



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

*„La femme n'existe pas –
Female ways of withdrawing from, interacting with or
opposing the Lacanian Symbolic Order“*

Verfasserin

Sophie Schallmayer

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2012

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 343

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Betreuerin:

ao. Univ-Prof. Dr. Monika Seidl

Ehrenwörtliche Erklärung

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich die vorliegende Diplomarbeit selbstständig und ohne Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel verfasst habe. Die aus fremden Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommen Gedanken sind als solche kenntlich gemacht.

Des Weiteren habe ich mich bemüht, sämtliche Inhaber der Bildrechte ausfindig zu machen und ihre Zustimmung zur Verwendung der Bilder in dieser Arbeit eingeholt. Sollte dennoch eine Urheberrechtsverletzung bekannt werden, ersuche ich um Meldung bei mir.

Ich versichere, dass ich diese Diplomarbeit bisher weder im Inland noch im Ausland in irgendeiner Form als Prüfungsarbeit vorgelegt habe.

Diese Arbeit stimmt mit der von der Begutachterin beurteilten Arbeit überein.

Wien, am 23. Apr. 2012

Sophie Schallmayer

Table of contents

1. Introduction	7
2. Theoretical Background – Concepts and Methodologies	11
2.1. The Feminist Enterprise	11
2.3. Freudian Psychoanalysis	14
2.4. Psychoanalysis à la Lacan – Imaginary, Mirror Stage and Symbolic Order.....	16
2.5. Death and Psychosis	24
2.6. Kristeva’s Semiotic Chôra as Space of Opposition.....	25
3. Saint and Sinner, Angel and Whore – Antithetical Conceptions of Femininity in Edgar Allan Poe’s “Eleonora” and “Morella”	31
3.1. Woman/Nature/Poetry/Semiotic, Man/Culture/Prose/Symbolic.....	34
3.2. The Angel of Death	37
3.3. The Sweet Heroine and the Vicious Bitch.....	40
3.4. The Heroine with a Thousand Faces – Versions of Femininity	42
3.5. The Return of the Repressed – Eleonora’s Evasion, Morella’s Migration.....	46
3.6. Resisting the Symbolic Order – Madness and Enigmatic Language.....	51
3.6.1. Morella as Miracle, Morella as Oracle	51
3.6.2. The Bitch is Back	53
4. Madwoman, Mermaid, Wretch – Ophelia’s Myth and Madness as Subversive Potential in William Shakespeare’s <i>Hamlet</i>	56
4.1. Hamlet and Ophelia as Star-Crossed Lovers.....	57
4.2. Suffering the Female Malady	61
4.3. Bride, Mermaid and Wretch – Ophelia’s Death as <i>Tableau Vivant</i>	72
4.4. Too Young To Die – Ophelia as Pop Culture Icon	77
5. The Curse Is Come Upon Her – the Impossibility of Crossing and Overturning Boundaries in Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott”	83
5.1. The Poem “Cracked from Side to Side?”	85
5.2. “Tirra lirra” – the Lady as a Lancelot?	89
5.3. All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Go – Here Comes the Bride	94
5.4. Powers of Horror, Horrors of Power: the Dead Body as Icon.....	98

6. The Beautification of Death – Images of the Femme Fatale and the Beautiful Corpse in William Holman Hunt, John William Waterhouse and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.....	103
6.1. “Emptiness and Violation, Terror and Charm, Archetypal and Existential” – the Face of Hunt’s “Lady of Shalott”	105
6.2. Visions of Impossible Romance – Waterhouse’s Sorrowful Maiden in Virginal White	111
6.3. Killed into Art – Rossetti’s Lady Lizzie.....	114
6.4. Resisting the Symbolic Order – Painting a Female Symbolic.....	119
6.4.1. Voices from the Grave: Elizabeth Siddal(l)’s Answer to Dante Gabriel Rossetti.....	119
7. Tales of Sex and Terror – Angela Carter’s Werewolf Trilogy.....	125
7.1. Models of Female Sexuality	126
7.2. Deconstruction.....	128
7.3. I spit myself out – Abject & Abjection.....	129
7.4. Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed – Carter’s Werewolf Trilogy	132
7.4.1. Castrating the Castrator	134
7.4.2. Outwolfing the Wolf.....	135
7.4.3. Through the Looking-Glass, and what Wolf-Alice Found There	137
8. Conclusion	148
9. Bibliography.....	151
10. Abstract	162
11. Lebenslauf	166

List of figures

Fig. 1: “Ophelia” by John Everett Millais, oil on canvas 1851-1852

(http://www.google.at/imgres?q=millais+ophelia&hl=de&sa=X&rlz=1R2ACAW_de&biw=1440&bih=734&tbm=isch&prmd=imvns&tbnid=e3UT6oNV6ewDJM:&imgrefurl=http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John_Everett_Millais_-_Ophelia_-_WGA15685.jpg&docid=Rf6kQT9vO2bktM&imgurl=http://www.wga.hu/art/m/millais/ophelia.jpg&w=1131&h=850&ei=LLBgT7m7Os-OswbOsf27CQ&zoom=1&iact=rc&dur=354&sig=114295397817358028883&page=1&tbnh=125&tbnw=166&start=0&ndsp=28&ved=1t:429,r:4,s:0&tx=116&ty=75 Mar 10, 2012)..... **79**

Fig. 2: “Lady of Shalott” by William Holman Hunt, illustration for the 1857 Moxon edition of Tennyson’s poems

(http://www.google.at/imgres?q=the+lady+of+shalott+hunt&hl=de&rlz=1R2ACAW_de&biw=1440&bih=734&tbm=isch&tbnid=4w6CVZDH0-cjeM:&imgrefurl=http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/whh/6.html&docid=ISmL0F6tM19yCM&imgurl=http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/whh/6.jpg&w=498&h=576&ei=nENOT8L8GNHbsgbl85WtDw&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=939&vpy=120&dur=901&hovh=241&hovw=209&tx=98&ty=103&sig=114295397817358028883&page=1&tbnh=126&tbnw=109&start=0&ndsp=40&ved=1t:429,r:7,s:0 Feb 29, 2012). **107**

Fig. 3: “Lady of Shalott” by William Holman Hunt, oil painting 1887-1905

(http://www.google.at/imgres?q=the+lady+of+shalott+hunt&hl=de&rlz=1R2ACAW_de&biw=1440&bih=734&tbm=isch&tbnid=QnENWuNSTavg0M:&imgrefurl=http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Holman-Hunt,_William,_and_Hughes,_Edward_Robert_-_The_Lady_of_Shalott_-_1905.jpg&docid=o3tv167FZ4EEqM&imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2d/Holman-Hunt,_William,_and_Hughes,_Edward_Robert_-_The_Lady_of_Shalott_-_1905.jpg&w=918&h=1200&ei=nENOT8L8GNHbsgbl85WtDw&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=167&vpy=112&dur=1411&hovh=257&hovw=196&tx=84&ty=137&sig=11429539

7817358028883&page=1&tbnh=126&tbnw=96&start=0&ndsp=40&ved=1t:429,r:0,s:0
Feb 29, 2012).....111

Fig. 4: “Lady of Shalott” by John William Waterhouse, 1888

(http://www.google.at/imgres?q=the+lady+of+shalott&hl=de&sa=X&qscrl=1&nord=1&rlz=1T4ACAW_de___AT377&biw=1440&bih=773&tbm=isch&prmd=imvnsb&tbnid=FrNSbo9MP271_M:&imgrefurl=http://webpace.webring.com/people/tu/um_11323/shalott.html&docid=VjXOgFrh7H0vKM&imgurl=http://webpace.webring.com/people/tu/um_11323/WATERH19.JPG&w=761&h=600&ei=CEZOT4PcO4rBtAbIrPzKDw&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=824&vpy=400&dur=432&hovh=199&hovw=253&tx=131&ty=92&sig=114295397817358028883&page=2&tbnh=122&tbnw=155&start=30&ndsp=35&ved=1t:429,r:25,s:30 Feb 29, 2012)113

Fig. 5: “Lady of Shalott” by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, wood engraving as illustration for the 1857 Moxon edition

(http://www.google.at/imgres?q=the+lady+of+shalott+rossetti&hl=de&sa=X&qscrl=1&nord=1&rlz=1T4ACAW_de___AT377&biw=1440&bih=773&tbm=isch&prmd=imvns&tbnid=fq8jxAQM1haOcM:&imgrefurl=http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/dgr/8.html&docid=aLby0F8HVo6S7M&imgurl=http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/dgr/8.jpg&w=567&h=648&ei=k0dOT7jECpDAswa5tqWxDw&zoom=1&iact=rc&dur=127&sig=114295397817358028883&page=1&tbnh=137&tbnw=120&start=0&ndsp=34&ved=1t:429,r:0,s:0&tx=50&ty=57 Feb 29, 2012).....118

Fig. 6: “Lady of Shalott” by Elizabeth Siddal, sketch from 1853

(http://www.google.at/imgres?q=siddal+lady+of+shalott&hl=de&sa=X&qscrl=1&nord=1&rlz=1T4ACAW_de___AT377&biw=1440&bih=773&tbm=isch&prmd=imvns&tbnid=qoxSwcgyTHZ9CM:&imgrefurl=http://www.artmagick.com/pictures/picture.aspx%3Fid%3D6210%26name%3Dthe-lady-of..&docid=B69hElIzBSIwrM&imgurl=http://www.artmagick.com/images/content/siddal/hi/siddal3.jpg&w=700&h=488&ei=Ru1VT9DAPInLsgaaqbGSBw&zoom=1&iact=rc&dur=317&sig=114295397817358028883&page=1&tbnh=117&tbnw=168&start=0&ndsp=34&ved=1t:429,r:0,s:0&tx=71&ty=22 March 6, 2012)123

1. Introduction

“La femme n’existe pas”, said Jacques Lacan – woman does not exist¹. Pondering about the superficially misogynist phrase, it certainly becomes clear that there is indeed a place that woman is not allowed to enter – where she literally cannot “exist” – which can best be labelled the Symbolic Order as the counterpart to the more feminine, elusively provisional structures of the Imaginary and its pre-Oedipal bliss. Bluntly assessing Lacan’s statement from a traditional viewpoint, steeped in the firm belief in hetero-normativism and the validity of hierarchical, binary oppositions, it seems indeed logical that woman, as a frail, eternally intangible category, tied to nature and irrationality, cannot claim her place within the Symbolic Order, understood here as a cultural, masculine realm informed by the discourse of paternal language.

However, when attempting to question the soundness of or challenge this paradigm that allocates men and women their places in society, tons of only too justifiable questions arise. These are only some of the questions coming to my mind: Why is it that men and women are ascribed those essentialist, rigidly framed roles they cannot possibly escape? Are the principles governing Imaginary and Symbolic Order respectively truly that strict and self-contained, or are there tiny gaps and fissures to be detected, discrepancies and ruptures that might testify to a fundamental cacophony deeply rooted within the long established hetero-normative categories? Why is it that woman is not allowed, or indeed not able, to secure herself a stable position within the Symbolic Order, and are there any possibilities for her to challenge or re-structure this mythically essentialist order?

Taking Lacanian psychoanalysis as a starting point, my diploma thesis mainly concerns itself with ways of living in and strategies of opposition to the Symbolic Order as the realm of patriarchal order and logic, and the perpetually beckoning promise of the Real as a reminder of the once blissful unity of mother and child that the heroines of literary and non-literary texts to be analysed will forever strive to regain. Furthermore, I am trying to investigate whether an attempted return to this maternally connoted stage (also known as the semiotic *chôra*) really constitutes a defeat for the woman, which

¹ That woman does not – or cannot – exist within the Symbolic Order is just my interpretation of Lacan’s quotation in order to illustrate what I am aiming at; however, it can be aptly employed in the sense that “woman” as a ready-made category does not exist and constantly escapes definition in a phallogocentric language.

necessarily surfaces in death and/or the expulsion from the Symbolic Order. This leads me to the question regarding possible and feasible means of opposition that might undermine or even weaken the male order, such as embracing madness, enigmatic language and the abject, which may permit female empowerment within a thoroughly paternal culture.

For my analyses, I will seek to portray a continuum of texts, regardless of their mediality and socio-historical context, taken from different periods and genres wherein women are confronted with the dilemma of self-development within the Symbolic Order, and try to solve or oppose this problem in distinct ways. The primary texts under consideration are Edgar Allan Poe's short tales "Eleonora" and "Morella", William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" as well as Angela Carter's short story "Wolf-Alice", taken from the *Bloody Chamber* collection of revised fairy tales. Additionally, I am going to forward readings of visual culture by focusing on Pre-Raphaelite paintings by William Holman Hunt, John William Waterhouse and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Starting with the tales written by Poe, I have to admit that these provide fertile soil for introducing antithetical conceptions of femininity and the discourse of binary oppositions; thereby constituting a perfect beginning for this thesis. In particular, "Eleonora" serves as an ideal illustration of both the semiotic and the symbolic realm, represented by the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass and the "strange city", respectively. "Morella", on the other hand, shall provide an example of how versions of femininity are constructed and ascribed to woman in order to secure the existence of the Symbolic Order and punish transgressive behaviour. The analysis revolving around Shakespeare's *Hamlet* shall center on the iconography and madness of Ophelia, in particular on the ways in which these are linked in representational culture allotting Ophelia the role of the mad bride and one of the first of literature's canon of madwomen, which is why I chose to include an extensive elaboration on Ophelia's latent revolutionary potential and the ways wherein hegemonic culture seeks to silence those. While in *Hamlet*, gendered categories seem relatively fixed and straightforward (although Ophelia provides means to lay bare contradictions and silences within the paternal order of Elsinore), Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott" exhibits some more revolutionary potential as the eponymous protagonist attempts to overturn dichotomies, uttering a desperate cry for self-realisation that will remain unheard as

ultimately, gender constructions are safely re-installed and left intact as they are and always have been. I believe this text to constitute a highly symbolically charged illustration of how semiotic and symbolic, or Imaginary and Symbolic Order, interact with and bleed into one another, and to epitomise the ultimate failure of attaining the Real, which is always beckoning, but still deferred endlessly, beyond hope or realisation. Following these literary and canonical texts, I will continue to scrutinise paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood framing the woman as spectacle in visual representation that has amongst others helped to found and foster woman's role as helplessly passive victim or desirably virginal maiden "killed into art", ever ready for conspicuous consumption. As befits the topic, I chose to include paintings by Hunt, Waterhouse and Rossetti that served as illustrations for the 1857 Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems, and arranged them in a sequence that seems to trace the Lady's journey away from her semiotic island, towards freedom and death. As an appendix to this chapter, Elizabeth Siddall's sketch of the Lady of Shalott shall be investigated as this piece of art aptly demonstrates a woman's reply to male hegemonic culture. Finally, the thesis is going to conclude its practical investigation with the analysis of Angela Carter's "Wolf-Alice", combined with an elaboration on Kristeva's notion of the abject as a perfect example of female empowerment and healthy sexuality at the limits of the Symbolic Order. I felt it to be crucial to include at least one contemporary text, and settled for Carter's tale as it exhibits, as the analysis will show, an enormously progressive and outstandingly unconventional potential concerning its approach to female psychosexuality.

Prior to subjecting the above mentioned texts to closer scrutiny, concepts and methodologies meant to function as epistemological lenses shall be introduced and explained. Amongst those, the tripartite model of Imaginary, Mirror Stage and Symbolic Order expounded by Jacques Lacan, as well as Julia Kristeva's concepts of semiotic and symbolic, the semiotic *chôra* as a space of female opposition and the notion of the abject, can be counted. So as to be able to fully grasp the texts' often contradictory potential for interpretation, it will become indispensable to apply a certain degree of eclecticism, meaning that various concepts employed within the branches of feminism, psychoanalysis or structuralism will have to be considered and adapted to my purposes. By drawing upon diverse models and methodologies, I hope to paint a polychromatic picture of the subversively powerful or desperately futile ways in which women interact

with the patriarchal discourse, either deriving empowerment, strategies of resistance, or withdrawing from the Symbolic Order into the Real via madness and death.

