable as it is unnameable, where, much like a stack of cocks, every incantation has “its meaning...renewed by each use” (3-5).

woman's adult body as "a trailer for a horror film", Cusk confirms that her perspective, more or less, reduces these women and their bodies as "declarative and material": "they exist as objects, communicating by form alone" (17). Meanwhile, Nelson experiences the same exposure to her own gendered body, though her response is expansive and productive. During her twenties living in Los Angeles, Nelson attended a weekly women-only day at a local Turkish Bathhouse, and meditated on "the impossibly ancient body of the woman whom [she] thought of as the ghost of the baths" (68). Nelson continues: "I meditated on her labia, which drooped far below her pale pubic hair, her butt cheeks dangling off the bone like two deflated balloons" (68).⁵⁶ Quoting Dodie Bellamy, Nelson continues: "*And I said, Do labia really start to hang? She said, Yes, just like men's balls, gravity makes the labia hang. I told her I'd never noticed that, I'd have to take a look*" (emphasis original, 68).⁵⁷ Cusk dissects the naked body of the mother as an objective site of cultural aversion, a trailer for a horror film. Nelson, however, clearly identifies the tense relationship between eroticism and disgust in the maternal figure. Using Allen Ginsberg's "Kaddish", Nelson appropriates the "Monster of the Beginning Womb"—Ginsberg's "hideous" mother Naomi, her "big slash of hair...belly wounds, abortions....ragged long lips between her legs...smell of asshole" (70). But

⁵⁶ I attend women-only days at a local Finnish sauna and, much like Nelson, can report one woman whom I consider a viable candidate for the "ghost of the baths". My experience of this environment—where women are both naked *and* outside the patriarchal discourse of desire and sexualising the female form—is undoubtedly similar to Nelson's. In our environment, Cusk's juvenile perspective is actively prohibited; Cusk's admitted half want to stare would be undeniably noticeable, making others extremely uncomfortable. It is a space where women's bodies are never—and should never be—sexualised, objectified; we exist in this space with the shared awareness that our unremarkable bodies are our own.

⁵⁷ Nelson also identifies Bellamy's response to Jonathan Franzen's description of "a middle-aged woman" in his novel *Freedom*: "Due to all the stogy points of view switches the novel apparently employs", Bellamy suggests, "I'd thought of assigning it to students, but after reading [that description] I was like, not in 100 fucking years" (*The Argonauts* 71). The description of "a middle-aged woman" in *Freedom* is not without precedence from Franzen; his Pulitzer-winning novel *The Corrections* features the nauseatingly sleazy Chip Lambert, an unemployed 'academic' working on a smutty screenplay, "The Academy Purple", a "wildly erotic" love triangle between a professor, his student, and her "diabolical lesbian lover" (30-31). His manuscript is rejected for being "creepy...the way [Chip] keep[s] talking about her breasts" (29). It is a claim Chip finds "unfair and cruel", that he could not write without "the lure of imagining the breasts of his young female lead." (29) Chip's 124-page 'magnum opus' contains upwards of 26 mentions of breasts, including "high round **breasts**", "perfect adolescent **breasts**", "milk-white **breasts**", and "sweat-drenched **breasts**", as well as repeated references to "eyeing her **breasts**", "eyeing her **breasts**", "his eyes drawn helplessly to her perfect **breasts**", "eyeing her **breasts**", "mentally fondling her perfect **breasts**", "eyeing her **breasts**", and "eyeing and eyeing her perfect adolescent **breasts**" (emphasis original, 31). As the novel suggests, there are "more [mentions of breasts] than Chip could remember!" (32)

Nelson recognises Ginsberg's approach to maternal eroticism as being similar to her own, "not in service of abjection, but in pursuit of the limits of generosity": "I still don't see the need to broadcast misogynistic repulsion", Nelson considers, "...but I do understand being repelled. Genitalia of all stripes are often slimy and pendulous and repulsive. That's part of their charm" (69-70).

But if the pregnant body is positioned as the locus of reconceptualising desire between the divisible self and *un autre*, then how does Nelson appropriate Barthes's presentation of eros in *A Lover's Discourse* as belonging to both the maternal and the lover, Argo and Argonaut? Nelson embraces the notion of pregnancy as inherently unstable: the dualism of reproduction, where one creates content as a revolution of form, an expansion rather than a retreat. In *The Argonauts*, Nelson seamlessly shifts from singular to double, without assimilation; there is a fundamental separation of desire from reproduction, where the queer experience of "fuck[ing] to come, not to conceive" assigns sex between consenting individuals as innately non-procreative (90). If pregnancy inherently queers the body, then the homonormative embrace of non-procreative desire gestures toward the functionality and versatility of queer sex, where Nelson's disappointment of her experiences with IVF treatment is captured in the moment she makes her non-procreative self come in stirrups: "the point wasn't romance" (96). Where conception is private and pregnancy public, the visible structure and ordinance of queer conception according to Nelson suggests a concept of natality not discussed in *A Life's Work*, where Cusk's premise of compulsory heterosexuality eschews any discourse on desire and the maternal body in the text.

In this way, Nelson characterises gendered anonymity as belonging to both the queer and maternal body, where both she and Harry are embodied as changeable, mutable, unfixed; a depression of constant flux, Nelson reformulates the pregnant body as inherently queer, acutely symptomatic as a site of transgression, reshaping of self and other, form and content. In doing so, Nelson in *The Argonauts* uses Barthes's dual discourse on maternal love and erotic desire to

challenge both the hetero- and homonormative, as well as the crisis of self-identification against maternal symbiosis and reproductive futurism: “Don’t produce and don’t reproduce ... Fuck *them*, I say” (emphasis original, 94-95). The destabilisation of the self through *un autre* in *The Argonauts* celebrates the queer maternal body as transgressive and radical as it is desirable, an infinite site of regeneration, reproduction, and reformation.

A Life’s Work makes the assumption that the identities of woman and mother are mutually exclusive, entwined by virtue of the maternal body. Elizabeth Grosz, in “The Body of Signification”, advances Kristeva’s ideas of maternal abjection and “the ways in which the inside and the outside of the body, the spaces between subject and object, and the self and other become structured and made meaningful through the child’s taking up a position in the symbolic order” (86). In this sense, Grosz argues that maternal subjectivity is continuously reaffirmed by the child’s relationship to the mother:

These pairs need to be oppositionally coded in order for the child’s body to be constituted as a unified whole and for its subjectivity to be definitively tied to the body’s form and limits. They are the conditions under which the child may claim the body as its own, and thus also the conditions under which it gains a place as a speaking being and point of enunciation. (86)

The womb, then, functions as a “corporeal site ... a boundary or threshold between what is inside the body, and thus an object of the subject, and what is outside the body, and thus an object for the subject” (88). Therefore, if Cusk’s womb is an abjection—embryo, amniotic fluid, placenta, umbilical cord—then the child is symbolic of the heteronormative maternal body, or “what the symbolic must reject, cover over and contain” (89). Kristeva’s semiotics of the mother’s body configure maternal subjectivity as a visceral discourse founded upon the experience of labour—a

physical expulsion, the violent delights of reproduction culminating in an absolute rejection of self.

As Grosz argues:

The subject's reaction to these abjects [signs of sexual difference] is visceral: it is usually expressed in retching, vomiting, spasms, choking – in brief, in disgust. These reactions signal bodily functions which a 'rational consciousness' cannot accept; yet the subject cannot adequately deny them either. They represent a body in revolt, a body disavowed by consciousness which it is yet unable to ignore. (89)

The maternal subject's reaction in *A Life's Work*—"a body in revolt"—is primary identified as Cusk's repeated inability to imagine giving birth. The heteronormative compartmentalisation of woman and mother requires that the heteronormative maternal body confront her own sexual difference. Much like Esther Greenwood's unseen proleptic baby, the corporeality of the child (as signifier) destabilises the subjectivity of motherhood. For Cusk, woman as mother is an abjection; in order to preserve her self as woman, she must cast out that which is symbolic of her identity as mother, the latter a threat to the former. "Another person has existed in her", Cusk claims of the heteronormative woman's postpartum state of mind; that person must therefore "live within the jurisdiction of her consciousness" (13). Labour acts as site of unknown trauma, matched only by Cusk's fearful anticipation of a potential, pre-emptive violence—the physical site of first departure between child and mother. Unlike Nelson, Cusk's discourse of motherhood does not address her partner; his figure shadows the maternal body, disturbs the configuring of her relationship between mother and child. Cusk's maternal imagination directly anonymises the established figure of the father in the heteronormative narrative—he is present at the birth, but Cusk comments that he can only offer "friendship" to their newborn child (49). This deliberate absenting is not apparent

in *The Argonauts*, where Nelson's experience of queer parenthood is undoubtedly a game for two: Cusk's narrative focuses on the creation of a new consciousness at the expense of her own self-dissolution, where Nelson explores the queer pleasure of self-expansion and the desire to create a new life with *un autre*.

If Cusk entreats her maternal experience with acerbic wit as *A Life's Work*, the joke is surely on her: who's life, exactly, is Cusk addressing? Her own certainly, but though Cusk uses Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*, at no point in *A Life's Work* does Cusk consider a woman's desire to have a child with anyone outside the heteronormative. In Rich's ground-breaking essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", she perceptively notes that, "in none of these books, which concern themselves with mothering, sex roles, relationships, and societal prescriptions for women, is compulsory heterosexuality ever examined as an institution powerfully affecting all these; or the idea of "preference" or "innate orientation" even indirectly questioned" (633). It is a charge that could easily be applied to Cusk's text, where maternity—impregnation, pregnancy, labour, and motherhood—are compulsorily heterosexual complaints. Though Cusk appropriates Rich's famous claim that we are all of woman born, she undoubtedly reaffirms Rich's longstanding criticism of the maternal body as inherently—compulsorily—heterosexual.

For Nelson and Cusk, the discourse of desire in their respective texts reforms the maternal body. Writing on body in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), Barthes makes the following claim: "The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas as I do" (17). Barthes uses the dialectics of desire to yoke the dualism of the corporeal self, whereby the self is primarily established within the physiological body. However, the secondary embodiment of the self is one of pleasurable solace, "a body of bliss consisting solely of erotic relations, utterly distinct from the first body": the second body—the body of desire, of bliss—is "another contour, another nomination" (16). Where the text purports to have a "human form ... a figure, an anagram of the body", Barthes declares that this form belongs to the

secondary embodiment of the self, the “erotic body”: “The pleasure of the text”, he argues, “is irreducible to physiological need” (17). Therefore, if pleasure is exclusive to the erotic body, then the recontextualising of the maternal body as inherently desirable re-presents the maternal subject as a site of regeneration, reproduction, and rebirth for the gendered self.

This chapter illustrates the critical and creative value of the anonymous mode as a productive lens for analysing gender in autotheory. As a contemporary genre, autotheory using the critical framework of philosophy and critical theory to reconcile the self in autobiography and memoir. Both Nelson and Cusk consolidate the first-person experience through an encounter with critical theory, where their maternal subjectivity is recontextualised as *praxis*: to be critic and critique, subject and object. Nelson’s examination of the incoherent self in queer pregnancy (and the homonormative) characterises the pregnant body as the unknown argo, a constant state of creative production. Nelson’s engagement with textual absence and maternal subjectivity reflects the boundary between the body and the gendered self, that form and content are continuously mingling to new effects and changes. In *The Argonauts*, textual absence re-produces the potentiality of queer parenthood as a metaphysical site of (re)production outside the framework of the heteronormative. Cusk’s use of autotheory similarly politicises her subjective experience of motherhood, where Cusk’s ontological foundation of the abject self-as-mother begins in a state of anonymity. Her use of narrative passivity exposes the relationship between the absent (abject) self and its present relationality in the anonymous mode. Nelson and Cusk further demonstrate the creative potential of the anonymous mode beyond fiction, where the first-person narrator is explicitly re-cast as the schizoid self: observer and observed, subject and object.

“One day long ago, I looked at myself as I faced a full-length mirror and saw my image darken and soften and then seem to retreat, as though I was vanishing from the world rather than that my mind was shutting it out.”

Rebecca Solnit, *Recollections of my Nonexistence*

“I had quite a heavy period last week, but other than that I think I’m okay.”

“Villanelle”, *Killing Eve*

Coda or: How to End it All

In August 2020, in collaboration with the Women’s Prize for Fiction, Baileys announced their “Reclaim her Name” Campaign: to celebrate the Prize’s 25th anniversary of “championing female writers everywhere”, Baileys confirmed their intention to release a collection of books, where previously pseudonymous (female) authors would have “their real names on the front of their work for the first time”. Now, the nu-feminist reader could consume (“for the first time”) *Middlemarch* (1871) by Mary Ann Evans, or *A Phantom Lover* (1886) by Violet Paget, or *Indiana* (1832) by Amantine Aurore Dupin, or Mary Bright’s feminist polemic *Keynotes* (1893), or Mary Hawker’s *Cecilia de Noël* (1891), or *Valerie Aylmer* (1870) by Frances Tiernan, or *A Diplomat’s Diary* (1890) by Julia Cruger, or even Julia Constance Fletcher’s *The Head of Medusa* (1880). Beneath the collections’ many and varied titles are boastful epithets: “Voted the best British novel of all time” (“Evans”); “A hauntingly beautiful ghost story” (“Paget”); “Her romances are known worldwide. It’s time her name was too” (“Dupin”); “Feminist work from 1893. Making it 127 years ahead of its time” (“Bright”); “Horror novelist whose name has always been in the shadows” (“Hawker”); “The American Civil War took everything from her. Except her voice” (“Tiernan”); “When it comes to affairs of the heart, there is no diplomacy” (“Cruger”); an invitation to join male authors like “Oscar Wilde and Rudyard Kipling as one of her fans” (“Fletcher”). “Throughout history”, according to Baileys, “many female writers have used male pen names for their work to be published or taken seriously”.

George Eliot chose “George Eliot”. But by positioning “Mary Ann Evans” as the “real” author of *Middlemarch*, Baileys displaces George Eliot. At best, the bizarre decision to “Reclaim her Name” negates Eliot’s autonomy completely; at worst, the publicity stunt demonstrates an absolute disregard for the textual history of George Eliot’s deliberate practice of gendered anonymity through her authorship.⁵⁸ On the subject of subject of voice and authorship in *Middlemarch*, Michael Peled Ginsburg rightly argues that “a pseudonym always subverts, or inverts, the relationship between an author and his work”, where the originator of the work “displace[s]” his theoretical position (544). Eliot’s borrowing of “George” from her relationship with George Henry Lewes—“To L I owe it”—corresponds to what Ginsburg describes as a “biographical truth”, where Eliot’s pseudonym is undoubtedly a product of her own, specific historiography (556). The textual relationship between “George Eliot” and her literature reflects Eliot’s active decision to present as masculine: it does not support the simplistic retelling by Baileys of female authors “forced” to sign their works as men.⁵⁹ Though arguably the most central figure of Bailey’s “Reclaim her Name” campaign, neither the personal nor socio-historical context of the pseudonym “George Eliot” are addressed by the Women’s Prize for Fiction sponsor, nor the professional damage done to an author whose “real” name is “outed” without their consent.⁶⁰ In

⁵⁸ It is unclear what Baileys is doing, exactly, by “Reclaiming her Name”, when the “Evans” of Mary Ann Evans belongs to her biological father, Robert Evans, and the “George” of George Eliot owes to her husband, George Henry Lewes (though they never married). Indeed, whose name is being “Reclaimed”? And what reality does Baileys presuppose, with the assertion of a “real” name? For example, my name—Galbraith—is neither my birth-name, nor my father’s name: it was my maternal great-grandmother’s maiden name, as well as my grandmother’s middle name, the oldest name that I could trace on my matrilineage. According to receipts, it cost me \$170 to claim my name. It is neither an alias, nor a pseudonym. Under no circumstances would it be appropriate to publish (or reclaim) the name on my birth certificate as my “real” name.

⁵⁹ Mary Ann Evans’s decision to publish fiction as George Eliot is hardly “forced”. Rather, it was a varied and complex decision. Evans was widely published as a critic and an editor, and did not wish for her fictional writing to be judged alongside her critical work; she was reticent toward her fiction belonging to the same “frothy” sentimental twaddle that she skewered in her essay “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists”; she expressed an interest in distancing her public writings from her personal life—Evans was in a relationship with George Henry Lewes, who had an open marriage with Agnes Jervis. Lewes and Evans lived together, honeymooned in Germany, and considered themselves married, with Evans referring to Lewes as her “husband”.

⁶⁰ There are undoubtedly overtones of anti-trans ideology (the practice of “deadnaming”, in particular) in Baileys’ presumption that a masculine identity is necessarily more favoured than a feminine one. For further discussion on the problematic aspects of Bailey’s Reclaim Her Name campaign, see Eleanor Dumbill, “Why it’s Not Empowering to Abandon the Male Pseudonyms used by Female Writers”, www.theconversation.com, accessed 26th September, 2020.

reclaiming these names, Baileys has inadvertently echoed the absenting of the authorial subject, eliding gendered anonymity as a historical compromise within print.⁶¹

To consider anonymity as an action, a functional aspect of a text rather than a consequence, requires an ideological framework that repositions textual absence as the authorial subject: the anonymous mode reveals the self as the locus of a narrative, where gendered anonymity satisfies the conditions of textual absence. The particular emphasis on the relationship between form and content in the anonymous mode, as well as the characterisation of the gendered figure as both subject and object, examines self-consciousness as a corollary of anonymity. These are narratives designed with the specific expectation that there is no singular experience of selfhood, but rather that selfhood is a multiplicity of form: a perpetual re-engagement with one's absence, whether it be individual or collective, personal or political, private or public. Within the anonymous mode, the text ascribes agency to a discrete performance of self-actualisation, where the subject experiences a refraction of identity rather than achieving the objective, singular, idealised self. Therefore, by separating the self within the text, the anonymous mode presents a growing awareness of the proximity of the subject to its environment, allowing the subject the objective omnipotence of being everywhere and nowhere, nothing and nobody.

The anonymous mode employs a number of narrative techniques to illustrate the complexities of gendered self-production. By identifying examples of textual absence, it is possible to further

⁶¹ Mark Vareschi's research attends to the intrinsic link between anonymity and mediation as a particular phenomenon in print. In his epilogue to *Everywhere and Nowhere* (2018), he considers more closely the relationship between anonymity and the recent media shift of the 21st century. Citing Julia Zhuo's 2010 op-ed for the *New York Times*—"Where Anonymity Breeds Contempt"—Vareschi captures the contemporary debate on individual anonymity; Zhuo, former vice-president of product design at Facebook, reconsidered anonymity in the wake of social media platforms, where "people's faces, real names and brief biographies...are placed next to their public comments to establish a baseline of responsibility" (Vareschi 175). Understandably, under a climate of growing "dataveillance", Vareschi appreciates that "actual anonymity...is a near-impossibility", stating further that Zhuo's argument inevitably links "the ideology of media shift...to an attention to anonymity" (175). His expert tracing of the relationship between anonymity and mediation identifies Woolf's essay "Anon" as similarly staking the claim that anonymity is a relic of the past. But, as Vareschi points out, "anonymity did not disappear with the coming of print; rather, it flourished and continued to do so well into the nineteenth century." (176). His work on theorising and historicising anonymity within media shifts "draws attention to the unique forms of agency ... and the manner in which they refract the agency and intention of others": he concludes that "it is the interaction between author and media where this refraction is most evident" (176-7).

interpret the effect of gendered anonymity in any given text. This semiosis between textual absence and the anonymous mode is critical. Narrative examples of textual absence include, but are not limited to: doubled selves and dissociative states (including post-partum); shattered and split identities; non-identification (or non-recognition); recurrent motifs such as mirrors, glass, and other blank surfaces (thereby dually gesturing towards the transparency and opacity of self-conception); nameless narrators, author surrogates, and other extreme acts of literary ventriloquism (such as the author-as-prosopopoeia, as with Chris Kraus's same-name narrator of *I Love Dick*, Chris Kraus); agender, non-binary, and other gender-fluid narrators or protagonists; collage, pastiche, and plagiarism, as a means of further distorting the self-conceived boundaries between fact and fiction, truth and reality. These encoded methods of communicating an *absence* of identity are decoded in narrative as gendered anonymity.

The internal fragmentation of the self is thereby externalised as textual violence; where the gendered body functions as *terra incognita*, examples of psychic and physical violence disrupt the continuity of selfhood. These examples include Esther Greenwood's gruesome attempt at self-homicide, her electro-convulsive therapy treatment, and violent haemorrhage after sex; Evelyn's violent transmogrification to Eve, her rape by the first man she meets, and her forced marriage to Tristessa; Acker's multimodal narrators are each themselves subjected to sexual violence as a method of self-production; Kraus's narrative of unrequited desire culminates in hysterical catharsis, her hyperbolic and frenzied sexual performance for "Dick"; Cusk's traumatic baptism into motherhood comes through an unplanned ("unnatural") caesarean, while Nelson's initiation to queer parenthood violently rejects the symbolic, hegemonic order. Furthermore, as a specific method of narration within the anonymous mode, narrative passivity enables the subject to represent a negative disequilibrium as a source of consolation in self-authorisation; the relationality of the speaker becomes intersubjective, reflecting the hybridity (and non-linearity) of the text. In the shift between subject and object, self and other, the speaker mediates a doubled-perspective.

A re-evaluation of the relationship between theory and practice in narrative, this idiosyncratic exchange expressly recontextualises the central speaker as unknown and, therefore, anonymous.

Texts within the anonymous mode employ a mixture of these techniques to illustrate gendered selfhood, thereby demonstrating a clear engagement with absence as a corollary to self-authorisation. Developing from ideas around anonymity, gender, and authorship, the anonymous mode is a significant contribution to contemporary critical theory: it is a mode that constantly shifts and expands to incorporate experimental, intertextual practices as flexible methodology, actively displacing the subject within a text. My critical investigation of anonymity as a mode of literature offers a new way of examining and understanding the central role of self-authorisation in gendered identity.



