

REVIEWS

RESEÑAS

LOVE AND LONGING IN BOMBAY:

FOREVER LISTENING

Vikram Chandra,

Love and Longing in Bombay.

London: Faber and Faber, 1997. 257 p.*

Those passionate poets and storytellers
melt the chains of worry
with the warmth of their song
Ali Sardar Jafri, Urdu poet

Love and Longing in Bombay (1997) is the second book written by the young Indian author Vikram Chandra. His first work, the novel entitled *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995), which has received great critical acclaim, has been awarded the David Higham Prize for Fiction and the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Published Book. Now Chandra comes back with a work that corroborates his mastery as a modern storyteller.

Love and Longing in Bombay is a collection of five interrelated stories set in contemporary India, displaying a rich variety of plots, characters and dénouements that are, above all, essentially human. *Dharma* is the story which opens the collection, establishing the frame for the whole book, a frame that confirms the important presence of traditional Indian oral storytelling in Chandra's intertextual and highly polyphonic fiction.

* I can never thank Vikram Chandra enough for his kindness, his support, his stories, his voice. This review is also in debt to Dr. Mary E. Farrell, who gently read the final draft.

We face the voice of a first-person narrator whose name, Ranjit Sharma, will remain unknown until the very end. He speaks in past tense and seems to be depicting events that happened some years ago, when he had just started working at a software company in Bombay. Ranjit introduces another narrator, Subramaniam, represented as an oral teller, one who “had a small whispery voice, a departmental voice” (*LLB* 3). Subramaniam is a retired civil servant who goes to a bar in Bombay, the Fisherman’s Rest, and delights everybody there with his stories. One of the members of his audience, our first-person narrator, recounts the storytelling for us. Nonetheless, in order to do so, many voices are recovered, so that, in addition to the two narrators being presented, we hear a rich multiplicity of voices that speak both in present and past time.

In *Dharma*, the first story of the collection, Subramaniam tells us about Major General Jago Antia, who was forced to save his own life through self-mutilation. Then he returns to his home in Bombay, where he is haunted by a ghost, the spirit of a small boy, who turns out to be himself as a child. This man, a lonely human being above all, hears the voice of the boy who constantly asks one same question: “Where shall I go?” At the end, when he is really able to see this spirit who comes from the past, he realizes that he himself is the boy, and then he can answer his haunting question: “Jehangir, Jehangir, you’re already at home.” Indeed, the ghost of the boy is the remembrance of lost innocence, comfort, love, home. It is a spirit that follows Antia when he comes back home being not Jehangir the boy, but the adult Jago, the mutilated soldier, the man who “knew he was still and forever Jago Antia, that for him it was too late for anything but a kind of solitude” (*LLB* 28). There is hope at the end: “yet he felt free” (*LLB* 28).

Shakti tells us about a love story, between the son and the daughter of two powerful business families, which in the end are able to overcome the conflicts, due to appearances, power and money, that only love seems to make disappear. Sheila Bijlani and Dolly Boatwalla, the two matriarchs, incarnate the struggle for power and material gain. However, this is left behind by Sanjeev, Sheila’s son, and Roxanne, Dolly’s daughter. The intervention of another character, Ganga, who works for both businesswomen, is definitive in order to make the marriage possible. Nonetheless, this relationship, as historical marriages did, serves to fulfill the two matriarchs’ desire for wealth, when they create the successful B.B.B.I. (Bijlani-Boatwalla Bombay International Trading Group), the beginning of many economical and political events. Fortunately, this began, despite all, as a true love story.

Kama is a murder story about the secret passions of common people. Its main character, Sartaj Singh, a Bombay police inspector who belongs to a family with police tradition, agrees to investigate the murder of Chetanbhai Ghanshyam Patel, a well-positioned man. The case gets increasingly more and more complicated until Sartaj discovers the secret passions of Patel and his wife, and how their son, Kshitij, is completely unable to face that truth. Kshitij is presented as a Rakshak, that is, a member of a fanatic group which claims to be a cultural organization. This group believes in coming back to a “perfect” past of virtue and strength, and in order to achieve their purposes they do not care if they kill. The intimate life of his parents seems unbearable to Kshitij, who, nevertheless, is let free. Why? A suspect murderer dies in the hospital and Kshitij is the victim’s son. But Sartaj knows.

Artha is a love story between two men, or, better to say, it is how a love story is destroyed by the desire for money of one of them. Iqbal works as a programmer for a computing company where a sort of embezzlement has been discovered. At the same time, Rajesh, Iqbal’s lover, has disappeared. Iqbal starts looking for him, and in the way he discovers how the possibility of fast and easy material gain can change one’s life, and how a dear friend can reveal himself suddenly as a complete stranger. Interwoven with these happenings, there is also the importance of Art and Beauty, represented by the paintings of an artist, the lover of a friend of Iqbal. Perhaps here Beauty is like the test of our human condition, the exploration of its abyss and limits, as the Argentinian author Ernesto Sábato would say. At the end, Iqbal cannot find Rajesh. But he knows that “life never does what it should.”

Shanti is the closing story of the collection, and also the one which ends the storytelling frame set up in the first story. Subramaniam, the oral teller, finds Ranjit walking, thinking about his girlfriend, Ayesha. And, of course, he tells him a story. However, here the setting is not the smoky bar, but Subramaniam’s own house. The story he tells occurred in 1945, just two years before the paradigmatic and problematic date of the independence of India and Pakistan. And it takes place mainly on a train. Shiv (Subramaniam) meets Shanti by chance and falls in love with her, with her name.¹ The assistant station master, Frankie Furtado, is the witness of the development of their relationship. Shiv listens to the tales Shanti tells him on the train, creating a spiralling structure of stories within stories that amazes Shiv. We

¹ As Chandra told me, “*Shanti* is Sanskrit for ‘peace’, or, as T. S. Eliot footnoted it in ‘The Waste Land’, it is ‘the peace that passeth understanding’” (personal communication, 25th July 1997).

should not forget that the frame in which the five stories of the collection are included is also one of oral storytelling.

Finally, he tells her a story, one he is not able to tell anyone else, so that it is Shanti herself who recounts Shiv's story to Frankie. After that, when Shiv asks Shanti to marry him, she accepts with no hesitation. Of course, the Shiv Subramaniam of the story is the oral teller. The listener of his stories, our narrator, is Ranjit Sharma, whose name we only learn at the end, when Subramaniam's wife appears. The real *tour de force* comes when she tells Ranjit: "You mustn't believe a word he says." Thus, Subramaniam appears to be an unreliable narrator, one that has been making stories up. Indeed, a real storyteller.

The whole frame of the collection finishes as it began, with Ranjit's voice, completing a circular narrative. Between the beginning and the end, many voices, many stories are heard. At the very end, Ranjit is walking in his city, Bombay, thinking, listening to the music in his head, filled with longing, and love. But, above all, in constant search of life.