2. Theoretical Background – Concepts and Methodologies

2.1. The Feminist Enterprise

Since the main part of my thesis revolves around the conception of literary and artistic female figures, the roles they are interpellated into, and the means whereby they seek to escape or oppose these rigidly framed roles, it seems apt to open the theoretical chapter with a reflection upon feminist theory. Essentially, I plan to briefly introduce the feminist agenda and some of its key figures in order to elucidate certain concepts and motifs that shall sustain the interpretations pertaining to the practical part of this paper. In particular, French Feminism shall be mentioned, which relates to my analyses in so far as it strongly feeds upon questions of identity, language and psychoanalysis playing a pivotal part in the conception of the characters I am going to scrutinize. Questions and problems encountered particularly within this strand prove to be perfectly applicable to the works I have chosen as my primary data. In general, feminism opens up a whole new dimension for the discussion of my selected texts, and partly aids in trying to account for the eternal submission of woman to man.

Since a thoroughly complete elaboration on the beginnings of feminism and its agenda would be beyond the scope of this thesis, the theoretical part shall be opened with a quote by Simone de Beauvoir, who understands feminists as women or men ‘[...] fighting on specifically feminine issues independently of the class struggle [...] fighting to change women’s condition [...]’ (qtd. in Moi *Politics* 91). In particular, Beauvoir sheds light on the fact that women have been dragged into the object position and even have internalized the dominant discourses themselves (Moi *Politics* 92). As the labels “feminist” and “feminine” have been mentioned above, it seems apt to try to establish boundaries between these terms that are conflated far too often. Toril Moi regards feminism as a political label, ‘[...] committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism [...]’ (*Feminist* 117); whereas “female” denotes a set of biological characteristics. Matters are more complex with regard to the term “feminine”, which Moi delineates as a socio-cultural construct, at the same time however finding fault with the elusiveness of this definition². Though, in the same instant, Moi rightly questions the validity of establishing a “proper” definition, for this very step would entail playing

² ‘It would seem that any content could be poured into this container; it does not read like a ‘proper’ definition’ (Moi *Feminist* 123).

directly into the hands of patriarchy. By the same token, Monique Wittig '[...] feels it is imperative to write female experience [...]', but simultaneously '[...] aims ultimately to eliminate the very notion of "woman"' (Griffin Crowder 118) since this would eventually re-inscribe and thus confirm the dialectical image of "man" and "woman" that is sought to be deconstructed for a feminist agenda.

French feminism, generally defined as a more eclectic approach, feeds upon post-structuralist and psychoanalytic theory, '[...] taking as its starting point the insights of [...] Lacan, Foucault and Derrida' (Barry 120). Essentially, this branch seeks to deconstruct fundamental concepts like identity or femininity, defining them as patriarchally informed categories produced by means of discourse and language (Babka 198) that '[...] have no meaning outside the historically determined discourse of our patriarchal culture' (Griffin Crowder 118). As key figures representing the French line, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray can be named; all of whom shall be introduced more elaborately in subsequent sections.

Probably the primary concern within the feminist agenda, according to Peter Barry, consists of '[...] exposing what might be called the mechanisms of patriarchy, that is, the cultural 'mind-set' in men and women which perpetuate[s] sexual inequality' (117). To be more precise, one could speak about testing underlying patterns and modes of discrimination against women wrapped in the coat of hierarchically organized binary oppositions. Within feminist theory, such oppositions are viewed as the very source from which inequalities and internalized stereotypes spring. Indeed there is broad consensus that a "natural" division between men and women does not exist; the division taken so often for granted proves to be historically constructed in order to secure the domination of one group over the other (Cameron 23). French feminists take up these impossible notions in order to play with the patriarchal concept of fixed identity; even more so, they '[...] embrace their attributes of otherness and absence incarnate, using them as the point of departure for a radically disruptive feminism [...]' (Müller 22), a school of thought giving birth to concepts such as deconstruction or gender. Academics like Kristeva or Cixous indeed seek to manipulate and pervert the prevailing roles provided for women in order to generate a wholly different, subversive position countering male hegemony. Ultimately, the goal of French feminism seems to be the achievement of supplying women with the promising possibility of an alternative life outside the Symbolic Order (Müller 23).

So as to challenge restrictively essentialist dichotomies, the biologically determined “sex” was confronted with the new, less stable category of “gender”. Contrary to the concept of sex³, gender can be seen as a more fluid, heterogeneous and also enabling term, whereby ‘[...] sexual difference is not considered as a given [...]’ (Mills intro 3). Attached to gender is the extremely liberating notion that adjectives like ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ do not denote male or female bodies, respectively, but are thought of as applicable to whatever biological sex the person has (Butler *Gender* 6). While some feminists have uttered doubts about this concept, fearing that gender might erase ‘[...] the political edge of feminism [...]’, other critics have celebrated the refusal to prioritize some factors over others which is refused within gender studies (Mills intro 4). As interactions between language and different discourses socially produce gender, it is potentially prone to change and proves an ever fluctuating notion without any conventionally fixed meaning (Spaull 118). This idea as expressed here possibly embodies a means to question the institution of patriarchy per se, indeed the system which presupposes the organization of power on the basis of sex (Spaull 117).

However, the boundaries that could have been said to keep sex and gender apart have become increasingly fuzzy. The concept of sex, once considered being a biological given, becomes itself subject to feminist scrutiny⁴. Ruth Wodak’s assertion that ‘[i]n a social construction perspective not only gender, but even sex is seen as a socially developed status [...] sex is understood more as a continuum [...]’ (intro 3), entails on the one hand that pairs like man and woman or masculinity and femininity have become obsolete; on the other hand, it undeniably cries for the advent of innovative models of sexuality. Possibly, such an alternative model not only of the conceptualization of the sexes, but even of the very basic concepts our worldview is built upon, can be found in Angela Carter’s “Wolf-Alice”; which is why the discussion of the concept of gender appeared to be of primal significance to this chapter.

In the second half of my theoretical introduction, I shall make accessible Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, which are both necessary in order to sustain possible interpretations and analyses I shall propose later on. I will start by illuminating Freudian

³ Conventionally – though differing from one culture to another – used to refer to ‘[...] the anatomical differences between men and women, to sharply differentiated bodies, and to what divides us rather than unites us’ (Weeks 101)

⁴ see Judith Butler’s justified questions, ‘And what is sex anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal [...]? Does sex have a history? Does each sex have a different history, or histories?’ etc (*Gender* 6-7).

theory that has paved the way for the Lacanian model of Imaginary and Symbolic. As has already been maintained, psychoanalytic theory has ever since played a pivotal role within feminism; Barry takes as the starting point of this twisted relationship Kate Millet's critique of Sigmund Freud (125). I will review Freudian theory only in so far as I consider it to bear relevance to the analysis of my primary data; to be more precise, I am going to briefly introduce dream interpretation, repression and the psychic apparatus, motifs that can be said to be latently prevalent in the poems and stories I am going to deal with.

2.2. Freudian Psychoanalysis

As regards dream interpretation, Freud distinguished two dream contents; the latent and the manifest one (Freud *Unbehagen* 31). The manifest content comprises pictures and scenes appearing in dreams, which are remembered the morning after; whereas the latent dream content encapsulates the actual meaning behind. So in order to arrive at an interpretation of one's dreams, one has to reverse the dream-work and decode the manifest symbols. Freud identified three main mechanisms of distortion, which are condensation, displacement and symbolism; the latter proving to be the most fruitful approach with respect to this paper. As a matter of fact, Freud was convinced that almost every symbol runs back to a repressed sexual element; a Phallic or a female symbol (Lahmer 226). To be more precise, Freud saw the phallic symbol represented by things that are long, erect and able to penetrate (Landry 95). The female symbol is preferably symbolised by objects endowed with a cavity in which something else can be put or filled. Freud also suggested topographical features like valleys and canyons as symbolising the female (Landry 95-96). As has been already stated, symbols are connected with repressed ideas. "Repression" itself denotes the containment of '[...] unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires, or traumatic past events [...]' which are '[...] forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious' (Barry 92-3). Via sublimation, this repressed material finds an outlet, but is disguised as something noble, e.g. an '[...] intense religious experience[...]' (Barry 93). Persons incapable of coping with repressed material might have to face what Freud labelled repetition compulsion: they will have to re-enact a past scenario again and again until they find a way to break successfully with the past and overcome a probably traumatic experience (Freud *Lustprinzip* 228).

This two-part model of the psyche was later substituted by a tripartite model; whereby the psyche was divided into id, ego and super-ego. First of these three instances emerges the id; it contains inherited and basic drives and is completely ruled by the pleasure principle (Freud *Unbehagen* 7). The two basic impulses it houses are Eros and Thanatos, the life and the death drive, which are inextricably linked: ‘[i]n den biologischen Funktionen wirken die beiden Grundtriebe gegeneinander oder kombinieren sich miteinander [...] Dieses Mit- und Gegeneinanderwirken [...] ergibt die ganze Buntheit der Lebenserscheinungen’ (Freud *Unbehagen* 11)⁵. Since the id is developmental on the first level, it is anterior to the ego, the part of our personality brought to the fore during socialisation. Its major task is to mediate between id and super-ego and reconcile their wants with what is accepted in and required by society (Freud *Unbehagen* 7). Hence, the ego acts according to the reality principle. Parental and social influences trigger the formation of a third part of the psyche, called the super-ego. The super-ego is deemed a moral instance diametrically opposed to the id. Concluding, Freud states: ‘Eine Handlung des Ichs ist dann korrekt, wenn sie gleichzeitig den Anforderungen des Es, des Über-Ichs und der Realität genügt, also deren Ansprüche zu versöhnen weiß’ (Freud *Unbehagen* 8)⁶. Another milestone brought up by Freud was the perception of the psychosexual development. Basically, he claimed that the sexual life does not start with puberty, but soon after birth (Freud *Unbehagen* 15). There is a strong case that children derive pleasure from various body parts; the first being the mouth. This first phase is superseded by the anal phase, which is in turn replaced by the phallic phase. The phallic phase marks the height of the psychosexual development; afterwards, the period of latency sets in, which is generally viewed as a quiet period. It is only after this “break” that the fourth and last stage emerges, the so-called genital phase (Freud *Unbehagen* 16-9).

Approximately coinciding with the libidinal and the ego development between the age of three and five, the universal phenomenon – if Freud is to be believed – of the Oedipal complex sets in. Starting simultaneously with the awakening of the sexual drive, it is primarily marked by a strong, though unconscious desire directed toward the parent of the opposite sex that goes hand in hand with the wish to eliminate the parent

⁵ ‘In their biological functions, the two basic drives work against or complement one another [...] this synthesis, or antagonism [...] comprises the colourful spectrum of living’ (my translation).

⁶ ‘A deed is accepted by the ego, if it manages to satisfy the needs of id, super-ego, and reality; that is, if it succeeds in meeting their respective requirements’ (my translation).

of the same sex. This inclination results from castration fear or penis envy experienced by boys and girls, respectively. In order to successfully overcome this oedipal phase, the inappropriate sexual desires have to be suppressed and identification with the parent of the same sex takes place. The opposite sex is only rediscovered as a partner of the sexually matured individual.

Beheld from a Freudian perspective, sexual difference assumes a pivotal role within the process of coming of age, possessing the very means to trigger reactions and evoking symptoms. Contrastively, Jacques Lacan refers to sexual difference as ‘[...] purely symbolic opposition [...]’ that can neither be sufficiently explained nor theoretically fully grasped (Pluth 70); thereby drawing upon the hypothesis containing the impossibility of a sexual relationship.

2.3. Psychoanalysis à la Lacan – Imaginary, Mirror Stage and Symbolic Order

The subsequent sections dealing with Lacanian conceptions such as Imaginary, Mirror Stage and Symbolic Order can be considered the most important points inherent to the theory part. Undeniably, the analyses that shall be carried out are most strongly informed by the Lacanian distinction between Imaginary and Symbolic Order, as well as by universal notions of desire and loss prevailing in different shapes and guises in the texts I have chosen to examine. I felt Lacanian psychoanalysis to be absolutely fundamental to this paper as the characters to be introduced all seem to experience a universally rather crucial moment – possibly the Mirror Stage – that triggers either their downfall or empowerment. Furthermore, the texts under consideration seem to exhibit distinct conceptions of Imaginary and Symbolic Order that serve to explain the prevalent structure and order, as well as gender relations and character development.

Jacques Lacan’s most striking contribution to psychoanalytic theory can be suggested in consisting of his ability to draw together distinct strands of thought. His extraordinarily fusional theories extend from fields like the Hegelian informed Master-Slave dialectic to Saussurean structuralist notions concerning language and the unconscious, wherein his central topoi – ‘[...] lack, alienation, separation and threatening violence [...]’ are carefully interwoven (Bendle 73). Most noticeably, Lacan radicalizes Freudian theory by shifting the key emphasis on the phallus as the master signifier firmly rooted within the Symbolic. Whereas childhood in Freudian terms is suggested to be ruled by “polymorphous perversity”, Lacan demonstratively elaborates

on the omnipotence of order, existing prior to birth, only waiting to accord the infant his unavoidable lot (Althusser 27-28). First and foremost, Lacan proposed a mechanism split into two parts, or realms, which he labeled the Imaginary and the Symbolic, respectively. The transition from the first stage into the second one is initiated via the mirror phase, which provides for socialization and the acquisition of language to take place. As regards the concept of the Mirror Stage, Lacan is deeply indebted to Henri Wallon, whose experiments on mirror experiences executed with children and animals are said to have elicited the formulation of Lacan's own theories (Barzilai *Lacan* 74). Basically, what Wallon achieved to prove was that human intelligence outbalances the biologically determined motoric advantages of animals (Barzilai *Lacan* 78). Lacan reformulates and appropriates Wallon's theories to such an extent that he feels no need to insist on a physically present mirror generating the ego formation.

Even before the infant develops a sense of self, it lives in a realm Lacan labeled the Imaginary (Barry 109); the child, experiencing itself as '[...] diffused and undifferentiated from the world' (Millard 156) lives in a pre-oedipal, blissful relationship with his mother, who serves as the only identification figure: 'Die Mutter stellt anfänglich für das Kind nicht etwas dar, was es als abgetrennt von sich wahrnehmen könnte, da es sich noch nicht als Einheit mit sich selber spürt' (Widmer 30)⁷. An "Imaginary" relationship can thus be delineated as a symbiosis wherein each party believes to complement the other (Pluth 73). Furthermore, the relation between the child and its mother can be seen as dualistic; marked only by presence or absence of the mother (Althusser 26). The mother embodies both the person with whom the infant relates most closely as well as the first object of love and desire, a hypothesis whereon Irigaray grounds the argument that the placenta is '[...] the first house to surround us [...] like some child's security blanket [...]' (Irigaray *Reader* 40). It follows that the proper name then cannot be taken as our real name, being '[...] slipped on to the body like a coating [...] an extra-corporeal identity card', thereby replacing the first original "name" we have been given, the irreducible mark of the navel (Irigaray *Reader* 40)⁸. This context particularly offers itself as fertile soil for explaining what Lacan termed the "Real"; summed up by Gerda Pagel in the following manner: 'Es bezeichnet [...] die

⁷ 'Initially, the mother cannot be perceived as a being separate from the child, as it cannot yet experience itself as a unified being' (my translation).

⁸ To be given a name, however, provides for the integration into the Symbolic domain: '[f]or Lacan, names, which emblemize and institute this paternal law, sustain the integrity of the body' (Butler *Bodies* 72).

Erfahrung des Seins in seiner primären Undifferenziertheit und Positivität [...] In ihm fallen Innen und Außen, Phantasie und Realität, Ich und Anderer zusammen' (59)⁹. Independent of Symbolic and Imaginary, the Real can be defined as a state governed by the pleasure principle, where any possible form of lack or discontentment is glossed over, making it appear perfect. Inextricably intertwined with Imaginary and Symbolic, the Real can be likened to an '[...] agency that sutures the two [...]' (Berressem 21) were one to imagine those realms as topological surfaces. In so far as the Real is said to "edge" with Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, it simultaneously disrupts the surfaces of the psychic spaces and thus provides not only the dream of fulfillment and unity, but also subversive potential that the female characters in the texts to be analysed dream to acquire and appropriate for the aim of finally reaching completion. This wish goes along with an unconscious desire for death as '[...] material dissolution through a regression to a state before the Imaginary [...]' (Berressem 23), an elusively indefinite feeling possibly triggered by sights of the abject.

The beginning of socialization, however, demands a repression of the desire for the mother and the maternal body as channel to the blissful merging with the Real, and encourages the child to '[...] enter into the desire of/for the father [...]' (Irigaray *Reader* 40), a transition which is most substantially marked by the acquisition of language (Eagleton Intro 15). Already the infant senses insuperable troubles arising, as soon as the mother does not attend to any seductive attempts. It follows then that her desire must be thwarted, or not directed towards the child at all, a severe discovery that alters the rules of the game for good (Pluth 74).