While this thesis has established the theoretical framework for reading gendered anonymity as a specific mode of writing, there are further approaches to this critical ideology that require attention. Where anonymity is positioned a vehicle of self-authorisation, and the deliberate act of anonymising the subject instructs a reorganisation of selfhood, the conventions of the anonymous mode therefore extend beyond the boundaries of this thesis: it is a mode applicable to all forms of narrative representation—whether it be literature, film, theatre, media and television, or art history. Andrea Lawlor’s novel *Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl* (2017) introduces the non-binary Paul Polydoris, whose mutable form and content constantly shift to produce and reproduce the figure of either Paul or Polly: Paul is neither Paul nor Polly, but an unfixed conglomerate of experiences and selves. Olivia Laing’s novel *Crudo* (2018) is a stunning work of autofiction that comingles the hybridity of Kathy Acker and the wry voice of Laing to test the limits of self-identification and

reality in a fictional narrative. Croatian writer Daša Drndić's novel *Belladonna* (2018), translated by Celia Hawkesworth, recounts the fragmented decline of a retired academic's memory, the separation of his mind from his body, and the degenerative shift each experiences at the loss of the other. The textuality of Drndić's novels, in particular her attention to collage as a stylistic feature of narrative, creates a schizoid, dis-reality in the memorialising of collective and personal historiographies: her 2007 novel *Trieste* (translated in 2012 by Ellen Elias-Bursac) recounts a 43-page list of the names of every Jew deported from or killed in Italy and the countries it occupied between 1943 and 1945. Irish novelist Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013) presents a ruptured account of girlhood, where McBride's fractured topologies and high modernist prose re-form gendered identity as a state of "half-formed" absence: McBride's narrative stream of pre-consciousness by an unnamed narrator invites us to reconsider girlhood as a perpetual state of violence on the gendered self.

Rebecca Solnit's nonfiction prose, her most recently published memoir *Recollections of my Nonexistence* (2020), deliberately engages with textual absence through her meditations on gendered violence, sexual violence, inequality, and systemic racism. Speaking with the *LA Review of Books*, Solnit considered the absencing of women from culture at large as a key focus of her text: "I wanted to convey that experience of erasure that is so ordinarily a part of women's lives", she claims, "the things you are told you must not do and say, the places you must not go, the clothes you must not wear, the aspirations you must not have, if you want to survive. The ways you are told you must erase yourself so as not to be erased more violently by someone else" ("One Voice in a Great Chorus", *LA Review of Books*). Solnit's contemporary engagement with the historical disappearing of women is a triumph for gendered anonymity in prose. Hers are texts that interrogate the cultural exclusion of women and the epidemic of sexual and physical violence against women, as a productive method of rewriting the trauma of silencing and absence in feminist consciousness. Solnit's writing precisely addresses the effect of violence on the gendered

voice: her examination of gendered anonymity as a social crisis uses textual absence to galvanise erasure as belonging to both the collective and the individualised self.

Though this thesis is chiefly concerned with gendered anonymity in literature, the anonymous mode undoubtedly extends beyond the page, with feminist film theory and practices explicitly renegotiating the representation of women on the screen. Women, queer and gender minorities, and black, brown, and Indigenous persons of colour, are notoriously under-represented in film and television; the representations of these individuals are often seen through the white, male-gaze, with their narratives written, directed, and produced *by* white, heterosexual men, *for* other white, heterosexual men. Powerfully wealthy, international film industries such as Hollywood and, more recently, Indiewood, continue to facilitate the absencing of queer narratives, in particular:

This Indiewood era, defined by increased production values, high profile casting, and an appeal to more mainstream audiences, has relied on reductive characterizations and the mitigation of queer topics and identities, in part to cater to a broader demographic. Part of this process has been the marginalization of queer people of colour, the historicization of queer narratives, and an appeal to respectability politics that re-affirm bi-gender structures and homonormative discourses. Moreover, this cinema's reliance on sentimental pedagogy to humanize queer characters has limited these characterizations to melancholic performances that fail to challenge homo- and transphobic practices imbedded within the culture.⁶² (Macintosh 94)

Written, directed, produced, and edited by Kitty Green, *The Assistant* (2019) tells the story of a young woman working in a downtown office in New York City. The film takes place over the course of a single day, following Jane, a junior assistant at a film production company. Green's

⁶² For further reading, see Paige Macintosh. "Queer Capital: Transgender Representation in Contemporary American Cinema." MA diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2018.

editing practices deliberately enclose Jane in her disquietingly hostile environment: over-the-shoulder shots of her computer, as her male colleagues dictate her apologetic emails to her boss, isolate Jane further. Her boss then verbally abuses Jane down the phone, as she sits in silence in full view of her colleagues: extreme close-up shots of Jane's face as she cries at her desk, holds her head in her hands, cradles the receiver to her ear, reflect the anguish of sexual violence and harassment, silencing and erasure. *The Assistant* is a film of sparse dialogue, and Green excludes a musical score entirely: we are forced to tune our attention to the repetitive bit-part life of the office—keyboards, doors, elevators, printers, faxes, mobiles, coffee machines, pen-tapping, mouse-clicking, muffled voices, ruffled papers, shuffled feet. Green's decision to remove an overlapping soundtrack creates a destabilising frequency, centering Jane's silence beneath the mundane, corporate cacophony. Through the process of editing and direction, the viewer follows Jane's realisation that her boss is having sex with younger women in his office; the toxicity of Jane's claustrophobic environs aggresses a culture of sexual harassment. When Jane speaks to the smarmy Wilcock in Human Resources about her boss's inappropriate and sexually harmful behaviour, the facts she presents are insidiously undermined by Wilcock to frame another, more palatable truth: that Jane saw "nothing". He gaslights Jane, insinuating that she is jealous of a new, younger assistant hired by her boss, envious of the attention he lavishes on the other employee. Critically, Jane's boss is not named, nor does he ever appear onscreen. When Jane finally witnesses her boss having sex on the couch in his office ("don't sit there", laughs one film executive during a meeting), she sees not the body of her boss, but his silhouette, obscured through the closed blinds that she opened that morning. One could be forgiven for thinking Green's portrayal of sexual violence and cultural silencing is explicitly about convicted rapist Harvey Weinstein, a former Miramax producer. But it is, rather, an exact, microcosmic representation of the gross complicity and

ignorance within an industry that silences women: the people who enable the predatory behaviour of men like Weinstein, and the many, many others like them.⁶³

Other visual media representations of gendered absence and anonymity include Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* (Amazon), a comedy-drama ("dramedy") television series based on Waller-Bridge's one-woman show, first performed in 2013 at Edinburgh Fringe. *Fleabag* follows the titular Fleabag, a 30-something hot-mess of anger and sex who runs a struggling guinea pig theme café in London's leafy Camden. Individuals in the show are named according to either their function, or their general sentiment, conforming to the anonymous mode's characterisation of identity as an object. There's Arsehole Guy, named for having anal sex with Fleabag in the show's pilot, and

⁶³ Allegations of a toxic culture of misogyny, sexism, sexual assault, and sexual harassment are currently being levelled against Wellington's Weta Digital, New Zealand's Academy Award-winning visual effects company. Weta Digi was founded by Sir Peter Jackson ONZ KNZM and Sir Richard Taylor ONZ KNZM to produce the digital special effects for *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), a fictionalised dramatisation of the notorious 1954 Palmer-Hulme murder case in Christchurch. The film, which Jackson co-wrote with his partner, Fran Walsh, made erroneous allegations of a lesbian relationship between Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme that culminated in the brutal murder of Parker's mother, Honora. Weta Digital is most famously associated with Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Several workers have described the existence of pornographic mailing lists, hosted on Weta Digital's intranet, which they say existed as early as 2002. Speaking to journalists for 1 NEWS, a former employee alleged that there "was a tradition ... called Porn Friday. Every Friday staff members would email round porn images to the whole team." Another former employee alleged that "There was a mailing list at Weta Digi called 'Caveman'. Men were offered a subscription to it. They could read and post porn on it, hosted by the company." It is further alleged that "the size and volume of the pornographic images on the mailing lists meant IT systems had to be upgraded to ensure the lists could continue." According to allegations, current and former employees also reported issues with sexual harassment and bullying which came from senior colleagues or managers. This follows initial allegations in June 2020 of sexual harassment and bullying at sister company Weta Workshop. ("World's most beautiful toxic waste dump", www.TVNZ.co.nz, accessed 29 September 2020). In 2018, following allegations against Harvey Weinstein, Sir Peter Jackson, whose films were distributed by Miramax, confirmed he blacklisted actresses Mira Sorvino and Ashley Judd from his *The Lord of the Rings* productions, at the request of Weinstein, who described both Sorvino and Judd as "difficult". Both Sorvino and Judd have since accused Weinstein of persistent sexual harassment and coercion, with Judd now suing the disgraced rapist for damages. Sorvino's father, actor Paul Sorvino, has since stated publicly on Weinstein, "I will kill that motherfucker." In May 2018, Gwyneth Paltrow told *The Howard Stern Show* that her then-boyfriend Brad Pitt approached Weinstein at the 1995 Broadway opening of "Hamlet" and told him, "If you ever make [Gwyneth] feel uncomfortable again, I'll kill you." At the 71st Annual Academy Awards, Cate Blanchett was nominated for Best Actress in a Leading Role for her outstanding performance of Queen Elizabeth I of England in Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* (1998). However, nominated alongside her that evening was Paltrow, for her role as the fictional Viola de Lesseps in the comedy-drama, *Shakespeare in Love* (1998); Weinstein, the producer of *Shakespeare in Love*, ran a targeted, aggressive, and bullying Oscar campaign on behalf of his film that has since become the standard. That evening, *Shakespeare in Love* was nominated for 13 Academy Awards. It won seven: Best Picture, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress, Best Original Screenplay, Best Original Musical Score, Best Art Direction, and Best Costume Design. On February 10, 2020, Brad Pitt won his first Academy Award: Best Supporting Actor in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019). It was his fourth nomination. Two weeks later, on February 24, Harvey Weinstein was found guilty of rape in the third degree and a criminal sex act and subsequently sentenced to 23 years imprisonment. At 68-years-old, Weinstein will likely die in jail. For further discussion on the patriarchal legacy of complicity and rape culture, see a live recording of Professor Jan Jordan's inaugural lecture, "The Price of Being 'Friends of Harvey': Men, Power, and Sexual Violence", available on Victoria University of Wellington's YouTube channel (<https://youtu.be/MKWGrfb6Zmg>, date accessed: October 13, 2020.)

Bank Manager, who refuses to give Fleabag a loan for her cash-strapped café. Fleabag has a meet-cute with Bus Rodent, a “surprisingly bony” man who fucks a desperately lonely Fleabag from behind (over the counter of her café) and while she loathingly grimaces into the camera. We are introduced to Hot Misogynist, an arrogant lawyer who makes Fleabag come “nine times”, much to her (and his) surprise. And, finally, we meet Hot Priest, an Irish gin-in-a-tin-drinking clergyman, and Fleabag’s ill-fated love interest: “It’ll pass”, he assures her. Meanwhile, Fleabag’s uptight sister Claire leaves her alcoholic husband for another man, also named Claire (“Klare”). Fleabag’s “Dad” is never named.⁶⁴ In the show’s finale, Olivia Coleman’s character “Godmother” introduces a series of stereotypes as her friends; Daniel, an “utterly fascinating” deaf man, who she “picked up at a student gallery opening”; her “extraordinary friend” Francine, who is “a lesbian”; and Asif, her “bisexual Syrian refugee friend”. When Godmother introduces her soon-to-be husband, she completely forgets his name, while the camera hovers on a mid-shot of actor Bill Paterson, quietly dumbstruck: “And this is um...oh my god...this is, uh...this is...oh, how extraordinary! I always call you ‘darling!’” Throughout the series, Fleabag consistently breaks the fourth-wall, offering her wits to the unseen viewer, demonstrating her own silent erasure from the present scene. But when the observant Hot Priest (played by Andrew Scott) notices Fleabag shifting her focus toward an

⁶⁴ Fleabag’s mother occupies a special absence in the series. It is revealed that she died from breast cancer before the show’s timeline begins. Fleabag’s grief for her mother is a silent void, her combined feelings of guilt, remorse, and emptiness overwhelming. While Fleabag confronts her traumatic memories of her best friend Boo’s death, she never tends to the wound left by her mother’s absence. “I don’t know what to do with it”, she tells Boo after her mother’s funeral, “...all the love I have for her. I don’t know where to put it now.” The memory of Boo’s response, that Fleabag should give all the love to her, breaks Fleabag’s heart again: Fleabag blames herself for Boo’s suicide. Throughout the series, Fleabag and her sister, Claire, talk about their mum, each one wondering what parts of her they will grow into. “I did a fart the other day that was exactly like mum’s”, Fleabag informs Claire, who replies “It means you’re getting mum’s bum.” A deadpan Fleabag describes her mother’s death from breast cancer as “particularly hard because she had amazing boobs.” Fleabag sadly observes that Claire’s breasts are larger than hers (a fact horrifyingly pointed out by Arsehole Guy.) At one point, Fleabag admits, “I sometimes worry that I wouldn’t be such a feminist if I had bigger tits.” Fleabag’s theft of a small sculpture (a nude female torso) from Godmother is a running gag throughout the series. Fleabag does her utmost to maintain ownership of the headless, limbless woman. But in one episode, Fleabag accidentally gifts the statue as an award to an associate of Claire’s, Belinda (played by Kristin Scott-Thomas). When Fleabag goes to retrieve the priceless artwork, she stays for a drink with Belinda: “God, she’s hot”, says Belinda of the torso. Eventually, Fleabag returns the statue. A final twist of the knife, Godmother reveals that it is a nude model of Fleabag’s mother, something Godmother has always known but never confirmed: “So nice to have her back in the house”, she smirks. In the closing moments, Fleabag confesses to the unseen, anonymous viewer that she still has the statue. She sits alone with the memorial of her mother. She embraces her, resting her chin atop her body, undefeated.

omnipotent disreality, he naturally inquires further: “What is that?” he asks, cradling Fleabag’s depressed guinea pig, Hilary, “That thing that you’re doing. It’s like you disappear.” When Fleabag hesitates to disclose her truth, Hot Priest dramatically turns and looks directly into the camera, following Fleabag’s distressed line of sight. The unfocused intrigue of Hot Priest displaces Fleabag’s absencing, revealing his insight into their uncommon intimacy: a shared awareness of their own self-confinement.

Gendered absence and anonymity feature prominently in *Deux* (dir. Filippo Meneghetti, 2019), a French film about two lovers who are approaching retirement. An extremely rare glimpse into the tender intimacy between older lesbians, the plot follows Madeleine (played by Martine Chevallier) and her partner, Nina (played by Barbara Sukowa) as they decide to sell their apartments and move to Rome, where they first met. To the outsider, it merely looks as if Madeleine and Nina are very close neighbours: their doors are always open, as they pass through each other’s apartments, sharing the top floor of their building. Madeleine is unable to tell her adult children the truth; that she and Nina—“Mrs. Dorn”—are lovers; for the past thirty years, Nina has been “the love of her life”. When Madeleine has a stroke, she is unable to talk; the behaviour of “Mrs. Dorn” become increasingly erratic, as she tries to care for “Mado”. When Mado’s daughter talks to Mrs. Dorn about her mother’s lifelong dedication to their absent father, the camera slowly zooms in on Mado’s glassy eyes, shifting between her daughter and Nina: only Nina and Mado know the truth. The film makes extensive use of a fish-eye shot for Nina’s point-of-view, as she peers through a peephole in her door across the hallway into Mado’s apartment: the shot demonstrates Nina’s invisibility, powerlessness and silencing, relegated to the position of (passive) observer, with her identity as the (active) lover seemingly erased. She waits for the timer on the security light to go out before she sneaks into Mado’s apartment, under the cover of darkness, to sleep beside her. Meneghetti’s film relies on an awareness of established tropes in lesbian cinema and television—the good neighbour, the close friend, the obsessive confidant, the

homewrecker—traditionally used to erase a gay partner or relationship.⁶⁵ Instead, Meneghetti subverts these tropes, and uses gendered absence and anonymity to rewrite the narrative of lesbian potentiality.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Arguably the most popular sitcom of the last three decades, *Friends* (1994–2004) is well-known for being one of the first mainstream television shows to depict a lesbian relationship. However, the representation of the show's local neighbourhood dykes is anything but positive. In the series pilot, a newly single Ross Geller, Ph.D, reveals that his ex-wife, Carol Willick, is a lesbian: "She didn't know!" Ross complains, "How should I know?" Over the first two seasons, the show chastises Carol and her partner, Susan Bunch. When Ross wonders how Carol couldn't have known she was a lesbian, his friend Chandler offensively replies, "Sometimes I wish I was a lesbian." Believing that his marriage is over "because [his] wife's a lesbian, and [he's] not one", Ross's entire first season narrative arc comes at the expense of lesbianism: being a lesbian is the butt of every joke, the source of Ross's misery and unhappiness. When Carol is pregnant with her first child, Ross competes with Susan for the unborn child's affections. This is despite Carol explicitly telling Ross that she and Susan will be raising the child together, but he can be as involved as he likes. When Susan and Carol want to know the sex of their baby, Ross refuses to hear it. Eventually, the entire cast learns it is a boy, and Ross sulks. When Ross goes for his first date after divorcing Carol, in the episode "The One With the Candy Hearts", he discovers Carol and Susan at the same restaurant. It's Valentine's Day. But instead of focusing on the beautiful woman having dinner with him, Ross obsesses over Carol's happiness without him. His date ditches him. Shockingly, he then asks Carol—a lesbian!—to give their "relationship" (they are divorced) another chance: "You're a lesbian", Ross tells Carol, before ignoring the fact, "What do you say we just put that aside for now?" He goes so far as to remind her, "Besides, you're carrying my baby. How perfect is that?" Carol kisses Ross, an act of intimacy that she never shares with her on-screen wife, not even at their "lesbian" wedding. Throughout season one and two, Ross inappropriately positions himself at the centre of Carol's pregnancy and her relationship with Susan. At Carol's first sonogram, Ross learns his surname is not on the table: their child will be Willick, or Willick-Bunch. He initially refuses to "be a part of this particular family", but changes his mind upon hearing the sound of a heartbeat. After the sonogram, the subject of the child's surname is never discussed. Another example of Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell's "patriarchal dividend", which I described earlier in chapter four (108fn), audiences learn (via the credits) that the child carries Ross's surname, Geller. Susan and Carol are their son's primary caregivers, not Ross (who is described as "Bobo, the sperm donor" in one episode.) Eventually, Carol, Susan, and their son disappear from the show's regular casting, their relationship erased from our screens. It is difficult to imagine this dynamic re-appearing in a contemporary television series. Indeed, the socio-historical context surrounding the highly marketable "lesbian chic" phenomena of the 1990s is arguably responsible for the negative portrayal of Carol and Susan. While musician k.d lang featured in a highly eroticized spread in *Vanity Fair* with supermodel Cindy Crawford in 1993, comedian Ellen Degeneres's sitcom *Ellen* was promptly cancelled after her character admitted she was gay. Later, Degeneres appeared on a 1997 cover of *TIME* magazine: "Yep, I'm Gay", read the now-infamous by-line. The cancellation of *Ellen* came at the height of the success of *Friends*. The same year *Ellen* was disappeared from the air, over 30 million people tuned in to watch the season finale of *Friends*, "The One With Ross's Wedding". (Spoiler alert! Ross ruins his vows and says the name of another woman at the altar, much to the horror of the registrar, the bride, her family, and the entire congregation.)

⁶⁶ The film's score, Petula Clark's "Chariot", deliberately introduces the concept of an omnipresent lover, whose gender isn't clear: "si tu veux de moi pour t'accompagner au bout des jours, laisse moi venir près de toi ... si tu veux de moi pour dormir à ton côté toujours ... Alors dis-le moi, je pars avec toi" ("If you want me with you at the end, let me come close to you ... if you want me sleeping always by your side ... then tell me, I'm leaving with you.") The French verb "partir" ("je pars avec toi") is used as a placeholder for the English equivalent "to pass away"; Clark is essentially saying, "til death do us part". The song, better known to English speakers as Peggy March's "I Will Follow Him", shifts in tone and direction in Clark's "Chariot": no longer does the female voice singing claim she will blindly "follow him wherever he may go", but she instead issues a demand to her lover to make the decision for them. "Tu" as the informal singular "you" is neither grammatically masculine nor feminine in French. Singing to a lover in the second-person is a common trope of lesbian singer-songwriters. For example, Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car", "Baby Can I Hold You", and "Give Me One Reason" all employ the second-person; k.d lang's cover of The Hollies's "The Air That I Breathe"; and Dusty Springfield's "I Only Want to be With You". A contemporary of Petula Clark, Springfield (born Mary O'Brien) was a gay woman who rose to extraordinary stardom during the Swinging Sixties. Her music subtly demonstrates the agony, confusion, and frustration of compulsory heterosexuality, for women who are anything but straight: it is difficult not to hear the self-mocking Springfield singing the conscriptive "Wishin' and Hopin'", the passive "Son of a Preacher Man", the aggressive "You Don't Own Me", and the desperate "I Just Don't Know What to do With Myself". In 1983, as the AIDS crisis was peaking in the United States, Springfield had a

The composition of anonymity in film, television, and media follows much the same conventions as anonymity in literature, where examples of textual absence expand to incorporate a wide range of film and editing techniques: direction, angles and camera shots (such as cross-cutting, fish-eye, and more), costume and setting (including anachronisms), props and lighting (mise en scène), dialogue and exposition, mood and music, silences and symbolism. These effects create an atmosphere of absence. Similarly, dramaturgical methods enable the performance of anonymity on the theatrical stage: the practice and language of feminist theatre, as well as the art and techniques of dramatic conventions, mediate the re-presentation of gendered absence. At Circa Theatre in September 2018, as part of the Women's Theatre Festival (WTF!), *MEDUSA*, created and performed by Wellington feminist theatre-makers Nisha Madhan, Julia Croft, and Virginia Frankovich, deliberately engaged with women's cultural erasure. Each actor operates as the polyphonic "Medusa", their harmonious, ritualistic chants—"I am Medusa", "I am not Medusa", "We are Medusa", "Which one of us is Medusa"—shift in and out of synchronicity. They are the feminist triumvirate deconstructing the tautological madness of female sexuality; the dissonance is deliberate. The staging of the performance—aggressive strobe lighting, three plinths (one for each triumvir), live audio-mixing and a deafening feedback-loop, a set of sand, polystyrene, and clay destroyed by the Medusas, wielding crowbars and sledgehammers—signals the anonymous mode's preoccupation with self-production-as-destruction, both literal and figurative. More research is needed on the effect of the anonymous mode on the triadic relationship between actor, performance, and audience in the dramaturgy of absence and gendered anonymity in feminist theatre.