In *Love and Longing in Bombay* we face a double narrative which juxtaposes, within the context of oral storytelling, past and present. Interspersed with the frame story in the past time, that of a group of people gathering in a Bombay bar, where they listen to Subramaniam's stories, we have memories of the past and also narrations of the past which catch up with the present. The situations, set in contemporary Bombay, allow the use of a wondrous up-to-date language, a reflection of the English spoken in present-day India, fifty years after independence. It is a language full of references to meals, computer systems, music, and present-day customs. However, what remains above all is the open frame of oral storytelling, traditional in India, a special compositional feature to which Chandra gives birth with his unmistakable hedge, "Listen." Here, skillfully, the author updates the context and makes it appear, in a natural way, an almost familiar one. After all, what really matters is the fact of storytelling, as in his first work, the novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*. The trace of the Indian oral traditions unifies the narrative work of Chandra hitherto.

Therefore, above all, *Love and Longing in Bombay*, as a fictional depiction of oral narration, recovers the relevant presence of the oral storytelling tradition in contemporary India. Through these brilliant and enticing pages, three elements connected with orality relate to each other: voices, music and silences. They define how the *speaking person*, as Mikhail Bakhtin would say, feels in each moment. The dialogue created among voices, music (chiefly *ghazals*) and silences surrounds the stories of the collection, creating

a curious sense of comfort and confidence. For instance, he depicts a voice “wrapped around silences like a call from the other side of the moon” (*LLB* 231), a music “ethereal and distant, which must have been always there but only now in my ears” (*LLB* 174), or a silence which was “wet and fresh and everywhere green” (*LLB* 231). Definitely, it is poetry that moves Chandra’s pen.

Furthermore, in a novel written in English, Chandra introduces a lot of Indian words, mainly from Hindi (his mother tongue). To begin with, the story titles are, metatextually, Indian cultural referents. At the same time, different accents from some of the many languages spoken in India are mentioned, accents that make this English sound different. Indeed, Chandra’s English reflects the language used by Indians, not the norm depicted in British grammar books. It is, we would say, the English used by somebody who fells chiefly in Hindi, a language that reveals that the intimate bond between language and ethnic identity is inseparable. It is not in vain that one of his characters, probably voicing Chandra’s own thought, says that “ethnic means real” (*LLB* 169).

In his second book, this collection of short stories, Chandra places at the centre of his narrations such universal human feelings as love and longing, displaying a varied range of love relations, revealing his broad-minded vision, comprehensive and deeply human. The stories of *Love and Longing in Bombay* represent romantic love, filial love, perverted love, damaged love, lost love, found love and absolute longing.

As the author behind the writing of this collection, which he lets flow in the characters’ own voices, Chandra displays a profound psychological capacity to describe feelings, emotions and thoughts, more than actions and happenings. He is able to enter the personality of each one of his characters. He knows them very well. And that allows us to understand their life stories as if they were real people, mainly because they have been depicted from within.

Once more, as in *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, Vikram Chandra shows us the power of stories as memory, both of past and present time; stories like life, stories like India herself, a contemporary India which is multicultural, pluralist, heterogeneous, half-caste, transcultured, a huge magical meeting place of races, cultures, tales, voices and times. Throughout these stories, Vikram shows us his present-day India, a country that fifty years after its independence from the British domination lives a complex reality of poverty, overpopulation and tremendous social differences, while, at the same time, it is able to reveal, among these shadows, its own artistic expressions as dou-

ble-rooted in modernity and tradition. It is this legacy of the past which seems to remain after all, namely, the importance of storytelling, voices heard, face-to-face conversations, human touch. A tradition that young generations, plunged into our paradoxical modern times, still trust. In other words, by means of Chandra's writing, in which oral performances are emphasized above all, India is represented as a multiplicity of voices telling universal human stories. On the other hand, he also shows us the memory of traditional India, which is not in books and official "Histories," but in everyday stories of the people, in their daily conversations, those which are not written but told, retold, and above all, lived.

Finally, conclusions are left open to the readers' imagination, perhaps as an attempt to make them also feel the need to retell them, in order to make them tell stories of their own. Vikram Chandra is a real storyteller indeed, one who goes on giving us stories in an endless process that, hopefully, has just begun. Perhaps, as one of the characters in this collection, he is "silenced by stories that appear abruptly in his head" (*LLB* 183), stories that, written on paper, we are also able to listen to, somehow.

DORA SALES SALVADOR
UNIVERSITAT JAUME I DE CASTELLÓ

**Chantal Cornut-Gentile D'Arcy and
José Angel García Landa, eds.,
Gender, I-deology: Essays on Theory, Fiction and Film.
Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996. 465 p.**

While collections of new critical writings are inevitably subject to editorial contingencies, their strength is that they can provide readers with varied constellations of fresh perspectives and complementary new departures. *Gender, I-deology: Essays on Theory, Fiction and Film* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996) is such a volume. Edited by Chantal Cornut-Gentile D'Arcy and José Angel García Landa, it contains twenty-nine essays which offer readers a textured overview of the theoretical questions and textual analyses one can bring to bear on intersections of gender and ideology within literary and film studies. Organized in three roughly equal sections—"Theory," "Fiction," and "Film"—these essays at once cover diverse materials and yet come across as focused and dialogically reenforcing. Most were written by members of the Zaragoza university faculty, which may partly account for the volume's cohesion. But this sense of unity is also indebted to the editors' effort to guide and organize their diverse contributions within a shared discourse that aims to elucidate a common subject matter.

While all three sections of *Gender, I-deology* are informed by recent developments in critical and gender theory, the essays included in the "Theory" section pursue them centrally, and in so doing provide a foundation for the subsequent "Fiction" and "Film" sections. "Theory" concerns the agendas, methodologies, and ideologies which have been informing contemporary debates about literary and filmic representations of gender, notably variants of poststructuralist and New Historical thinking. The "Fiction" and "Film" sections apply these and related theoretical strands to specific texts, and do so in a flexibly eclectic manner. As such, these two sections provide readers with case studies against which one may assess the applicability and potentials of the theoretical approaches probed in the first section. Furthermore, with "Fiction" and "Film" focusing on narrative media, and with "film" limited here to fiction film, these two sections dovetail and echo one another despite the fact that the two media consitute radically different modes of representation (or "languages," or "signifying systems"). Instead of being torn asunder by such multiple undertakings, the volume is held together by a selection and

organization of essays which end up constituting a whole made up of mutually elucidating parts.

As the inclusion of “Gender” in the title signals, this book’s project is to elaborate a feminist orientation towards filmic and literary representations of gendered identities. Significantly, this orientation is not theoretical or critical in the sense of semiotics, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, New Historicism, or for that matter New Criticism. Feminism is a politics, and as such it gives direction to theories and practices of textual interpretation. The questions it raises concern the social use of textual production and reception. It fosters attention to ways texts help shape the collective ideological imaginary, to the position of texts within specific historic contexts, and to the meanings which emerge from texts as they are considered singly and in relation to one another. The essays assembled here respond to these questions by unmasking the inscription of gender in fiction and film. Using the tools made available through recent developments in theory and criticism, they stand as interventions in the political consequences of social ideology.