The immediacy sensed during the relationship with the mother is violently disrupted during the oedipal moment, as the father penetrates the Imaginary bliss in order to bring the gift of language (Althusser 26). This crucial developmental step is achieved via the Mirror Stage. Granting the infant a successful transition from the Imaginary into the Symbolic, the Mirror Stage primarily fulfills the role of elucidating the subject position, the function of the Ego, to the child (Lacan *Schriften I* 63). This psychologically decisive momentum occurs at the age of about six months, when the child recognizes its own image in the mirror and is thus rewarded with a unified,

⁹ 'It designates the experience of being in all its primary indifference and positivity [...] it is the site where inside and outside, imagination and reality, I and Other, collapse' (my translation).

coherent image of itself. What previously had been the so-called mutilated body¹⁰ is now being transformed into a thoroughly structured and sensually perceptible entity (Hopf 22). Jubilatory gestures and facial expressions accompany what Lacan has termed the ‘Aha-Erlebnis’ (Lacan *Schriften I* 63). Seeking for answers and explanations concerning this newly arrived stage, the child turns questioningly to the mother – it requires a third instance to confirm what the child experiences (Widmer 28). The mother’s gaze confirms the child’s expectations about the separateness of the two up to now unified beings (Millard 156). Other than conceiving of itself in realistic terms, the infant perceives itself as complete and perfect, which is why the Mirror Stage can be said to suggest illusory pictures about selfhood (Widmer 28). Contrarily to reflecting a preexisting entity, the mirror acts as a frame for an ideal projection, thereby allowing the infant to compensate for his motoric shortcomings via a visually coherent sense of self (Butler *Bodies* 74-75). A deceptive, narcissistic universe reflects only the ideal configuration of the imago of the doppelgänger (Lacan *Schriften III* 59). In this respect, Lacan deviates from Wallon’s theories, which seem to envision a lighter view of the world, putting the emphasis on playful elements¹¹; whereas Lacan foregrounds sinister Hegelian aspects that picture the ‘[...] encounter between the subject and the other as a [...] life-and-death struggle for recognition [...]’ (Barzilai *Lacan* 81). Observed from a darker angle, the Mirror Stage embodies the desire for compensatory fulfillment of the lost unity, a completeness the child will forever strive to find and eventually hope to regain in language (Hopf 32). Confined within a hopelessly traumatic stage of alienation, the child gradually realizes that not only the mother, but also the father can impersonate an instance granting security and wholeness. It is hence lured away from the maternal body and invited to replace this desire with the belief in the word (Ragland-Sullivan 63). By embodying the instance of language, the father provides for the independence of the child, which goes hand in hand with the separation from the mother (Widmer 35). Yet by metaphorically severing the umbilical cord, that is, by entering into the incestuously amatory union of mother and child, the father rescues the child from the mother’s desire – the development of a subject position depends on the repression of the ‘[...] pre-individuated incestuous pleasures associated with the [...] maternal body’ (Butler *Gender* 45). This proposition leads to a re-consideration of the

¹⁰ “Le corps morcelé” in the French original

¹¹ “Where is Mommy?” (Barzilai *Lacan* 84)

role of the mother, which Lacan does not read as fully positive. What the intrusion of the father truly amounts to is the disengagement of the infant '[...]' from the psychical dangers of fusional identification, from wanting to be the mother's phallus, from striving to fill completely the place of her lack' (Barzilai *Lacan* 201). Viewing the father not as an intruder, but also as the savior logically hints to the contentious nature of the maternal function. Other than rewarding the baby with the possibility of assuming a subject position, she – albeit unconsciously – transforms her child into the phallus she desperately desires to make up for her lack (Barzilai *Lacan* 2). The renunciation to fulfill this utility enables the child to gain access to the '[...]' dimension of language and law where the symbolic phallus prevails' (Barzilai *Lacan* 201). Now that the Mirror Stage has come to an end (which occurs, according to Lacan, at the age of approximately 18 months), the child first experiences what Henry Sullivan has termed '*desire as lack*', the '[...]' first pure signifier of lack [...]' being the phallus (45).

The Symbolic Order the child has entered into completely restructures and rewrites its life; announcing '[...]' the beginning of socialization, with its prohibitions and restraints [...]', in other words, the child is introduced into a '[...]' world of patriarchal order and logic' (Barry 109) entailing the abjection of the maternal body (Seet 146). The Symbolic Order forces the child to sacrifice the Imaginary structures in order to make room for the paternal language. The rules and taboos being installed are regarded as vital for the continuation of the patriarchal order as they protect '[...]' the subject from falling into the violent, *abject* enjoyment [jouissance]' (Berressem 26) that might empower the subject enough to throw into question and fiercely oppose the Law of the Father. Therefore it appears indispensable to shepherd the subject into language, the instance founding the separations whereon the Symbolic Order is built (Berressem 27). Furthermore, the acquisition of language allows for making desires explicit, entering into social exchanges (Millard 156) as well as witnessing the introduction of the sexual division (Apollon 118). As regards the latter point, it is viewed as an achievement of language to accord the ego a sexed position, and, by fixing that highly arbitrary position, to secure the stability of the otherwise disintegrated ego (Butler *Bodies* 138). However, believing in the omnipotence of language will prove to be just another fatal fallacy: initially convinced that language might embody the means to solve life's riddles, the subject will sooner or later realize that '[...]' the major function of

language is not to find answers, communicate, or provide information, but to project narcissism, protect egos, mask *jouissance*¹², negotiate desire' (Ragland-Sullivan 69).

Notwithstanding language's actual function, linguistic units like words or phrases are superimposed upon visual, acoustic, tactile or olfactory impressions (Fink 123); notions that can no longer be expressed in the Symbolic and therefore undergo repression and ultimately silencing. Lacan comments on this procedure with the words "*le mot est la meurtre de la chose*"¹³, alluding to the actuality that words unavoidably replace things (Miller 30). Elaine Millard accords the Imaginary feminine traits, since the child adopts the language carrying '[...] authority and self possession which Lacan designates as male' (156-157). The law which to abide by is now called "Nom du père", which designates the possibility to symbolically refer to an omnipotent position (Hopf 38). The arrival of this stage witnesses the phallus becoming '[...] the organizer of the world [...]' (Irigaray *Reader* 38). Importantly, Lacan explicitly distinguishes between penis and phallus¹⁴; whereby the latter metaphorically points to the "Law of the Father", thus being linked to the Symbolic Order – the very order that is represented by the Father (Hopf 39). The penis on the other hand, assuming the power position in the relationship between the two sexes, constitutes the object endowed with phallic value (Widmer 96).

Although a quite stable border can be drawn between phallus and penis, it is still the male body that acts as the site of desire; as desire is seen as utterly dependent on the experience of having a penis. Once again, it is the man who sets the standard; by this means both picturing female sexuality as a blank space, a negation, and secondly, assimilating it to the man's (De Lauretis 23). Teresa De Lauretis mockingly, albeit with a sober undertone, sums up conventionally defined psychoanalytic views about female sexuality in the following statement:

Leaving home, she [the girl] enters the phallic phase where she comes face to face with castration, engages in uneven battles with penis envy, and remains forever scarred by a narcissistic wound, forever bleeding [...] her transformation

¹² The complex term of *jouissance* in Lacan maintains its original associations - '[...] sexual climax, excessive enjoyment, legal ownership [...]', and can as well be compared to the Freudian notion of 'Lust'. However, Lacan broadens the range of meaning by understanding *jouissance* as '[...] more excessive, perverse, murderous even enjoyment [...]' (Rabaté 27).

¹³ 'The word murders the thing' (my translation).

¹⁴ Mervyn F. Bendle quotes Rycroft, who identifies the penis as an anatomical term; contrastively, the phallus constitutes an '[...] anthropological and theological term referring to the idea or image of the male generative organ [...]' the phallus is an idea venerated in various religions as a symbol of the power of nature' (79).

into woman will take place; but only if she successfully negotiates the crossing, haunted by the Scylla and Carybdis of object change and erotogenic zone change, into passivity. 131-32.

With all possible monsters defeated, all obstacles crumbled, the woman finds her reward in motherhood, her one and only biological destiny (De Lauretis 132). While De Lauretis' allegorical little tale admittedly captures rather Freudian tendencies, Lacan sees both boys and girls as affected by the Symbolic Order; notably during the last oedipal stage, the stage of castration. Whereas the little boy has to learn that he is not yet endowed with the same rights as the father; but that he will one day when he is grown up; the little girl has to accept that she will never have the same rights as a man for her lack of a phallus (Althusser 29-30). To some extent, both sexes experience the phenomenon of irreconcilable lack; the only difference being the depth of the impact on the formation of a healthy subject position. Girls will necessarily encounter the irretrievable loss of the maternal body; and will be reminded of their shortcomings twice as much as boys, since they are to discern that the position intended for women within the Symbolic Order is but a subsidiary one (Hopf 83). Boys are able to partially reconcile this lack due to their possession of the anatomical penis (94). This is how the male sex organ – the penis – becomes a phallic object, which to lose the man will constantly fear¹⁵. It has to be remarked, however, that castration also needs to be considered in a more figurative sense than merely cutting off the testicles. Jean-Michel Rabaté suggests a link to Platon's *Symposium*, wherein Aristophanes' allegory concerning the second halves also evokes castration; it instills an insatiable desire in humans to unite with their second halves in order to be one, thereby bridging the void or lack constantly experienced¹⁶ (144).

Castration fear is not in the same way experienced by the girl¹⁷, who, having accepted that nature did not furnish her with the same organs, can strive for completeness either by identifying with the imago of the mother, or by identifying with

¹⁵ Stuart Schneiderman points out that the primal scene of man's castration fear occurred when the boy was confronted with the uncanny image of his own genitals in his mothers' hands (157). Ellie Ragland-Sullivan elaborates on this perceived calamity as following: 'Having seen visible proof that the other sex has no penis, he [the man] bears witness to the fantasy he can lose his, be castrated imaginarily' (59); and thus becoming, in Butler's terms, like the woman, whose '[...] position is constituted as the figural enactment of [...] punishment' (*Bodies* 102).

¹⁶ 'Nachdem nun so die Natur entzweigeschnitten war, ging sehnsüchtig jede Hälfte ihrer andern Hälfte nach [...] strebend aus zweien Eins zu machen und die Natur zu heilen, die menschliche' (Platon *Gastmahl* 57-58).

¹⁷ At this point, Lacan distinguishes between two "impossible positions", namely being the Phallus and having the Phallus (Butler *Gender* 44).

the phallus itself. Being the phallus here means supplying that which men are not; thus indirectly becoming the phallus' absence and lack (Butler *Gender* 44). Put another way, the female body is stylized as '[...] the primordial object of desire [...]', thus becoming the alleged key to '[...] secret truths, the answers to enigmas [...]', which Ellie Ragland-Sullivan classifies as '[...] attributes of the phallus *qua* lack [...]' (60). In this context, she launches the term of the 'sexual masquerade', a societal illusion providing the basis whereon gender fictions are enacted¹⁸. By sexually desiring the female body, the man – in Freud's opinion – reassures that he has never encountered homosexual desire in the slightest instance, and therefore can never be accused of having grieved over its loss (Butler *Gender* 71). Additionally, Freud sees the boys' repudiation of the maternal body and the ensuing growing identification with the father as grounding in the fear of becoming effeminized, and to be thus associated with homosexuality (Butler *Gender* 59).

Notwithstanding all the postulated (and admittedly constructed) differences, both sexes undergo the phallic stage; during which the clitoris or the penis, respectively acquire phallic value. The fear of castration decreases as the phallic stage gradually fades, and the belief in reaching a stage of ideal completeness is overcome (Hopf 96). So ultimately, both boys and girls have to submit to the order of the Symbolic, inevitably confronted with the fact that neither sex can be the phallus, nor completely attain the potency of the phallus (Hopf 94). Due to the above outlined emphasis on the phallus, Lacan has been falsely taken for a 'phallocrat' by feminists like Cixous or Irigaray (Ragland-Sullivan 53); while in truth Lacan shifted the focus from the Freudian father to the mother: '[...] human desire cannot find its place without questioning its link with the mother's desire [...] it is the mother who can open up the realm of the 'Desire of the Other'' (Rabaté 13). Similarly, one faces the risk of running into difficulties when assessing the ambiguous role of the phallus. Opponents of the Lacanian school of thought claim that the enduring emphasis on the phallus inevitably casts woman into the role of man's eternal inferior, evoking distortedly romanticist visions; whereas defenders argue that Lacan's view of woman as pursuing ateleologically informed pleasures sheds light on woman's potential to escape the trap of signification,

¹⁸ 'Scents, intimate details, and resonances surround female bodily orifices with a supposed essence of the feminine [...]', whereas '[t]he masculine [...] signifies a search for knowledge, authority, or prestige' (76).

as her jouissance is located outside and beyond the limits of the Symbolic order (Bendle 85).

2.4. Death and Psychosis

Successful socialization is however always connected to ceaseless separation and loss, a constant yearning for the primordial harmony with the mother enjoyed in the Imaginary. This suffered loss accounts for the fact that death comes to be seen as the '[...] ultimate object of desire [...] the recapturing of the lost unity, the final healing of the split subject' (Moi *Politics* 101). Death is posited as the only means to revert to the blissful union once felt, for to statically remain in the Imaginary would necessitate the subject becoming psychotic and '[...] incapable of living in human society' (Moi *Politics* 100). Lacan defines the psychotic subject as a person who has willingly rejected the Law of the Father¹⁹ in order to not have to break with the maternal body and lose the prospect of reaching an uttermost level of satisfaction. The psychotic feels the world around him irreversibly crumbling and collapsing due to a lack of stable foundations on which to rely on. The admittedly wanting guarantee for an assuring and comfortable stability in language – usually redeemed through myths and beliefs – casts the psychotic into a profound crisis, leading him to question all that he has taken for granted or probably held dear. As satisfaction can only be momentarily attained, a state of '[...] lack and loss [...] producing a kind of low grade dis-ease or even anxiety' gains the upper hand (Ragland-Sullivan 55). According to Willy Apollon, the psychotic subject '[...] chooses to consider the default in language as a failure or an evil of the human condition [...]' (119) and dedicates himself to the immense task of mending the world of language; albeit on a self-constructed and thus unhappily delusional basis. This irrationally irrefutable belief in the absolute necessity of fulfilling this Sisyphean task can only ever be effectively overcome via psychoanalytical treatment (Apollon 122).

Otherwise, the deliberate withdrawal from the Symbolic Order would entail developmental regression, manifest in the use of fragmented, disordered language: 'Dieser [Sprachzerfall] zeigt sich als Delirium, Wahn, Konkretismus, Halluzinationen,

¹⁹ Lacan in this context launches the technical term of "foreclosure", which Slavoy Žižek defines as '[...] exclusion of a certain key signifier [...] from the symbolic order, which trigger[s] the psychotic process' (205).

oder in Form abgebrochener Sätze' (Widmer 127)²⁰. Likewise, Kristeva refers to the cases of borderline patients, whose disintegrated language purposely eludes order and logic, with the prospect of repulsing the Law of the Father. This surfaces in a retreat into the pre-Mirror Stage, and eventually, by '[...] echoing infantile discourse' (Barzilai *Lacan* 238), amounts to psychological deterioration wherein the individual remains frozen in a childlike state. To sum this up, the subject reluctant to enter the Symbolic Order finds itself caught between the devil and the deep blue sea; having to choose between two mechanisms of rejection: either becoming a psychotic or regaining freedom and unity in death (Hopf 60). This last supposition applies especially to Ophelia, whose only hope to escape the order that has driven her into madness is death. The dissolution of life within the Real constitutes, however, the hope of all heroines, except for Wolf-Alice, probably.

Now that the Lacanian agenda has been presented in apt detail, the last point of this theoretical introduction shall be concerned with Julia Kristeva's notions of semiotic vs. symbolic, an adaptation of the Lacanian distinction between Imaginary and Symbolic Order, and the semiotic *chôra*. Kristeva's concepts and suppositions deserve mentioning in so far as they provide an additional methodological tool needed for analysing the primary material. Her semiotic *chôra* can be understood as exactly the space wherein the female opposition that is already hinted to on the titular page is carried out. Furthermore, semiotic and symbolic can be claimed to latently show up in the stories, paintings and the poem to be considered, as well as the different aspects of language they denote that surface on the linguistic level.