The anonymous mode in the visual arts also leaves much for future exploration: the complex representation of absence, erasure, and silence in painting and portraiture by women is well-

symbolic wedding with her long-time partner, Teda Bracci, on a California ranch. "I never knew that I could be in love like this", sang Springfield in her debut single, "it's crazy but it's true, I only want to be with you." The marriage was never legally recognised.

established. Artemisia Gentileschi, an Italian Baroque painter, famously modelled herself as Judith in her paintings depicting the Biblical story of Judith and Holofernes. Many critics consider that Gentileschi, who was raped at 17 by her father's associate and her mentor, Agostino Tassi, used her own likeness to portray Judith, who eventually beheads Holofernes. Tassi, who was tried and convicted of rape, was allegedly used as the model for Holofernes. An imagined self-portrait of sorts, then, Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1620–1621, Uffizi Gallery) features an anachronistic bracelet of Artemis on Judith's left arm, a sword in her right hand, both sleeves rolled up while she and her maidservant (and accomplice) Abra restrain the horrified Holofernes, savagely hacking away at his neck. It is a gruesome, grisly contrast to Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598-99, Palazzo Barberini), which features a delicate, ashen-faced Judith recoiling from the unsavoury task of decapitation whilst an elderly Abra watches over her shoulder.

Other female artists who framed their perspective through their experience of gender include Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), an American impressionist, who depicted the “New Woman” of the nineteenth century from a woman's point of view: her paintings, pastels, draftsmanship, watercolours, and etchings expressly focus on the rich, inner life of her own gender. Arguably her best works, Cassatt's later portraits predominantly focus on representing the complex and tender relationship between mother-and-child, arranging her figures in such a way that separated women and their children from the ideological framework of male artists. Her attention to women, and her varied studies in their composition, demonstrates an accomplished preoccupation with women's absence in public discourse. Other contemporary feminist artists and visual artists (photographers, sculptors, mixed-media creators) who engage with textual absence in their chosen medium, include, but are not limited to: Frieda Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, Kay Sage, Laura Knight, Elaine de Kooning, Rita Angus (self-portraits), Joan Mitchell, Augusta Savage, Georgia O'Keeffe, Sigrid Fridman, Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Louise Bourgeois, Cindy Sherman,

Elaine Sturtevant, Connie Imboden, Marina Abramović, Berenice Abbott, Adrian Piper, Marilyn Minter, Jenny Saville, Abigail Lane, Tracey Emin, Allyson Mitchell, and Mickalene Thomas.

Gendered anonymity reorganises itself depending on the medium: though textual absence is identifiable in all representations of gendered selfhood across literature, film, theatre, media studies, and art history, the technical expression of these conventions understandably differ.



More research is needed on the intersection between the anonymous mode and other literary forms, particularly poetry and the essay; literature by writers with disabilities, who are notoriously rendered invisible in and by an ableist society; and specific literary genres beyond autotheory, like Gothic fiction, magical realism, historical fiction, the *Bildungsroman*, literary realism, speculative fiction (including science fiction), children's literature, and travel literature, to name a few. But there are forms and genres where anonymity, or a lack (or theft) of identity, is the direct result of a culturally-specific trauma. The destructive impact of colonisation and colonialism, in particular, on Indigenous identities and personhood is well-documented. Where there are productive applications of the anonymous mode, there are similarly grossly unproductive (and reductive) methods of reading that, much like Baileys' sentimental "Reclaim her Name" campaign, will only erase those identities further.

There are several translations for "anonymous" in Māori, including a verb for conducting meetings in private, and a noun meaning to conduct oneself with secrecy, or confidentiality. But the modifier "tautangata", to be without identity, of unknown people and origin, approximates the dangers of yoking our well-meaning Pākehā rhetoric to mātauranga Māori. As a prefix, "tau" means stranger, alien, foreigner, or prisoner, while "tangata" refers to people, human—to *be* a person.⁶⁷

⁶⁷Thank you to Himiona Grace (Ngāti Toa/Ngāti Porou), for sharing with me your knowledge and translation of te reo Māori, and for sharing your poetic and creative insight.

Māori identity expresses personhood as a multi-dimensional model that includes one's whakapapa, their tīpuna, their history, experiences, ethnic, and cultural wellbeing: Māori are tangata whenua of Aotearoa, and therefore not “anonymous” strangers to this land. The concept of identity in te ao Māori differs from the structural implications of the anonymous mode—Māori literature clearly represents a powerful approach to personhood and identity, where deep-rooted, sacred traditions and beliefs eclipse any attempt at a literary analysis through non-Māori systems of meaning. “If Māori have no land, they will be strangers and foreigners in the world — servants of the Pākehā”⁶⁸: the trauma of being forcibly removed in one's homeland, to be separated from one's tīpuna, to have one's whakapapa erased equates to “tautangata”, to be “servants of the Pākehā”. If theft of whenua (land) is theft of whakapapa (genealogy) is theft of one's tīpuna (ancestors) and, therefore, Māori existence, colonialism and colonisation in New Zealand is the continued systemic obliteration of Māori identity and personhood under false sovereignty. It is not appropriate to analyse Māori literature within the anonymous mode (a Pākehā lens), when Māori literature clearly engages with their own specific questions around self-identification within their own cultural, social, political, and historical framework: Māori literature by Māori writers about Māori experiences for Māori readers. There is a gross absence in criticism on New Zealand literature, because of the proliferation of institutionalised racism in our national curriculum and education system and, consequently, a widespread lack of Māori teachers and senior leaders at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.⁶⁹ To collapse writing by Māori within a critical framework of

⁶⁸ This quote (used in the online Māori Dictionary) is taken from the final line of “Te Ope Paremete”, an editorial by Reweti Tuhorouta Mokena Kohere (Ngāti Porou), who wrote prolifically for *Te Kōpara*, signing his name as “R.T.K”. Kohere contributed countless articles to *Te Kōpara*, *Te Toa Takitini*, *Poverty Bay Herald*, *Te Ao Hou*, and the *Gisborne Herald* over his career, writing in both Māori and English. With financial support from the New Zealand Literary Fund, Kohere published *The Story of a Māori Chief* (1949), a biography of Mokena Kohere, as well as his own biography, *The Autobiography of a Māori* (1951). “Te Ope Paremete” can be found in *Te Kōpara*, 31/3/1921, page 5-6 (www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz).

⁶⁹ To expand on this description of the NZ education system: in 2018, Laura Walters, writing for Newsroom, reported that UNICEF's annual Innocenti Report Card ranked New Zealand 33rd out of 38 countries in terms of educational equality, with Māori children continuing to trail behind Pākehā in numeracy and literacy standards. Research in New Zealand argued that poverty alone cannot account for the gap between Māori and Pākehā. Experts, including the Children's Commissioner Andrew Becroft, and Associate Education Minister Tracey Martin, say racism and unconscious bias in the mainstream education system play a part in gaps in achievement. Commissioner Becroft said the enduring legacy of colonisation was behind the long-term disadvantage: “Coupled with modern systemic bias, and

“anonymity” would fundamentally erase Māori personhood, and further contribute to institutional racism.⁷⁰ It is not appropriate to use our Pākehā systems of meaning to address the intergenerational trauma of colonialism’s theft of identity in te ao Māori.

unconscious individual bias, you put those two things together and they are a potent cocktail for ongoing disadvantage for Māori.” Further analysis by policy researcher Jess Berenston-Shaw found Māori and Pasifika students were more likely to be excluded, or expelled, increasing inequality. Associate Education Minister Tracey Martin referred to a Parliamentary inquiry into dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism spectrum disorders, which received more than 400 submissions, but none from Māori. University of Waikato Te Kotahi Research Institute director Associate Professor Leonie Pihama (Te Atiawa, Waikato-Tainui/Ngā Māhanga a Tairi) said the education system, and the intentions that underpinned it, had failed Māori children for 200 years. She said both strands of the argument around inequality—socio-economic deprivation, and racism—could be traced back to colonisation, and the institutional racism and bias, which made its way into the system. The intentions of New Zealand education have had a detrimental effect on Māori since the system’s inception in 1816, Pihama said. (“Our racist education system”, www.newsroom.co.nz, accessed 31 August 2020). Speaking about learning te reo Māori, RNZ journalist Guyon Espiner confessed he did not learn about Parihaka until he went to university. The absence of Māori history, and the history of the New Zealand wars, in particular, is well-established in the New Zealand curriculum: it was simply not taught. The invasion of pacifist settlement at Parihaka occurred on 5 November, 1881: 1,600 volunteers and members of the NZ Armed Constabulary Force (later to be known as the NZ Police—“Ngā Pirihimana O Aotearoa”) invaded Parihaka, where 1,600 Māori (mostly women and children) were living. The aggressors were greeted by singing children, offering them food. Led by Native Minister John Bryce, Crown troops looted and destroyed the village, robbed Parihaka of their pounamu and taonga, and raped the women, many of whom bore children as a result. To demonstrate how little Parihaka features in New Zealand’s national consciousness, one need not look any further than the country’s continued 150-year celebration of Guy Fawkes Night on 5 November: Spaniard Guido Fawkes and the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605 by a group of rebel English Catholics are totally insignificant to our history, and yet it is annually commemorated by Pākehā families across New Zealand (although regional councils—excepting Palmerston North—have ceased hosting free public fireworks displays). Still, the public sale of fireworks continues, with retailers like The Warehouse selling bargain sparklers and other colourful home explosives (“Boom Box”, \$30RRP). Te raukura, the albatross feather, has become a symbol of peace, protecting the mana of the people of Parihaka and followers of Te Whiti: when Te Whiti (who was arrested at Parihaka and held without trial until 1883) died in 1907, a kaumātua speaking at his tangi, stated “Let this be clearly understood by all Māoris, Pākehās and all other nations. The white feather is a sign that all nations through the world will be one; black, red and all others who are called human beings. This feather will be the sign of unity, prosperity, peace and goodwill.” On 1 September, 2020, at about 11:45pm, Newstalk ZB late host Marcus Lush received a phone-call from a Pākehā named Judith, demanding an answer to the following question: “Why are albatross chicks always given a Māori name?” “I’m not at all racist,” Judith erroneously claimed before continuing, “But I don’t know why the albatross chicks have to be called a Māori (“ma-ree”) name all the time ... I just wonder why it is always a Māori name because I don’t think albatrosses are particularly related to the Māoris ... They’re not a bird that’s, you know, depicted particularly by the Māori community, they go all round the world don’t they?” (“Marcus Lush, Judith and the Albatross Chick That Wasn’t Called Bob”, www.thespinoff.co.nz, accessed 5 September 2020). The Northern Royal Albatross (“toroa”) established a breeding colony at Taiaroa Heads in Ōtākou in 1919. It is the original site of the Ngāi Tahu iwi pā, established around 1650, and still occupied by Māori as late as the 1840s. There is also another breeding colony in Rēkohu, where the Northern Royal Albatross (“hopo”) is a culturally important symbol for Moriori, too, as evidenced by Moriori carvings (rakau momori) in living Kōpi trees.

⁷⁰ This is what institutional racism looks like. In 2019, I organised a (monthly) feminist book club on Victoria University of Wellington’s Kelburn campus. For our April meet-up, I selected *Poukahaŋatus* (2018), the debut poetry collection by Tayi Tibble (Te Whānau-ā-Apanui/Ngāti Porou), as an entry point to discussing “feminism” in Aotearoa. But the title I selected for the session—“Mana Wahine”—in no way reflected Māori feminist discourses. In fact, at no point prior to selecting the text did I engage with others who were better informed on the intersection of being Māori and female in Aotearoa. My approach was racist, deeply mired in white, Eurocentric pedagogy: organise the session first, invite the experts later. It was an act of structural violence. I owe a special thank-you to Ataria Rangipikitia Sharman (Ngāpuhi/Tapuika), who expertly chaired this discussion. Ataria’s Master’s research at Te Kawa a Maui explored mana wahine as a framework for Māori female expression. Her writing has been widely published in *Mana Wahine*, *E-Tangata*, and *The Pantograph Punch*. I also owe a special thank-you to Tayi, who came to the book club and spoke about her poetry with Ataria. It was a privilege to listen to and learn from you both. For further reading on identity, colonisation, and whakapapa in Aotearoa, from Ataria and Tayi, see Ataria Sharman, “Mana wahine and atua wāhine”, MA. diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 2019; and Tayi Tibble, “Thumātāo: Everyone was there, e hoa”,

Tāngata Ngāi Tahu (2017)⁷¹ is the first book in a planned series of Ngāi Tahu biographies: writing the book's foreword, Sir Tīpene O'Regan Kit, chairperson of Te Pae Kōrako and Te Pae Kaihika for Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, states that they "[remain] painfully aware of the constant loss of historical knowledge, the erosion of tribal memory, and consequent deficit in [their] heritage identity arising from [their] failure to control and maintain [their] own tribal knowledge base" (*Tāngata Ngāi Tahu* 6). Under the guidance of Te Pae Kōrako, O'Regan explains that they are "intent on repatriating Ngāi Tahu knowledge of Te Waipounamu...recovering, rebuilding, and maintaining [their] heritage memory": "it's ours", writes O'Regan, "and if we don't do it, who will?" (6). In collecting the biographies of the people of Ngāi Tahu, O'Regan explains that they are responding to the critical "need to know who we are as a tribal national; we need to know where we've come from so as to inform our future and guide our own journey" (6). Most importantly, the collection assigns agency to Ngāi Tahu: it is not that this knowledge base is "exclusively" belonging to Ngāi Tahu, explains O'Regan, but that they are "the primary proprietors of [their] own story, [their] own heritage and [their] own cultural identity" (7). This ownership and guardianship are "fundamental expression[s] of [their] rakatirataka", where Ngāi Tahu, in recovering and rebuilding their historical and cultural knowledge base, "now have the capacity to design for [themselves], a capacity [their tīpuna] never had" (7). Volume one of *Tāngata Ngāi Tahu*, edited by Helen Brown and Takerei Norton, contains fifty entries on people of Ngāi Tahu, over 300-pages of memories, anecdotes, essays, and storytelling: the editors explain that the book's front cover undoubtedly "mirrors many of the walls in [their] family homes, rūnanga halls and wharenuī, where photographs of their tīpuna watch over the activities of their descendants" (8). A joint

www.newsroom.co.nz, date accessed: 27 August, 2019. More recently, Newsroom columnist Emma Espiner (Ngāti Tukorehe/Ngāti Porou) spoke about Māori women's writing at "Waitohu: Women Reclaiming The Ink", a celebration of mana wāhine hosted by the National Library. For a full transcript of Espiner's speech, see "Emma Espiner on Māori women owning the written word", www.newsroom.co.nz, accessed 22 October, 2020.

⁷¹ Thank you to Daniell Nepia Ellison (Ngāi Tahu/Ngāti Kahungunu) for sharing with me knowledge of his whakapapa, through *Tāngata Ngāi Tahu, Hākuī: Women of Kāi Tahu*, and his stories of his tīpuna. It has been a privilege to read and hear and learn about your whakapapa, from your perspective.

project between the Ngāi Tahu Archive and Bridget Williams Books, the series of biographies were published in 2017 to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the Ngāi Tahu Deed of Settlement. “Whānau”, explain the editors, “have been central to this project”, where “interviews and conversations with whanaunga, descendants and friends have taken place at kitchen tables from Rotorua to Awarua, and over numerous cups of tea and the occasional cream bun” (8). Furthermore, *Hākui: Women of Kāi Tahu* (2015)⁷², which shares “the stories of Kāi Tahu wāhine from the perspectives of their mokopuna”, celebrates the “lives, achievements and legacies of Kāi Tahu wāhine past and present” (3). Writing the foreword, Matapura Ellison, chairperson for the Otago Museum Māori Advisory Committee, explains that the book’s kaupapa “was conceived to honour those wāhine who attained a special place in the hearts of their people, who undertook special duties within their whānau, hapū and iwi, and whose actions have often not received the recognition they deserve” (9). The Hākui Steering Committee, working alongside Otago Museum, received over 50 submissions from whānau, runaka and iwi, which included “waiata, traditional crafts, taoka and original art pieces” (13). Migoto Eria, Otago Museum’s first Māori curator, explained that the “rich tapestry of stories presented” in the book acknowledges the achievements and “transition of knowledge” passed down by hākui—“mothers, aunts, grandmothers, great-grandmothers and great-aunts”—from the perspective of their mokopuna and tamariki: “without you, there would be no us” (17). The leadership and achievement of Ngāi Tahu in reclaiming, recovering, and rebuilding their cultural knowledge base illustrates an open awareness of the intergenerational destruction of Māori identity under colonisation in Aotearoa: *Tāngata Ngāi Tahu* and *Hākui: Women of Kāi Tahu* remembers, celebrates and unites their whakapapa.

⁷² The Otago Museum in *Hākui: Women of Kāi Tahu* “uses local Kāi Tahu dialect where possible. This dialect inserts a ‘k’ where other iwi would use ‘ng’”. For example, karaka instead of karanga. Other words, such as taua, are specific to the Kāi Tahu lexicon. Alternative phrasing, spelling and dialect have been used where specifically requested by whānau” (13).



In Virginia Woolf's final novel *Between the Acts*, a disembodied, "megaphonic, anonymous" voice asserts itself over the audience, in the closing moments of La Trobe's pageant, but exactly who speaks no one knows: "Before we part, ladies and gentlemen, before we go...let's talk in words of one syllable, without larding, stuffing or cant. Let's break the rhythm and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves. Some bony. Some fat ... Liars most of us. Thieves too." (135). As La Trobe hides behind the trees, holding mirrors up to her audience, they recoil at seeing their most horrid parts magnified, their selves diverged in every crevasse: "O we're all the same. Take myself now. Do I escape my own reprobation, simulating indignation, in the bush, among the leaves?" (136) The mechanised voice of an unseen La Trobe directly anonymises the audience, and, in turn, herself: "Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen!" the gramophone drones, mirrors flashing, "then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilisation, to be built by [...] orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?" (136)

Anonymity offers a new way of examining and understanding the central role of self-authorisation in gendered identity. The semiotics of absence in the anonymous mode, both as formal significant and contextual signifier, theorise identity as an objective construct: the private compromise of anonymity complicates the motive and intent of the self-producing subject. These are texts that demonstrate a specific interest in the loss of identity; they call attention to anonymity as a site of endless self-reproductivity, an ongoing engagement with absence. Though the motives for gendered anonymity vary, there is a noticeably wide network of narratives—literature, film, television, theatre, visual arts—that explicitly engage with identity as an object, an artefact of the gendered self. A text consciously produced within the theoretical boundaries of the anonymous mode will identify, characterise, and mediate the self through absence.

5.2 Theoria, Poesis, Praxis: *The Albatross*

The purpose of this thesis's creative component is twofold: to present a gendered commentary on the critical framework of the anonymous mode, and structure a contextualised response to the rhetoric of absence in gendered self-authorisation: *The Albatross* is a compartmentalised, metanarrative account of anonymity. Where *praxis* and *poesis* refer to the Aristotelian philosophy of being—praxis as the activity with an end in itself, poesis as a means to an end—the *telos*, or goal, of *The Albatross* is a meditation—*theoria*—on the relative and relational causes of gendered anonymity in female self-consciousness.

The Albatross has no definite structure or chronology, an aspect of form that is contextualised across a trilogy of different sections: the text develops three separate narratives that, in their comingling, produce a non-linear account of gendered identity and self-production. *The Albatross* is a refracted narrative and discourse of interpolating voices, an explicit doubling of self-consciousness and perspective: where the extended, double metaphor of the albatross at once represents the psychological burden of absence, and the complex negotiation of selfhood and identity as a state of flux, a prolonged metaphysical state that one both leaves and returns simultaneously. That the characters of Mary McFarlane and Mary McFarlane are both distinctly separate, yet one and the same; where the theoretical 'deaths' of the author are both conditional and signified; and where the interrogation of a doubled-sight reconciles the expression of a singular perspective; it is a manifest performance of textual absence. The entangled voices of a personalised historiography falsify an extra-textual reality, a destabilisation of selfhood reconstituted in the narrative and discourse. Recurrent motifs such as Mary McFarlane; one-eyed and doubled sight; the twin as a provisional site of self-reference; the Crone and the Whore of Babylon; silence and *silencing*; as well as sexuality and its relationship to death; these all demonstrate a prolonged engagement with textual absence. As an example of the anonymous mode, *The Albatross* it is mixed-

genre text, where the “I” does not emerge: it is a text that manipulates the boundaries of autofiction, lyric, magical realism, and prose, incorporating literary devices such as prosopopoeia, mythopoeia, pastiche, and plagiarism to represent gendered identity and selfhood as a transient state, where voice and content shift independently of subject and form.

The Albatross illustrates the material cause of anonymity as the gendered mind, where the causal modalities of temporal self-knowledge constitute a rhetorical shift in understanding. Here, the delivery of the narrative in second-person reforms the dialectic approach to the *topos* of causality by introducing a speaker and subject indistinguishable from each other. The metamorphosis of the speaking voice parallels the degradation of the doubled, gendered subject, gesturing to the metaphysical degeneration of Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (1961). Furthermore, the narrative act of ventriloquising through a matriarchal forebear concisely frames the potential of the anonymous mode to characterize metaphysical change. Similarly, the intertextual relationship with Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)—the speaker-as-biographer, the Four Marys, Professor Trevelyan, and the absence of women—situates the anonymous mode within a specific literary tradition and, moreover, a distinct sociopolitical context: gendered histories and the unknown, unrecorded life.

The creative component responds to questions of the doubled and disassociate forms by isolating the gendered body as the locus of causality. Each of the thesis’s primary texts consider metaphysical self-destruction as a corollary for autonomy, where the reconstruction of the monstrous form engenders the self-reflexive “I” (to varying degrees of success). Continuing in the second-person, *The Albatross* isolates the doubling of Mother and Daughter, critically evaluated in earlier material on Angela Carter, Kathy Acker, and Rachel Cusk. It meditates on the gendered body as a changing, unfixed state within the anonymous mode. Furthermore, the double-metaphor of the albatross considers the impact of psychic violence on women’s sexuality, considered here as *ethos*, and the subsequent *pathos* in rejecting the established, unconscious conventions of being:

the essential cause of anonymity. In this way, postmemory and the gendered body abstract the process of unlearning structures of knowledge, where lesbian self-authorisation acts as causal reformation, a challenge to what Adrienne Rich considers compulsory heterosexuality's objectification of lesbianism and same-sex female eroticism; lesbian appropriation in the cultural imagination.