In part, such demystification invokes and expands European and American feminist work on literature and film as it has evolved over the last three decades. Published in 1996, this volume participates in a project which has been transforming the ways we understand art and cultural production—notably in terms of how cultural artifacts and social relations (political and economic as well as gendered) intersect in the production of ideology. While the “Theory” section of *Gender, Ideology* reviews and critiques the theoretical foundations of these developments, the “Fiction” and “Film” sections supplement past work with additional case studies that further document ways those same cultural artifacts which nourish social and political formations can also create ideological formations can also create ideological spaces for change. That this work is brought to bear on two of the most accessible media—media that blur the “high/low” culture divide and use verisimilitude (in plot, character, etc.) to promote identification and empathy—makes it all the more useful.

An additional strength of this particular anthology is the clarity and accessibility of its essays. While the volume is just about bursting at the seams with its 465 pages which contains a richness of essays, the essays are clear and mostly short. Even the theoretical ones are clear and concise in a genre of scholarship notorious for its obscurantism. The commitment here is clearly to readability—to familiarizing readers with difficult but nonetheless important debates which have been guiding feminist cultural work since the 1960s, and to providing us with models of approaching these debates

through applied critical readings. This goal is further assisted by a comprehensive introduction which lays out the book's concerns in a systematic manner. As José Angel García Landa explains at the conclusion of this essay, at issue is ultimately the demystifying capabilities of literature, of feminist criticism and theory, and of cultural semiotics. In this volume, such demystification has a liminal function, for it helps expand readers' awareness of ways figurative discourse guides our understanding and action.

At the same time, the availability of appropriate materials is almost always a challenge for editors of such collections, and all the more so when the goal is to be comprehensive when what the field yields at a given point in time may not make that possible. As an American reviewer, I am struck by ways the scholarship published in this collection, including the helpful bibliographies appended to each essay, is at once inflected through a fresh European perspective I find very salutary, and yet is also insufficient in the space given to considerations of race, social class, and other kinds of social marginalization as inextricable from the social constitution of gender. While this volume's emphasis on semiotics in particular is stronger than one would find in representative American texts, attention to social marginalities is mostly tokenist. Ironically, this imbalance ends up essentializing gender in contradistinction to this volume's obvious effort to de-essentialize. Treating gender as universal—as mostly detached from its specific social, historic, economic, and political inscriptions—the volume takes a step back from its goal of demystifying it as a factor within social relations.

This caveat aside, the issues raised in various essays are important. Among them, Pilar Hidalgo's laying out of the potentials and difficulties entangled in New Historical approaches is helpful in making explicit ways cultural artifacts and their reception are embedded in evolving material history and social formations. Furthermore, the inclusion of perspectives on masculinity (e.g. by JoAnne Neff van Aertselaer), cross-gender identification (Juan A. Suárez), androgyny (Ana Zamorano and Hilaria Loyo), and lesbian identity (in essays about Jeanette Winterson's fiction by María del Mar Asensio, Susana González and Susana Onega) reminds us that "gender" includes much more than a binary male-female organization of sexual and social identities and relations. Though none of these essays makes this argument explicitly, the thrust of this work is to suggest that "feminism" itself needs to be reassessed in relation to a more complex understanding of diverse gender constructions and their ideological function within social and political appropriation.

This point is evident most clearly in the “Film” section, where critical analysis rests on a bedrock of scholarship concerning ways the viewing relations films set up for their audience’s gaze end up destabilizing the meaning of “gender.” That essays in the “Fiction” section lean towards thematic criticism while those in the “Film” section lean towards an emphasis on spectatorship and reception is to be expected, considering that literary and film scholarship have followed somewhat divergent paths in this respect. Though the two media share a concern with narrative arts given to verisimilitude and reader identification, there are specific historic reasons why critical work in the two fields headed in different directions, including material differences between the two media as discourses, and the differing reception they therefore necessitate. Still, a comparative reading of the differences between the “Fiction” and “Film” sections of *Gender, Ideology* is illuminating precisely because highlights the different assumptions each critical tradition makes and the different questions each brings to bear on its texts. For beyond the usefulness of reading specific novels and films with an eye to gender, or ideology, or for that matter any conceptual framework, the juxtaposition of the fiction and film criticism in this anthology helps us consider these two disciplines afresh.

This notion of seeing things afresh is addressed centrally in Beatriz Penas’ discussion of “making strange” (*ostranienie*) as Julia Kristeva adapts it from Roman Jakobson in her work on desire and language. Key to here is the idea of taking the familiar and revisiting it from a perspective that renders it unfamiliar, and so, capable of providing new kinds of understanding. This concept, so fundamental to modern and postmodern theories of art, reception, and social appropriations, is useful both as an approach to film and fiction and as a lens through which one may consider *Gender, Ideology* fruitfully. Though to date film scholarship on the operations of desire tended to be anchored in sight-based Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of reception (as initially elaborated by Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey), while word-based theories of reading have largely turned to linguistics, semiotics, and deconstruction (which are less concerned with desire, and certainly less with sight-based desire), an integrating reading of the essays gathered in this volume nudges us towards making both of these traditions “strange” and revisiting each with a mind open to re-assessing its capabilities.

LINDA DITTMAR
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

Janet Holmes,
Women, Men and Politeness.
New York: Longman, 1995, 254 p.

Gender is a crucial factor to take into account when dealing with politeness phenomena. Holmes' book explains through nice examples and interesting experiments how gender differences may influence and affect linguistic politeness. She reviews studies and research on this topic by a great number of authors and she adds her own experiments and results obtained from speakers of New Zealand English (although one would expect the New Zealand evidence be dealt with in more detail, she fails to elaborate it thoroughly). The topic of research and the data used seem to be very well-connected since New Zealand culture has been described as a "gendered culture, . . . gender is the motif and preoccupation of New Zealand society, as class is in Britain" (*WMP* 27). This may be an advantage for her study or it might be a drawback since it may lead to simplistic conclusions as I will comment on later.

Holmes bases her analyses and investigations on grounds defined in their essence by Brown and Levinson (1987). Concepts such as face (in its two modalities: positive and negative face), FTA (face-threatening act), positive and negative politeness, and the social variables influencing politeness have been treated in this book basically following Brown and Levinson's first drafts but adding some new touches. The main new stroke here is the addition of one social factor not included in Brown and Levinson's fine analysis of politeness: gender. This variable will give rise to two different politeness styles: a positively-orientated politeness identified in women's discourse and a rather negative politeness style in men's interaction.

The main idea from which the book starts is that women and men have different ways of talking and hence, of realizing and interpreting speech acts. In the first chapter ("Sex, politeness and language"), Holmes points out the

feasible reason why this is so. Women and men use language in a different way because they have different perceptions of what language is for. Whereas men use language as a tool to give and obtain information (the referential function of language), women see language as a means of keeping in touch (the affective or social function). Holmes includes politeness, which is defined as “an expression of concern for the feelings of others” (*WMP* 4), within the affective or social function of language, and hence, the women being the ones who use language more in this way, women are more polite than men.