2.5. Kristeva's Semiotic Chôra as Space of Opposition

Julia Kristeva's concepts of semiotic and symbolic assume a crucial function within the analyses to be carried out in the practical part, as they denote the very oppositional realms that tales like "Eleonora" or poems like "The Lady of Shalott" are built upon. Those realms inform the texts with meaning, bleed into one another and, to some extent, lead the characters to take the steps they do. This is why I feel the need to provide a thoroughly researched elaboration of Kristeva's semiotic *chôra* and her relation towards the Lacanian legacy, as well as her adaptations and appropriations of Lacanian notions

²⁰ 'This [decline of language] manifests itself as delirium, delusion, [Konkretismus], hallucinations, or in the form of broken sentences' (my translation).

that need to be outlined first. It would indeed appear unfeasible to elaborate on Kristeva's work without previously mentioning Lacanian theory; to which secondary literature unsubtly testifies. This admittedly twisted relationship has already been extensively discussed within the academic field; among numerous other scholars, Toril Moi emphasizes the heavy commitment of French feminism to Lacanian theory (*Politics* 99). Anna Babka somewhat extends this by hinting to the fact that Kristeva borrows not only from Jacques Lacan, but also reflects and benefits from the work of Derrida, Hegel and Freud, especially as regards the development of subject positions in connection with language (204). Teresa De Lauretis connects the names of both scholars only in parenthesis as she discusses "Desire in Narrative", but still sees Lacan's Imaginary and Kristeva's semiotic as inextricably linked within the practice of language (149). Mary Eagleton most explicitly comments upon the interrelation of the aforementioned concepts, implying that Lacanian theory sows the seeds for the development of Kristeva's "semiotic" (Intro 15).

By now it should have become clear that Julia Kristeva is heavily indebted to Jacques Lacan, yet, as Bettina Schmitz points out, it needs to be remarked that she appropriates and modifies his concepts for her own purposes, endowing them with her '[...] specific tenor [...]' (70). Her notion of the semiotic can be said to be corresponding to the Lacanian Imaginary, being a feminine space dominated by fluidity and sensory impressions²¹. To be more concrete, the semiotic resists explicit labeling and orderly structures in so far as it '[...] comprises structures that are still provisional and ambivalent' (Schmitz 74) and therefore cannot be assigned concrete qualities. Being ruled rather by bodily drives²² and emotions, the semiotic can be linked with the pre-Oedipal realm anterior to paternal language (Moi *Politics* 161) and in this respect assumes traits Lacan accords the Imaginary. Its greatest strength – and consequently its greatest potential for subversion – obviously grounds in the fact that the semiotic '[...] knows no sexual difference [...]' which triggers '[...] a weakening of traditional gender divisions [...]' (Moi *Politics* 165). Therefore, the semiotic can be claimed to carry faintly subversive notions as it is both '[...] plenituous and powerful, sensual and disruptive [...]' as well as a constant '[...] source of voluptuous energy', notions that

²¹ Comp. '[...] drive charges, energy flows, affect pulses [...]' (Margaroni 85)

²² '[...] the basic pulsions of which Kristeva sees as predominantly anal and oral [...]' (Moi *Politics* 161)

are placed against the paternal law within a discourse anterior to the harrowing separation of mother and child (Müller 25).

If, as evidence allows, the semiotic can be viewed as an equivalent of the Imaginary, Lacan's Symbolic Order can be seen as corresponding to Kristeva's symbolic, which she associates with a space of '[...] authority, order, fathers, repression and control [...]' where the '[...] self is fixed and unified [...]' (Barry 123). Another way to put it would be to claim that the symbolic embraces just the notions of patriarchal order that seem to be irrevocably imprinted on Lacan's Symbolic Order. As a matter of fact, Imaginary and Symbolic Order exist in a state of continuous mutual interaction, which holds true for Kristeva's semiotic and symbolic just as well. Although existing prior to language, the semiotic necessarily prefigures linguistic signs that are generated within the symbolic, in so far as the '[...] semiotic drives [...] initiate the constitution of meaning [...]' (Schmitz 75). It has already been mentioned that the structures of the semiotic are still provisional and forever fluid; nonetheless, they can be considered indispensable for the foundation of language meant to take place across the thetic barrier. Thus it can be maintained that semiotic and symbolic are interwoven into a non-hierarchically determined dialectical relationship wherein one party complements, depends upon and ceaselessly floats into the other (Schmitz 75). Peter Barry proposes a comparison with conscious and unconscious, on which he elaborates in the following manner:

The symbolic is the orderly surface realm of strict distinctions and laid-down structures through which language works [...] But ever-present is the linguistic 'unconscious', a realm of floating signifiers, random connections, improvisations, accidents, and 'slippage' [...]' 123-24.

Taking Barry's analogy as a starting point, it seems only justifiable that on an overall level, Kristeva defines symbolic and semiotic not as '[...] different *kinds* of language, but [as] two different *aspects* of language [...]' (Barry 123), connecting them with the orderly structures of prose and the elusive, slipping qualities of poetry respectively. Within texts, the semiotic components may be claimed to surface as contradictions, gaps, disruptions or absences, which will be subjected to closer scrutiny in the practical part (Müller 25).

The last theoretical concept that shall be outlined before closing the theoretical section concerns the notion of Kristeva's semiotic *chôra*, a "master term" in both contemporary French philosophy and Kristeva's work in particular (Grosz *Space* 112). I

hold it to be absolutely necessary to include the concept of the *chôra* into the theoretical chapter as the *chôra* constitutes the very space from where heroines like Eleonora or Wolf-Alice draw their inspiration and subversive powers. Taking on different shapes, like the home wherein the little Morella is enclosed, or the tower that serves as the Lady's home and prison, the *chôra* in my thesis can probably be best understood as the space where female opposition can thrive and be – if possible at all – enacted.

Basically, the *chôra* is conceived of as an elusive, maternally connoted space of opposition, wherein the subject is free to move, thereby gathering the potential to disrupt and subvert the Symbolic Order. Rather than perceiving the *chôra* as a space or notion, one could speak of a subject-object and space-time continuum (Babka 205), which seems to be more in line with Kristeva's understanding of the term. So as to shed more light on the expression "chôra", the etymology needs to be considered as well. Kristeva refers back to Plato, who in *Timaion* employs the term *chôra*, partly keeping its original meaning "womb"²³. In an extensive article on the Platonic *chôra* and its adaptations, Thomas Rickert notes that in classical antiquity, the term "chôra" was used to denote space and place synonymously (254). Whereas this explanation sounds fairly concrete, it is infinitely harder to define Plato's appropriation of the term. Probably the statement that the *chôra* cannot be satisfactorily defined, that it resists labeling and materiality – and exactly for this reason, eludes any attempt of naming via language – comes closest to what both Plato and Kristeva might have had in mind²⁴. Having no shape or matter itself, the *chôra* cannot be confined by any determinate qualities available within the verbal realm (Rickert 256). Rather than allotting material traits to the *chôra*, one could concentrate on what it does, which Grosz understands as '[...] to hold, nurture, bring into the world [...] Not to procreate or produce – this is the function of the father [...] but to nurse, to support, surround, protect, incubate [...]' (*Space* 115). Any eager efforts of Rickert to provide something of a definition still leaves us on shaky ground²⁵, which is why Plato's understanding of the *chôra* needs to be abandoned for

²³ 'Welche Bedeutung ist ihr ihrem Wesen nach beizulegen? Am ehesten die folgende: dass sie alles Werden in sich aufnimmt wie eine Amme' (Platon *Timaios* 87).

²⁴ 'Sie muss man immer als dasselbe bezeichnen, denn sie tritt unter keinen Umständen aus ihrem eigenen Wesen heraus, nimmt sie doch immer die Gesamtheit der Dinge in sich auf, und [...] sie nimmt niemals irgendwie und irgendwo eine Gestalt an, die einer der hereinkommenden Dinge ähnelt [...]' (Platon *Timaios* 91); 'Deshalb ist es notwendig, dass dasjenige, was alle Formen in sich aufnehmen soll, frei von allen Bestimmungen sein muss [...]' (Platon *Timaios* 93).

²⁵ 'Indeed, *chôra*'s nonplace frames the gap sundering the Forms from the physical world as well as providing passage between them' (Rickert 258, emphasis in the original), '[...] there remains something elusive about the *chôra*, something about it that resists determination [...] the *chôra* also recedes,

now, allowing for Kristeva's chôra to be introduced. Seeking to negotiate the aporia concerning the chôra in an attempt to transform its potential into a possibly interpretative tool, Kristeva views the chôra as

[...] a preverbal realm prior to and distinct from the symbolic realm, one that is subversive of the symbolic's masculine, overly rational character [...] The semiotic chôra includes emotions, sensations, and other marks and traces of psychical and material experience. Rickert 260-61.

Offering up a possible, yet probably slightly Utopian alternative to phallogocentrism, Kristeva proposes a feasible way of connecting the subject with the body, especially as regards the maternal body. Thus, the chôra does take on some qualities that appear to be feminine, sometimes even faintly motherly²⁶ - in so far as the chôra precedes language and the father (Kristeva *Desire* 133). Although dismissing materially existing labels, it seems that Kristeva attempts to shed light upon the mystery invoked by Plato; though formless and intangible, her chôra is referred to as being transverbal and transhistorical (Margaroni 84), which indeed conjures up the impression of a space-time continuum mentioned earlier. Furthermore, Kristeva highlights three qualities the chôra embodies: motility, errancy, and transfer. This in-betweenness is what moves Kristeva to associate the chôra with femininity, which constitutes one of the greatest problems ascribed to the chôra. Butler raises the well-founded question whether the maternal body Kristeva obviously has in mind is ultimately to be revealed as another patriarchal construction (*Gender* 93)²⁷. As a counterargument, Kristeva openly states that she flatly refuses to reduce the maternal body to biological reproduction²⁸ and that it is indeed a socialized body she links with the chôra (Margaroni 95). Still, the chôra remains one of Kristeva's most problematic notions, retaining a smack of a romanticized, mystically feminine realm ultimately founded on a Utopian enterprise (Margaroni 79). Derrida especially finds fault with the feminine connection – associated with qualities such as nursing, passivity and virginity – supposing that such an assumption would adumbrate an anthropomorphic character, thus specifying exactly that which cannot (and, as is

declining to leave its imprint on things just as it declines to take on the qualities of the things it receives' (Rickert 259, emphasis in the original).

²⁶ Derrida regards the chôra – or khora, as he wishes to call it – as '[...] matrix, mother, receptacle, nurse [...]', all of which can conventionally be understood as female traits (Rickert 264).

²⁷ '[...] what passes as "maternal instinct" may well be a culturally constructed desire which is interpreted through a naturalistic vocabulary' (Butler *Gender* 91).

²⁸ Notwithstanding her use of the term "pre-Oedipal mother", Kristeva holds this figure as one encompassing both masculinity and femininity (Moi *Politics* 165).

repeatedly stated, *should not*) be grasped. However, Kristeva cannot be blamed for this, since it is already in Plato's text that the chôra is thought of as "receptacle" and "nurse", which are indeed both sexually coded terms (Derrida 23).

In order to stress the enduring importance of Kristeva's work for both theory and this thesis, this section shall be closed with a quotation by Toril Moi:

The criticisms leveled [...] against Kristeva's politics should not be allowed to overshadow the positive aspects of her work. Her commitment to thorough theoretical investigation of the problems of marginality and subversion, her radical deconstruction of the identity of the subject [...] have opened up new perspectives for further feminist enquiry' *Politics* 172.

It is precisely this "feminist enquiry", this opportunity to assess both verbal and visual texts from a psychoanalytical, feminist angle with special focus on the semiotic chôra, that is meant to be carried out in the main part of this thesis. This kind of enquiry allows me to assess canonical texts, such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* from a very specific angle that foregrounds those aspects that have been previously neglected, but that are of singular importance to the task I have set myself. Amongst others, hidden facets such as Ophelia's use of language or her resistance on a socio-linguistic level may be placed at the center of attention, allowing for a somewhat distinct interpretation or outcome. By focusing on details that possibly have already been mentioned by scholars, but not further elaborated upon, a much closer or indeed individual analysis may be carried out. Also, giving prominence to seemingly supplementary details provides the means to shed light on aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis, such as discovering the moment of the crossing of thethetic barrier in a painting. To detect and analyze tiny gaps and fissures or contradictions within texts may as well lead to new detections concerning the relationship between the sexes, woman's submission to man, and further allows asking for possible reasons. Ambiguously received and complex concepts such as Kristeva's chôra undoubtedly need to be incorporated into my theory part, as I find that notions such as these serve to illuminate those questions I have set myself at the beginning. Indeed I now hope to answer, or provide possible answers for the following questions: How does female resistance manifest itself in texts taken from various ages and genres? How can psychoanalytical stages of development be captured within a picture? What means do authors need in order to capture that which cannot be labeled? How are ambiguous notions of gender roles and relationships intertwined into texts?

3. Saint and Sinner, Angel and Whore – Antithetical Conceptions of Femininity in Edgar Allan Poe’s “Eleonora” and “Morella”

For one thing, readers of Poe will have almost certainly noticed that the universally acknowledged topoi of beauty, death and obsession run through his stories like a red thread²⁹. Basically, the preponderance of his female heroines can be said to emerge from the so-called ‘[...] Poe-canon of idealized femininity: frail, consumptive and doomed to die young, or already an embalmed corpse on show on a secret catafalque for the mad, deeply devoted poet’s worship only’ (Müller 67)³⁰. Furthermore, a predominantly structuralist arrangement can be quite safely assumed to govern his tales and poems; an organization that all too often presupposes natural connections between woman, nature and poetry and man, culture and prose, respectively. In this respect, the distinction of Imaginary and Symbolic Order, or semiotic and symbolic is introduced; the basis of all oppositions whereon the narrative is fleshed out. The problem of such allegedly natural or inborn differences creating a mythical gap between men and women is encountered quite frequently in other poems and stories I am going to elaborate on. Especially a quite stable division between semiotic and symbolic realms, which seem to be conflated with men and women, appears to form the backbone of my texts. In order to fully grasp the weight attached to the concept of dichotomies within the realm of cultural studies – and to enhance a profound understanding of the analyses I am going to forward in this and the following chapters – it seems indispensable to trace the origin of dualities back to the analysis of myths expounded by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss issued the claim that each text – regardless of its cultural, geographical or temporal context – could be subjected to scrutiny with the particular aim of detecting ‘[...] repeated motifs and contrasts [...]’ as well as ‘[...] dyadic pairs [...] of symbolic, thematic, and archetypal resonance [...]’ (Barry 45). Lévi-Strauss further defined the dyadic pairs and figured out certain characteristics: ‘La plus importante est que les individus se définissent, les uns par rapport aux autres,

²⁹ Kennedy sees Poe’s fascination with death and beauty as grounding in the conjunction of the most ‘[...] essential elements of desire: irresistible loveliness and the impossibility of its preservation or recovery (67). Furthermore, he identifies a latent repetition compulsion in Poe’s works as the story of the dying maiden could never be finished for good: ‘[...] it could only be rewritten, over and over, obsessively, like the repetition of some hideous drama of revivification’ (Kennedy 88).

³⁰ Indeed, Poe was heavily criticised for his poetical alignment of beauty and death, as this correlation suggested a state of complete passivity to be occupied by the woman, which led to accusations of misogyny (Bronfen 89).

essentiellement, d'après leur appartenance ou leur non-appartenance à la même moitié' (Lévi-Strauss *Parenté* 83)³¹. Having clarified that the halves of the pairs could only be understood in relation to one another, he also proved their inequality. Both halves are invested with certain values, which is taken for granted until it is forgotten that these constructions were man-made and not God-given. Thus what initially constituted an arbitrary allocation of characteristics to the two sexes that '[...] situated the individual within the poles of nature and culture, self and society, sex and sexuality only later became a psychological reality, and not the other way around' (N. Armstrong 13). As Lévi-Strauss continues, '[d]ans notre système de parenté, [...] le terme *père* a une connotation positive en ce qui concerne le sexe, l'âge relative, la génération [...]' (*Anthropologie* 48, emphasis in the original)³². This comes as little surprising; since applying this supposition to modern Western societies will surely verify that androcentrism is more common than egalitarianism or even gynocentrism (Sheldon 226). Since it is the man who conventionally sets the standard, the woman finds herself mechanically placed within a rigidly pre-established role that allows for nothing but defining herself in relation to the man. Furthermore, the woman will encounter the impossibility of developing a positively connoted (semantic) space of her own, since that is already occupied by the man (Spender 20). This inequity the two sexes find themselves encumbered with starts with childhood plays that socialize girls and boys into internalizing different roles (Coates 13) and manifests itself most obviously at the level of language: the woman '[...] must signify that the norm, the positive, does not apply [...]', and thus inevitably becomes '[...] a *lady* doctor, a *female* surgeon, a *woman* lawyer, or else, in less prestigious occupations, a *waitress*, a *stewardess*, a *majorette*' (Spender 20, emphasis in the original). These linguistically marked forms conjure up the impression that it is "natural" or God-given that the man assumes the unmarked form, '[...] that the world is male unless proven otherwise' (Spender 20), and that hence women are '[...] trespassing on male territory' (Reddington 244). Eventually, this unsubtle claim can be traced back to Virginia Woolf, who already pointed to the inextricable link between gender and the use of language (77). Another instance that testifies to the phenomenon of accepting man as the norm can be found within Freudian

³¹ 'Essentially, individuals define themselves, the ones in relations to others, by their sense of belonging, or not-belonging to the same half'(my translation).