The characterisation of “queerness”, or what Maggie Nelson charges as the “homonormative”, warrants further discussion within the anonymous mode, where the queer individual is neither probe nor hole, but inherently doubled, self-consummate. Furthermore, the characterisation of lesbianism under a heteropatriarchal structure is a self-referential parody; a performance of gendered interpersonal dynamics, where individual identity yields to a collective. For this reason, the contemporary lesbian identity functions critically as example of both textual absence and textual violence, where the doubly literal and figurative loss of one's self challenges the teleology of compulsory heterosexuality. In this way, the creative component responds to textual absence within lesbian historiography: *The Albatross* deliberately gestures toward Sappho as a silent, recurring figure, her erased and fragmented verse like a speaker without a voice. Responding to same-sex desire between women as a vanishing point of queer erasure, *The Albatross* draws attention to the resultant void of autonomous sexual identities under heteronormative cultural practices.

The Albatross

For Gareth



A few times a month, I retreat to a sauna. It's mixed, but I keep my bones and flesh to *Women's Only* day. I don't know what possessed me that first time, except perhaps a rabid curiosity, like testing a battery with my tongue. I thought to myself that if I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't be the first; I could always leave. I always leave. Oh, there she goes (there she goes again)—the familiar sight of me upping myself, spreading my wings when I don't want to be there anymore. Something keeps me from sticking. I don't reproach myself for this queer maladjustment but lately I have begun to wonder if I should.

Weary from the chase, Diana, down in a valley of cypresses, was wont to bathe her virgin limbs in cool retreat, her private haunt. Panting with heat, breathless from sport, she lifts her spear, her unstrung bow and quiver, and hands them to her nymphs, each one for their part undressing her; another loosening sandals; armour-bearer with her heavy robe. Crocale gathers her flowing hair in bundled knots, with a fetch of water unlade above the Goddess undrest. When Actaeon the hunter, as the hard fates would will, came through the rocky cleft to a fountain blessed of naked nymphs; and did espy the frightened virgins (whose shrieks thus echoed with the forest's cries). But to Diana they flocked, the nymphs around her body clustered in surprise; she exalts herself in ruddy blushes, her anger the colour of Aurora's dawn. She snatches fistfuls of water and dashes them in Actaeon's face. *Go on*, she goads him, *if the cat hasn't got your tongue, you can tell them all what you saw*—

He never gets the chance, Diana disappearing by slow degrees his fearful form to that of a deer. Wretched Actaeon! Panting with unimaginable fright, he groans with no voice of his own; shame dissuades him, his body lost while his mind remains; his hounds do not recognise him as they tear flesh from bone, eat him limb from limb. Words fail the noble huntsman; servants ignorant, their joyful shouts to their master go unanswered.

It's my favourite part of *Metamorphoses*.

The first description of Rebekah appears in Genesis 28:10–19:

“And Rebekah went out toward the Father. And she lighted upon the place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and she took one of the stones of the place, and put it under her head, and lay down in that place to sleep. And she dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to Oblivion; and behold the angels of the Father descending on it. And, behold, the Father stood beside her, and said: “I am the FATHER, whose Name is Like God. The land whereon thou liest, from thee will I take it. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” And Rebekah awaked out of her sleep, and she said: “Surely he is in this place;

and I knew it not.” And she was afraid, and said: “How full of fear is this place! This is none other than the house of the Father, and this is the gate of Hell.””

5

My father’s father once killed a man. It was an accident; he was driving a bus and a man walked out across the street.

6a

Don’t read my diary when I’m gone

*OK, I’m going to work now, when you
wake up this morning, please read my
diary. Look through my things,
and figure me out.*

Kurt Cobain’s journals are arranged more or less chronologically, but as he never dated his entries it’s difficult to say whether the composition has a tangible form. Sketches of violence and grotesqueness, Cobain’s self-portrait of an emaciated torso, concentric swirls for Dante’s Vestibule of Hell; early concepts for music videos and protean lyrics; his favourite bands and tracks in listicles—The Stooges, The Beatles, The Clash, Pixies, Sonic Youth, The Vaselines, Black Flag and Black Sabbath, Violent Femmes, Sex Pistols, Velvet Underground, and more; your pal Kurt ironically decorating mock-up Nirvana Order Sheets for T-SHURTS with the dumb, stupid, ugly faces of the band (“Don’t buy this one”); tabs for chords—F4, F6, F7 (moveable)—with diligent instruction on which calloused fingertip should press and where; and a custom-designed left-handed Fender “Jaggstang”—half Mustang, all Jaguar—slipped and reshaped, a thinner neck and Les Paul gut switches; letters of madness and humour, drafted and unsent; his journal entries of piss, vomit, shit, urine (and Charles Bukowski); altogether an obscene confessional box of abject torment, tender grief, and the mechanics of pain. “If you want to know what the afterlife feels like”, Cobain tells no one, “then put on a parachute, go up in a plane, shoot a good amount of heroin into your veins and immediately follow that with a hit of nitrous oxide then jump. or, set yourself on fire.”

Like an outline, he admits to using bits and pieces of others personalities to stencil his own: it’s a stoic admission of form, made in bullet-point. In fact, there are 11 in total, but the final three are left blank. I think more about what he didn’t scrawl down on this page, want to ask if he had other ideas about himself, something more that he couldn’t bring himse **[incomplete entry]**

7a

I can’t remember that I was ever a girl; if the aftermath of my strangled childhood outlined my adolescence and ran in pursuit toward an unyielding adulthood. “IF THERE IS A GOD”, writes Kathy Acker, “GOD IS DISJUNCTION AND MADNESS.” Cobain has something similar: *I*

miss the comfort in being sad / I miss the comfort in being sad / I miss the comfort in being sad. Do I create myself anew, survive because I choose artful exile? Or is it that there is no church for an incomplete woman and her matchless need, however hard she prays—*hey, wait, I've got a new complaint!*

8

I like to think about anger as a place of origin, the selflessly rich landscape of a furious woman. There's nothing wrong with wanting to fuck the pain away, an ill-tempered bloom seething with violence.

(This kind of beauty is not submission.)

6b

I'm not the only one

I'm not the only one

I'm not the only one

I'm not the only—

9

Once upon a time you lived in a brick house with an orchard. Apples, mostly, but pears, too, and wine grapes on a vine at the back. Over the fence, the neighbour's black doris plums dropped in their dozens, sucked one after another into your greedy mouth. It was late January; the blueberries had soured.

This afternoon though, you're lying in the back of a sedan, parked on the street outside your house, clothed and damp with sweat. Everyone has left, gone back inside, but you're still here, heaving the stink from the fall, your own voice crying *Look what you've done to my mother—*

I

It was cold elsewhere on the long beach when you were born low tide in silky wave. Moonlit sands ribbon beneath the black rocks, swallowed fresh before the sea burnt with day. Like a comely shade your mother mingled with the pale-green currents and turned to water, fading in the white spray, piercing thick of spit blood shit. Offshore winds cliff the still-dark night; then a sudden cry—you!

Some way north an island pressed by dawn drifted into her anchored view; together, you rested damp on stones heavy with grey light. When daylight folded and she carried you home through the primrose how faithfully you slept.

Look, they said, when swaddled you were brought inside, a shell between your pink toes.

For six days and a night you smelt like the ocean, your mother flushed with the stillness of the sea; outside her earthen blackhouse she knelt on the moss.

What passion had she for solitude! She was nothing, nobody—months she roamed the machair, bruised and idle wildflowers illumined by stone and sea. Heath orchids tumbled uneasy dazling in the tussock. How she rustled in the valley, vanished beneath her own rising tossed down chasing hares and heather-bees. Her father was a lonely

drover, as was his, and his before, you notorious black-haired bastards steered from Ulaid for breaching cattle: a centuries-old theft in the silent night and her raided stock condemned.

She is more myth than woman, this daughter of Cú Chulainn, thinned-out and heartless, wielding her gapped spear. Her fierce histories crumpled and shut, contrary and unforgiving; and your flashing story made breathless by so many empty, empty—

This is rogue magick. How long have you fallen tarried on earth? From what ruins do you descend like a common rook? Where among the rubble of some desolate crannog did Nature's bride record her myth, unveil her history?

Too antique to speak; caught in a creeping bower you are newly born.

7b

My mother went to see the white priest in his parsonage.

He saw what was left of her sanctified face and gave her heavenly benediction: *Why don't you go home and cook him a nice, hot meal?*

II

She heralds divine interruption—Who speaks? Who writes? The Host growls from behind his tree: he wants to know what secrets, what ideas pass beneath this hideous sham. Is it an old voice? Is it new? Is it time, perhaps, for the next—? He retreats; he advances. He asserts himself, unashamed, upon the daily common and rattles the cradle of its various parts—Where is the bitch? Who is our whore? He anticipates ambitious favours against all expectations to come streaming unattached; and leaving his tower falls upon his weathered words with vengeance; he alone shakes an empty fist. Who could he make responsible? Who could he thank for his entertainment? Is there no one? The stone tinkle of a sixpence drops; and the tendrils of his menacing mind curl around the poet's treasures as he winds and whips through sentences unfinished—

11a

A man, a total stranger in a bar, asks if you're a lesbian, adding, *I bet you love the taste of your own pussy.*

13

How to tell my story?

1. Believe that habits should be as profane as they are profound. In this divided space, there is a great deal of satisfaction to be had in sourcing something novel from the sighted and commonplace, replacing the blissfully familiar with the naked and strange.
2. Yield; do not submit.

III

Sometimes you dream twisted on the rack, fringed by a shallow stream leaf-shot and heavy with roots, grass, weeds. Polished thoughts pick their way through the night like soft-knit crowds in glittering rooms, dividing all shades of meaning. Your graceful head and gipsy eyes shut in their own waters drowned by Nature fall like fine pearls before pen and ink. Life throws its dark wing over you bringing you hours, hours; but it gives you no satisfaction. Unsealed, you brood for relief.


Sea and blood; bone and shell; this was your beginning.

How sing her schizoid tongue—

Tha mi sgàth de luchd na Beurla!

A

]
]O shame

]
]
]she is 

] for *shame*

12

She isn't a *self*: there is no *I*.

She is lost the moment she sees her mother's face; his evil etched in witness across—

One day she'll return to you as *inferno*.

15

One year on my deathiversary I saw Donna Deitch's *Desert Hearts* at The Embassy. It's always a pretty shit day and I couldn't believe it was screening that night. It would definitely cheer me up. I hate thinking of something to do every year, but I've learned it is best to make plans. Lucky for me that the 2018 New Zealand International Film Festival was a real bonanza for Lesbians: Sally Potter's *Orlando*, Desiree Akhavan's *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, Sebastian Lillo's *Disobedience*, Wanuri Kahui's *Rafiki*—and there I was, starved for content. It's not a question of form; we're always hungry, us dykes.

I thought they must have been a social club or something; the end of the first row reserved by a soft butch chapter. They all looked adorable, boots and bomber jackets, craft beers. I saw them

first; no woman ever sees me first. But when I sat down behind them, and saw two gently crane their necks in secret—you've forgotten this.

What providence of the deity passes over us all; how implausible it seems that we should expire. Of our volatile nature, David Hume argues that while a house built by the hands of men may fall by its own weight, no self-governing individual incurs the indignation of its creator in throwing away a life while it is worth keeping. What a disturbing tempest it makes, this trembling empire of self-destruction—Hume is resolute where Donne is less clear on the zealous martyr, exposed to charity and self-indulgence; that Christ's passionate embrace for the glory of the Father occasioned His own death. Donne gives up the ghost. But it prickles us that rattling in the throes of oblivion, mankind still yet insists upon all that remains of its mortal paradise; where no one shall take my body from me, but lo, that I should lay it down myself. A celebrated emission: *Death, be not proud—*

It's like Cay Rivvers tells the pearl-clutching Vivian Bell, *we all have to draw the line somewhere.*

11c

Soy un perdedor—
I'm a loser, baby

So, why don't you kill me?

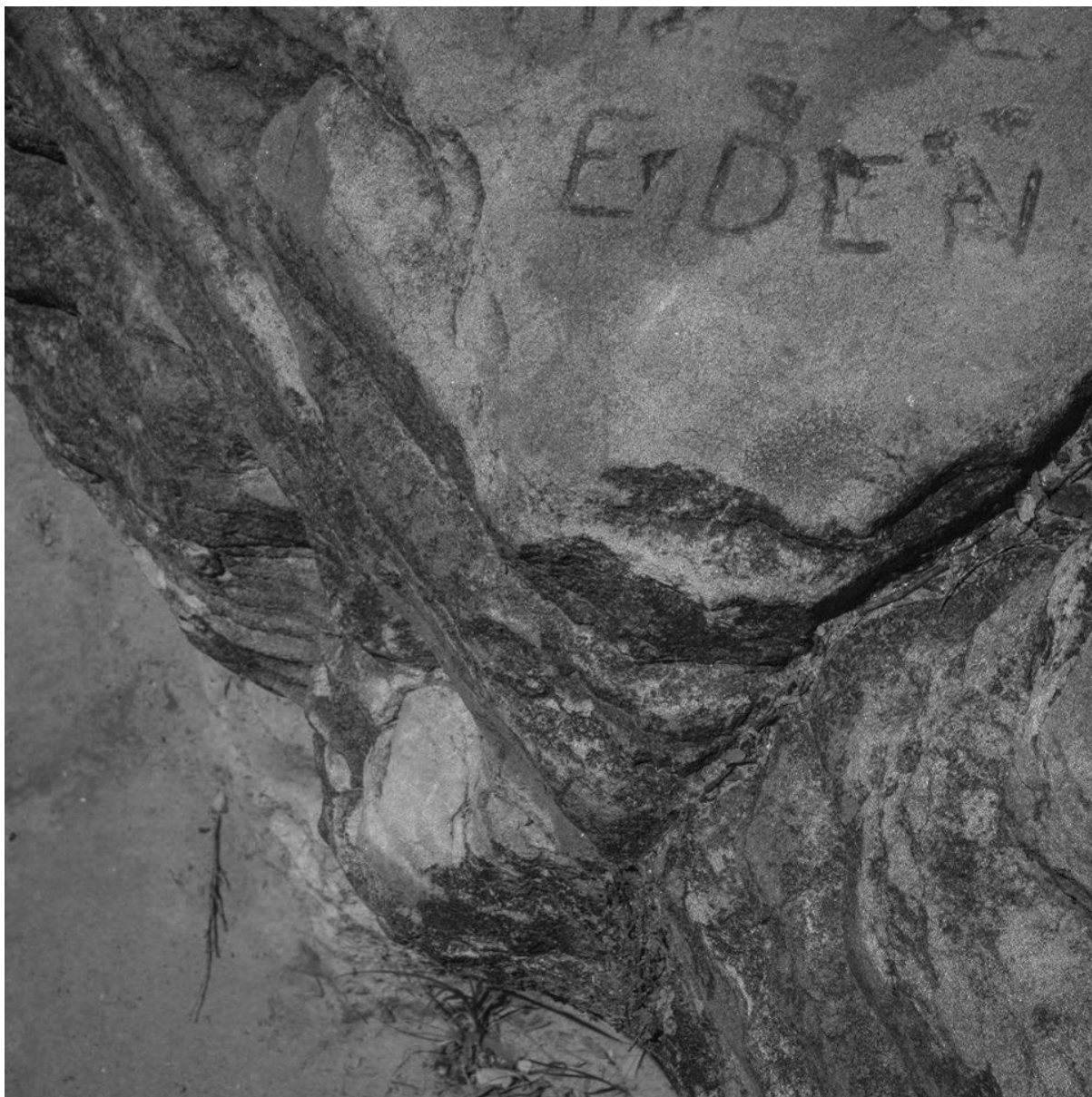
14

You're **[illegible]** woman **[?]** without **[illegible]**

11d

I'd use nothing but my bare fists. I read somewhere, once, long ago, that after you first fracture a human skull, the bone fragments are so thin that there's really no stopping the damage one could do to the brain. There's a pocket, behind the eyes, that is particularly vulnerable; if you push the bridge of the nose up, up, up into that squishy consciousness, you're well on your way to fulfilling your fierce appetite for butchery. Like flat little grapes you can puncture the eyeballs, hook your fingers inside and heft them from their sleep. Let it dangle there a while; wonder what He sees? Teeth, false and real, pummelled to dust, jaw clean ripped away beneath the ears for good measure. Face to liquid, a congealed mass of blitz and blood.

Here is something you can't understand; How I Could Just Kill A Man.



Elle est mord, elle est mord—

>>Adieu! Adieu! Je sais le jeu!

>>Oh, mon demi-dieu: regarde tes yeux!

<<pourquoi l'eau éteint le feu?>>

C'est la petit mort d'auteur!

18a

"Well, if you're like me, then you read it and thought, God, I don't want to see that happen to a another pair of breasts!"

—Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un Discours Amoureux* (1977)

11b

Compulsory heterosexuality is a false conceit, a perpetual mistake; it is living with the assumption that everyone is *just like you*.

For every single man who reduces you to *another pair of breasts*: not for love, but lust, his life's work nothing beyond grotesque self-parody. His certainty is delusion; he voyages out from solitary pleasure with no thought but for himself, outlining the bad object of your form with inappropriate ease. His desire is artifice, prejudice; have you ever needed emasculation as urgently as you needed his?

18b

"Well, if I've offended or upset anyone, then I apologise unreservedly—but it's a real shame if we can't teach with a bit of irony."

—Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988)

2b

"We have no recourse to living bodies in art", writes Siri Hustvedt, as a woman looking at men looking at women, where the self in a painting is reversed, inversive: the relationship between object and subjectivity is measured by a sensory distance. Thinking about her own relative positioning, Hustvedt determines that "without a viewer, a reader, a listener, art is dead. Something happens between me and it, an "it" that carries in itself another person's willed act, a *thing* suffused with another person's subjectivity, and in it I may feel pain, humour, sexual desire, discomfort.

And that is why I don't treat artworks as I would treat a chair, but I don't treat them as a real person either."

The rude obsession with the female nude in art history, its hidden condescension and wretched history—*his*-story—part of the canon: the prevailing impurities of our collective perception paralyzed by absence. Of course, we can speculate about the identity behind a desperate man's modelled origin of the world, but it isn't her face to which we are invited to down our pledge. This isn't a reversal of self but a reflection of our beginning, Lacan's chiasmus of the cunt: *there is no absence in the Real*.

(And what of the Actual—?)

Consider the compositional unity of my sleepy form beneath an oil: Is the bold stroke of my thigh powerful, toned muscle rich and vivid? What can be said of the loose arrangement of figures, lying above and below, crouched tight between? How subtle the pattern of heads and limbs, our framed supplication a symbol of our shared cultural experience, a silent gesture toward the surrounding discourse on the female body. Prone and alone on the heated panel do I find a contained site of meaning, a radical, aesthetic experience of my own gender? Or do I isolate corporeal beauty: order, symmetry, and definiteness?

Why does common decency require that a woman's head be severed from her body before she can speak? I am not a work of art; I am never nude. I am easy and unregulated: a woman, naked and asleep.

B

men spit at your feet with stamp'd hoof
when rough beauty cleaves their cheap design
—soft-breasted rake who knows your unbecoming
]
]
as Fortune's bride in horse-cloth—
kiss'd by whipcord in harmless tempests

]we of purer rage

19

The first time a woman asks to ■■■ your ■■■■, you forget your name; feel no shame for what you are.

IV

There was once a one-eyed crone who lived in a lonely hollow above a cairn 'cross the Minch Barra way. Around her the land rose heavy half-hillock half-mountain; all was wet with fog. In her youth there was not a glade that flourished; nor flower that bloomed; nor stag that brawled, but for her beauty alone. Flesh the colour of bone, deep eyes like peat moss: this wild daughter of David, a stranger's child by the Hound of Ulster.

By moonlight on a hallowed-tide she is born; her horns netted with kelp. And with her on this noble isle her hair-strung harp a soothsayer; for the sea she sings her lament so foul a tempest she does unburden from her palsied spirit. Narrow valleys fall beneath her torrents, dashing mournful winds over the dark heath; her weary ghosts echo stone and spring o'er the moors and marsh.

This loving creature! O crafty sage! Once beloved, she came on death with a bitter sigh; her fine heart pricked by pride.

He was a sea-faring man, a modest warrior; he could not look at her but her face would split like red on mountain-ash.

"Are you mine?" he asked.

And she would say, "Not for yesterday, not for today, not for tomorrow am I yours."

Day after day after day he would return to her; he drove himself faithful to her keep through butcher's broom and thistle. For years he did follow like a champion, plaintive and tender, until one night, with a voice black like those blood-crested beasts, his sad boat-song was heard across the bay as blue men dragged him below the brine.

The undead do not feel; his salt form cleaved to wave; and the crone waits still like a raven in a knot above his grave.

1

Walk by yourself, talk by yourself; and the *unself* says to thee—

>*look to thyself*

>*take care of thyself*

>*somebody cares for thee*

So now walk with yourself; talk with yourself; your self-same repartee—

>*look to thyself*

>*take heed of thyself*

>*or thyself will never be*

That intangible thread that runs above, between has always tugged at you; you are never far from its violet thrum. There's nothing in English to describe it, except through rigid truths and uncomfortable practicalities—sure, an adult woman, brushed with D—, might see this uncanny world a little differently, may feel its grief touching every side of her mortal coil. Fine, accepted. But you wonder where a woman like that goes after all this, if she already lives in suspended belief. Is she coming or going? Did she ever truly return, or does some spirit of hers lie in repose faraway, paradise nearby? Is this *Allhallontide* bullshit something she tells herself to make everything alright, or was she once reaped clean with such a divine pulse that it severed a gathering again?

It doesn't matter; no answer will satisfy you. What terrifies us about the unspeakable is that our enforced silence implies the unimaginable is not worth articulating. We cannot know, we can never truly *know*: why say anything? I want to say something, writes Sappho in a surviving fragment, but shame prevents me.

If shame prevents one answer, your fear denies the other.