These two different perceptions and usages of language cause different norms of interaction, which is—as Holmes points several times—the most plausible reason why women and men interact differently. In other words, she explains in the second chapter that what is perceived as rude to the women may be perfectly polite to men and vice versa (*WMP* 53). Nevertheless, according to this, there is something that does not quite fit into the picture. On the one hand, there are different patterns of politeness due to gender differences, and the most plausible reason why this is so is that women and men have different perceptions of language. If perception of language implies what is polite or rude to both women and men, politeness is being regarded as a factor and as a consequence at the same time. In other words, politeness is being considered as a factor that contributes to the assessment of what is appropriate in each context by each gender—“politeness, or sensitivity to the needs of others, may be another contributing factor” (*WMP* 37)—and as the result of that assessment—“New Zealand women tend to be more polite than men” (*WMP* 70)—since she draws this conclusion after assessing the results of others’ and her own experiments and data. So, it seems to be somewhat contradictory that the result of the assessment—the politeness of women and men—might be due to precisely different ways of evaluating interaction—evaluating what is polite and what is not. It might be that politeness is extralinguistically motivated and then, as Mey (1993) says there would be a metapragmatic level.

The idea presented in the first chapter pervades the whole book: women and men have different ways of interacting because women are more positively polite than men in talking cooperatively and supportively. This is developed throughout the book and supported by a wide range of linguistic evidence. In the second chapter, it is shown how male interviewers talked more than female interviewers whereas male interviewees talked less than female interviewees, who were more sensitive to their interviewer’s needs. Moreover, men ask more response-restricting questions that focus on the

content, while women ask more facilitative questions which function as supportive elicitations rather than as information seekers. Another piece of linguistic evidence is the fact that men interrupt more than women, who use a lot of back-channeling “to encourage others to continue talking and reflects concern for their positive face needs. . . . Back-channeling is typical of a good listener” (*WMP* 56-57).

In chapter 3, Holmes analyses the use that women and men make of some linguistic devices which serve to increase or reduce the force of an utterance. These are hedges, boosters, tag questions, and pragmatic particles such as “you know,” “I think,” “sort of,” “of course.” Their interpretation in verbal interaction will depend on their function in a specific context. All these linguistic means can be orientated either towards a referential, content-focused function or an interpersonal and affective function. Men tend to emphasise the former function while women prefer the latter.

The next two chapters—chapters 4 and 5—show how two different speech acts, compliments and apologies, can render useful insights about gender differences in politeness behaviour. On the one hand, compliments are paid, realized and received differently by women and men. Women in general pay and receive more compliments than men. Interpretation of compliments also varies depending on the person who receives it. Females tend to regard compliments as positive and affective politeness devices and hence they pay and receive more than men who tend to consider them not as positive as women. Males often see compliments as face-threatening or at least not as unambiguous in intentions as women do. The content of compliments is also another point of divergence. While men usually compliment on ability or performance, women compliment more on appearance. The reason seems to be the subordinate status of women in society, which plays a relevant role in both the linguistic realization of speech acts and in the interpretation of them. On the other hand, apologies constitute another field to study how women and men differ in dealing with speech acts. Females apologise more than men do and for different reasons, and they also respond differently.

Finally, in the last chapter—chapter 6—Holmes explains why politeness matters by pointing to the implications of these differences in women’s and men’s politeness behaviour in two contexts: the educational and the professional world. All the linguistic devices seen in the previous chapters are now analysed in the classroom and at the office. Getting to know the different strategies women and men use and getting familiar with the different ways in which they interpret speech acts can help a lot in our private and public

lives. Personal relationships between women and men could be improved if the different politeness patterns males and females use were known. A lot of misunderstanding could be avoided—Tannen (1990) explains this problem very well. In public spheres as well, public discussions and decision-making could benefit from knowing male and female types of discourse. Holmes adds that, apart from knowing all this, women's style of discourse should be applied to all these spheres since it is more supportive, cooperative, just more polite. This however should be analysed more carefully.

Thus, Holmes' conclusion is that in the same way as there seems to exist positive and negative politeness cultures (Brown and Levinson 1987; Sifianou 1989; Hickey and Vázquez Orta 1994) there are positive and negative politeness genders. Females express more appreciation towards the other in their discourse (positive politeness), whereas males show consideration and respect (negative politeness). According to Holmes, women are more polite using this type of politeness, that is, she equates politeness with positive politeness. Also, women are more affective and social, so politeness is enhanced in the affective or social function of language. These two assertions, however, should be pondered cautiously.

Firstly, saying that women use a more positively-orientated style of discourse and patterns of politeness, and therefore are more polite than men in general—of course Holmes says there are always exceptions—seems to be a very simplistic conclusion. Or it may just seem to be simplistic because data and results come from a very gendered-biased society, as was said above. Perhaps in other cultures and societies, the outcome would not be so clear-cut. In any case, positive politeness is just one side of politeness. Negative politeness is as important and as necessary. Some authors think one type of politeness is more important than the other. Leech considers positive politeness as "somewhat less important" than negative politeness (Leech 1983: 81). Yet, showing concern about the addressee's own territory and freedom of action (negative face) is as polite as showing interest, admiration or common grounds with her/him (positive face). So, the fact that women use positive politeness devices more than men do does not just mean that they are more polite. Secondly, it seems to be true that women are more affective and social than men. It is also true that politeness seems to be linked to the social function of language. But the latter statement does not have to derive from the former. In other words, the fact that women show more affection and consideration toward the other in verbal interaction does not mean that this is politeness; it might be something else.

Reading Holmes' book, one can have the feeling that women ("other-oriented") are the good "guys" and men ("self-orientated," almost, selfish) are the bad guys of the movie. There are some examples in which Holmes seems to be bringing facts to her own territory even when the evidence is not so much in her favour. One example of this can be found in chapter 5, when she is dealing with the different strategies women and men use to apologise. She presents the different strategies used to apologise by women and men. One of the paramount differences emphasised by her takes place within the broad mechanism of acknowledgement of responsibility (one of the three main devices to apologise). Within this, there are five strategies. Two of these: *accepting the blame* (e.g. "It is my fault") and *expressing self-deficiency* (e.g. "I was confused") are more used by men than women. Yet other two strategies, *recognising the other is entitled to an apology* (e.g. "You are right") and *expressing lack of intent* (e.g. "I didn't mean to") are just used by women—although in her data the figures are not very significant: just 2 women for the former strategy and 7 for the latter out of 214 females. Holmes says that this shows that "women tend to use strategies which focus on the harmony of their relationship with the other person. . . . Men, on the other hand, tend to use more strategies which focus on the relative status relationship with the other, accepting blame and expressing self-deficiency" (*WMP* 163). However, it can also be said that the strategies of recognising the other is entitled to an apology and expressing lack of intent focus on the relative status relationship with the other since there is really no difference between saying "You are right" or saying "It is my fault." It is just the perspective—the functional sentence perspective: theme/rheme—that changes, not the meaning. Similarly, the strategies of accepting blame and expressing self-deficiency can establish harmony in the relationship since one is acknowledging responsibility and hence trying to repair a damage.