³² 'In our system of relationships, the term *father* has a positive connotation concerning sex, age, and generation' (my translation).

theory which presupposes female sexuality as being the deviant one (Eagleton Intro 19)³³; a motif that shall play a surprisingly weighty role – though appearing as a seemingly insignificant detail – in Poe’s “Morella”. Spender elaborates on this problem by demonstrating how this asymmetry was further enhanced, claiming that ‘[...] there is no name for a sexually healthy female’³⁴; that she truly becomes a devouring, castrating monster bereaving the man of his physical and psychical potency. Paradigms that accord women either the role of the virgin or the whore seem to have been carried to new extremes in 18th and 19th century literature, cultivating the virtue of a woman up to a fetish. The woman herself becomes a blank page, readily waiting for pre-fabricated roles, all of which are severely adhering to the prevalent hetero-normative discourse, to be written on her. Leading “anti-lives” as mere fantasies or projections, literary heroines achieve to regain their integrity but in death, where the promise of wholeness, of the Lacanian Real, and independence of the male subject, is at last granted to her. Even conforming to established roles is unraveled to be illusory – a lesson that Eleonora has yet to learn – since men’s demands to women prove to be incompatible with reality.

The fate of Poe’s heroines is so strictly pinned down that an escape seems indeed impossible: either the woman is lifted to the venerable position of a virgin, a purely higher being³⁵ (Eleonora), or demonised as the monstrous feminine (Morella), luring the hero to his downfall or death. Either way, the woman is set up in a particular ‘[...] position[...] of meaning, fixe[d] [...] in a certain identification. Represented as [...] spectacle-fetish or specular image [...] woman is constituted as the ground of representation [...]’ (De Lauretis 15). Probably the most beloved “specular image” that man has created for woman can be found in the omnipresent vision of the angel; be it ‘[...] divine Virgin [...]’, ‘[...] domestic angel [...]’ or a bitter-sweetly alluring incorporation of Goethe’s ‘[...] eternal feminine [...]’ (Gilbert and Gubar 20-21).

³³ Felman remarks in connection to this dilemma that ‘[f]emale sexuality is thus described as an absence (of the masculine presence), as lack, incompleteness, deficiency, envy with respect to the only sexuality in which value resides’ (136).

³⁴ While engagement in extensive sexual intercourse is considered normal for men, the attempt to do the same necessarily backfires for women: while sexually active men are ‘virile’ and ‘potent’, sexually active women are ‘nymphomaniacs’ or ‘bitches’ (Spender 175). As a reason, Spender posits the deplorable fact that ‘[...] women have not been in charge of the language and [...] there are no words for sexual behaviour which encode the experience from the female perspective’ (178), thereby alluding to the impossibility of aculturally and unbiasedly perceiving the differences between the two sexes.

³⁵ Halliburton’s explanation, ‘[...] the god-figure is presented through the eyes of the lowly. It is contemplated, in other words, much as God or an image of God is contemplated by a believer in real life’ (137), aptly grasps the extent to which Eleonora is deified by the narrator. She is heaved upon a pedestal whereon she can be beheld, but assume no active role.

Anyhow, the angel woman seems completely void of agency, leading a life wholly dedicated to the welfare of others, neglecting any personal desires for fear of becoming a selfish monster. Hers is an '[...] anti-story of selfless innocence [...]' based utterly on the paradigm that pleasing her husband in turn may – and indeed, must – please her (Gilbert and Gubar 23).

The supposition on which this chapter shall be built upon is that Eleonora, equated with youthful frailty and an almost preternatural femininity, has no place in the Symbolic Order due to her rigidly framed role as angel woman, and therefore, as a last resort, withdraws from this order via death in order to gain her inner peace and salvation. To specify this assumption further, it can also be claimed that Eleonora's poetic beauty cannot be satisfactorily rendered in a predominantly masculine literature boasting of phallogocentric language, and that consequently, Eleonora eludes the text, which figuratively represents the Symbolic Order³⁶.

3.1. Woman/Nature/Poetry/Semiotic, Man/Culture/Prose/Symbolic

That Eleonora '[...] resists being defined by means of words [...]' (Lopes 41) – words adhering to a pervasively paternal language – surfaces in the narrator's falling back upon poetic language when describing his beloved. It appears strikingly bewildering that though Eleonora's beauty is worthy of immeasurable praise, she is yet never suitably described; her portrait is composed of partial features that the reader may assemble in his mind. Paying minute attention to facial features, Poe '[...] relies heavily on sensory imagery [...] particularly sound, sight, touch and smell' (Fletcher 113) so as to transmit an idea of Eleonora's otherworldly flair. Even more so, a '[...] semantic similarity [...]' (Stankiewicz 72) between Eleonora's facial features – traits to which Poe dedicated particular attention (Bland Crowder 181) – and natural phenomena seems to be presupposed on the behalf of the narrator. Reiterating that her beauty is unearthly and ungraspable, Poe implies that Eleonora '[...] stands for "the Idea of Beauty", the mediatory principle through which the divine is known to men [...]' (Wilbur 139). She is therefore not an ordinarily attractive human being, but an essence coming from the world of Ideas, reminding the hero's soul of '[...] its first condition' (Wilbur 139). As prosaic language apparently does not do justice, Poe resorts to poetic language, the only

³⁶ Elisabete Lopes proposes this argument in an article about Poe's allegedly unrivalled "Ligeia", whose uncanniness and beauty escapes any attempt of verbal representation. This hypothesis can as well be applied to Eleonora, as shall be proven in this chapter.

mode wherein the female can be aptly represented³⁷. The comparisons between the blatantly feminized landscape and Eleonora's facial features function like a verse refrain in the tale (Wilbur 141). Not surprisingly, the conventional association woman/nature/poetry and man/culture/prose is upheld and runs like a red thread through the tale. Actually, this might account for why Eleonora cannot break free from her overly narrow-minded angel-of-the-house-role; the dichotomies are so strictly established that the threshold cannot possibly be crossed. Being so strongly associated with the landscape, Eleonora's body becomes the site where nature and femininity inescapably conflate³⁸; so that ultimately no other option than to fade from the text and to merge with the natural world is left for her.

The first so-called "refrain" tells the reader that '[f]rom the dim regions beyond the mountains at the upper end of our encircled domain, there crept out a narrow and deep river, brighter than all save the eyes of Eleonora [...]' (Poe *Eleonora* 224), immediately conjuring up Cixous' proposition of water as the incarnation of femininity. The woman becomes an absence, an object of study, a geographical map ready to be interpreted. The narrator is unable to enter, to possess this country – Eleonora's body – and therefore seeks to describe it in analytic, rationalistic terms. His attempt of grasping and, as a consequence, of transfixing Eleonora in time is structured into a voyeuristic description, which intends a "natural" link between the winding river and the gentle curves of the hips, the outlined arcs of breasts. Whereas the mountains can either be seen as instances of phallocentrism or metaphorical breasts, the creeping-out river most probably can be linked to bodily fluids, which imply reproduction and birth, thereby establishing a maternal connection³⁹. The narrator advances in his raptures, proclaiming, '[t]heir bark [of fantastic trees] [...] was smoother than all save the cheeks of Eleonora [...]' (Poe *Eleonora* 225). The flatteries approach their summit when

³⁷ Poe frequently relies on heightened vocabulary and rhetorical devices like alliteration – "soft sighs" (229) – metaphors – "the loveliness of Eleonora was that of the Seraphim" (226) and rhetorical questions – "for what was she but a child?" (228) when it comes to describing feminine qualities.

³⁸ A reason for why the man ascribes nature to the woman may be found in the fact that nature is ephemeral and therefore mortal: 'Natur aber ist sterblich, während der Geist den Naturgesetzen enthoben ist, also auch dem Gesetz des Todes' (Rohde-Dachser 117). Hence, man associates himself with culture, spirit and reason, in order to make himself believe he could evade the powers of death. Likewise, Simone de Beauvoir has found that '[...] woman has been made to represent all of man's ambivalent feelings about his own inability to control his own physical existence, his own birth and death. As the Other, woman comes to represent the contingency of life, life that is made to be destroyed' (Gilbert and Gubar 34).

³⁹ Garai labels water a '[...] maternal element [...]' (14) in so far as it is regarded as the origin of life. De Vries suggests the likeness to bodily fluids - '[...] blood, saliva, semen [...]' (493) – and, in a broader sense, the likeness between femininity and fluidity.

Eleonora's traits are deemed superior to those of gods: '[...] a lulling melody more divine than that of the harp of Aeolus – sweeter than all save the voice of Eleonora' (Poe *Eleonora* 226). One gains the impression that Eleonora has to passively accept her deification, her role and her destiny. Being rigidly placed within a male dominated framework, Eleonora cannot possibly gather any subversive potential; the only feasible way for her to escape patriarchy is to withdraw into her personal semiotic chôra wherein she is shielded from masculine power exertions.

When talking about himself, however, the narrator applies a somewhat prosaic and sober language: 'We will say, then, that I am mad' (Poe *Eleonora* 223), sounds like a straightforward, rationalistic conclusion, both orderly and logical, allowing little room for diverse possible interpretations. Secondly, the narrator eagerly attempts to accord his life a highly structured frame, introducing a binary configuration to the tale as well as to his life:

I grant, at least, that there are two distinct conditions of my mental existence: the condition of a lucid reason – not to be disputed, and belonging to the memory of events forming the first epoch of my life – and a condition of shadow and doubt, appertaining to the present, and to the recollection of what constitutes the second great era of my being. Poe *Eleonora* 223.

This fairly philosophical elaboration testifies to the eternally patriarchal struggle for control and order, a strong desire for assigning explicit labels to whatever might be categorized and reasonably grasped.

As regards Ermengarde, the tale's only other female character endowed with a proper name, the patterns used to describe Eleonora are as well applicable to her. Ermengarde's arrival observably comprises the narrative's turning point. Straying from descriptions of the city, the strange, albeit undoubtedly masculine realm the narrator finds himself in, and dreamy recollections of his beloved Eleonora, the narrator unexpectedly reports,

'Suddenly these manifestations they ceased, and the world grew dark before mine eyes, and I stood aghast at the burning thoughts which possessed, at the terrible temptations which beset me; for there came from some far, far distant and unknown land [...] a maiden to whose beauty my whole recreant heart yielded at once [...]' Poe *Eleonora* 230.

This chillingly lyrical statement exhibits both archaisms ("mine eyes") and rhetorical devices like alliteration ("terrible temptations") and anaphora ("and the world [...] and I

stood” (emphasis mine)). Furthermore, the “and” inducing the sentences is reminiscent of Biblical language (Wilbur 141). Both antiquated language and poetic conventions evoke connotations of some higher truth that surpasses the hero’s understanding. Thus it seems only logical that Ermengarde must come from some place detached from the everyday world the hero is part of. Woman is hence rendered man’s other, inhabiting an unspecified realm evading patriarchally informed (geographical) labels.

3.2. The Angel of Death

Assessing the tale from a psychoanalytical angle informed by Lacanian structures in this second subchapter, one may assert an equation between the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass and the Imaginary. The naively blissful time spent in the valley – ‘Hand in hand about this valley, for fifteen years, roamed I with Eleonora [...]’ (Poe *Eleonora* 225) evokes images of youthful happiness sprinkled with playful elements, where the boundaries between self and other are still blurred, allowing for ideal identification to take place. The passage further testifies to an innocent union with nature, no hints about sexual love are given. The pre-oedipal momentum determining this stage is witnessed as Eleonora’s mother is mentioned: ‘Thus it was that we lived all alone, knowing nothing of the world without the valley – I, my cousin, and her mother’ (Poe *Eleonora* 224). Imaginary traces protrude in so far as Eleonora’s mother is insignificant for the narrative’s further development; notably, she is not even given a proper name, but only referred to as “mother”, the term which encapsulates both her social role and her biological function. This prelapsarian inexperience – knowing nothing of the outside world – reminds one of the infant whose worldview depends upon presence or absence of the mother. After this statement, the mother indeed becomes an absence, since she is mentioned no more. Actually, one is tempted to speculate about the disturbingly odd fate of this enigmatic character. Does she stay in the valley? If so, we might legitimately ask why she does not mourn her daughter’s death; or, if she dies before Eleonora, why this deserves no mentioning at all. Indeed it appears as if she would dwindle away, no longer deemed important for the further progress of the narrative.

‘A change fell upon all things’ (Poe *Eleonora* 226) hails the arrival of the Mirror Stage in the valley. The moment meant to change everything for good occurs when the couple sits beneath the trees – thus, the scene can be claimed to be dominated by the

phallic power⁴⁰ – looking peacefully and tightly embraced at its reflection in the river. Regarding their own images, they draw ‘[...] the God Eros from that wave [...]’ (Poe *Eleonora* 226), which suggests that they are engaged in autoerotic contemplation. In this flash of self-recognition, the subject positions of the couple as lover and beloved take on shape (Fink 122). At the same time, this scene subtly alludes to the myth of Narcissus who fell in love with his own image and therefore rejected the love of the nymph Echo⁴¹. Further developing this hypothesis, one could then ask whether the contemplation of the mirror-imago in effect disguises an unconscious death wish. Is Eleonora already aware of the fact that she, as a girl, will never be able to leave the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass, and thus willingly chooses death, rather than endure a psychotically static existence in the valley? Truly, the image of the happy couple mirrored in the river proves to be a fallacy.

The third stage irretrievably arrives after Eleonora’s death. Nature becomes uncanny, as if mourning the severed ties to Eleonora: ‘[...] there sprang up [...] dark, eye-like violets, that writhed uneasily [...]’ (Poe *Eleonora* 228). These violets hint to the Gothic atmosphere⁴² typical for Poe; the violets seem to haunt the narrator with their watchful eyes, “writhing” as if in great pain, “uneasily”, since salvation is beyond reach. Utterly submerged in melancholy, a feeling Elisabeth Bronfen links to the inability of accepting the death of a beloved person and the negation of loss (97), the protagonist seemingly has to sever with the valley reminiscent of Eleonora. Unable to live with his memories, to cope with the desire that cannot be fulfilled, the protagonist leaves the valley for good in order to live in the city, at the ‘[...] gay court of a king [...]’ (Poe *Eleonora* 230), which could be considered as a microcosm reflecting a patriarchally hierarchical order. Also the ‘[...] mad clangour of arms [...]’ (Poe *Eleonora* 230) evokes associations of a male dominated realm due to its traditional connections to

⁴⁰ The scene wherein the innocently childish affection transforms into sexual love has attracted quite a lot of attention among scholars. While D.H. Lawrence dismisses the imagery as bearing little authenticity (‘The symbolism of Poe’s parables is easy, too easy, almost mechanical.’ (97)), Woodberry praises precisely this straightforwardness: ‘[...] symbolism has seldom been more simple and pure [...] more absolute master of the things of sense for the things of spirit than in this unreal scene’ (qtd. in Poe *Eleonora Collected Works* 635).

⁴¹ Narcissus indeed anticipates his fate – which is to be death – when proclaiming: ‘Ante [...] emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri!’ (Ovid 391).

⁴² ‘Die Landschaft tritt hier selbst ganz an die Stelle der Seele, sie wird ihr eigenster Ausdruck. Aus dem Zusammenklang von Landschaft und Gemütsstimmung wird geradezu ein Gleichklang’ (Wolff 23). Likewise, Pease talks about an [...] air of pastness [...]’ (187) that seems equally suitable in this context.

army and war. Perceptibly, the Imaginary bleeds into the Symbolic, as the narrator confirms '[...] the radiant loveliness of women [...]' (Poe *Eleonora* 230) in the city.