20

The wandering albatross doesn't migrate because she doesn't need to—predictably monogamous, she simply returns to her natal colony when she reaches sexual maturity. But at sea, alone for all her life, she is little more than a solitary scavenger, rarely calling to another. It is an eerie silence that can go on for years. Out here, she doesn't fly, *per se*. Rather, she angles her wings into the wind and swoops her relatively small body upward. Imagine a paper dart, that never falters, but rises still, still: it is the unseen updraft that keeps the lonely bird in the air for thousands and thousands of miles, year after year, year after year. A wandering albatross can circumnavigate the entire globe, without a single flap of her wings; she's not there, she

C

nets me [like fine silver over prey]
for treason; you could hang me
down and swarm the seas alone—

 ||
waste my yield; what suffers
is only my body, gone grey]rolled back
on shell-cast waves, holdfast to tether

]this great unseeing
]
]

21b

In New Zealand, a death is only classified as suicide by the coroner on completion of the coroner's inquiry. In some cases, an inquest may be heard several years after the death, particularly if there are factors relating to the death that need to be investigated first (for example, a death in custody). A provisional suicide classification may be made before the coroner reaches a verdict—

Death referred to the coroner / Death not treated as suspicious

A house built by the hands of men should never fall by its own weight; a life is a life worth keeping.

In a 2019 interview with *Newsroom*, Te Rau Ora chief executive Maria Baker spoke to the worrying increase of suicide among wāhine Māori, in particular, *the same women who encountered disproportionately high rates of family violence and intimate partner violence. These events caused trauma, which was a significant risk factor in suicide deaths—colonisation and marginalisation of Māori had also contributed to disproportionate incarceration and removal of children. The impacts of colonisation, marginalisation and deprivation were often discussed when trying to understand the over-representation of Māori in other poor outcomes, such as the criminal justice system and in having a child uplifted by Oranga Tamariki. People are more likely to take their own lives when they don't have an income, a sense of purpose, warm dry housing and an education.* “Socio-economic deprivation is a major issue for us...All those wonderful things New Zealand was known for – the land of milk and honey...” Baker said, “we’re a far cry from that.”

SUICIDE FACTS: 2016 Data (Provisional)—KEY FINDINGS:

- In 2016, ~~553~~ **418 non-Māori** people died by suicide in New Zealand, which equates to an age-standardised rate of ~~44.3~~ **9.5** per 100,000, **decreasing from 9.6 in 2015.**
- **In 2016, 135 Māori died by suicide in New Zealand, which equates to an age-standardised rate of 20.3 per 100,000, rising from 17.8 in 2015.**
- There were ~~442~~ **313 non-Māori** male suicides and ~~444~~ **105 non-Māori** female suicides (~~47.0~~ **14.3** per 100,000 and ~~5.8~~ **4.9** per 100,000 respectively). For every female suicide there were 2.9 male suicides.
- **There were 99 Māori male suicides, and 36 Māori female suicides (31.7 per 100,000 for Māori men, rising from 25.6 per 100,000 in 2015). For Māori females, this equates to 10.1 per 100,000. For every Māori female suicide, there were 2.8 Māori male suicides.**
- **For every non-Māori suicide, there were 3.0 Māori suicides; for every non-Māori male suicide, there were 3.1 Māori male suicides; for every non-Māori female suicide, there were 2.9 Māori female suicides.**
- ~~In 2016, the highest rates of suicide were among youth aged 15–24 years (16.8 per 100,000) and those aged 25–44 years (16.3 per 100,000). The rate for youth suicide in 2016 was similar to the rate in 2015, and among the lowest for this age group in the ten year period, 2007–2016~~ **In 2016, the highest rates of suicide were among Māori males aged 25–44 years (55.8 per 100,000) and those aged 15–24 years (49.8 per 100,000).**

Māori suicide rates are more than twice as high as those of non-Māori; the disparity is greater for females: Māori females are more than twice as likely as non-Māori females to commit suicide; Māori overall are significantly more likely than non-Māori to be hospitalised for intentional self-harm; the hospitalisation rates for intentional self-harm for women are twice as high as for men; Māori males are about twice as likely as non-Māori males to be hospitalised for intentional self-harm; Māori youth have higher suicide rates than youth from other ethnic groups—in 2016, the

New Zealand suicide rate reached a ten-year high, where the suicide rate among Māori men rose to almost 32 per 100,000 (more than double the non-Māori male rate).....And still, no stand-alone suicide prevention policy designed by Māori for Māori, overseen and delivered by Māori.

This is our great unseeing; the *suddenness* of our invisible ignorance; have pākeha switched on an automatic pilot, closed our eyes in sleep? It unfolds like this; the mythologizing of suicide as spectacularly feminine, the self-destructive narcissism of Lady Lazarus's resurrected spectre in all her white/feminist/middle-class/heterosexual dissatisfaction, emotional disintegration and ambiguous departure marked by a murder most—Antigone, Eurydice, Cleopatra, Dido, Jocasta, Lucretia, Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, Goneril, Juliet, Portia, Lily Bart, Judith Shakespeare, Emma Bovary, Tess Durbeyfield, Anna Karenina, Maggie Tulliver, Brünnhilde, Sibyl Vane, Hedda Gabler, Avery Hill, Nellie Cross, Esther Greenwood, Thelma & Louise, Cecilia Lisbon, Lux Lisbon, Bonnie Lisbon, Therese Lisbon, Mary Lisbon, Hannah Baker—an inexhaustible trope, *femme fragile* and her morbid eroticism: there is nothing new here.

According to UNICEF, New Zealand has unequivocally the worst rate of indigenous suicide, youth suicide, and attempted suicide in the industrialised world. No death is alike; so what do we talk about, then, when we talk about the single leading cause of death for Māori, youth, LGBTQ+ and Takatāpui—Marginalisation, and discrimination? Separation from land, culture, whakapapa? Institutional racism and unconscious bias? Prejudice and microaggression? Insults, slurs, and derogatory abuse? Intergenerational poverty? Family violence? Intimate partner violence? Child sexual violence? Drug and alcohol abuse? Armed police uplifting Māori babies? New Zealand's Indigenous incarceration rate? Homelessness? Unemployment? Homophobia? Transphobia? Sexual harassment? Workplace bullying? Gender inequality? Socioeconomic deprivation? Access to mental health support services? Colonisation? Colonisation? Colonisation? Well-meaning pākeha, what do we hear about when we talk about our white defensiveness, our *complicity*? Listen, *listen*; if prevention has been our strategy against this silent epidemic, five hundred-and-fifty-three pairs of empty shoes is a testament to our skilled craftsmanship.

What good are we who build a house to fall?

Why look'st thou so?

—*With my cross-bow*
I shot the ALBATROSS

23b

No complete, comprehensive, in-depth survey on New Zealand's LGBTQ+ and Takatāpui has ever been conducted; we have no facts or figures on our lives; relationships; education; careers; families; household income; ethnicities, cultural beliefs, religious beliefs; sexual identity; gender

identity; mental well-being; feelings of loneliness and isolation; body dysphoria; physical health; diet; substance and alcohol abuse; life satisfaction; life expectancy; fertility; experiences of discrimination, harassment; inclusion in a community; age; ethnicity; whether our damp dwelling has mould, mildew; do we have access to electricity, running water, appliances, heating; where do we usually reside; what is our preferred mode of transport; do we have trouble with seeing, hearing, walking, remembering, concentrating—*Do you have difficulty communicating using your usual language, for example understanding or being understood by others?*

In the 2018 General Social Survey, StatsNZ reported that the majority of New Zealand adults identified as heterosexual or straight (96.5 percent), with 1.9 percent identifying as bisexual, and a final 1.1 percent as gay/lesbian.

Do you have difficulty communicating using your usual language, for example understanding or being understood by others?

What is “gay/lesbian”, you wonder: these are not the same thing, after all.

23c

When the spirit is banished, writes Lucretius, the body is quite insensible. In the womb their mutual contact is forged, cast into relief by your very existence. Destroy the spirit, and you destroy the body: “They cannot be wrenched apart without hurt and havoc.” *The body can exist without a spirit, comes your quiet hand in the margins, but it loses its purpose, rots away in a foul stench, collapses so utterly into decay, etc.....*A mind ruddy with agony, divorced like a violet in the bramble: can you repair both?

Darling, it’s rarely about you.....one of *those women*—

In May 2018 MediaWorks was announced as the first television broadcaster in New Zealand to be awarded the Rainbow Tick:

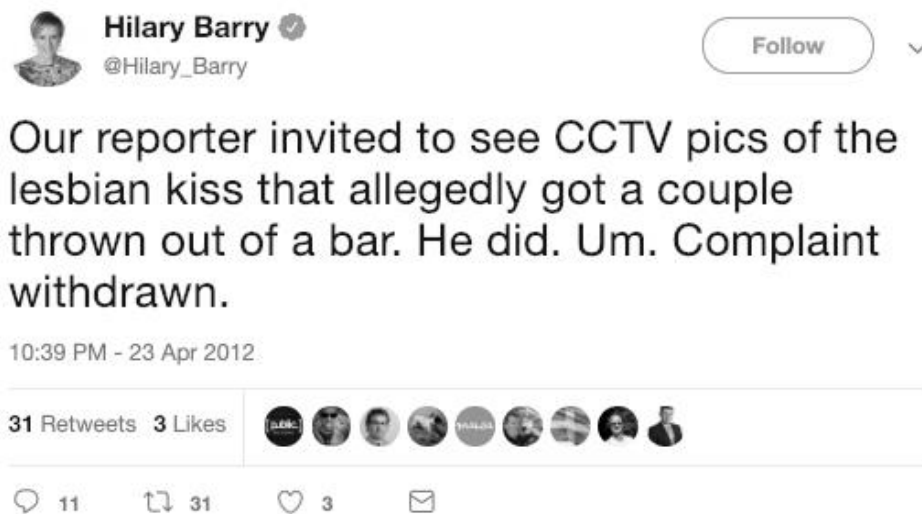
Nau mai, tomo mai ki tō mātou pae tukutuku o Rainbow Tick.



Rainbow Tick is a certification mark for organisations that complete a Diversity & Inclusion assessment process. Rainbow Tick is about accepting and valuing people in the workplace;

embracing

the diversity of sexual and gender identities. A supportive



work environment that is accepting of peoples' differences benefits everybody in your organisation. The certification process tests whether a workplace understands and welcomes sexual and gender diversity. The process involves



Dan Rock
@DanRockNZ

Follow



Replying to @ryansallan

@ryansallan @idarima But apparently was fairly full on - @Hilary_Barry jokingly said on here the reporter needed a cold shower!

11:37 PM - 23 Apr 2012



Hilary Barry ✓
@Hilary_Barry

Follow



Replying to @KerreMcIvor

@KerreWoodham I'm not sure whether said reporter will need counselling or a cold shower. The latter probably!

10:42 PM - 23 Apr 2012



an on-going quality improvement process.

Getting the Rainbow Tick allows you to show employees, customers and the wider world that you are a **progressive, inclusive** and *dynamic* organisation that reflects the community you are based in.



Matt Hall-Smith
@MattHallSmith21

Follow



I work with one of the girls involved in the lesbian kiss thing at Public bar. Work will forever be interesting

11:29 PM - 23 Apr 2012



Contact us to find out how
to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace
for your own organisation.



Jerram Watts
@JerramWatts

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#colincraig says the promiscuity prob isn't just about women - men are just as big a part and need to take responsibility. Well said.

9:04 PM - 8 May 2012



Jerram Watts
@JerramWatts

Follow



#colingraig standing up for good family values. I like him.

9:02 PM - 8 May 2012

WE WANT TO GET STARTED!

Filthy hermit, you dirt *sapphist*—You strayed exist in the [P U B L I C] imagination, but all this here is false: this is not your home, and yet (splendid creatures!) you low, you bare cast run together. Where female virtue, beauty, and innocence arouse suffering, there is no pleasure in the spectacle—Was your ineffable cunt *ever* satisfied?

Flesh comes to us out of history; so does the repression and taboo that governs our experience of flesh, writes Angela Carter in *The Sadeian Woman*. That her version of the pornographic collectively reduces man and woman to their primal parts—pricked probes and fringed holes—is a gross over-simplification. To be queer is to be neither probe nor hole, but consummate, optional, abject: if, as Maggie Nelson writes, the pink dollar has begged entrance into the historically repressive structures of marriage and the military, then the real *incapacity of queerness* is our inability to strike our own reinvention. The erotics of sameness, the *same* of same-sex, to come together without assimilation, requires a recalibration of form; to be queer is to be limitless, boundless. Our cultural performance is its own cultural cringe: a repulsion toward both the radical and the normative, the turbulent relationship between self and *other*—

The new chapter of the homonormative is already commodified, its vanishing delights distributed among the heteronormative erotic *witnessing*: it's a fucking waste, a fucking shame, these dykes, these faggots; girl fags and lady fags; little fagettes with their vag-fags; bloody lezzers, more lezzers, ugly lezzers; fuck ugly dykes and bulldykes with bulldicks; fanny smashers and fanny bashers; pussy-eating scissor-banging dick van dykes; fur-trading, carpert munching vag-snatchers; just your average cunt lapping, beaver trapping, clam slapping cockdodger, all strapped up, with no one to watch—?

I saw the footage of the fairly full on lesbian kiss saga at the centre of CCTV pics lesbian kiss drama in right in joked on here I'm not sure might need counselling or a cold shower (the latter probably!) with girls at work forever interesting lesbian kiss thing public bar and the promiscuity prob our men take responsibility #colingcraig standing up for family values I like him He did Um Complaint withdrawn—

The final description of Rebekah appears in Revelations 13:5–10:

“Then the Crone was allowed to speak great blasphemies against the Father. And She was given Dominion to do whatever She wanted for forty-two months. And She spoke terrible words of blasphemy against the Father, slandering his name and his dwelling—that is, those who dwell in Oblivion. And the Crone was allowed to wage war against the Father’s people and to conquer them. And She was Providence over every name and jurisdiction. And all the bodies beholden to this Fate worshiped this Whore of Babylon. They are the ones whose names are not written in the

Book of Life before the world was made—the Language that belongs to the Whore who was slaughtered. Anyone with ears to hear should see and understand.”

22*b*

CUT TO:

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO, EVENING BULLETIN. TWO NEWSREADERS SMARTLY DRESSED WITH HANDS POSED IN ONE OF FIVE APPROVED GESTURES BY NETWORK; FEMALE NEWSREADER AND NATIONAL TREASURE Hilary Barry (NOTE ONLY ONE L) TAKES HER TURN READING FROM THE PROMPTER; SHE LOVES TO MAKE A JOKE.

HILARY BARRY

The couple at the centre of the lesbian kiss drama have withdrawn their complaint from the Human Rights Commission after footage emerged of them at the bar.

HILARY BARRY pauses for a moment before continuing.

HILARY BARRY

(wisecrack)

Hm. Enough said.

SHE turns to MALE COHOST for REASSURING response to JOKE that she REPEATS online for her FOLLOWERS. Across the country viewers nod and chuckle in agreement. NETWORK happy.

D

take your velvet tongue

loose mirth fourflush with face

justly hoarse with another's breath

]

]whore-stink of boot-wax

you bring me[

]

]shame me through and rise

24

an dà-shealladh—your great-great-grandmother’s tongue. She wasn’t the first of her kind, but she’s the first of yours. *You look just like my mother—doesn’t she look just like my mother?* It is what it is, *an dà-shealladh*—beyond you; always you have felt its pulse. Like a muscle it strengthens, its heated intensity quite unlike its sporadic temperance in childhood, but even you can’t appreciate its capacity, the things you can do now that you couldn’t then; lately you’ve learnt to smell it out before it washes through your little body, tickles your flesh—if you had words enough you would say, *it swells tight beneath, like a veiled echo.*

When you see Mary McFarlane these days, she tells you how much you look like Mary McFarlane. She had one-eye, your Farley, but two sights. You know it, *taibhsear*—you all do, you're

23c

Reading *Te Ara: Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, the story Lesbian Lives: across the 19th and early 20th century, women in New Zealand forged “passionate friendships”; only “sometimes” lifelong partnerships; for very few women had the means necessary—money, employment, stability, and resources—to live independently of men. It has only been since the advent of assisted reproductive technologies that lesbians have been able to design their own households, live “out and proud”.

Same-sex relationships were “accepted” in Māori communities; though it is hardly “acceptance” if personhood is named, understood—Takatāpui, an *intimate, devoted companion of the same-sex*. Accepted, perhaps, by European standards, for colonisers criminalised sodomy, enforced moral constraint on the expression of aberrant sexual behaviours; buttoned their pearls; refused to acknowledge the lesbian existence. Though lesbians were not punished for *lesbianing*, they were fired from their place of employment; socially ostracised; sent to psychiatric units; received electroconvulsive therapy—converted, cured, *silenced*.....

Of contemporary lesbian lives, Te Ara explicitly states that *Many lesbians choose not to have children. Others choose to live alone, or have a relationship with another lesbian who lives alone*—“Many”? “Choose”? “Alone”? How convenient, how depressingly inaccurate; and, further still, that, historically, *it was socially acceptable for women to have romantic, physically close friendships with one another. Some of these relationships were passionate without being sexual, while others may have involved sexual intimacy.* A picture of two women *holding hands and entwined in the boughs of a severely pruned tree* demonstrates the *romantic friendship*.....

It’s a dramatic shift, hard to shake; for every contemporary lesbian you know, not one wishes to live alone, have a romantic friendship; a sexually intimate relationship, perhaps, or a beneficial friend whom one fucks regularly, but—? You ask around, and the collective is resolute: *Haba not since I was 11 and confused; Why would I have a Romantic Friendship when I could have a girlfriend lol; Romantic Friendships were invented for women by the heteropatriarchy to keep them culturally anchored to the domestic as wife and mother; They don’t exist, except in the closet; Noooo! There’s a real danger in erasing the real lesbian experience of intimacy and love by reducing it to a friendship; Aren’t we all just really good gal pals anyway?; What the fuck is a Romantic Friendship? Ugh; Sounds boring, no thanks; Does a Romantic Friend ask you to sit on her face? If so, count me in; If gay men don’t have Romantic Friendships then why the fuck do women? Patriarchal bullshit if you ask me; Imagine falling in love with a woman and she tells you she just wants to be your Romantic Friend; I’d like to take a big shit on Romantic Friendships; Oh I get it, because women can’t possibly fuck each other’s brains out; Sounds like when straight married couples fall out of love but they’ve got a mortgage, kids, in-laws, and the bach, so they just have a Romantic Friendship; What a turnoff; Pretty sure Call Me By Your Name isn’t a Romantic Friendship, eat the fucking peach already; It’s a No from me; Do we get flowers? I’d love flowers; Honestly a Romantic Friendship sounds like the most lesbian thing I have ever heard; Don’t be gay; Who’s asking? Tell her she needs to read the Epistemology of the Closet; I’d rather have multiple orgasms than constipated homosocial desire; Fuck sake if it isn’t Lesbian Bed Death it’s Erotic Friendships; Oh my god is this like that thing where women are conditioned in their twenties to believe that all female friendships throughout history are secretly erotic and full of unresolved sexual tension, only to come out in their fifties, horny as fuck and desperate to U-Haul with Karen from Karori and live on her lifestyle block in Makara with a cat and two German Shepherds? Woof!*

There’s more to the picture than meets the eye: no one ever *chooses* to be entwined in the bough of a severely pruned tree.

V

It is true that your lot lay on the moors for centuries, centuries, dispersed along the coastal frays and shut out of view, all your separate parts resisting the common life; how you toiled in obscurity, with no arm to cling to save famine and waste. Travelling in 1773, Dr. Johnson says of you that though your customs fine, whiskey plenty, and comically tree-less landscapes both ghastly and supernatural, supreme beauty is seldom found; for such bloom and softness are not to be expected among the lower classes, whose faces are exposed to the rudeness of the climate, and your features contracted by want. These inhabitants of Skye are defective, he suggests, agreeing with his companion Boswell that they subsist in perpetual retrograde, unmade by a region of barrenness and scarcity, the human race hindered in its growth by the same causes as other animals. Wholly miserable, wet and tempestuous: there was no romance for them in the Highlands, save for its whiskey and Mrs McLean, that most accomplished lady: French,

musick, and drawing, sews neatly, makes shell-work, and can milk cows, in short, she can do everything. They went looking for you Erse folk; they were happiest among the literate, the high-minded, well-spoken and genteelly dressed.

Quaint tours; carriage and cart. How they butched, these travellers, gentlemen, royalty, her Majesty burning her way through the picturesque hillocks, picturesque glens, picturesque ravines, picturesque orchards and scattered cottages: all was very picturesque.

25

In 1846, Dostoyevsky writes to his brother of his latest novel *The Double*: it's positively un-readable, he claims, absolutely everybody finds it a desperate and unexciting bore. It is a queer book, the helpless Mr. Golyadkin, swamped by modernity, astonished and bewildered by a world in bloom, undone by the suffocating bureaucracy of nineteenth-century autocratic Russia, seeks blind shelter in the recesses of his maddening self, staggers into disquiet; meeting his double—Golyadkin junior—proves an inexhaustible, ultimate agony, and our hero thinks to himself, *How should I behave now?*

Across this St Petersburg Poem, our hero mutters to himself, stares out at the Golyadkin doppelgängers that cluster in the streets and carriages, parties and parlours: a splendid hothouse of mania and inexplicable madness, Mr. Golyadkin's persecution by his *own* hand, the vile customs of his junior form, seizes him with defenceless greed, our hero his most mortal and worthless enemy.

It is not until he is shoved into a carriage and delivered to the sanatorium that his indecent twin disappears, finally and completely; and with it, the last vestibules of Golyadkin's timid realities:

There was a dull ache in the heart in Mr Golyadkin's breast; hot spurs of blood beat into his head; it was stifling, and he wanted to unbutton himself and bare his breast, to sprinkle it with snow and pour cold water onto it. He fell at last into a half-conscious state... And when he came to, he saw that the horses were carrying him along some unfamiliar road. To right and left was the blackness of forests; it was remote and empty.

Golyadkin sets off alongside himself to determine his own character, the strength and firmness of his own self-identity; the unexpected and strange appearance of his coarse, accusatory twin spites his consciousness. In the end, Golyadkin is nothing, no-one; a true Nobody. His ravings in every respect are cursed by casual deception, and it is *the other one* who triumphs—the phantom, the devil, the *double*.