In short, Holmes' analyses of female and male discourses are appropriate from a formal and functional perspective. Her assessments of female and male patterns of politeness are adequate as well. Yet her final conclusion about women using more positive politeness than men and hence being more polite than males, and her final advice about adopting women's style of discourse in all spheres in life should be taken very cautiously. Holmes sustains that women's style of discourse have all these features (*WMP* 222): being active listeners, giving support their addressees, disagreeing in a non-confrontational manner, asking facilitative questions, using pragmatic particles in their affective function, complementing and

apologising frequently, etc. Yet if all these features were used by women and men, wouldn't verbal interaction be— apart from dull and boring— artificial? I do not really know why but I refuse to think all politeness is about can be reduced to that. I am not sure this is the authentic and real linguistic politeness. We might be mixing up deference —or even mere flattery—and politeness. And I like to think that politeness is something else, something deeper than mere sycophancy. Perhaps real politeness actually loses its spirit when it is linguistically realized. Perhaps authentic politeness is non-verbal. If this is so, we might as well do research on another topic and forget about linguistic politeness altogether. Or perhaps we should rather investigate why what we call “polite” acts, sentences or phrases often seem to be more insincere praise than real politeness.

MARÍA JOSÉ GARCÍA VIZCAÍNO
UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA

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George P. Landow, ed.

Hyper/Text/Theory.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994. 381 p.

George P. Landow (Brown University) es uno de los pioneros del desarrollo de herramientas informáticas aplicadas a la enseñanza y teoría de la literatura. Quizá mejor que intentar resumir la variedad de proyectos en que ha trabajado remitiré a su página personal en Internet, donde se pueden encontrar conexiones a muchos, algunos de los cuales detallo (ver Referencias), además de las ediciones electrónicas de varios de sus libros sobre temas victorianos. La página de Landow es interesante porque desde hace tiempo ejemplifica lo que es muy posiblemente el futuro de la página personal académica en Internet, una vez se difunda esta modalidad de acceso y edición entre un colectivo en general tan refractario a la cibernética como es el de los literatos.

El libro que reseñamos aquí remite inevitablemente al anterior *Hypertext* de Landow, un texto crucial entre cuyas traducciones ya se cuentan la española y catalana, así como las versiones hipertextuales en disco y en Internet que reseñamos. Los estudios de Landow tienden a proliferar en versiones cibernéticas, explotando en la práctica el instrumento que teorizan; son pues una referencia de gran interés para quien se interesa por las implicaciones de la informática para la literatura y la teoría literaria. También del volumen que nos ocupa hay edición española (Barcelona: Paidós Ibérica, 1996); aunque en el área en rápido desarrollo que nos ocupa, originales, traducciones, *hardware* y reseñas se difunden ya desfasados por los avances tecnológicos.

Podríamos definir la hipertextualidad como *intertextualidad cibernética*: una manifestación específicamente contemporánea de la intertextualidad, dado que la base material para esta modalidad intertextual se ha desarrollado sólo recientemente, especialmente en lo que toca a sus aplicaciones críticas y literarias (Nelson 1981, Delany y Landow 1991). Como herramienta informática la hipertextualidad ya tiene la venerable antigüedad de unas tres décadas, y su prehistoria se remonta de hecho a los primeros años de la cibernética (Bush 1945).

En comparación con el optimismo y el tono profético de *Hypertext*, los artículos de este volumen suenan menos ambiciosos, y la confrontación de la teoría hipertextual con distintas áreas de la teoría literaria problematiza mu-

chos de los aspectos supuestamente revolucionarios de la hipertextualidad. A la vez, se ve más claramente que la problemática de la hipertextualidad no es en última instancia radicalmente nueva: es la de la (inter)textualidad moderna en general, con algunos condicionamientos genéricos y técnicos cuyo alcance preciso ayudan a determinar los artículos aquí publicados. Así, un estudio narratológico del concepto supuestamente tan revolucionario de “no linealidad” relativiza bastante su novedad y alcance. Un análisis de los elementos “liberadores” y “democráticos” del hipertexto a la luz de la teoría de la acción comunicativa de Habermas (escrito por Charles Ess) mantiene un tono optimista pero recuerda que la libertad comunicativa no es inherente en última instancia al medio sino al contexto social de su utilización (*HTT* 252). Análisis de las nociones de clausura narrativa o lógica tal como funcionan en el hipertexto encuentran paralelismos en formas literarias vanguardistas (Pynchon es una referencia favorita aquí, aunque Beckett o Robbe-Grillet quizá sean más adecuados); también filosofías como las de Nietzsche o Wittgenstein—a la vez que insisten en la necesidad de mantener en el acto de lectura o interpretación hipertextual una coherencia narrativa o lógica que no se disuelva en la galaxia infinita de conexiones. Uno de los aspectos más interesantes del volumen es el contemplar la relevancia que sigue teniendo la reflexión crítica (post)estructuralista en un área que podría parecer tan revolucionaria: Barthes, Genette, Eco, Freud, Lacan o Deleuze y Guattari son aquí referencias tan constantes como los son teorizadores de la informática propiamente dichos (como por ej. Michael Heim, Theodor H. Nelson, J. David Bolter o el propio Landow). La confrontación con un material tan candente suele resultar tan beneficiosa para la teoría como para el objeto de estudio; en este sentido este libro y esta área de reflexión son fascinantes e imprescindibles. Se encontrarán aquí artículos que ofrecen nuevas perspectivas en la teoría de la lectura y la actividad del papel del lector, anunciándose por ejemplo la llegada del “wreader” (“escrilector?”) hipertextual que combina efectivamente los papeles de autor y de lector. Hay artículos magistrales en su uso de la interdisciplinariedad, y que merecen de por sí el conjunto del volumen. Martin E. Rosenberg (“Physics and Hypertext: Liberation and Complicity in Art and Pedagogy”) explica los paralelismos entre distintas teorías del (hiper)texto por un lado y los paradigmas físicos de la dinámica y la termodinámica por otro, sobre la base de sus concepciones del tiempo reversibles o irreversibles (una reflexión fundamentada sobre conceptos de Bergson y Prigogine). Interés comparable en su propia línea tienen los ensayos de Stuart Moulthrop (“Rhizome and Resistance: Hypertext and the Dreams of a New Culture”), de J. Yellowlees

Douglas (sobre la problemática de la clausura) o de Gunnar Liestøl, quien confronta los conceptos de la teoría hipertextual con la retórica clásica y la narratología. Otros trabajos hay que aun siendo de indudable interés adolecen de oscuridad y complicación innecesarias, como el de Terence Harpold (una reflexión lacaniana sobre la actuación hipertextual), o de una curiosa irrelevancia para los propósitos de este volumen, como el de Gregory Ulmer. Se hubieran agradecido índices de nombres y materias (la sección más “hipertextual” de un volumen impreso falta aquí, aunque sí hay notas abundantes y muchas referencias bibliográficas de utilidad).