With respect to the current state of affairs, it appears that Eleonora has submitted to her fate, which had been revealed to her by some unknown entity: '[s]he had seen that the finger of Death was upon her bosom [...]' (Poe *Eleonora* 227). She seems to have resigned, withdrawn from representation into a realm just as indefinably mysterious as her own person.

Rethinking the highly restrictively patterned role of the angel woman, one is indeed enticed to conclude that there might have been no other choice, that death was designated in the poorly developed script of her life from the beginning. As Gilbert and Gubar have rightly and necessarily deduced as regards the role of the domestic angel, a woman without prospects, without agency, without occupations or own will is already dead. However desirably stylised the angel's excessively lauded self-surrender might have been, '[...] to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead' (25). Re-assessing Eleonora's role within the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass, and further, within the tale, there seems to reside at least some truth in that statement, as her life, her "anti-story" in truth constituted nothing more than '[...] a life of death, a death-in-life' (Gilbert and Gubar 25). Considering this fact, Eleonora's begging uttered prior to her death acquires to a certain extent a wholly new meaning: 'She grieved to think that, *having entombed her* in the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass, I would quit for ever its happy recesses [...]' (Poe *Eleonora* 227, emphasis mine). Surely, what Eleonora fears is a betrayal on her lover's part after her death; what the plea really amounts to, however, is that she has been dead and "entombed" all along, that she has, quite frankly, endured a '[...] posthumous existence in her own lifetime' (Gilbert and Gubar 25). Reframing the angel of the house as an angel of death, Gilbert and Gubar quote Welsh saying that '[...] the power of an angel to save implies, even while it denies, the power of death' (26). As I do not wish to leave this crucial statement speculating about the inextricably connected powers of life and death unnoticed, it shall be figuratively taken up in the next chapter, at the heart of which the ambiguity of death – is it truly a defeat or merely a retreat? – lies. The question, then, shall revolve around such arcane conjectures as the very nature of Eleonora's "powers of death".

3.3. The Sweet Heroine and the Vicious Bitch⁴³

Given Eleonora's exceedingly normative role as sweet, modest and submissive, and – as will follow – Morella's wicked, unruly behaviour '[...] as a source of horror and disruption threaten[ing] the symbolic order, generating chaos and catastrophe, mayhem, madness, and murder' (Seet 145); suspicions as to the antithetical conception underlying Poe's heroines can be fairly certainly confirmed. Eleonora as angel has access to ghostly, even deathly powers – a supremacy she uses for the good – which are exactly the same powers that are deliberately and more fully exploited by her uncanny sister, the monster-woman, '[...] a magical creature of the lower world [...] threatening to replace her angelic sister [...]' (Gilbert and Gubar 28). Indeed it can be safely claimed that self-assertive Morella seems to challenge all that which Eleonora stands for.

Completely immersed in the attempt to measure up to her lover's picture of herself, Eleonora is utterly absorbed by the role she has been allotted. Morella on the other hand categorically refuses to merge with the part of the submissive, handsome angel of the house, only at the expense of becoming the other extreme, the female uncanny. To a certain extent, Eleonora and Morella can be viewed as antagonists, Eleonora impersonating the powers of love⁴⁴, while Morella is suggested to be a metaphysical incarnation of Death itself. Furthermore, when paying closer attention to the constructions of femininity prevailing in the texts, it can be claimed that Eleonora in typological terms represents the '[c]lassical body which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek [...]' (Russo 63), while Morella's genotypic features unmistakably evoke associations of the grotesque body. Bearing resemblances to this type, her body '[...] is open, permeable, and ambiguously gendered' (N. Armstrong 183), which ultimately allows for a terrifying, "unhappy" ending. Morella deliberately withdraws from being placed within a paternally constructed scheme; she '[...] resist[s] confinement in that symbolic space by disturbing it, perverting it, making trouble, seeking to exceed the boundary [...]' (De Lauretis 139), which on the one hand endows her with subversive power, but on the other hand prepares for her death, since refusing a role can be read as tantamount to refusing to live in the Symbolic Order. The following chapter shall chase this supposition through Poe's tale, proving that the disturbance Morella enacts exposes

⁴³ This heading feeds upon Gilbert and Gubar's assertion that '[...] throughout most male literature, a sweet heroine inside the house (like Honoria) is opposed to a vicious bitch outside' (29).

⁴⁴ 'In "Eleanora" [sic], Poe implies that the new love, Ermengarde, is a reincarnation of the dead wife; the spirit of Eros, too, is immortal upon the earth' (Gargano 263).

her as a potential threat to male authority, which in turn casts her into the role of the monstrous-feminine and constructs her as the abject body.

From the beginning it is plainly stated that attraction, but not love, ties the narrator to his wife Morella: 'With a feeling of deep yet most singular affection I regarded my friend Morella [...] my soul [...] burned with fires it had never before known; but the fires were not of Eros [...]' (Poe *Morella* 39). In the same instant, the element of the uncanny comes into play; her mental powers are immense, as is the scope of her knowledge she irresistibly dazzles and captivates her husband with. Indeed, Morella seems to boast an immeasurable wisdom, but possesses none of Eleonora's angelic features. Her cold hand, the '[...] unearthly tones [...]' issuing from her lips when she would '[...] rake up from the ashes of a dead philosophy some low, singular words [...]' (Poe *Morella* 40) lend her a '[...] halo of uncanniness' (Lopes 41) that the narrator both fears and desires to decipher. The traditionally unfeminine traits – like the low voice – his wife exhibits to an ever greater degree make the narrator grow pale and shudder. Morella's mysterious aura increases, until her husband seems to be completely under her spell. Lopes aptly suggests that '[m]etonymically, she becomes the text that the narrator cannot read nor grasp its meaning [...]' (46). Inevitably, a reversal of roles seems to take place; Morella wields the phallic power conventionally designated as male, thus drifting still further away from any readily available feminine roles, and forcing her husband to give up on his manliness and to completely become her phallus⁴⁵.

Even paternal reasoning fails him; any desperate attempt of his to figure her out, to categorise and label the being he has married only feeds her already superior powers⁴⁶. Probably the fact that the nature of their relationship remains somewhat indeterminate and changing – first, the narrator acknowledges having become her pupil and thus having implicitly agreed on a submissive role; then, he watches his wife with mounting horror and torment, secretly wishing for her death – proves to be nail in both their coffins. In order to regain his manliness, Poe's protagonist falls back upon prefabricated constructions, or rather, myths, of femininity so as to be able to conceive of his wife in conventional terms. Necessarily, he reverts to the prototype of the

⁴⁵ 'Identifiziert sich der Mann mit dem Phallus der Frau, wird er zu ihrem Kind und verliert dadurch seine Männlichkeit' (Widmer 97).

⁴⁶ 'She knows that, in his resistance to her, he tries to use reason to deny an unalterable fact of the universe. In effect, she tells him that in his unwillingness to understand the nature of their necessary relationship, he paradoxically persecutes himself and falls more completely under her sway' (Lopes 264).

monstrous feminine, that which threatens any systematic patriarchal order due to its unconventional and ungraspable nature.

3.4. The Heroine with a Thousand Faces – Versions of Femininity

In an elaboration on patriarchal myths of femininity, Christa Rohde-Dachser reasonably accounts for the necessity of coherently formulated roles that women are inserted into by men: ‘Die so konstruierten Weiblichkeitsentwürfe enthalten deshalb mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit das im menschlich-männlichen Universum Abgewehrte, sei es als das Verbotene, Verpönte [...]’ (99)⁴⁷. These schemata, founded on indispensable irrationality, allow the man to use the woman as a container for all that is unwanted and despised by society⁴⁸. Thus he is able to self-consciously declare what he is not: ‘Weiblichkeitsmythen haben so auch eine *die männliche Geschlechtsidentität stützende und das bestehende Geschlechterverhältnis legitimierende Funktion*‘ (Rohde-Dachser 100, emphasis in the original)⁴⁹. Assuming what woman might represent, ‘[...] makes her containable within his imagination (reduced to his size) but also produces her as a mystery for him to master and decipher within safe or unthreatening borders [...]’ (Grosz *Bodies* 191). Finally, the protagonist discovers a receptacle for all his fears, ethically inappropriate wishes and illegitimate desires. He needs no longer participate in the master-slave relationship Morella has introduced, and can renounce the initial delight he has taken in the common studying of ‘[...] mystical writings [...]’ (Poe *Morella* 39). Having previously escaped definition, Morella may from now on be viewed in the light of the female uncanny, ‘[...] her preternatural traits [...] ascribe her the role of the monster’ (Lopes 44). From this point onwards, it can be safely claimed that Morella appears as the monstrous feminine: ‘[a]nd thus, joy suddenly faded into

⁴⁷ ‘These constructed versions of femininity comprise in all probability those characteristics that human/man repulses; be it forbidden, or frowned [...]’ (my translation).

⁴⁸ Elisabeth Bronfen further elaborates on and tries to account for hegemonic ideas that foresee inextricable ties between woman and nature: ‘Eines der prägnantesten Beispiele [...] ist die Gleichsetzung der Frau mit Natur, denn als Körper ist die Frau zugleich auch Allegorie für die Gefährlichkeit sexueller Lust, unkontrollierbarer Leidenschaft und Spontaneität. Tatsächlich gibt es zwei „Kulturmütter“, von denen eine Vielfalt weiblicher Typen abgeleitet ist – die Versucherin Eva und die heilende Jungfrau Maria. Diese stehen nicht nur in einem diametralen Gegensatz; beide sind, was noch entscheidender ist, Quelle der Kultur, indem sie gleichzeitig mit Aspekten des Todes gleichgesetzt werden und somit auch die Grenze und den Endpunkt eben der Kultur bezeichnen, die sie entstehen lassen’ (100).

⁴⁹ ‘Thus, myths of femininity serve to strengthen the male identity and legitimate the prevailing gender relations’ (my translation).

horror, and the most beautiful became the most hideous, as Hinnôm became Gehenna⁵⁰ (Poe *Morella* 40). In this terrifyingly Gothic scene, binaries are reversed, that which is known and appreciated as familiar becomes alien and uncanny (Russo 33), hence aggravating the terror latently intertwined into the story. Comfortable spaces like home and hearth provide the very source of terror, a '[...] safe and dangerous [...]' (Russo 36) other space, semiotic insofar as meaning is continually slipping and elusive.

Morella is no longer simply the wife; she becomes the vampire, the witch, the woman as monstrous womb, the woman as bleeding wound, the woman as possessed body, the castrating mother, the woman as life-in-death⁵¹. Whatever the role may be that is allotted to her, the resonating overtones are almost always of an archaically sexual nature. Firstly, Morella's immense wisdom and the guidance she enacts over her husband as "pupil" are '[...] likely to bear an allusion to sexual experience, [...] a common trope in many Gothic plots, where the pursuit of knowledge appears strongly associated with sexual initiation' (Lopes 43). As an ancient temptress, '[...] other sexual behaviors [...]' reside in her '[...] as archaic forms that are both powerless and terrible' (N. Armstrong 183). This may in all probability account for the power she exerts, the temptation she radiates, but cannot feasibly be posited as the sole reason for her monstrosity. Creed, however, offers a viable explanation for the dangers Morella potentially exhibits; her supremacy is said to ground in castration anxiety she is able to invoke in the male (intro 2). Indeed, Morella figuratively castrates her husband by controlling him psychically, as he shockingly reports, '[...] the time had now arrived when the mystery of my wife's manner oppressed me as a spell', and, later confesses, '[...] I met the glance of her meaning eyes, and then my soul sickened and became giddy with the giddiness of one who gazes downward into some dreary and unfathomable abyss' (Poe *Morella* 41). In order to unravel the source of these male fears, Creed draws upon Susan Lurie, who challenges traditional views by claiming that '[...] men fear women, not because women are castrated but because they are *not* castrated [...] woman is physically whole, intact and in possession of all her sexual powers' (intro 6).

⁵⁰ Poe alludes to the myth of the transformation of the "Valley of the Children of Hinnon" into the nightmarish "Gehenna", which '[...] is usually now translated H E L L [...]' (Hobbes, 313).

⁵¹ Barbara Creed suggests these archetypal roles women are meant to occupy (apart from the above mentioned also the amoral primeval mother, the woman as beautiful but deadly killer, the aged psychopath, the monstrous girl-boy, the non-human animal, the woman as the deadly *femme castratrice*) to have '[...] evolved from images that haunted the dreams, myths and artistic practices of our forebears many centuries ago. The female monster, or monstrous-feminine, wears many faces [...]' (intro 1).

As much as the presence of an antagonistic force is necessary for the perpetuation of the Symbolic⁵², it is the same preternatural, truly “monstrous” powers that ultimately bar Morella from a safe existence within the Symbolic Order, the foundations of which she attempts to shake. Her sickness and especially her pregnancy allow her to be casted into the role of the abject, and thus be repelled by her husband once and for all. Her exclusion from the Symbolic Order is vital for him in order not to lose his position and to secure the hierarchical order Morella-as-abject has managed – at least temporarily – to ‘[...] subvert, shock and disorganize [...] from within’ (Berressem 29).

Basically, Morella can be classified as abject in so far as she continuously disrespects borders⁵³; she is both heavenly and devilish, sublime and uncanny, gentle and dangerously authoritative⁵⁴. This infuriating indeterminacy is conventionally allotted to woman’s very nature as both angel and monster; thus, the twin sisters (here embodied by Eleonora and Morella) have melted into a single, though incoherent image. Morella has not replaced and devoured Eleonora, but literally become one with her: ‘[...] the monster may not only be concealed *behind* the angel, she may actually turn out to reside *within* (or in the lower half of) the angel’ (Gilbert and Gubar 29, emphasis in the original). Judging by this quote, it is again female sexuality – to be more precise, the female genitals – that evoke existential angst in men. Finally this may as well account for Eleonora’s angelic halo that has in her ‘[...] alienation from ordinary fleshly life [...]’ (Gilbert and Gubar 24) never been dirtied by sexual desires or worse, encounters. Morella incessantly oscillates between these above outlined states of being, alternately showing one of her many faces, never taking up a secure position; thereby driving her husband to the brink of madness. Her metaphorical rebirth as madwoman seems only too justified as the constant sexual repression and damnation to half-presences or absences women had to endure necessarily had to find an outlet. Progressing from the

⁵² ‘[...] fiction depended on bringing forth some monstrous woman to punish and then banish from the text [...]’ (N. Armstrong 165).

⁵³ Creed maintains that ‘[...] that which crosses or threatens to cross the ‘border’ is abject [...] the border is between the normal and the supernatural, good and evil [...] or the monstrous is produced at the border which separates those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not’ (11). Although her analysis refers to gender roles in horror films, the elaboration can as well be applied to Poe’s tale, due to its rootedness within the Gothic (horror) genre.

⁵⁴ Gargano continuously refers to Morella as a being that fluctuates between diametrically opposed states: he calls her ‘[...] an agent of an eternal will’ (259), a ‘[...] celestial and fatal spirit [...]’ (260), a ‘[...] gentle temptress [...]’ (261), ‘[...] both victim and siren [...]’ (264), and finally states that ‘[...] Morella’s affiliation with the divine is shown by her willingness to forgive the man who cannot love her’ (264).

margins of the socially acceptable, Morella's fashioning as monster testifies to a loss of identity, gender roles and finally to a loss of categories witnessed at the end of the poem, which can be interpreted as potentially progressive.

Secondly, Barbara Creed argues that '[...] when woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions' (7), which to a certain extent holds true for Morella⁵⁵. Though her pregnancy does not deserve any mentioning until childbirth has taken place, it is this very scene that most intensively associates her with the monstrous womb, the primal mother, the very source of man's existential angst. The deathbed scene again witnesses a reversal of binary oppositions as the man becomes the passive spectator, reporting Morella's decay with almost pathological interest in minute detail (Lubbers 39). Morella as incarnation of the abject body is both grotesque and threatening in that her body has considerably changed its shape and thereby disputed the notion of the '[...] clean, disciplined body that respects borders' (Gear 322). The horror experienced by the narrator can most necessarily be traced back to the act of birth itself, and the bodily fluids that come with it, since these phenomena prove to be far beyond his control⁵⁶. Elizabeth Grosz supposes male fears of fluidity as grounding in

[...] the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside [...] They [bodily fluids] attest to a certain irreducible "dirt" or disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body [...] They resist the determination that marks solids, for they are without any shape or form of their own [...] Body fluids flow, they seep, they infiltrate; their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed. *Bodies* 193-94.