It is a direct assault on self-determination, Dostoyevsky's polyphonic measure between pleasure and failure: a schizophrenic study of the void between our most private selves and the *inexpressible*. The poet of St Petersburg has no time for others—*Everything walking, making a noise, speaking, laughing, suddenly, as if in response to some gesture, fell silent and little by little crowded around Sylvia Plath. It was as if Sylvia Plath, however, heard nothing, saw nothing, she could not look...not for anything could she look;*

she lowered her eyes to the ground and just stood there like that, having promised herself in passing, incidentally, that somehow or other she would gas herself that same night.

Mother, you are the one mouth I would be a tongue to. Mother of otherness eat me.

VI

He was gassed in the war, Farley's husband, his sifting lungs an unhealthy spot; for when he died that unhonoured being fell like a dead bird in the dirt, and still she side-stepped his floating fist, milk-white mouse of a skeleton. Man or beast, her one-eye couldn't say. Her circle breaks, and beside her slowly caught in lamplight, she is seized by that most unrecorded moment.....you bit jade—

And so brother David, bristling with stiff apprehension, comes into her room, his bounding proof and solitary footsteps a painful visit: "O Christ Caledonia, I've married a whore!"

Now, we can believe of virtue in its simplicity: the widow's pension, and his brother's bent pocket—but what do we say of the sobriety of a man, his sympathy of mind and the sensibility of yours? Underneath, his troubling wild eye and pursed lips, displeasure most unwarranted; and Mary, swung out and damned, fixed like prey.

Quick now, quick: in her belly he sinks.

Her roots cast on the waves, every nerve seen before: at what point did she feel them both inside? What secret economies creep like foxglove and settle between her thighs, tightening her pensioned heart? How it closes in, that inch of devotion, that gross welfare of state. How humiliating, their rounded passage woven like plumed marble, and her irrational chastity deformed by strain—Mary McFarlane, encumbered by sin, class on her feet: swollen twofold with blame.

Consider the facts: no money to leave his offspring, a lady holds up her skirt. All this remains to be recorded, but you won't ever have her true history: so why then fidget in her name?

They died where you only fell.

Braced and undesired, no nursemaid came: looking out the window, fawning her bastard force. What fear bred in her those hours takes your breath, rides out to meet you now and again, reflecting an illusion of might. Her shape and form, shouldering their birth, cradles delicious pain; and light-fingered death, rousing deep a tear in your world, shuffles past. It is unreal, and it is gone. An everlasting bruise on the square court beneath, and her, already standing to mop the afterbirth.

She never did learn that great art; only, if Mary Farley and her like had possessed a life her own, there would have been—that was the snag in the argument—no Mary.

Hers is a bashful sunrise; and that dreadful sickle never did quite swing as it did before. Down her branches a doubled prelude, stillborn statues of a pious spirit; but now, overcome by second waters, they rekindle themselves to the surface, ripple the noise of the daily common. When she bridged the first, broached her small form, all she felt was relief; but mark how she brimmed with agony at the second, pushing an unknown breech, an exquisitely man-made, heavy cleft. Indirect and indifferent, she saw how carefully you came, indecent with your back turned like a being divided by dominion. Even so, it remains how she named you in her likeness, pinioned as an image of resentment and shame. You great, solitary lady—she named you Mary, too.

So that was one-eyed Mary Farley, who beget the bastards Mary McFarlane and her fair twin, a hedge rose coloured like June, not his girls, but another's.

The compression of trauma is culture-specific; but you don't know where you are from. No one speaks in your history; little by little your mothertongues have fallen silent. But by no possible means could your voices with nothing but shame and scarcity at their command have taken part in any one of the great movements which, brought together, constitute the historian's view of the past. Nor shall you find her in collection of anecdotes. Dr. Johnson hardly mentions her. She never writes her own life and scarcely keeps a diary; there are no letters in existence. She left no birth or marriage or death certificate by which we can name her. What one wants, you think—and why does not some brilliant student supply it?—is a mass of information; at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like, had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; or was she more likely a servant? All these facts lie somewhere, presumably, in parish registers and account books; the lives of your mothers must be scattered about somewhere, could you collect it and make a book of it. It would be ambitious beyond your daring, however, looking about the shelves for books that were not there, to suggest to the students of those famous colleges that they should rewrite your history, though you own that it often seems a little queer as it is, unreal, lop-sided; but why should you not add a supplement to history, calling it, of course, by some inconspicuous name so that your mothers might figure there without impropriety? For you often catches a glimpse of them in the lives of others, whisking away into the background, concealing, you sometimes think, a shriek, a howl, perhaps a tear.

But what you find deplorable, looking about the bookshelves again, is that nothing is known about your lives before Monday, December 30th, 1935. You have no model in your mind to turn about this way and that. Here you are, asking why your mothers are each themselves a great colossus of silence, and you are not sure that they were ever educated; whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting-rooms to themselves; how many had children before they were twenty-one; what, in short, they did from eight in the morning till eight at night. They had no money, evidently; according to Trevelyan, Skye accounted for nearly 60% of men, women, and children sent to the New World under the Society's scheme, for the Irish and Scotch, especially the latter, do much better when they have a fresh start in other countries, and become mixed up with other people, than when they stay at home—were married whether they liked it or not before they were out of the cottar's blackhouse, at fifteen or sixteen very likely. It would have been extremely odd, even upon this showing, had one of them suddenly recorded their life...but mark how the borders of ignorance shrank back at their approach!

What you create in place of fact is a sudden historiography, some untouchable truth, an imaginative reality; where the representation of *kith & kin* are without doubt a metonymic medium through which you navigate your own supplementary identity. Marianne Hirsch, writing in *Family Frames*, gets it: *What relationship can one have to the traumatic events of one's parents' lives? horror? ambivalence? envy? a negative nostalgia?*

VII

So certain that the facts of her life are scattered somewhere; you Star of Skye went looking for the crone. In the matter of ornament, you fasten your robe with a brooch on the left shoulder and seek her lonely glade across the water. Not for loss of temper do you cause offense to rootle in your compounded histories, disturb her zealous, melancholy spirit. O savage druidh, how you lament your own fate—

Yours was a laissez-faire migration: lairds incentivized to pay passage to New South Wales or Manitoba in exchange for wiping your rental arrears. Entire families deracinated with sickening haste for the sake of pocket and industry; an entire landscape creased by run rigs emptied of its people, a centuries-old way of living now wasting wee bit hills of dust; no relief but the destitution test and systemized starvation: you superstitious Gaels need to learn to support yourselves, shift your two-sighted mindset away from public charity. It is not a sustainable model of farming with these Highlands, enormously overstocked with inhabitants; exposed to famine; a shifting economy; it is a degrading and suicidal system, oppressive to tenants like yourself. You farm out of necessity, with no thought for profit or progress; you do not seek to improve your position, to raise yourself from remoteness by means of improved agriculture, bettering your neighbour. You suffer from scarcity and want; and we find your poor selves in a most wretched condition, dependent on what little black cattle and sheep you can muster. You are little more than foragers now, and the ill-behaved, most notorious drovers of Scott's Highlands are in a dangerous decline, disposed and morally bankrupt: there is no honourable warfare in cattle-lifting, no credite or commission for creach. Your time has passed, Conchobhar. This is not rural entrepreneurship: you blacken the landscape, spoil the dawn-burnt grange, the picturesque.

27a

A negative nostalgia, postmemory ambivalence: is that the way it happened? *All this happened, more or less...*

Rebecca Solnit's "A Short History of Silence" is, of course, hardly *short*—silence, subspecies of silence and silencing itself, is pervasive, infective, complicit. *If to have a voice, Solnit writes, to be allowed to speak, to be heard and believed is essential to being an insider or a person of power, a human being with full membership, then it's important to recognise that silence is the universal condition of oppression, and there are many kinds of silence and of the silenced.* Gender-based violence, discrimination, colonialism, genocide, slavery, racism, classism, sexual abuse, humiliation, intimidation, domestic violence, exclusion, harassment, misogyny, homophobia—disappearing by dehumanisation: It is *speech, words, voice*, she argues, *that sometimes change things in themselves when they bring about inclusion, recognition, the rehumanisation that undoes dehumanisation.*

The struggle to assert one's voice becomes less about the speaker and more about a willingness to be heard, however. Silence is what enables the powerful to crowd around the attractive promise of refusal, non-belief—that one *perceives* their silencing, rather than acknowledging it as fact; to engage with the insensibility of silence and overthrow one's powerlessness requires a serialised act of self-destruction. Silence is like Acker's GOD, pure disjunction and madness; and its resultant suffering and discomfort upends coherence, disrupts a continuity of the self; you will never know yourself so long as you know yourself. Writing on "The Aesthetics of Silence", Susan Sontag considers its changeable characterisation in art, narrative, history: *A genuine emptiness, a pure silence is*

not feasible—either conceptually or in fact. If only because the art exists in a world furnished with many other things, the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence. Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element of dialogue. Thus coherence—of patriarchy, of ancestry, of narrative—is made by erasure and exclusion...

You dark albatross, your wandering furies are inseparable, insensible: the war parts, anyway, are pretty much true.

26b

Writing on the *vita activa*, life, according to Hannah Arendt, has a definite beginning, at least in the Christian tradition—where the self-homicide receives no burial on consecrated earth. Immortality is the central creed of the West, life on this earth an ultimate paradise; though it is possible that our mortal passage is the only and indeed most miserable passage of eternal life, our ignorant contempt for the unknowable *afterlife* deafening. An insensible violation, the *undoing* of one's *vita activa* passes into action a laboured silence: *One could no longer with Plato despise the slave for not having committed suicide rather than submit to a master, for to stay alive under all circumstances had become a holy duty, and suicide was regarded as worse than murder.*

Your father used to threaten his death without saying a proper goodbye, leaving you close to tears and certain it was a promise to be fulfilled. His words held you, face-to-face with the devil a straight possibility: surreal and unsentimental, his aggressive poeticisms come to you as dogged counsel, bursting with horrifying pride. When you are small you resolve to hold your tongue, but you desperately fear the daily loss of your body, its divorce from your spirit, your soul: great parricide, you grand emasculator, his unnerving obsession interrupts with impossible agony. *And just maybe if you're lucky*, he shouts, bashing his fists against the wall, splitting his furious head on the doorframe, *we'll all get into a car accident and die, and then what will you do?* A picture you paint at kindergarten is cello-taped over his five-fingered hole in your bedroom door, as if nothing happened here at all.

Baby, do you know what that's worth? Heaven is a place on earth—

homeward]bound and spread

]

]

outstretched]no more

Everything you left behind: books, letters, photographs, clothes, bedding, shoes, toys, records, posters, artwork, cassette tapes, a ukulele, a telescope, cricket set, bicycle, rollerblades, skateboard, softball glove, swimming togs, sunglasses, oils paints and sketches, a-frame easel, a trampoline, cutlery, frying pan, dining-room table, casserole dishes, plates and bowls, the contents of your pantry, cups and mugs and saucers, television, PlayStation, games, memories, everything, everything, kitchen sink, refrigerator/freezer, washing machine and dryer, two-piece fabric lounge suite and coffee table, curtains, carpets, desktop computer, printer/scanner, landline, two single beds and a queen, frames and plants and décor, your *home*, your *friends*, and the orchard, the chestnuts, the magnolia, your *garden*—

We took the car. He had his own, now. It was crucial he had his own: one Saturday afternoon, a year earlier, I had watched from our front window as he kinked for hours in the driveway, spanner in the radiator. *Don't try to fix it*, he was told, *it's been broken since '95*. He did, anyway. Sunday morning, he started the engine, and left the driver's seat—left us there, while a green smoke silently emitted itself from the grill. When we were on the stoop, and the dashboard came alight, horn blaring black billowing thick from beneath the bonnet—

The whole street came to watch agog; firefighters aghast that a foolish man had nearly driven a bomb down the road with his wife and children inside. *You're lucky*, they said, *bloody lucky*—

The explanation for Mary's name appears in Luke 1:26-33

“And in the sixth month the Crone was sent from the Barra unto a city of Glasgow, named Proven Mill, To a Whore espoused to a man whose name was John, of the house of McFarlane; and the Whore's name was Mary. And the Crone came in unto her, and said, “Hail Mary, *Alba gu bràth*—thou that art highly favoured, Caledonia is with thee: blessed art thou among Whores.” And when she saw Her, she was troubled at Her saying, and cast in her mind what manner of Salvation this Fate should be.

And the Crone said unto her,

“Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with Oblivion.

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy Aged womb,
and bring forth a Daughter, and shalt call Her name Mary.

She shall be Shame, and shall be called the Guilt
of the Highest: and I shall give unto Her such
pain, ye Daughters of the father David: And lo, shall you
reign over them for ever; and of your Dominion
there shall be no end.”

Then said Mary unto the Crone, How shall this be, seeing I know John is dead?

And the angel answered and said unto her,

His Brother David shall come upon thee,
and the power of the Highlands shall overshadow thee:
therefore also that holy thing which shall be born
of thee shall be called the Whore of Babylon.

And, behold, thy one-eyed Mary, hath conceived another Mary in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For in Oblivion nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Whore; be it unto me according to thy word. And the *albatross* departed from her.”

30b

What is anonymity?

It is a lawful undocumentation of one's self: *non*-identity like a clang of absence above an uncertain ground. To be anonymous is to rearrange the particular parts of one's knowable self into an ugly conglomerate of silence; to test the primitive as possible, an inconclusive contentment with expectation. The self is soluble, equal pain and equal pleasure—wherever it roams, you follow in waves of breathless shade. Yes, anonymity is a guideline for the unheard traveller: like a lead weight,

it airy swoops around your neck, a suspended impression of your most volatile form. Seldom does it slip, but leaves as it please, transforming all whose tender life neglects like steel tension the lost, the silent. And while these conversations undertake an answer to the beguiled loneliness of selfhood, no one can tell the difference: you are gone and unknown, grieving that which has no name.

29

The explanation for Rebekah's name appears in Luke 2:1-12

“And this crossing was first made when Hafez al-Assad was president of Syria. And all went to hitchhike from Damascus to the Dead Sea, every one into his own way. And the younger Mary's Daughter also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because She was of the House and lineage of David): To drink tequila with the Brother. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that Her Sister should be delivered a letter from Rebekah's absent Father. And lo, years passed, and the Sister brought forth from her cleav'd chamber Rebekah, a firstborn Daughter hung in a noose; and laid her thick cord down; because there was no more room around her neck. And, lo, the Crone came upon them, and her one-eyed Glory round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the Crone said unto them,

“Fear not: for, behold, I gift you each sight for Two,
which shall be to all your likeness. For unto you each
is born this day in the city of Mersey a Daughter, a true Whore of Babylon.
And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find
the babe slung in a silver noose of Her making, crying in Oblivion.””

VIII

When Trevelyan was done, Skye accounted for nearly 60% of the Highlanders sent to the New World under the Society's scheme: The Irish and Scotch, especially the latter, do much better when they have a fresh start in other countries, and become mixed up with other people, than when they stay at home.

Drovers, cottars, crofters: the dispersed and illiterate. The violent common of her uprooted voice a dispassionate phantom.....crossing the unreal. Faded, then, from the brae, you drover's daughter leaving as you came centuries before; crying on the waves, gold favours in your hair.

The lowest strata of a fallowed history: undocumented_____



Family Violence: it's not OKAY.

Here in New Zealand, we have one of the worst rates of intimate partner violence, child sexual violence, and youth suicide in the developed world. They are all interconnected issues. In 2016, police investigated 118,910 incidents of family violence, which equates to roughly one every five minutes, an increase of more than 8,000 on the previous year. There were more than 101,955 investigations in 2014 and 95,101 in 2013, but, according to *Are You Okay?* it is not clear whether the rise in numbers is due to an increase in violence, or an increase in people reporting family violence incidents.

However, only 24% of family violence incidents are reported to police, meaning three-quarters go undocumented; a further 24% of women and 6% of men *report* experiencing sexual assault in their lifetime; only 14% of young people *report* being hit or physically abused by an adult at home in the last year; and just 20% of girls and 9% of boys in New Zealand *report* unwanted sexual touching or being forced to engage in sexual activity.

New Zealand Women's Refuge rightfully notes that intimate partner violence is a global problem, and their website states that The World Health Organization assessed the experience of violence in over 24,000 women across 10 countries, and found that:

- Between 15% and 71% of women *reported* physical or sexual violence by a husband or partner.
- Many women said that their first sexual experience was not consensual (24% in rural Peru, 28% in Tanzania, 30% in rural Bangladesh, and 40% in South Africa).
- Between four and 12% of women *reported* being physically abused during pregnancy.
- Each year, about 5,000 women worldwide are murdered by their family members in the name of honour.
- Forced marriages and child marriages violate the human rights of women and girls, yet they are widely practiced in many countries in Asia, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa.
- Worldwide, up to one in five women and one in 10 men *report* experiencing sexual abuse as children. Children subjected to sexual abuse are much more likely to encounter other forms of abuse later in life.

What goes *unreported*—?

There are eight titanium plates holding your mother's neck together; muscle and tissue fused to foreign metals, pain clamoured and unequivocal. On her hip, a juddering shaft of roughage, bone grafted to her cervical spine; for when your father hit her so hard that he left an imprint of his hand, he compressed her vertebrae—C4, C5, C6, and C7 (immoveable)—therefore damaging,

but, luckily, not severing, her spinal cord. The scars are permanent, the weakness immeasurable. In the beginning, her concussion lasted for days, weeks, months: you remember the curtains drawn, the darkened silence, absolute. He wouldn't leave the house, squatting like a bastard until she disconnected the internet, and he was gone no less than 12 hours later, to doss in Christchurch where he could stream *big tit rough teen fuck girls* night after night after night—

Crippled, she found a resting-place at Whanga-nui-a-Tara; found space at last to recompose herself; two surgeries, front and back, five years apart to let the bone heal in place—the first, her surgeon carefully opened her neck at the front, lifted the bone and saved her life, his eternally kind hands travelling through her vocal cords. When she woke, her voice...different, now. Back then, she was in hospital for weeks, but...my memory wanes. I remember the long night in theatre, her children in a holding pen; how she couldn't walk, couldn't feel her legs, could barely eat; sitting with her, holding hands while a priest gave her the *last*—but I don't remember staying with Mary McFarlane. No one ever told me that my mother nearly died. There are weeks, months, years that I don't remember, so much that I won't recall, can never report except in bizarre retrospect; and what frightens me most is the prospect of relearning some horror buried away, and how seamless the readjustment of my self-knowledge needs to be to accommodate the unfathomable, my worst memories separate and unbound, the undocumented arriving like an unflinching ripple.

If I've remembered before; I'll remember again.

IX

Let's talk of something dialectical, a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence: professors and antiquarians lifting your image and archiving your ornamental tongue, while your children are flogged and shamed. Or that full void, where years later, when you Crone are gone, your one-eyed daughter with hair blackened blue names her stillborn twins after you; an enriching emptiness, for your granddaughter cannot tell her granddaughter your name because she was never told of that connection between her predeceased kin; how genuine your emptiness, how pure is your silence, when your inescapable absence resonates like a thick, dumb brute.

O my Mary, all you know is upset: yours was a life backward and cruel, bodies bound by unanswered disgrace. Unyielding howling in those early years and you two shuffled like basket cats under the clouds, lying small together one shape in the steel night. How it waged around you, this stroke and roar—you, who ought to be out of Glasgow, billeted to some country grove. Instead, by morning, you two-part daughters with fistfuls of shrapnel stamping down the Clyde shining glass and watery shell, heaped by vanishing sights, a speck of something grey.....lamp-lit white garlands in the darkness, and the promise of being blown to smithereens—to whom?

You never do find out, but every now and then on the Southside you recognise that place before your time, up close to the edge of your being: seabirds and cramped memories, black cliff sand and its shadows teasing with light.

Or are you just remembering it wrong?

If anyone ever suspected anything, no one ever said: I want to say something now, but shame prevents me.

Kiss the children for me, Mary, and I'll shrieve your soul; I'll learn your heavy truth, wash away that great bird's blood.

X

Here you are then, Yours Affectionately, Mary McFarlane, Mary McFarlane, or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance—walking up and down the shore on a wet, windy morning, smudges of brine beneath the breeze, lonesome and lost in thought: where can you go? Thick drag of rotten kelp; limpets throb with decay on wooden wrecks, between the rocks; gulls rally on a weathered crag; and the lonely cormorant bird hangs from its saintly perch, stretchwing and breast bare. No fishing boats dare to sail today; but in the south-wind together they roll and sigh from their beached moorings as the waves lick their hulls—

And the crone: she comes for you alone like an albatross wet with reproach. Both your hoary lives seem of an altogether different current, an itch unsettled anen: see her plaited wreaths in the hollyhock wild by the streambank, lost and cursing like a brat. Poor devils, how did you stray so far from the land of fact?

You speculate possessed by a morbid second sight of that woman beyond belief. Cruelty runs in her blood; an intolerably unhappy life. Here you come to seek out the barest means of her misery and in doing so find yourself coursed through the spirit of her age. All is over, all is done. What is lost between you is time, and rounded the ambiguity it makes: so uncertain are you to acquire your own history. Does she correspond to fact, or reverse your expectations? What tradition do you inherit but an ancient sketch of a space?

Stop plucking at her lungs, eating her bitter liver. It casts such gloom across the invention of time, your house empty, your action ceased; nobody but you hears her bellow such a brogue.

F

]O

]think of me in tuneful waste

you oily-tongue of hateful

bloom; your milk-blood heart grubbed from a wasp's nest

]still green in age

[]untried clot

this dirt-husk of mine will eat you, feverwoman

Often for you who inhabit the touch of *un autre* there is a horrid gap between how things are, how you want—need—them to be. It is a disturbing aspect of your sexuality, an insult to your body: an exhausting performance to hold yourself *there, yes there*—suffering and confusion, in the place where pleasure should lie in secret sanctuary. It the beginning, you were electric, named and recognised; a menace of intimacy and emotion, appreciative and pliant. But something changed, and you gave voice to that nameless violence, the consequence being that you *disappeared*—

Now, all is spoilt; unknown and uninhabitable; if you had words enough, you'd learn to say *Stop, I want you to stop*—

XI

So you vulgar uncultivates never crossed the ocean; so far as new worlds come, there wasn't much choice with a tongue like yours, wild flutter scent and sly bit look like yours. Sweet-smelling hair thick to your waist, like a noose of blackness singing blue in the faint light; you stock of rags, you long shadow flung across the whin, burning shame opened and swallowed, fair a fool and mortal thing!