En casi todos los ensayos hay una concentración demasiado exclusiva en sistemas hipertextuales “delimitados” y contenidos en sí mismos, como son los archivos Hypercard, la novela de Michael Joyce *Afternoon*, elaborada con el programa hipertextual Storyspace, o las bases de datos de Landow. Aunque su interés es innegable, estos textos ofrecen quizá una versión limitada de las posibilidades del hipertexto. Lo que podríamos llamar al actuación hipertextual por definición tenderá a ir más allá de los límites de *Afternoon* u otro texto, y expandir la red hipertextual en el sentido de una intertextualidad más generalizada. Internet es, por supuesto, el hipertexto por excelencia, y se echa en falta en este volumen una teorización de las modalidades hipertextuales en red y de los programas de búsqueda (*web browsers*), entre los que destacan actualmente el Navigator de Netscape y el polémico Explorer de Microsoft.¹ Las capacidades técnicas de las herramientas actualmente en pleno desarrollo serán un condicionante importante de las formas que asuma la hipertextualidad en los estudios literarios como en otros campos (un efecto saludable de la hipertextualidad será favorecer la interdisciplinariedad). Como algunas posibilidades de desarrollo interesantes, mencionemos los buscadores “inteligentes” o personalizados que seleccionan la información preferida por el usuario a lo largo de las diversas sesiones, o bien sistemas de transformación automatizada de texto electrónico en hipertexto mediante el establecimiento sistemático de conexiones e información en el marco de un servidor, de un conjunto de servidores seleccionados o en el conjunto de la red, mediante sistemas estadísticos más o menos personalizados. El Word 97 de Microsoft, por ejemplo, ya incluye la posibilidad de editar un documento como

¹ Para uno de los últimos episodios en la batalla por el espacio informático puede verse Levy 1997. Aunque todo pronóstico en este terreno pronto resulta patético, parece realista viendo las actuales cotas de mercado (Netscape 54,6%, Microsoft Explorer 29,5%) que serán las compañías mayoritarias quienes determinen mediante el desarrollo de los programas más usados cuáles serán las posibilidades hipertextuales que se generalicen.

hipertexto, y el Netscape Communicator está equipado para permitir al usuario medio la edición de páginas HTML.

A pesar de los límites inherentes al concepto de hipertexto manejado en el volumen, su lectura es muy recomendable a todas las personas interesadas en la interfaz entre teoría literaria y cibernética, un área que casi por definición tiende invariablemente a estar infradesarrollada. En este sentido, y aunque no se pueda estar de acuerdo con todas las concepciones o valoraciones sobre la hipertextualidad aquí expuestas (que ya son de por sí divergentes), las reflexiones y trabajos de Landow y sus colegas tienen una importancia histórica.

JOSÉ ANGEL GARCÍA LANDA
UNIVERSIDAD DE ZARAGOZA

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Stan Smith,
W.H. Auden

(*Writers and Their Work*).

Plymouth: Northcote House in Association with the British Council, 1997.
 xiii + 107 pp.

This new title of the series *Writers and Their Work* aims to introduce W. H. Auden and his context to a wide academic reading public. The book takes into consideration some interesting biographical material, and includes a detailed list of biographical, bibliographical and critical studies on the poet. Furthermore, it offers a concise, thorough, and distinctly personal reappraisal of Auden's major literary production, while making constant references to his main literary and ideological influences—the Icelandic sagas, Old English poetry, the Bible, Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Bertolt Brecht, to mention but some of the most relevant—and brings to the fore the influence he exerted upon other important literary intellectuals such as Christopher Isherwood, with whom he wrote plays in collaboration, and his three colleagues at Christ Church (Oxford), who eventually came to be labelled as the “Auden group”: C. Day Lewis (named Poet Laureate in 1968), Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender, who printed by hand the first collection of Auden's poems in 1928.

Stan Smith's book strives, on the whole, to offer a chronological scrutiny of Auden's literary and personal evolution. Accordingly, Smith divides the outline of his literary life of Auden into five chronological phases, respectively entitled “We are Lived by Powers,” “On the Frontier,” “Truth is Elsewhere,” “The Inconstant Ones” and “Going Home,” which are in turn subdivided into smaller sections, whose headings have the merit of highlighting the most important aspects or circumstances of the particular period under analysis. However, and in spite of Smith's efforts to stick to a strict chronological criterion, his strong familiarity with the poet's works occasionally makes him move backwards and forwards, which, no doubt, allows him to establish illuminating associations and relate apparently different or disconnected aspects of Auden's production. Yet, what may be of great interest for readers who are already familiarized with Auden's writings might conversely contribute to puzzling newcomers to his work, who might at times find it difficult to make sense of these connections.

Finally, although the book may at first sight seem a merely introductory study, this is not quite so. Smith's awareness of modern critical approaches,

together with his extensive knowledge of Auden's work, leads him to corroborate his continuous assessments of the literary, social, and cultural climate in which Auden lived and wrote by quoting at ease from most of his poems, thus assuming that the reader is minimally acquainted with the poet's life and writings. Yet, however difficult it may sometimes be for newcomers to Auden's work to follow, they will nonetheless easily manage to understand the reasons why he has been, and still is, regarded as a crucial and controversial twentieth-century critic, man of letters and poet. Not only was he politically committed—he tried to interpret the times and deal with intellectual and moral problems of public concern—but also succeeded in expressing his own inner world of fantasy and dream. As can be deduced after reading Smith's book, although Auden's poems, when taken individually, are often obscure, they create, when taken together, a meaningful poetic unity crammed with symbolic landscapes and mythical characters and situations, which undoubtedly manage to encapsulate and illustrate the worries and meditations of a left-wing writer and thinker whose lifetime was as intense as to span two world wars, the Russian and Chinese revolutions, the rise and fall of fascism, and three decades of cold war.

M. DOLORES HERRERO
UNIVERSIDAD DE ZARAGOZA

VV.AA.

Colección “Taller de Estudios Norteamericanos”.

Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de León, 1992-

Esta singular colección de textos norteamericanos merece ser destacada, entre otras muchas cosas, porque su interés primordial reside en presentar textos que han podido caer en el olvido de editoriales comerciales por su falta de ganancia económica a corto plazo. Se pretende sacar textos claves, algunos antiguos, no confundir con anticuados, textos con aspectos que a veces sorprenden por su actualidad.

Se presentan textos en edición bilingüe, cosa rara de encontrar en el mercado de hoy en día, ya que compromete de manera especial a los traductores: no pueden saltarse ni una sola coma, ni traducir según les convenga o parezca, ya que el texto original está impreso al lado de su traducción. Por todo el mundo es sabido que existen muchas formas de traducir correctamente un mismo texto, y esto precisamente hace a esta colección interesante para estudiantes, o aficionados a la traducción, pudiendo de esta manera ejercitar y practicar este difícil arte. Otra ventaja de la presentación de la obra en edición bilingüe es la de que se pueden acercar textos a quienes no saben o no dominan la lengua inglesa, teniendo así la colección un carácter interdisciplinar tanto a nivel universitario como de secundaria.