In a similar manner, Poe's narrator is obviously unable to deal with the '[...] revulsion and curiosity [...]' (Gear 326) aroused by the sensational transformation; he cannot reasonably grasp, let alone explain, what is going on at the moment as the spectacle he reluctantly witnesses '[...] def[ies] common language; like the abject, [it] exist[s] at the place where meaning collapses' (Gear 326). Morella's body, particularly in its state of

⁵⁵ 'Birthing is perhaps the most terrible abjection of all, as a feminine body produces amid blood and amniotic fluid a child connected to its mother via the umbilical cord' (Kilker 58), a connection as unfathomable as irretrievably denied to men and children. Creed elaborates on the hypothesis of why men need to dissociate themselves so strongly from the act of birthing: 'Her [the woman's] ability to give birth links her directly to the animal world and to the great cycle of birth, decay and death. Awareness of his links to nature reminds man of his mortality and of the fragility of the symbolic order' (47).

⁵⁶ 'The womb represents the utmost in abjection for it contains a new life form which will pass from inside to outside bringing with it traces of its contamination – blood, afterbirth, faeces' (Creed 49).

pregnancy, latently hints to the “grotesque”, and therefore becomes a ‘[...] central source of abjection’ (Creed 49). Putting Morella in the subsidiary position of the abject, however, entails the ‘[...] activity of exclusion [...]’ (Creed 9) crucial for ensuring the stable perpetuation of the Symbolic Order⁵⁷. After having given birth to a daughter, that is, figuratively having produced a ‘[...] unique blend of *fascination and horror*’ (Braidotti 81, emphasis in the original) that connects the female body to the monster, Morella becomes the ‘[...] most sickening of wastes [...] a border that has encroached upon everything’ (Kristeva *Horror* 3), the corpse. Death seems to be the only too logical consequence, seen as a punishment for the danger Morella has brought with her. As a human being, her powers had been too vast for them to be contained within the patriarchal order; as the grotesque or abject body respectively, she could be marginalised and finally expelled from the Symbolic Order. In this respect she follows a long tradition of metaphorical monsters, ranging from Spenser’s *Errour* to Shakespeare’s *Lady Macbeth* and Swift’s *Goddess Criticism* that can be traced back to the mother of all women and women-monsters, the mythology’s first outlaw and outcast, Lilith. What unites all these more or less allegorical women is the fact that it is ultimately always the body (particularly the sexed female body) that is tied to monstrosity and deformation, an ‘[e]mblem of filthy materiality [...]’ (Gilbert and Gubar 29); a dream, once become physical, fleshly and real, turning into an abyssal nightmare.

3.5. The Return of the Repressed – Eleonora’s Evasion, Morella’s Migration

Considering the factum that Hélène Cixous’ interpretation of the Lacanian Imaginary understands itself as a feminine space wherein ‘[...] all difference has been abolished’, it seems undoubtedly justified to ask whether the death of a female protagonist – be it Eleonora, Morella, Ophelia or the Lady – really signifies the complete overpowering of woman by an ever victorious, omnipotent patriarchy. Furthermore, Cixous avers that water – assuming an exceedingly symbolic character both in *Hamlet* and “The Lady of Shalott” – can be said to signify the ‘[...] feminine element *par excellence* [...]’ for it offers the ‘[...] comforting security of the mother’s womb’ (Moi *Politics* 117, emphasis in the original) and thus relates to Lacan’s notion of the unification experienced by

⁵⁷ ‘While the male body signifies form and integrity, and is clearly differentiated from the world, woman’s body possesses none of these characteristics. The mutable nature of women’s bodies is made most clear during pregnancy [...] It is woman’s fertilizable body which aligns her with nature and threatens the integrity of the patriarchal symbolic order’ (Creed 50).

mother and child. Simultaneously to signifying death as a way of melting with the primal state and pleasures of the Real, water embodies life and birth, the entrance from within the semiotic womb into the symbolic existence as the '[...] bursting water sac accompanies the birth pang and announces the onset of delivery' (Seet 149). Thus it appears that water forms the backbone of existence, either violently donating or gently dissolving life. The rational conclusion of this sketch could then be that death in water provides for the regaining of the lost unity with the pre-Oedipal mother and a final attainment of the state of the Real. Prior to discussing Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott", Poe's tales "Eleonora" and "Morella" shall be reverted to. Despite their display of conventional versions of femininity, one may detect tiny gaps and contradictions inherent to the stories when applying concepts expounded by Lacan and Kristeva as epistemological lenses.

Having been unable to enter the Symbolic and to secure herself a valid subject position therein, Eleonora has withdrawn from this very order into what one could call a naturally connoted semiotic realm. Death has not predictably put an end to her existence; still, she lets her lover partake of her presence via '[...] the sounds of the swinging of the censers of the angels [...]', '[...] streams of a holy perfume [...]', '[...] indistinct murmurs [...]' and '[...] the pressing of spiritual lips upon [his] own [...]' (Poe *Eleonora* 229). These descriptions of Eleonora's protectiveness and her vigilant visits possibly entice one to reconsider the bonds that, according to Kristeva, link the chôra with the maternal body. After all, Eleonora's visits do convey a strong sense of motherly affection directed toward the left lover. As if he could not cope with the loss of his beloved and his loneliness, the protagonist's beloved wants to make sure that nothing will harm him; in particular during the dark and shady hours of the night.

Where exactly Eleonora now resides and how this condition could be imagined remains – as befits the semiotic – unspecified. Thus, Eleonora's supernatural elusiveness has increased considerably, she is '[...] not an object of passion but the angelic spirit whom first he knew [...]' (Wilbur 139). Presumably, Eleonora has moved from physical existence into a subject-object-continuum conceived of as one of the chôra's "characteristics". On the one hand, Eleonora can be said to be her own master now – a subject that decides to move between the spheres; yet on the other hand, she is still the "object" of her lover's desire.

Truly, it is the man who benefits most from the current situation, however miserable his lot may seem to him. After having been rewarded with nocturnal visits, metaphysical manifestations of Eleonora's anxiously watchful soul, the narrator is able to experience the gift of love once again. While Eleonora is no more than a memory, Ermengarde appears as a physical, sexed body; and in marrying her, the narrator can experience the sexual fulfillment that was denied to him in his previous relationship. One could even argue in Freudian terms that the character Ermengarde functions as a materialization of the narrator's repressed sexuality. Beheld from this angle, Ermengarde is not a serious, round character, but merely a narrative device providing for the hero's psychological recovery. Anyway, it becomes obvious that he egoistically clings to the pleasure principle; seeking joy in wedlock and ignoring the sincere vows he had given to his dead love. He attempts to attain satisfaction by giving and taking love; furthermore, he seeks to experience happiness through the love of beauty (Freud *Unbehagen* 114). This pursuit of aestheticism may well compensate for his loneliness, but does not provide safety against potential sufferings – for instance, he may be punished for breaching his oath. However, it is Eleonora who grants a happy ending by liberating her lover from the promises given in the Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass. Thus one is enticed to conclude that Eleonora has found her inner peace, the fulfillment of the long lost pre-oedipal unity in death and is now able to altruistically release her beloved.

Another interpretation holds that Eleonora's soul has transmigrated into the body of Ermengarde; considering the substantial similarities shared by the two women. Adhering to this version, one could further argue that Eleonora has not been defeated by death at all, but has been rewarded for her exceptionally mature decision and given a second chance to find completion. Either way, one is forced to grant Eleonora at least a tiny quantum of the notion concerning the powers of death expounded by Gilbert and Gubar. Although still more angelic than in her lifetime because probably residing in Heaven, Eleonora may have found a way to defy death by either visiting her lover or being reborn in the shape of Ermengarde. The logical conclusion then seems to be that no woman is fully angelic; that every girl – however modest, pure and polite she may be – does offer at least a glimpse of cunning when it is least expected.

Despite having conceded certain powers to the helplessly fragile maiden Eleonora, I do not attempt to read the tale's ending as a predominantly positive one.

Admittedly, Eleonora's death maintains its ambiguous notions. Not really defeated because having either matured in Heaven or returned to her lover, Eleonora still cannot defy the Symbolic Order. At the end of the day, she is still more purpose than person, more scheme than subject; first having been placed within a narrowly framed role, then elevated to a superior entity granting the hero's happy ending, which is to be enjoyed without a whiff of guilt.

Notwithstanding their intently framed roles as archetypal antipodes of angel and demon, Morella and Eleonora do share a common feature, namely that death has not put an end to their existence. Morella's return either testifies to an instance of metempsychosis, her soul having transmigrated into the body of her daughter, or – as has been suggested by relying on popular Gothic motifs – alludes to vampirism, whereby the mother feeds upon the daughter.

Another attempt to unveil the mystery surrounding Morella's existence draws upon the metaphysical-transcendentalist components and superstitions (Poe *Morella Collected Works* 221) prevalent in the story. Beheld from a philosophical angle, Poe's tale revolves around the '[...] *principium individuationis*, the notion of that identity which at death is or is not lost for ever [...]' (Poe *Morella* 41, emphasis in the original). In other words, the narrator truly grows obsessed with the question whether '[...] the individual identity [is] extinguished by death' (Gargano 261). Poe implicitly raises the Lockean question whether two persons can be the same person '[...] if they have the same consciousness, thinking, and personality' (McCarthy 150). Thus it seems fairly predictable that following this restlessly truth-seeking elaboration, a rebirth or return from the dead has to take place. This defiance of paternal laws, which has triggered her expulsion from the Symbolic, indeed bestows subversive potential upon Morella; consequently, death cannot be seen as her defeat⁵⁸. Morella initiates her husband into the world of dark magic and forbidden, mystical scripts, only to make him understand that their content is beyond his intellect. As an observably superior being, she possesses the ability to enter '[...] doors that vision and philosophy promise to open but that remain, maddeningly for him, forever locked' (Gargano 261).

Morella's immense knowledge, her comprehensive powers, her vengeful return from the dead, her unconventionally unfeminine traits as well as the psychical authority

⁵⁸ Gargano suggests that Morella '[...] cannot really die because she is Death itself' (262), an interpretation which would lend her an even greater because darker character.

she exerts as a means of controlling her husband, could all be viewed as potentially transgressive; would the narrative not ultimately fall back upon traditional patterns that reaffirm the arbitrary association of woman with mortality and nature. As Morella displays the first signs of decay, her husband interestingly explains this as a common fate destined for the weaker sex, which in turn needs to be pitied for its frailty⁵⁹. Compassion merely arouses for fear of ephemerality and mortality, as ‘[...] Morella represents to the intellect of the narrator the menace and certainty of recurring death and human insufficiency’ (Gargano 262). Morella shares with Eleonora the aspect that focuses on a fusion of nature and femininity, as her death scene inevitably bears witness to:

But one autumnal evening, when the winds lay still in heaven, Morella called me to her bedside. There was a dim mist over all the earth, and a warm glow upon the waters, and amid the rich October leaves of the forest, a rainbow from the firmament had surely fallen. Poe *Morella* 42.

The narrator conjures up a picturesque tableau loaded with clichés of rainbows and mist, as if nature already sensed the impending death of one of her daughters. Truly, the impressions one gains are warm and sensuous ones, being reminiscent of those qualities ascribed to the (feminine) semiotic/Imaginary sphere; there is even a certain cosiness or comfortability clinging to this description that recalls the enclosing warmth and security of the womb. The stillness and all encompassing peace that govern this scene suggest that Morella leaves the earth in peace with herself and her husband. Another common trope employed in this passage links the passing of the seasons with the circle of life, disguising autumn as harbinger of death. Does Morella attempt to confront the powers that be, by returning immediately in the body of her daughter? In doing so, she would irretrievably distort the natural order, and might thus be punished via the “second” death she experiences as her daughter drops dead in a horrifyingly Gothic baptismal scene.

Ultimately, it can be suspected that Morella’s death was necessary for both the husband and the Symbolic Order, since the exasperatingly perpetual indeterminacy of her character, synonymous to the fluctuating state of the semiotic *chôra* as something that cannot be labelled, offered a prospective threat to patriarchal institutions like family

⁵⁹ ‘Yet was she woman, and pined away daily. In time the crimson spot settled steadily upon the cheek, and the blue veins upon the pale forehead became prominent; and one instant my nature melted into pity [...]’ (41).

and home⁶⁰, and that, as suits the femininely coded semiotic realm, she fades from the text into the night. Like Eleonora, Morella has resisted definition, albeit more consciously than her angelic counterpart. Yet unlike Eleonora, Morella has not released her husband and oppressor from the bond that united them, but managed to wreak havoc even after her death. This truly prevents one to categorise death as defeat, since in the aftermath of Morella's demise, it becomes evident that the foundations of the orderly established paternal world have been irreversibly shaken; that Morella has laid bare fissures in the Symbolic Order that have previously been sugared over so as not to call into question the stability of this realm. Morella's policies of resistance, or should one say, confrontation – reverting to enigmatic, even cryptic language in order to defy phallogocentric language and her striving for power even after her disempowerment – shall be outlined in the chapter dealing with strategies of resistance to the Symbolic Order, wherein the tale will be assessed according to its subversive potential and the exploitation thereof.

3.6. Resisting the Symbolic Order – Madness and Enigmatic Language

The following chapter is meant to witness a move from the meta-level of analysing Poe's use of language to the level of the story itself, that is, to an analysis of the way his characters are employing language. Such an examination might indeed be indicative of the conception of the mysterious character Morella as well as of the ways in which she manages to undermine the prevalent order of things. So as to gain a deeper insight, the conversation on Morella's deathbed, her name and the ending of the story need to be subjected to linguistic scrutiny.

3.6.1. Morella as Miracle, Morella as Oracle

Prior to her death, Morella initiates the subsequent conversation:

'It is a day of days,' she said, as I approached; 'a day of all days either to live or die. It is a fair day for the sons of earth and life – ah, more fair for the daughters of heaven and death!'

[...]

'I am dying, yet shall I live.'

⁶⁰ '[...] the Oedipally defined law of the father still aims at narrative containment by preventing the emergence of alternative personal structures and repressing its subjects into conformist positions – in other words, by advancing an emphatic need for society to be recuperated into the male order of things' (Seet 142).

'Morella!'

'The days have never been when thou couldst love me – but her whom in life thou didst abhor, in death thou shalt adore.'

[...]

'Morella!' I cried, 'Morella! how knowest thou this?' Poe *Morella* 42.

What appears at the very first sight utterly disturbing about Morella's use of language is the enigmatic, if not prophetic character of her declarations. Like an oracle, she '[...]' utters uncanny prophecies [...]' (Gargano 260) about primary principles of life – as a closer verbal analysis proves, death protrudes as the leitmotif – using typical rhetoric devices such as archaisms (thou couldst, thou didst) and even rhyme (abhor – adore) so as to align herself with the semiotic, poetic realm; a pattern that has already found resonance in "Eleonora". Further, by choosing to ignore given contexts, she is entirely in control of any communication; observably, her partner of exchange does not seize the frame she has constructed. Though he does '[...] intone her name four times as if in religious response' (Gargano 260), probably with the prospect of obtaining a less unfathomable response, Morella does not adhere to prefabricated patterns of conversation and thereby persistently holds the floor. Her refusal to attend to her husband's pleas renders evident the supposition that Morella alone controls the exchange. She chooses to ignore the desperately requesting 'Morella!' by preferring to continue her sinister prophecies with which she dazzles her partner, thereby substantially increasing the halo of her obscurity. Morella remains an unsolved mystery in so far as she defines the rules for the setting, which, however, have nothing to do with systematic principles. Obviously, the way Morella utilizes language adds to the narrator's inability of understanding, and thus, possessing her. He frantically tries to get hold of some piece of her – she, however, evades him by continuously issuing prophecies he cannot possibly understand. As has already been discovered, he seems to live more in a prosaic than poetic world and therefore has no access to the higher truths Morella envisions.