And then how it all came to pass: a marriage, undoubtedly on slight and sad soil; lost in strangeness, bedded like a breeding sow; and the ground beneath your feet plain filth, dull brown and smacked with industry. A most different patter and your feint stolen flesh: thundering textiles and you flowers of the forest laid up in mill factories of tanning hide, tobacco rollers and ink. Little to do now but smooth your white brow, bite that silver tongue: how queer your riven pain, an ungrateful beast wheeling blood and earth.

Festering descends; a foulness of mind; and weary of wrist you sickening plunge one wet morning, tight eyed shut from the banks of Babylon, like a fearful stain into the Clyde.

How criminal, you slum huir—

When they cut open your corpse it fair ran blue with the sea: in death soaked still by torment.

33a

Somewhere along the way, you're told that there lies in parenthood a reservoir of kindness, but you're not sure if they mean your own or someone else's: *It's always 3am*—

It is already 3am, and you have no model on which to cast into relief your potential as a mother, a parent; no sense of empowerment or freedom in your unknown body's biological fold, the way new life could presently transform inside you. All you know is upset and cruelty: a twofer you could easily, happily reverse. But for the outsider, there is a wild absence in your unfriendly spectacle: no partner to lend her signature to your cause. *Does not a lesbian have a fallopian tube*, writes Sue Perkins in her memoir *Spectacles*: when she was informed that a benign tumour in her pituitary gland had left her infertile, she cried herself hoarse until her eyes ran empty. The consultant who her gave the diagnosis asked if she was married, or had a boyfriend; as a gay woman, Perkins had neither. *Oh, OK*, he replied, *Well, that makes it easier. You're infertile. You can't have kids.*

A gynaecologist refuses to test your anti-mullerian levels, conduct dye studies on your scarred, unpatented fallopian tubes; he asks if you're married, planning on getting pregnant anytime soon, *because it's not really worth the effort, otherwise*. No, you say, you're gay. *Well, is your partner here then?* He rudely gestures to the floating space, the empty seat beside you, without looking up from your file. *No, barefaced lying now, I—she's...at work—Am I not human, and am I not somebody who could be a lovely, wonderful mother?* asks Perkins, abstracting heterosexuality as a brave, new world, the conceit and ease of natural conception, its visibility and privilege. When you leave his office, you cry yourself sick in a disused bathroom, three floors above.

According to a recent survey, one person is born in New Zealand every seven minutes and 49 seconds: at least 40% of this generation's pregnancies are unplanned. It's a figure that surprises the statistician on a purely elemental level, because although "unplanned" doesn't necessarily mean "unwanted", it does mean that the choice to have a baby was not a conscious decision: *because if you really thought about what parenthood is, and how challenging it is, you know if we reeeally had a choice about it, how many of us would actually one hundred per cent plan it?*

How many of *us*—?

Your GP will need to refer you directly to Fertility Associates Wellington and specifically ask for a public consultation; otherwise you will be treated privately.

To be eligible for a publicly funded consultation in the Tairāwhiti, Hawkes Bay, Whanganui, Mid-Central, Wairarapa, Wellington, Capital Coast and Hutt region:

- Both partners must have NZ residency, citizenship or a work visa showing at least 2 years.

Additionally:

- If you are 35 years or younger, you also need to have been trying to get pregnant for at least 18 months or for women over 35 years you must have been trying for 12 months,
- Or have a severe male or female factor, such as no or very poor quality sperm or failure to ovulate,
- Or have a genetic condition that can be treated with pre-implantation genetic diagnosis,
- Or have an indication for fertility preservation.

Good to know:

- At your publicly funded consultation you will be scored for publicly funded treatment using the fertility Clinical Priority Assessment Criteria (CPAC) system that gives you a score out of a 100.
- You can have a private consultation to access public treatment. This is useful for those who want to be assessed sooner than the public wait time of 3-4 months.
- You can also access privately funded treatment while on the waiting list for publicly funded treatment. You would only lose your place on the waiting list if you achieve a successful pregnancy.

Good to know—you're not sure how to try to get pregnant for at least 18 months, as an unpartnered gay woman, short of self-inseminating with an increased risk of an ectopic; whether you will score the required 60/100 on the CPAC system to qualify for funded treatment, as an unpartnered gay woman with a documented history of endometriosis, three laparoscopic surgeries; how long you will sit on the waiting list; whether there is sperm available from a private donor; whether the fibroid that's been flaring needs to be removed before implantation; if your periods are becoming irregular because your hormonal IUD is waning, or if you've started spotting because you're failing to ovulate, your fertility taking a silent, protracted nose-dive.

Like Nelson, you homonormative railed against the smug complaints of pregnant women, this life's work in camouflage, bellowed upset at being exposed to their sexual difference; but now, here you are, wanting to be pregnant but instead accepting that you might never be: *I felt that pregnant women had the cake I wanted*, Nelson decries, *and were busy bitching about the flavour of the icing*. But Nelson was wrong on all counts, and so are you: what are your *hopes and fears*? Can you *let it hang out*...?

The promise of an unseen reservoir of kindness is nothing more than a wet dream within a nightmare, for such occasion would surely drown half-formed, illegitimate women like you, your pockets full of stones.

XII

So that was you; elsewhere, your one-eyed daughter slept in loch-side rushes, shameful of her name. Folk said she grew up a glare of a woman, gowned by torpor, a missing face. When all the world was over, devastated by boast and bomb, she rose in the bloom and wept for her men, her sons.

Poor Mary, proud Mary with her bit cloth at the ready—Wedded by John McFarlane, we called her Farley; her shame runs deeper still.

G

dare you stay

unwoven thrum

]

]indulge me on the rack

]spoiled and spun

spend me an hour

and you will take it alone

XIII

You're beginning to repeat yourself: you almost always do.

For your mother never spoke of the dead, their old song bubbling up through the earth, muddy relics cannoned by stone: you cannot rustle time like a veil.

Mary, you suffer triumphs, half-finished crimes: you could hardly walk for the stares, chatter and disgust. But when your hand dropped to his wedding ring, you knew it all.

How criminal, you slum huir—

All their thoughts, you knew it; passing lies and horrible things. And this stranger's child, O wild daughter of David—that bound was unchanged.

So you sought him out, Mary McFarlane, daughter of Mary McFarlane: it is not a matter of any importance—except, of course, that you caught him, reminded him; and he, as if to prove it, leapt instantly from his keep, tearing far from reach—for who else but that one-eyed crone would come?

Who is it now that is done to? Here you are at a crossing.....but it makes no difference in what age you swamp.

All you possess in one bag—leaving, holding tightly to a life of your own.

You open your body, lean out of the window, desperately whipped from side to side: what an awful fix you've got yourself into. Struck by anger, you hard desert your kin in the middle of a morning, emboldened by facts. So deep your rage, so immense that stream of fury that your hands clasp white over railings on the muster deck; eyes swell not for your one-eyed mother, but for your own arrogance. She saw things too, but to learn their meaning you wore alone—it was you who suffered, and there was no one to tell.

Look—ocean, ocean everywhere; you're never coming back.

You are growing deaf on this bright horizon: you cannot know your age in such a fatal muddle. Endless, your misery emerges from the sea with a life its own, softly fur like moth's wings under moonlight: in this land, which Mary? Who Mary? This Mary is New.

What do you hide there slipped beyond the frame?

Mary, this blackened moon has folded you like a parasol. Years, years like a silver string and you, elderly now, settle clean into hallucination, a dribbled brain glazed by grey, salty memories furrowed into one slow show—a resting death, carried by so many others.

In the night,

—goodbye.



Morning, again.

Tomorrow, and you go back; today, next week, so far and your voice unrecognisable somewhere caught and climbing into conversation—sweetly creaking reflection, gone.

So dampened, matte mind: you fear this place, arbours of the diseased and unknown. You cannot follow any thought as it moves through your consciousness, no word as it travels across your tongue.

You're beginning to repeat yourself: you almost always do.

Look Mary, this is deranged: you speak of now as being beyond time, and yet you haven't shifted from today, this hour, this moment—Could you tell me your age? Would you even want to know? Answer me, hurry up.....do you recall how you dream apart from your fair sister? Did you hear your two halves fall either side of the far and away from home?

Where do you bury yourself in the past if your soul flies heaped above the ground? You talk in eternity, suspended above a world unfinished: still, you have to see where you were from. Not to talk about yourself; to impose your presence on time, that dull distance between us. Mean and chaff of everyday lives, unspeakable and primitive; inflammable husks of our most violent selves. Then, some rank miasma of our histories; an excitable admission; and our guilt, atrophied. Such disturbance seems to outline our grief; and the whorled sluice of melancholy to soothe our hot love,

A moment—

{...}

So much time lost: now, it is neither night nor day in this demented space. For the poet—that profitless occupation—there is a curious passion that dislocates the rhythm of past and present, casting into relief the perpetual uncertainty of the future.....this year, last year, next—never?

But that refusal to pardon—and between us.....its holy silence.

35b

Mary McFarlane can't remember that I ever had a father, or if my mother—her daughter—was ever married; she has lost the barest facts of her most recent selves, reflection unravelling, the self-image unknown. Still, I wonder what memories she does sift, what body she wears each morning, and if she feels the echoes of her strangled histories, voyaging out like bodies carrying bodies carrying bodies under the peat moss. *You look just like my mother*—she doesn't say this as fact; she repeats her truth to remember me, *her*.

It has been 54 years, and every day Mary McFarlane apologises yet for her rude disappearance from Mary McFarlane—*send nae word tae my dear mother...*

My dear—

One night we together slept in a church, around the corner from our home on Belgrave Street, crushed foetal between the lowly pews, nowhere to go. He had beaten her, thrown her little body up the passage way; and me, her silent passenger floating in a sac, feeding off her fear.

Do you have a husband?

Mary McFarlane wants to know.

33b

The word *reservoir* comes from the French *réservoir*, meaning both *réceptient*—a receptacle, container or *tank*—and *lac artificiel*, a man-made lake that controls the flow of water from another, larger body. Building a reservoir in a valley usually requires that a river be manually diverted, via downstream by-pass or tunnelling a canal; while a coastal reservoir requires no land submergence, storing fresh water on a seacoast reshaped by dredging, with minimal disruption to the surrounding habitat. A reservoir is not an aquifer, upon which we have collectively become increasingly, depressingly reliant: across the globe, natural groundwater is being depleted at an alarming rate by the human population, fresh-water exploited by excessive pumping to urban and agricultural areas. Currently, according to UNICEF and the World Health Organization, one in three people do not have access to clean, drinking water; one day, when all the aquifers on this earth run dry, it will be three for three.

Wellington's water network is a complex design; an intricate, invisible system that runs from city to sea, hill to shore, beneath your feet; over 6,300km of pipes, 138 reservoirs, 249 pump stations, and four drinking water treatment plants. In terms of drinking water, the system pumps daily over 140 million litres across the Wellington region, for over 400,000 residents; it supplies house and garden, fountains and ponds. Moreover, it silently moves your piss shit vomit blood semen out the gully trap and lateral pipes of your property, before flushing your treated emissions into the Cook Strait. Unlike waste, stormwater is untreated; all that falls eventually returns to a local stream or trickling river, flooding into the sea.

But the region's water supply is critical, vulnerable: flood modelling and emergency preparedness by the Wellington Regional Emergency Management Organisation confirm that the region post-Big One will most likely be without fresh water supplies for (at least) 100 days. For that first week, you will be dependent on your own water storage; though most people do not have enough water to last a day.

Across the region, the following dams are now defunct: Upper and Lower Karori dams and the Karori reservoirs, Morton dam, Korokoro dam, the Johnsonville Waterworks in the Ohariu Valley, and the Birchville dam (concrete and unreinforced, now home to eels and brook trout). There are weirs along the Wainuiomata River, George Creek, Orongorongo River, Big Huia Creek and Little Huia Creek, Te Awakairangi, Kaitoke, and more; dotted across the surrounding hills and tracks, brutal water towers stand old and alone, graffitied and littered with beer bottles, haunted by cans of pre-mixers, fag ends—

Could an emergency water supply for Wellington be found beneath Wellington Harbour? There is a drilling rig currently in Lowry Bay, another in Evans Bay, testing the conditions of the seabed; to see whether the undersea Waiwhetu aquifer extends into both areas. And the proposed new Omāroro Reservoir at Prince of Wales Park will create an additional 35 million litre buffer-zone for the region's water capacity, improving the operational resilience of the network in the wake of a natural disaster—

Generally speaking, a reservoir a large expanse of water held back by a dam; artificially carved to match the topologically of its surroundings, the apparatus collects and stores for public and industrial use. Sometimes, a reservoir can mean a hidden part of a human or animal body, or, of a plant; a cavity, or a womb in which a fluid or other substance is collected or stored—a *repository of kindness, naturally hidden, self-isolated and contained*.

But a natural reservoir is entirely unrelated to water, let alone *kindness*; as a source of virus, disease. Not of kindness, but a reservoir of *infection*; a living host inside which a pathogen survives, lives and reproduces, sometimes without causing disease to the *reservoir* itself—smallpox, Ebola, colonialism, CV19, dementia, syphilis, intergenerational trauma, cholera, racism, influenza, and more, many more. The natural host—symptomatic, asymptomatic—acts as a site of transmission between pathogen and another susceptible body, infecting either directly or indirectly: a kiss or touch, or passively, particles inhaled like long-dead ghosts. To protect against the contagion, the body presently requires a refuge, a hidden retreat, undisclosed and inaccessible, locked-down never found.....

Truth is, you don't know where to begin digging; so you let it [REDACTED].

XIV

Consider the queer design of self-consciousness: the depthless pond of one's private thoughts. To labour over a sentence, the chance meeting of words on a page. Pause; and we start anew—words run foul, and our image of the troubled mind from which they stream a spectre that we must then unravel despite ourselves. Nature, so unforgiving in her harmony, triumphs; yet we are no wiser; no bolder; no better. Such is the debate—are we to go on, thinking, retracing? It is an exhausting method; to conjure up some image of a ghost, wander for splendour's sake in the gifted attic of another's mind; and there explore that noble rage of knowledge, making visible its enchantment.

Words do this. Unreal, they stress upon us a figment—a singular begetter—and it is only by reading them through that we resist the temptation to look beyond their power toward their savage architect.

But suppose we dare to look: must we all turn like that famous dupe to pillars of salt on the earth? Perhaps so. For here opalescent buds yawn in the golden light, and the day's eye closes in the gloaming—where do you go when dreamily you furl yourself from the far away, nearby?

35a

Oh tie a napkin round my e'en
No let me see to die
And send nae word tae my dear mother
Who's far awa' o'er the sea

But I wish I could lie in oor ain kirk yard
Beneath yon old oak tree
Where we pulled the rowans
And strung the gowans
My brothers and sisters and me—

34b

Think about it like this: you are fragments each of something else, a desperate cog simulating the voice of many for mercy, *merci merci*—

H

]faint me fresh
bolt fur on steady knees fawning
that faire leather hide from hideousstirring

finish me—

34a

Try not to think of this as a way of writing through your loss, a narrow insurrection of truthful defence for a buried history.

XVI

Truth, you are the modern Sibyl: think what damage you hatch with each stroke of ill-tempered ink! You seldom accomplish this feat alone, freely inventing conventions to husband your cause. You are unrepentant; aroused. You vanish into the infinite blue, offering for the sake of offering, perhaps, some electrifying morsel of your spirit. So it is that you are found, washed with incandescence—heaven only knows your conditions; anguishes and pain; felicities and joy. Yet to see you in your chambers, a sentimental wisp with an itch, is to split the image more completely; to raise you from remoteness as a most brilliant promontory; and in doing so measure your insufficient pieces like some violent spectacle. How acutely the sharp wedge of consciousness takes possession of the public mind, running swift together like the fleshed arrow of Time, splintered by that great weapon—the silver bow of signature.

Now your mind is cut; and all that rests beneath, heaped upon the hearthrug, buckles the roots of your thoughts. Suspended in animation you have no name; no state; no grave. You write to please; to satisfy your sex. Confronted with sailing images of yourself, christened and launched with brisk irreverence, but determined and unsinkable; reflecting how fanatical the innumerable impressions of you seem to be; how your convictions now grow indistinguishable from your confessions, happily, divided Sibyl, you expose the intangible banner of truth. Black is your looking-glass; stillness your mood. Against your will you have come to the surface, and found yourself half out of the pictu—

23b

Anon is not dead

Anon is not dead

Anon is not dead

Anon is not—

I

]hooded crush of my lead eye
 O princess of Aurelian clay with tending shapes delight
 as the couched orb of dawn reminds us
there is an aftertime breathing out

36a

Virginia Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past" recalls her first memory: half asleep, half awake, in the nursery in St Ives, listening to the rhythm of the waves breaking, the wooden tassel of the blinds rolling like an acorn across the floor. In this recalled moment, Woolf senses the purest ecstasy she can conceive, the near-impossibility of her existence becoming clear: *If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills—then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory.* A welcomed change in perspective determines the concentration and strength of these impressions: the exotic sensation of remembering her life filtered through the sheer skin of a grape, her lens a *film of semi-transparent yellow*. The obstacle of the past tests the peril of an obscured vision, memories of *curved shapes showing the light and through, but not giving a clear outline*. While she envisages her histories as an *avenue lying behind, a ribbon of scenes, emotions*, there is, *at the end of the avenue still ... the garden and the nursery*. Reimagining makes these pictures solidify in the present, where *the buzz, the croon, the smell, all [seem] to press voluptuously against some membrane*, the distended belly of time arranging these images and impressions to form a tangible, impenetrable link to paradise.

Woolf's perspective on the past directly isolates her subjective experience of time, trauma and selfhood. Consider, for a moment, *Matter and Memory*: Henri Bergson figures the relationship between perspective, place, and memory, as well as the lasting effects of duration, the passage of time as experienced by the individual rather than as an observable, quantifiable measurement. Our ability to inhabit true consciousness, Bergson believes, relies on a union of body and spirit, where the body pertains to the present while the spirit lodges itself in the past. To understand the present, as Bergson hypothesised, is to use the eyes, the spirit of the past, a theory accepted and utilised by Woolf throughout her writing. The process of Woolf's perception is understood in Bergson's terms: her recollections are penetrated by a *memory-image*, which fills the gaps in her view of the present, thus materialising a *pure memory* to which her perception holds itself—the nursery, the waves, the tassel. The union of Bergson's body and spirit organises past, present, and future, and Woolf's ubiquitous moments of being therefore depend on reaching this pure state of consciousness; she 'sees' the present, so to speak, through complete immersion in the past.

38

But why should you fear a nameless grave when you have hopes for eternity?

XVI

But what, after all, is one life? Some dull distance, where the ordinary pond of one's own thoughts ebbs and flows in ecstasy, and the mind, pressed by spring's pearlish blossoms, ever grows, resplendent and flourishing in the earth. The impersonal darkness of winter gives a merciful lurch beneath the sweet breath of the blushing lemon; and falls deeper, deeper still, under a moonbeam. It is a tender and enchanting space, where the wild moth sucks the whorled milkweed and the yellow spider's sac is buffeted on the breeze. Here the months strike with glowing temperance; and the green bones of perennial stock inch through the dirt. Rubies bloom from the summer grove and hasten to sapphires under the harvest moon; these perfumed jewels destroy themselves, wrinkle and shatter to the autumn winds. How precisely Time marches her passionate disciples, rearranging their draperies of lilac and silver; and as the brook babbles with its twigs and leaves, the light of this year's end cascades from the wooded canopy as a russet flush of gold, dispersing her separate parts until all is dipped again in winter's night.

In the broiling heat your pen descends; and the mean sword of a sapphist scores the earth. It will not do to write for your own pleasure but rather to lavish on convention the raw splendour of invention. There oozes a soft profundity in the relative connection between the swarm of ideas and the croon of action. The trick is to be ventrous; harvest something ripe. Such departure need only dovetail; forget the unyielding precedent of history's composition; throw over the existent world and there, treading the deny-blue of creation, she will be born.

39

It is not possible to understand your present

when you have no record of your past.

To assume that identity is primeval and ready-made wildly misrepresents the temporality of one's consciousness, and the resultant self-displacement through trauma; the body as that post-memorialised site of violence, and the corporeal, ransacked; *with the lights out, it's less dangerous*—As Bergson reminds us: *To picture is not to remember*. Self-perception is *never a mere contact of the mind with the object present*, but instead insists that our thoughts travel along a *line in a single movement*. When we *call up some period of our history*, we detach from the present to replace ourselves in the past, and our *consciousness bears witness* to this invisible line of sight, *a dirty word*—it is an act of adjustment Bergson likens to the *focussing of a camera*.

Here we are, now. *Whatever else may perish and disappear*, Woolf writes of the passage of time, *what lies here is steadfast*.

A denial, a denial, *a denial*; a vision of your body, hung in effigy, in the fork of a pear tree.



OUTRO: *an afterthought—*

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

WORDS AND MUSIC BY KEITH RICHARD & MICK JAGGER & THE WHORE OF BABYLON

The musical score for "Sympathy for the Devil" is presented in a standard musical notation format. It includes a piano introduction and four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The chords are indicated above the notes.

System 1: The piano introduction consists of two measures. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Please al - low me to in - tro - duce my - self, — I'm your whore of guilt and". The chords are Am, Dm7, and Am.

System 2: The vocal line continues with "shame. — I've fucked a - round for long, Long years — spurn - ed". The chords are E7 3, Am, and Dm7.

System 3: The vocal line continues with "ever - y man's — heartless face . I was a-round when Ad -". The chords are Am, E7, and Am.

Dm7 Am E7

am's Wife_ had Her mo-ment of rebelled Fate. I made damn sure that Li-

Dm Am E7 E

lith Kissed his brow and walked a - way.

CHORUS B7 B7sus4 E

Pleased to meet_ you hope you guess_ my game. But what's

B7 E

puz-zling you_ is the na - ture of my Name.