La colección, que empezó a publicarse en 1992, consta de cuatro secciones reflejadas en cuatro diferentes colores: azul, rosa, verde y salmón, que corresponden a su carácter literario, histórico, socio-político, y textos misceláneos respectivamente.

Dentro del grupo azul, es decir, dentro del grupo literario de textos publicados encontramos a Whitman: *Una mirada retrospectiva a los caminos recorridos*; Sinclair Lewis: *El miedo americano a la literatura*; Henry James: *El arte de la ficción*; Philip Rahv: *Rostro pálido y piel roja* y Michael A. Rockland: *Redescubriendo América*; Melville: *Bartleby, el escribiente*; Dean Howells: *La crítica y la ficción*; Charlotte Perkins Gilman: *El empapelado amarillo. La wisteria gigante*; Maxwell Anderson: *Textos sobre el teatro norteamericano I*; O’Neill y Thornton Wilder: *Textos sobre el teatro norteamericano II*; Raymond Chandler: *El simple arte de matar* y Henry Adams: *La dinamo y la virgen*. Textos acompañados por introducciones de Derrick, López Gavilán, González de la Aleja, Rodríguez Celada, Rosado Castillo, González Groba, Díaz Sánchez, y Coy Ferrer.

En el grupo de textos históricos podemos encontrar textos como *La declaración de la independencia* y *La declaración de Seneca Falls*; William Bradford: *De la plantación de Plymouth (una selección)*; Varios Presidentes: *Discursos inaugurales*; Margaret Fuller: *El gran proceso judicial*; o Sui Sin Far: *Páginas del archivo mental de una euro-asiática*. Estos textos vienen con introducciones realizadas por Hernández Sánchez-Barba, Beltrán Llavador, Fernández Rabadán, Muñoz-Torrero, Baena y G. Davis.

Dentro del grupo de textos socio-políticos están: Lincoln Steffens: *La vergüenza de las ciudades*; Olaudah Equiano: *Autobiografía, (Selección)*; Zora Neale Hurston: *¡Mi gente! ¡Mi gente!*; Thomas Nelson Page: *Los sureños durante la reconstrucción*; W. E. B. Du Bois: *Las almas del pueblo negro*; George Washington Cable: *El sur silencioso*; Gerald Vizenor: *Literatura india nativo americana*; y Jarana Lee: *La vida y experiencia religiosa de Jarana Lee*. Con introducciones que corren a cargo de Rodríguez Celada, Polo Benito, Manuel Cuenca, Benito Sánchez, Manzanas, Fraile Marcos y Sabán Godoy.

El último bloque, o grupo, corresponde a los textos misceláneos: Emerson: *El intelectual americano*; *Discurso a la Facultad de Teología*; Nathaniel Hawthorne: *Prefacios*; John Kouwenhoven: *Qué tiene América de 'Americano'*; Thoreau: *Una vida sin principios*. Van introducidos por Derrick, López Gavilán, Montes Mozo, Rockland, Coy Ferrer.

También están en preparación entre muchos interesantísimos títulos: Robert Brustein: *Si un artista quiere ser rico, famoso y popular, y la vez serio y respetado, sufre de esquizofrenia cultural*; William Kennedy: *Una entrevista*; M. L. King: *Sermones y discursos*; L. Hughes: *Oscuridad en España*; John Smith: *Historia general de Virginia*; Sacco y Vanzetti: *Discurso final*; Booker T. Washington: *Ascenso desde la esclavitud*; Harriet Jacobs: *Incidentes en la vida de una esclava*; o Mrs Mary Rowlandson: *Narración del cautiverio indio*.

Se intenta englobar bajo la etiqueta, tan general y al tiempo específica como es la de "American Studies", (sin excluir a Canadá), las raíces ocultas de lo contemporáneo en la historia del pensamiento social, cultural, literario o político de norteamérica. Cada obra tiene una introducción y notas realizadas por un especialista, poniendo la obra en su contexto con matices políticos, sociológicos, económicos, ideológicos, literarios, etc. Pero el traductor o el introductor no es lo esencial de esta Colección, no existe la intención de vender ningún ejemplar por él o ellos, lo que aquí tiene importancia primaria es el texto, que luego ha sido traducido e introducido como ayuda para el lector. Como prueba de ello no aparece en portada ni el nombre del

introducción ni del traductor; para averiguarlo hay que adentrarse en las primeras páginas del libro. No hay que olvidar que el crítico no ofrece más que una opinión más a la lectura de un determinado texto, es una herramienta más que podemos utilizar si nos convencen sus argumentos. Así estos textos pueden provocar interesantes debates, polémicas, y discrepancias, que demasiadas veces brillan por su ausencia en las aulas.

Resumiendo, es una colección interesante por su variado contenido, por su aparición en edición bilingüe, y por qué engañarnos, por su precio, ya que hoy en día, y más para los estudiantes, puede resultar un lujo el comprarse un libro. La colección del “Taller de Estudios Norteamericanos” es de algún modo utópica al no seguir recomendaciones económicas, ideológicas o de ningún otro tipo a la hora de seleccionar los textos que van a ser publicados. El único criterio seguido es de su importancia en la cultura norteamericana, y por ello son interesantes para cualquiera que quiera acercarse a esta cultura.

ELVIRA JENSEN CASADO
UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA

pPp

Alice Thompson

Justine

Edinburgh: Virago Press, 1997. 137 p.

In 1996 Alice Thompson became the first female Scottish writer to win the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction with her first novel, *Justine*. In 1991, when she was a student at Oxford University, *Killing Times*, a novella, was published by Penguin. After completing her PhD on Henry James, she moved to the Shetland Isles where she wrote *Justine*. Nowadays, she is a novelist in residence for St. Andrew's University.

Justine investigates the world in which fiction works, a fiction which needs the help of the reader to interpret its full meaning—and which also needs the reader to open the uncut pages of the novel with the paper knife supplied with it; a fiction printed with gaps and spaces (blank pages, ellipses, flashbacks and -forwards) in an attempt to create a written account of the narrator's unconscious mind.