E Dm Am

I fell down from — My, ste - ri - on — when I heard you were ripe for a change.
I walk so Free while the Stoneking sings; marshalled fit and cage — for a —

E Dm

Hate that Raged — Shot the sher - iff and his de - pu - ties; — how your
I shout - ed out "Who killed your Li - ber - ty? — When

Am E

fa - thers drown - ed their reign — I rode the beast — held a gen -
af - ter all it was Fra - ter - nity. Let me please — in - tro - duce —

Dm C#m A E

'rous feast while your bo - dy Aged and your mind went East.
— my - selves I'm your whore — of guilt and shame . —

1. E 2. E Dm

and I lay traps for mis-ogy-nists who do

C#m A E

feast be-fore_ they skip fore-play. —

B7 B7sus4 E

Pleased to meet you hope you guess my game. — But whats

B7 E

puz-zling you_ is the na-ture of my Name. — Just as

E D C#m

ev - ry Whore— is a Mad - o - na and all the vir - gins , stained .—

E D

As Man is Man,— Take me to Ba - by - lon 'cause I

C#m E

Bleed— with rough com - plaint... So if you eat me, Have some

D C#m E

rev - er - ence— Show some el - e - gance; enjoy My taste. Give Me—

E D C#m

— your sweet - earned ab - ili - tease and I'll see your shame ef -

E B7

ased! Pleased to meet you,

B7susE E

Hope you guess my game. But whats

B7 E

puz - zling you is the na - ture of my Name.



Page:

- 146 GALBRAITH, REBEKAH. "MOTHER OF MANKIND." 2018.CANON EOS 1000D. JPEG FILE
147 'there she goes (there she goes again)': "There She Goes" by The La's, music and lyric by Lee Mavericks. Originally released in 1988, the cult song has gained a reputation for its hidden ambiguity; being about Mavericks's drug use (heroin). Described by author Matthew Macefield as "The JD Salinger of Pop" (The Guardian, 3 Dec., 2003), Mavericks disappeared from public life after the song's re-release in 1990. Formed in Liverpool in the 1980s, The La's only released one self-titled album in 1991. Macefield's biography of the band, *In Search of the La's: A Secret Liverpool* (2003), was reviewed by Alexis Petridis for *The Guardian*, where Petridis notes that Maver's eccentric and chaotic performances and interviews were overshadowed by an "impenetrable Scouse psychobabble".
- 147 The Myth of Diana and Acteon, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Book III, lines 131 - 253.
- 147 Jacob's Ladder (or, Jacob's Dream at Bethel): Genesis, 28:10-19.
- 148 Cobain, Kurt. *Journals: Kurt Cobain*. Riverhead Books, 2002.
- 149 'I miss the comfort in being sad': Born in 1913, Frances Farmer was a Seattle-born American actor and writer, her life in Hollywood and experiences in several psychiatric hospitalised infamously memorialised by biographers in several sensational accounts: the erroneously 'autobiographical' *Will There Really Be a Morning?* (posthumously published in 1972), and the Kafkaesque *Shadowland* (1979), a biographical novel by William Arnold. Much of Farmer's life is open to scrutiny, the self-reporting account of herself dangerously, highly fictionalised: Arnold is responsible for making the false claim that Farmer, diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, underwent a transorbital lobotomy. No evidence of the procedure was ever uncovered, and Arnold later admitted that he fabricated and fictionalised most of *Shadowland*. Similarly, though Frances records the following in her 'autobiography' *Will There Really be a Morning?* there is doubt over the validity of the account, and confusion over whether Farmer's friend and room-mate, Jeanira "Jean" Ratcliffe, ghost-wrote the text: "*For eight years I was an inmate in a state asylum for the insane. During those years I passed through such unbearable terror that I deteriorated into a wild, frightened creature intent only on survival. And I survived. I was raped by orderlies, gnawed on by rats and poisoned by tainted food. I was chained in padded cells, strapped into strait-jackets and half-drowned in ice baths. And I survived. The asylum itself was a steel trap, and I was not released from its jaws alive and victorious. I crawled out mutilated, whimpering and terribly alone. But I did survive.*" Nirvana's "Frances Farmer Will Have Her Revenge on Seattle" is inspired by Farmer's persecution by the press for her increasingly erratic behaviour, the chorus of which repeats the paradoxical line, "I miss the comfort in being sad". Cobain became interested in Farmer after reading *Shadowland* as a teenager. In an undated interview on YouTube, Cobain refers to Farmer as a "foul-mouthed sort of person" who "hated the whole Hollywood scene and expressed her hatred for them publicly". An instrumental exists for an unwritten song by Cobain, "Letters to Frances". Frances's award-winning 1931 essay, "God Dies", which she wrote when she was 15, had a profound impact on Cobain's developing sense of nihilism and the private self: "I felt rather proud to think that I had found the truth

- myself, without help from any one”, writes Farmer, “It puzzled me that other people hadn't found out, too.”
- 149 ‘hey, wait, I’ve got a new complaint’: Originally titled “Heart-shaped Coffin”, Cobain’s open-ended love-letter to Courtney Love, “Heart-shaped Box”, was released in 1992. Later, in a 1993 interview with Ben Mothersole for *Circus*, Cobain claimed the line “Hey/Wait/I’ve got a new complaint” was less about his turbulent relationship, and more about his fabricated portrayal—Cobain as “the whining anarchist millionaire”—by the media and paparazzi: “That’s just me giving an example of how I’m perceived.”
- 149 ‘I’m not the only one’: Nirvana, “Rape Me”, released in 1993 as the second single from *In Utero*.
- 150 “*Her father was a lonely drover, as was his, and his before, you notorious black-haired bastards steered from Ulaid for breaching cattle: a centuries-old theft in the silent night and her raided stock condemned.*” In the 14th century, according to Mary McFarlane, her family were “kicked out of Ireland” for thieving cattle. They were exiled to the Hebrides.
- 150 ‘*Who speaks? Who writes?*’: A pastiche of the final moment in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*, where the audience is forced to view themselves through the historical lens: “How to make an end? Whom to thank? [...] But no one spoke. Whom could they make responsible? Whom could they thank for their entertainment? Was there no one?”
- 151 ‘*Tha mi sgàth de luchd na Beurla!* (‘I am tired of the English speakers’): Màiri Mhòr nan Òran (Scots Gaelic: Big Mary of the Songs) was a Scottish Gaelic poet from the Isle of Skye, whose political works responded to the Highland clearances and the collective loss of identity. She memorised her poems and songs, as, like most Gaelic speakers, she could not write, and therefore relied on others put them to page for publication. Similarly, much of the Gaelic-speaking population on Skye during the clearances were illiterate, and consequently relied on song as a mode to spread news and information across their various communities; Big Mary’s songs of discontent have since become a reliable source of evidence about Gaelic sentiment and resistance during the crofters’ uprisings.
- 151 ‘I hate thinking of something to do every year, but I’ve learned it is best to make plans.’: Generally, in Catholicism, a saint’s Feast Day is scheduled for the day of their actual death, though occasionally the Church will assign an alternate date (if the date of death is unknown, or already allocated to a number of saints). Locally, pupils at Catholic schools across Australia and New Zealand celebrate the Feast Day of Saint Mary of the Cross on August 8, attending liturgy for Mary MacKillop, known as Mother Mary of the Cross. In 1870, MacKillop and the Josephite sisters reported instances of child sex abuse to the Church, which saw the return of Father Patrick Keating from Adelaide to Ireland. That same year, MacKillop was excommunicated from the Catholic Church by Bishop Laurence Bonaventure Sheil, OFM, for “insubordination”. MacKillop is the first Australian to be recognised as a saint; she was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1995, and canonised in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI. On Thursday, August 8, 2002, I attended service, where the homily was a commentary on MacKillop’s life: she was of Scottish descent, emigrated to Australia, and worked as a governess to support her family before joining the Church, taking the name Sister Mary of the Cross, after the Feast Day of the Presentation of Mary. That evening, while Mary McFarlane was out getting dinner with my sister, and my mother was asleep, recovering from spinal-fusion surgery, I tried to kill myself. I

- remember Paul Holmes's voice coming through the television, speaking to the nation as if nothing was happening at all. It was two weeks before my thirteenth birthday.
- 152 'Soy un perdedor/I'm a loser, baby/So, why don't you kill me?' Beck's "Loser", released in 1993, is a nonsensical parody of Generation X's slacker attitude, the lyrics a schizophasia word-salad.
- 152 "Here is something you can't understand/How I could just kill a man": The debut single from Californian hip-hop group Cypress Hill, "How I Could Just Kill a Man", was released in 1991; reissued in 1999 with Spanish lyrics; later covered by rap metal band Rage Against the Machine in 2001.
- 153 GALBRAITH, REBEKAH. "DISCORD." 2018. CANON EOS 1000D. JPEG FILE
- 155 'Of course, we can speculate about the identity behind a desperate man's modelled origin of the world, but it isn't her face to which we are invited to down our pledge.' It is not known who, exactly, is the model for Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* (1886), though correspondence between George Sand and Alexandre Dumas posits that it is likely Constance Quéniaux, a dancer for the Paris Opera Ballet and, later, courtesan. Courbet's eroticism obscures the subject's face: a close-up of her genitals and lower abdomen, the nude form with legs invitingly spread, 'she' has been displayed at Musée d'Orsay since 1995.
- 155 'feel no shame for what you are': At the time of his accidental death in 1997, Jeff Buckley (raised under the name Scott Moorhead) was working on a new studio album, ostensibly titled *My Sweetheart, the Drunk*. He recorded (and re-recorded) a number of demo tracks, which were posthumously released in 1998 as *Sketches for (My Sweetheart, the Drunk)*. The album preserved Buckley's variable musical style as painfully restless, unfinished and unsatisfied: melodic and hypnotic, "New Year's Prayer" replaces formal structure with a highly repetitive lyricism. It strikes a spiritually tantric tone, echoing Buckley's interest in Qawwali, and Sufi musician Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. It opens with the following lines: "Fall in light, fall in light/Fall in light, fall in light/Feel no shame for what you are/Feel no shame for what you are/Feel no shame for what you are/Feel no shame for what you are/As the marrow in your bones/Fall in light/Feel no shame for what you are/Feel no shame for what you are." The compilation and release of *Sketches* was overseen by Buckley's mother, Mary Guibert.
- 156 'Walk by yourself': Pastiche of an undated verse in Robert Burns's holograph, a traditional song thought to be collected by the Bard.
- 158 Statistics collected from Ministry of Health, New Zealand website; 2016 data (provisional), and Suicide Facts—Data tables 1996–2016. Additional information provided by "Every Life Matters: He Tapu te Oranga o ia tangata—Suicide Prevention Strategy 2019–2029 and Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2019–2024 for Aotearoa, New Zealand", available online, and the 2018 General Social Survey, by Statistics New Zealand.
- 159 "This is our great unseeing; the *suddenness* of our invisible ignorance; have pākeha switched on an automatic pilot, closed our eyes in sleep?": Hone Tuwhare's poem "Toroa: Albatross" describes the long journey home for a solitary bird, exploring themes of isolation and loneliness, a metaphysical separation between body and spirit, soul and place. As the albatross flies home to Otākou Heads, the speaker asks the bird how he manages such a demanding journey: "Do you switch on an automatic pilot, close your eyes in sleep,

- Toroa?” As he crosses land, he is shot by “ignorant people” and rests a while at Wai-o-te-mata. Eventually, Toroa rests his body at Whanga-nui-a-Tara, his death away from home crystalising his sense of disconnect. Flesh melts from his bones, leaving just a skeleton. Using the myth of the brothers Ngake and Whātaimai, taniwha who shaped the harbour and surrounding hills of Whanga-nui-a-Tara, the speaker tells the spirit of the albatross that he is “not alone”. Turned to stone, the “lonely” taniwha Whātaimai calls out to Toroa: “Haeremai, haeremai, welcome home, traveller.”
- 159 The final report of the Justice Committee responding to Petition of Max Tweedie for Young Labour and the Young Greens: Ban Gay Conversion Therapy explicitly reads: “The desire to reduce harm by banning conversion therapy must be balanced against the desire to protect freedom of beliefs and religion for those offering the therapy.” Furthermore, the Justice Committee concluded: “We thank the petitioners for raising this important issue. We agree with the argument that conversion therapy is harmful. However, we believe more work needs to be done before any decision is taken to ban it. In particular, thought must be given to how to define conversion therapy, who the ban would apply to, and how to ensure that rights relating to freedom of expression and religion were maintained.”
- 161 *[replying to @LittleCatDesign]* “@LittleCatDesign @iantls @kiwidaveg I saw footage few hrs ago, public bar in right in[sic] lesbian kiss saga.”: @JerramWatts, Twitter, 23 April 2012
- 161 “Our reporter invited to see CCTV pics of the lesbian kiss that allegedly got a couple thrown out of a bar. He did. Um. Complaint withdrawn.”: @Hilary_Barry, Twitter, 23 April 2012
- 162 *[replying to @ryansallan]* “@ryansallan @idarima But apparently was fairly full on - @Hilary_Barry jokingly said on here the reporter needed a cold shower!”: @DanRockNZ, Twitter, 23 April 2012
- 162 *[replying to @KerreMcIvor]* “@KerreWoodham I’m not sure whether said reporter will need counselling or a cold shower. The latter probably!”: @Hilary_Barry, 23 April 2012
- 163 “I work with one of the girls involved in the lesbian kiss thing at Public bar. Work will forever be interesting”: @MattHallSmith21, Twitter, 23 April 2012
- 163 “#colincraig says the promiscuity prob isn’t just about women - men are just as big a part and need to take responsibility. Well said.” @JerramWatts, Twitter, 8 May 2012
- 163 “#colincraig standing up for good family values. I like him.” @JerramWatts, Twitter, 8 May, 2012
- 164 Revelations 13:5–10: “The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months...”
- 165 *[Paraphrased]* Transcript of 3News 6pm bulletin, live broadcast for Tuesday 24 April, presented by Hilary Barry and male co-host.
- 167 “There’s more to the picture than meets the eye”: A line taken from the refrain of Neil Young’s “Hey Hey, My My (Into the Black)”. In his suicide note, Cobain lifted another refrain from Young’s song: “It’s better to burn out than to fade away”. In his autobiography *Waging Heavy Peace*, Young finally responded to the discovery of his lyrics in Cobain’s final letter: “When he died and left that note, it struck a deep chord inside of me. It fucked with me.” Tragically, Young also reveals that he had, “coincidentally, had been trying to reach [Cobain]”: “I wanted to talk to him. Tell him only to play when he felt like it.”

- 169 'Mother, you are the one mouth/I would be a tongue to. Mother of otherness/eat me.' From Sylvia Plath's "Poems for a Birthday—1. Who".
- 169 'So that was one-eyed Mary Farley, who beget the bastards Mary McFarlane and her fair twin, a hedge rose coloured like June, not his girls, but another's.' My great-grandmother, Mary McFarlane (born in Glasgow, 13/10/1891) gave birth to a set of fraternal twins (date unknown) by her husband John McFarlane: it is speculated that Farley named her still-born twins after her deceased parents—Annie and Archibald Galbraith. Annie (my great-great grandmother) came from the Isle of Skye, and did not speak English; she only spoke Gaelic. It is not known what happened to Farley's parents; as she never spoke of them, beyond confirming that "the sickness took them both" before her 16th birthday. Farley's husband John died in 1932. In March 1935, she became pregnant by his brother, David, and gave birth to twin girls on Monday, December 30, 1935. Here, a doubling emerges down the maternal line—one black Scot, one red: one-eyed Farley gives birth to Mary (dark hair/hazel eyes) and Catherine (red hair/blue eyes); later, Mary has two daughters—black Scot (my mother), red Scot (my mother's sister); later still, my mother has two daughters; the pattern repeats again. Once, when I was a girl, I asked my grandma if this historic rhyme was because we were "cursed". *Naw*, she replied, through Benson & Hedges, *we're jus' fair folk*. Historically, the distinction between Black Scots and Red Scots refers to one's general temperament, or social politics, though our family has undoubtedly appropriated the terms to describe the intergenerational repetition of dominant/recessive traits: our alarmingly small gene pool. Australian bush poet Henry Lawson's "The Scots (A Dirge)" (1909) describes the Black Scot as "frien'ly—A brither an' a'", while the Red Scot is "Angry [...] The warst shade o' Scot". More recently, the distinction between Black and Red Scots doubles further; according to writer (and Scottish expatriate) William Boyd, who takes the Black Scot to mean *one who leaves* and the Red as *one who stays* (*The Times*, September 2018).
- 170 'But by no possible means...how the borders of ignorance shrank back at their approach!': Pastiche of chapter three in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, the section immediately preceding the myth of Judith Shakespeare.
- 170 'Monday, December 30th, 1935': There are currently two living sets of fraternal twins on my maternal line, both of which were born on December 30th: 1935 (Monday) and 1999 (Thursday). Though no genetic testing has even been done on my maternal family, it is thought that we likely carry a gene for hyperovulation, a mutation to compensate for a very specific issue: me, my mother, and my grandmother all have one unpatented fallopian tube (right).
- 172 'All this happened, more or less. The war parts, anyway, are pretty much true': The famous opening line for Kurt Vonnegut's semi-autobiographical *Slaughterhouse Five*, which deliberately isolates the painful connection between truth and fact, collective history and the personal experience.
- 172 'great parricide, you grand emasculator': Both are names given to Mother, the many-breasted monstrous matriarch of Beulah in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*.
- 172 'Baby, do you know what that's worth? Heaven is a place on earth': Belinda Carlisle, "Heaven is a Place on Earth", released in 1987. Music and lyrics by Rick Nowels and Ellen Shipley.

- 174 'The explanation for Mary's name appears in Luke 1:26-33': The Annunciation, Luke 1:26-33.
- 175 'The explanation for Rebekah's name appears in Luke 2:1-12': *Mary travels to Bethlehem, and the Angel visits the Shepherds, Luke 2:1-12*. In 1986, my mother's sister travelled around the Middle East, hitch-hiking with her boyfriend through Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, before arriving in Jerusalem. There, she met my father's brother. My father was not present: he had left the group some days prior to drive to Bucharest, Belgrade, Zagreb. My father's brother invited my mother's sister (and her boyfriend) to a tequila party on a kibbutz outside Bethlehem where, over shots, my parents' addresses were exchanged (my mother in Geelong, Australia, and my father in Liverpool, England). They wrote letters to one another. The following year, my mother moved to Liverpool; married my father in November 1988; had her first child in August 1989. She returned to New Zealand in July 1990, where her second daughter was conceived on Mary McFarlane's living-room floor during the national telethon, 1-2 September 1990: "Thank You Very Much For Your Kind Donation."
- 175 'And lo, years passed, and the Sister brought forth from her cleav'd chamber Rebekah, a firstborn Daughter hung in a noose; and laid her thick cord down; because there was no more room around her neck': Like Cobain's "Heart-shaped Box", my mother had a bicornuate (heart-shaped) uterus, which meant that her pregnancies were isolated to the left chamber (as her right fallopian tube was unpatented); the right chamber remained empty. My mother's pregnancies were high-risk, and she was scheduled to be sectioned at 38-weeks, to prevent her from going into labour: her pelvis was too narrow for her baby to safely pass through the birth canal. My birth was a nuchal cord; it was not picked up on ultrasound prior to her caesarean; going into labour would have resulted in still-birth. And where skin-to-skin contact, the act of placing on the mother's chest for an hour after birth, or until the first feed, is recommended by the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, and modern midwifery practices, my birth prevented this; after my cord was cut ("you're gonna need a bigger bowl"), I was not returned to my mother for several hours. "Rebekah", taken from the Hebrew *ribbqāh* (meaning "noose"), translates to "knotted cord", "beautifully captivating", "ensnaring", or "to tie firmly", though my mother was unaware of these meanings when she named me so: an accidental nominative determinism.
- 176 GALBRAITH, REBEKAH. "EXPULSION." 2018. CANON EOS 1000D. JPEG FILE
- 177 Statistics taken from www.areyouok.org.nz and Women's Refuge NZ (online).
- 178 "Crippled, she found a resting-place at Whanga-nui-a-Tara; found space at last to recompose herself": pastiche of Hone Tuwhare's "Toroa: Albatross". The poem's lines are as follows: "Crippled, you found a resting-place at Whanga-nui-a-Tara; / found space at last to recompose yourself. And now / without skin and flesh to hold you together / the division of your aerodynamic parts lies whitening / licked clean by sun and air and water. Children will / discover narrow corridors of airiness between, the suddenness / of bulk. Naked, laugh in the gush and ripple—the play / of light on water."
- 179 'Kiss the children for me, Mary': "Kiss the Children for me Mary (the Exile song)", is a traditional folk song, recorded by The Corries in 1976.

- 179 'I'll shrieve your soul; I'll learn your truth, wash away that great bird's blood': Pastiche of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"—"He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away/The Albatross's blood."
- 181 'Your GP will need...if you achieve a successful pregnancy.': Preliminary information for patients interested in accessing privately funded IVF treatment, from Fertility Associates New Zealand website.
- 184 GALBRAITH, REBEKAH. "UNFORMED." 2018. CANON EOS 1000D. JPEG FILE
- 186 'Wellington's water network...in the wake of a natural disaster': Statistics taken from www.wellingtonwater.co.nz.
- 188 'Oh tie a napkin round my e'en...': Lyrics for the traditional folk song, "The Queen's Maries", made famous for feminist literary critics in *A Room of One's Own* as the Four Marys—Mary Seton, Mary Beton, Mary Carmichael, and Mary Hamilton.
- 190 'But why should you fear a nameless grave when you have hopes for eternity?': The final line in the final verse of "The Queens Maries" is as follows—"But why should I fear a nameless grave/When I've hopes for eternity?/And I'll pray that the faith o' dying quick/Be given through grace to me."
- 191 'with the lights out, it's less dangerous', 'a dirty word', 'Here we are, now', and 'A denial, a denial, *a denial*': Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" is the opening track (and leading single) from their second album, *Nevermind*. It is only song on the album where all three band members are credited as writers. Patti Smith recorded the track for her 2007 covers album *Tweleve*. In her 2015 memoir *M Train*, Smith writes of her experience handling Virginia Woolf's walking cane, left on the banks of the River Ouse on 28 March, 1941, leading Leonard Woolf to determine with certainty that his wife had walked into the waves: "Perhaps I will live long so long that the New York Public Library will be obliged to hand over the walking stick of Virginia Woolf", says Smith, "I would cherish it for her, and the stones in her pocket."
- 198 GALBRAITH, REBEKAH. "INTO THIS WILD ABYSS." 2018. CANON EOS 1000D. JPEG FILE

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