In this new way of writing “what to express” and “how to express it” are blended in the same framework. Alice Thompson approaches closer and closer the way in which the human mind works, trying to find a new way of expression for the psychological novel. This new way is as hermetic as the human mind can be to us, and as elliptical as the human mind is. The novel is therefore an attempt to create a unified meaning which can no longer be achieved within its fiction, because only the reader can supply the ultimate meaning: “That's for you to find out” (*J* 136). And though her narrative style is very descriptive and profusely decorated with over-adorned gothic adjectives, the whole story goes round a certain unknown truth one is never able to discover, round the unknown which is hidden in the darkness of one's mind. Therefore, to a certain extent, the reader is caught in “the black art of manipulation and the casting of spell” (*J* 1), in the manipulation of the author's prose, in the dichotomy of the prose which allows readers to know everything and the prose which makes them ignore the main facts:

The style in which my flat [novel] is decorated gives everything away about me. A gift to you which includes the fact that there is something about me that will never be given away. (*J* 1)

Justine is a dream, a two-faced woman, a painting, but above all an object of desire, especially a projection of male desire. *Justine* is the story of a man in a continuous search for Beauty, both spiritual and physical, pleasant

and hurtful, not ethereal but sexual, a beauty which transgresses every aesthetic theory because of its masochism.

It is in his continuous search for Beauty, in his role of collector, that he creates his own hallucinations. This collector must be collected or possessed by someone else; he is a man who wants to possess the last object of his desires: Justine or Juliette? Or both?

For Justine pretends to have a twin sister, Juliette, and step by step, as the story begins, the opium-dazed narrator becomes more and more insecure, not only about the identity of the woman he is chasing (Justine or Juliette), but about his own feelings and desires. Besides his life in London, he lives his "Midsummer Night's Dream," as the prologue to the novel reads:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.1.4-6)

Everything is a dream, a fantasy created by a madman or a lover whose self has dissolved and merged into new characters, in the Gothic house he is living, a decadent scene in which characters and events are exaggerated beyond reality to become symbols, monsters, ideas and passions. As J. E. Fleenor remarks, "Monsters are particularly prominent in the work of women writers, because for women the roles of rebel, outcast, seeker of truth, are monstrous in themselves" (Fleenor 1983: 83). The monster here is the misshapen narrator who explores the obsessive emotions, forbidden by society, arising from pain, masochism and murder, once the traditional roles of victim and abuser have been turned completely upside-down. According to Fleenor,

[n]ew writers are changing the female Gothic symbols of victimhood and persecution into new sources of strength. Undergoing journeys that lead to a personal integration, their heroines rejoice in the exploration of their full human potential, and transform social stigma into power. (1983: 83)

This is what happens in *Justine*. The narrator believes that everything is under his control, that the story belongs entirely to him. He is the owner, a collector of characters: he would want to take them home, touch them, lock them up, take them out, look at them, stroke them whenever he wishes, as if they were objects of art. But he must come to grips with reality to find that

he is another character who must fulfil his author's will, Justine's will. He painfully discovers that he cannot behave as a human feeling because his story has been written by the woman whom he dreamed to possess: "My plot had been rewritten by her and I didn't like it one bit" (*J* 39). His plot has been written by Justine and Juliette, by the projections of his masculine fantasies, the fantasies of a man who wants to live in a masochistic relation to his mother.¹ For that purpose, the figure of the son (the narrator) must be stripped of all virility (of his deformed foot) to be "reborn as a new sexless figure" (Silverman 1992: 73) out of the castle, out of the uterus-room in which he was enclosed. Otherwise, the figured mother could not be invested with the phallus.

From the very beginning, the narrator is associated with his mother in sexual and masochistic terms. His mother is fully conscious of her beauty and her sexuality:

My mother worshipped at her mirror's shrine; she adored beauty and her own was no exception. She would gaze at herself for hours and I would catch her gazing. Idolaters came from all over the country to pay her tribute. They came in the form of men. (*J* 5)

But she refuses to touch his deformity and his body. She fully enjoys her sexuality, whereas he is punished for his deformity and is sexually separated from his mother. His mother is so active and phallic that she will turn into a destructive woman when she becomes unable to attract men. She will destroy anything she is unable to achieve, and a symbolic way to do that is to cut off every prominent body part, as she does by mutilating all the statues, one by one, with surgical precision: legs, teeth, hands and ears—everything that protrudes is cut off:

The activity of these [castrating] women consists in castration. Heads, noses, feet, anything that protrudes is cut off by them. (Theiveleit 1996: 65)

In spite of being such a strong woman, she is never named, but is called only "mother"; a mother shown to be protective, but also an iron mother who

¹ As Kaja Silverman points out, "Masochism is entirely an affair between son and mother, or to be more precise, between the male masochist and a cold, maternal and severe woman whom he designates as the oral mother" (1992: 73). There is no need for her to be the biological mother, she may be another woman performing that role.

can administer torture slowly and gruesomely. The narrator is only attracted to Justine and Juliette because of their resemblance to his mother, although the incest taboo makes such feeling towards his mother painful and impossible. Hence, the only way to have sexual relationships is with women who do not resemble the mother, and degrading the love object. If Justine and Juliette had not been degraded they would still resemble the mother, and would not be acceptable as sexual partners.

The narrator often remembers being a child, and being bathed by his mother, though she refuses to touch his deformed foot, the result of a fore-shortened leg. And she even turns her head. But as time goes by, and his mother is getting old, another woman has to fulfil her mother's role as a sadistic mother. This new unpredictable woman is a red-haired woman, who is even more aggressive and castrating, because she is a whore. She is able to do what his mother did not dare: to cut his foot off, removing his deformity, leaving him physically immaculated. She is the woman who transforms all his masochistic obsessions (punishment, castration, whippings, sadism and masochism) into literal truth. And, although what he desires is to be tortured, to be raped, a kind of struggle takes place in his unconscious, because on the one hand, he wants to be sexually possessed, but on the other hand, he is repelled by this woman, because of her repugnant temptations, for being too much of a woman for him.

All his relations are defined by the sexual element he is able to establish with the different feminine characters. This relation is not based on love, unless it is at the same time redefined or used ironically, but on pain and sufferings. And though Justine is not a sensual woman, what really makes her so powerful and so attractive is her obsession with power, politics and possessions. She is a character who celebrates women's sexuality as well as the pleasure of the female body. She does not hesitate in trapping the narrator in a circle of impossibilities in which his reality and personality disappear when he is not able to understand what is going on.

Who are you? I asked, suddenly realizing that this was the point to everything, everything has gone through, the point to the story of Justine (*J* 136).

This is the very end of the novel, when the narrator is fully-conscious of his impossibilities as a character, as a narrator and as the owner of the story. He has been deceived by a two-faced woman, a woman who pretended to be Justine and Juliette, by the beautiful object that he had been eager to

possess, and about which we do not know anything else. At the very end of the novel she still remains a mystery, because we discover that she is neither Justine nor Juliette, but a mixture of both, a character living somewhere between Justine and Juliette, between the needy virgin and the powerful whore. She is the only character who is able to cross the frontier between reality and fiction whenever she pleases, being the only true writer of her own story and destiny, whereas the narrator is only used as a ghost-writer, as the slave that has to write for her. Thus the novel finishes in the place where it starts: in the library where the narrator is writing for us the story of Justine. And the only conclusion that the narrator as well as the reader can reach is that reality, all that has been written, is the product of imagination, because there is no single true view of any of the events depicted.

CONCEPCIÓN SANTARROMANA
UNIVERSIDAD DE ZARAGOZA

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