On a different level, Morella can be deemed to speak as the daughter of nature by voicing ancient, albeit stereotypical, beliefs. Has Morella already internalised conventional clichés that conflate women with nature? Indeed it seems so, given that she speaks about "sons of earth and life" and in the next instant about the "daughters of heaven and death". This statement entices one to deduce that men are aligned with straight, understandable principles (earth), whereas women correlate to concepts far

more slipping and vague (heaven). Additionally, the connection with death voices men's ascription of mortality to women, an association allowing for repression of primary male fears. That Morella may truly impersonate a daughter of "heaven and death" proves to be true as she reveals herself as "[...] a "timeless entity", if not a god principle, that actualizes itself at will in time and space, echoing the words of God in the Old Testament: 'I am here' (Gargano 260). At this point doubts may justifiably arise as to whether woman is really conceptualised as man's inferior: Morella materialises as she chooses, does neither stick to rules nor petitions, and has obviously access to truths that remain withheld from mortal men.

3.6.2. The Bitch is back⁶¹

A second case of subversion latently circulates around the riddle of Morella's daughter, or, to put it other words, Morella's reborn self; about whom the following is reported: 'And she grew strangely in stature and intellect [...] Strange, indeed, was her rapid increase in bodily size, but terrible, oh! Terrible were the tumultuous thoughts which crowded upon me while watching the development of her mental being' (Poe *Morella* 43). Though tending feelings of parental love for his daughter, this affection inevitably mingles with terror as the daughter progressively assumes features that had been the wife's. Past and present blurs as the tale's mystery increases and steadily affect the father's state of mind (Ramakrishna 51-52). Morella's daughter takes on traits of the carnivalesque, grotesque body, she is literally pictured a "biological freak"⁶², the same monstrous feminine her mother had been. Suspicions emerge about the incident that might have occurred, which prompt the narrator to shut his daughter up at home. The terror evoked by the daughter can be claimed to feed upon the horror Morella has conjured up both with her body and by turning the familiar uncanny. Gradually, the house, and by association, the body of the young Morella, becomes a place of terror par

⁶¹ The slogan "The Bitch is back" is taken from Barbara Creed's elaboration on women's role as monstrous womb in horror films. The logo was used as an '[a]dvertising material [...]' for David Fincher's *Alien*³, wherein woman (Lt. Ripley) is starkly contrasted with man and therefore aligned with the alien, '[...] both 'bitches' in their respective ways' (Creed 52). In a quite similar manner, Morella, especially in her birth giving function, is suggested to share characteristic with the abject, the monstrous, and the inhuman.

⁶² 'Monsters are human beings who are born with congenital malformations of their bodily organism. They also represent the in between, the mixed, the ambivalent as implied in the ancient Greek root of the word *monsters*, *teras*, which means both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration' (Braidotti 77, emphasis in the original). It is exactly this blend of dread and fascination that the father watches the daughter with.

excellence, as '[...] the body/house is literally the body of horror, the place of the uncanny where desire is always marked by the shadowy presence of the mother' (Creed 55). While for the restlessly pondering father, home and daughter prove to be a source of constant fear and alienation, for the daughter, the home might bear traces of the Real that Morella has desperately longed for and is now able to re-experience through her daughter. Thus one might suspect that the young Morella grows up in a semiotic realm utterly defined and designed by herself⁶³, a *chôra* that the father can anxiously behold, but neither watch nor control. Categories like space and time, usually compulsory if wanting to govern chaos and assign labels to human environment, but immaterial to the *chôra*, seemingly have become irrelevant, not to say perverted, when regarding the concept of time that is not at all in line with the young Morella's physical development. Matters are difficult in terms of an ideal mother-daughter relationship, or identification with the mother-imago, since mother and daughter are palpably exactly the *same* person.

It comes little surprising that, when remembering Irigaray's views about proper names, the daughter has not been given a name yet, only been referred to as 'My child' and 'my love' (Poe *Morella* 44). Also the horrifying incident at the baptismal ceremony may be explained by referring to Irigaray's conceptions. Strangely but necessarily, it is precisely during this procedure that the narrator learns that '[t]he name, it seems, has a terrifying life of its own; only too obviously, it cannot be suppressed by rational checks, for at the baptismal fount it leaps, without his conscious volition, to the lips of the possessed father' (Gargano 260). The evident conclusion must be that Morella, as a spiritual essence, still determines the lives of her family members. Yet by endowing the child with a proper name, the umbilical cord is irreversibly severed, the first proper name, the navel, eradicated, which surfaces in a figurative death necessary to leave the Imaginary and enter the Symbolic. What can actually be seen as an initiation into society opens up the desire for the lost unity with the mother figure, which is immediately fulfilled as the daughter drops dead after having uttered the biblical 'I am here!' (Poe *Morella* 45). Hence, the father has not been able to lure the child away from the maternal body and into the realm of language; indeed, this very attempt has only provided for the ultimate fulfilment of mother and daughter and his own downfall. On the other hand, it can be argued that the young Morella has never been able to occupy a

⁶³ In fact, she is said to have '[...] received no impressions from the outward world [...]' (44).

subject position within the Symbolic Order – what in fact should have followed baptism.

Ambiguities concerning the true nature of the mother-daughter relationship will probably remain unsolved; however, it seems fairly certain that Morella has drawn benefit from her subversive powers in so far as she has managed to pervert the Symbolic Order. The protagonist's mental state at the end of the tale is all but safe. Obsessed with awfully sinister memories⁶⁴ and tormented by the necromantic happenings surrounding him, he has worn down with guilt, regret, horror and grief. Even fundamental concepts like time or place, the foundations upon which patriarchal constructions are built, fail him, he keeps '[...] no reckoning [...]' (Poe *Morella* 45) of them at all. Morella may have been defeated, but her long anticipated death comes at a high price:

[...] the stars of my fate faded from heaven, and therefore the earth grew dark, and its figures passed by me like flitting shadows, and among them all I beheld only – Morella. The winds of the firmament breathed but one sound within my ears, and the ripples upon the sea murmured evermore – Morella. Poe *Morella* 45.

Suitably, the '[...] last three sentences of the story end, incantatorily, with Morella's name' (Gargano 260), emphatically heightened by poetic phraseology. The orderly world apparently has been turned upside down (stars fall from the heaven), and Morella's spirit inhabits whatever it can appropriate to its resentful purposes. Finally, the '[...] long and bitter laugh [...]' (Poe *Morella* 45) the narrator gives as he entombs the second Morella can indeed be viewed as a sign of madness; traditionally an illness allotted to women. Assuming that the protagonist has now involuntarily acquired feminine traits further testifies to the deconstruction of clear boundaries Morella has achieved – though, admittedly, at the expense of her death. Yet paradoxically, it is only *in* death that her greatest subversive powers may unfold, as she '[...] assumes truly Gothic proportions [...]' and continues to usurp the Symbolic Order '[...] not as a material body [...] but as a psychological one' (N. Armstrong 183). All the same, she had to pay a high price indeed; like her ancestress Lilith, Morella is '[...] locked into a vengeance [...]' (Gilbert and Gubar 35), trapped into the scheme of an archetypal monster-woman, as a punishment for keeping her integrity and subjectivity as a self-assertive individual defying patriarchal values.

⁶⁴ 'Years – years may pass away, but the memory of that epoch never' (Poe *Morella* 45).

4. Madwoman, Mermaid, Wretch – Ophelia’s Myth and Madness as Subversive Potential in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*

Having previously elaborated upon little popular heroines of Gothic literature, wrought by the pen of Edgar Allan Poe, the following chapter shall introduce one of the most popular characters of canonical literature. Ophelia, one of the first characters to fit into the type of the “madwoman”, is, similarly to Eleonora and Morella, inserted into hetero-normative categories constructed and perpetuated by the patriarchal order that she can escape but in madness where systematic norms and categories are blurred or erased. When taking a closer look, it will become evident that those categories imposed upon Ophelia and her contemporaries merely served to ‘[...] construct natural aspects of womanhood by establishing a matrix of class-specific emotional, mental and physical characteristics supposedly demonstrated by women [...]’ (Rhodes 19). That these strictly essentialist discourses ‘[...] fashion[ed] “woman” as a monolithic rather than diverse category [...]’ (Rhodes 19) may indeed account for the fact that Ophelia ultimately withdraws from the Symbolic Order wherein a safe place cannot be found for her. Ophelia is alternatively framed as obedient daughter, fallen woman, elusive nymph or dangerously seductive mermaid without ever being able to develop a healthy personality congruous with her own needs and desires. Instead, she is only ever ‘[...] serving an image, authoritative and central, of man: a woman is first and foremost a daughter/mother/wife’ (Felman 134); an image, that, when rejected, condemns the woman to suffer the fate of the “madwoman”, the one who flatly refuses to act out her role within the Symbolic Order. Thus it appears sadly inevitable that the only way to escape prefabricated roles leads into madness and death: ‘[a] therefore difficult, if not impossible, identification with the sacrificial logic of separation and syntactical sequence at the foundation of language and the social code leads to the rejection of the symbolic – lived as the rejection of the paternal function and ultimately generating psychoses’ (Kristeva *Women’s Time* 204). Only in madness, Ophelia gains the strength to pervert and distort the order that continuously seeks to categorise and label her both on a socio-linguistic and a symbolical, iconographic level. After her death, which probably constitutes the only possibility of achieving the promised state of the Real and unconditionally regaining blissful fulfilment, Ophelia’s revolutionary powers are

glossed over and almost erased as she is elevated to the position of an icon, a token of popular culture to be admired, desired and possessed.

4.1. Hamlet and Ophelia as Star-Crossed Lovers

The very first scene endowed with the physical presence of Lady Ophelia seems to reinscribe traditional gender roles both on the social as well as on a linguistic level, as Ophelia is cast into the position of the attentive listener, eagerly waiting to obtain advice from her obviously overly protective brother. Subjected to closer scrutiny, however, myths of female passivity and obedience manifest themselves only on the surface level. Indeed, it is Ophelia's brother Laertes who commands, but Ophelia herself who poses the questions⁶⁵ and thus assumes the actual position of controlling the dialogue. Hence Laertes may think of himself as the one holding the power position, but in truth it is his sister who subtly yet undoubtedly determines the course of the interaction. It can even be claimed that Ophelia radiates an unusually strongly developed self-confidence and unwomanly bravery as she asks her brother whether her faithfulness and obedience to him can be questioned. Laertes warns her, admittedly in a predictably hypocritical fashion⁶⁶, not to tend and foster any susceptibilities to Hamlet's flatteries, since these are purely of a voluptuously ephemeral nature. Ophelia challenges this view, sweetly disguising the cunning of her laconic attire. As a response, Laertes firmly sticks to the sermonic tone of his lecture, quoting instances testifying to the worth of chastity. Scrutinising Ophelia's retort renders obvious that she is not the naive, sweet dove one might have supposed her to be. Quite wisely, she promises to obey, but demands her brother to stick to his principles himself, faintly hinting to a possible pursuit of worldly pleasures on Laertes' behalf. Allegedly ashamed of his sister's knowledge, Laertes abruptly changes the topic, thereby straying from the course of the interaction by pointing out that he is already late. This unexpected twist, apparent on a socio-linguistic level, casts Ophelia in the power position as she is equipped with secret knowledge that Laertes cannot refute. Still, Laertes as the man is fully in command of any situation and severely determines to avoid the highly delicate subject his sister has timidly touched upon.

⁶⁵ 'Do you doubt that?' (Shakespeare 1.3 4), 'No more but so?' (Shakespeare 1.3 9)

⁶⁶ 'Of course Laertes' advice is shallow; he seemingly judges Hamlet to be a man like himself. And Ophelia is perceptively aware of his shallowness as she reminds him in sisterly fashion to heed his own warnings [...]' (Camden 248).

The tiny amount of subversive power Ophelia has wielded is immediately snatched away from her as Polonius, undeniably superior to both his children and representative of the institution of patriarchy, enters the stage. Again, Ophelia utters a small clue directed towards her brother as she is repeatedly cautioned by him, but her innuendo remains without comment as Laertes disappears with a simple 'Farewell' (Shakespeare 1.3 87). Polonius unsurprisingly reaffirms his advanced position by assuming the floor, forcing Ophelia to reply honestly to all his questions. Immediately, he considerably diminishes his daughter's agency by pointing to her youthful inexperience⁶⁷ that might all too easily be exploited. Although it can be assumed that Hamlet's affection is sincere, and that Ophelia returns the tenderly burgeoning feelings, she is discouraged by her father and even ordered to stay away from Hamlet, who is bluntly accused of solely wanting to steal her virginity. Disillusioned and disappointed, Ophelia agrees to do so, thereby unwillingly entering on the fatal course drawn by patriarchal authorities denying her access to the Symbolic Order she may have glimpsed during the interaction with Laertes when smoothly handling systematic principles of a predominantly paternal language. Simultaneously, Ophelia's tenderly awakening sexuality is harshly repressed, until the seething energy can no longer be contained and breaks through with catalytic force at the expense of Ophelia's sanity.

Ophelia's second appearance proves that Laertes' and Polonius' worldly-wise cautioning have gathered momentum, as a terrified Ophelia enters Polonius' chamber to report some significantly disturbing off-stage action. According to her, Hamlet has entered her closet, bewildered and seemingly mad in looks and manner, frightening poor Ophelia out of her wits. Polonius insistently convinces his daughter that Hamlet has come "mad for her love" and contributes to her belief that '[...] she is the cause of Hamlet's madness' (Camden 248), probably oblivious to the tragic irony that his indications seem '[...] to bring about Hamlet's pretended madness but actually [contribute] to Ophelia's real madness' (Camden 249). If only cautiously, it can be suspected that the fatal games played at Elsinore indeed gravely shake Ophelia's world views, causing serious detriment to her unstable because still innocent character. Truly, it must appear as a ruthlessly mocking blow of fate to Ophelia that the steps she has taken in order to keep her integrity and value have, according to her father's words,

⁶⁷ 'You speak like a green girl / Unsifted in such perilous circumstance' (Shakespeare 1.3 101-2), 'Marry, I will teach you [...]' (Shakespeare 1.3 105).

driven Hamlet mad. To her father's question, whether she has followed his commands, Ophelia answers in the affirmative, only to obtain the awful diagnosis, 'That hath made him mad' (Shakespeare 2.1 107). As the scene draws to a close, Polonius is determined to confront the King with the '[...] very cause of Hamlet's lunacy' (Shakespeare 2.2 49).

As it appears, Ophelia is inserted into a pre-fabricated role of the ideal Lady, generated as a hetero-normative, all-encompassing category by patriarchy, as much as she is led into internalising the constructions she is made to embody. Recognition of the perverse inappropriateness of these models will only come to her too late; when she has already been driven over the brink of sanity into a realm that witnesses the complete rejection of any morals and norms.

The metamorphosis Ophelia has undergone since her first appearance attains completion as Ophelia is finally transformed into a mere puppet, a shallow character in the power struggle of Denmark's aristocracy in the third scene. Finally believing that '[...] she herself is the immediate source of Hamlet's madness' (Camden 249), distressed Ophelia has been successfully introduced to the '[...] bittersweet delights of love' (Camden 247). Apparently having lost the wittiness she still possessed when conversing with her brother, Ophelia most humbly agrees to the instructions given by King, Queen and Polonius, as yet unaware of her impending doom.

As has been hinted to in the previous paragraph, the third scene witnesses the elevation of Ophelia to the '[...] status of a cult figure [...]' as well as the degradation to a highly stylised image of Victorian womanhood, '[...] appropriated in popular culture to such an extent that she has become a cliché' (Solomon Kiefer 11). Far from being the devout yet smart sister and daughter, Ophelia becomes subsumed in the web of intrigues that is being woven around her, which is soon to assume the archetypal form of the well-loved '[...] sentimental tale of a victim, young and beautiful' (Solomon Kiefer 11) wherein she is protagonist without agency.

Pawn to father, King and Queen, Ophelia is systematically fashioned as a decoy, meant to lure Hamlet so that the reasons of his alleged madness might become evident. Treating her exactly like the "green girl" Polonius has called his daughter before, he keeps giving orders, 'Ophelia, walk you here – Gracious, so please you [...]' (Shakespeare 3.1 43). Thus, Ophelia is aestheticised and framed by authority, bestowed with signifiers targeted towards Hamlet in an overtly symbolical language he is supposed to decipher the way it has been encoded for him. Much as Ophelia has been

‘[...] deliberately [fashioned] [...] into an image [...]’ (Gellert Lyons 60), Hamlet is supposed to “read” the two-dimensional text before him and fulfil the script Polonius has in mind. Equipping Ophelia with a book, Polonius draws upon a thoroughly reputable system of ‘[...] established significances [...]’, thereby presupposing ‘[...] knowledge of traditional visual symbols’ (Gellert Lyons 61) on the behalf of Hamlet. Gradually, Ophelia’s transformation into a prop, a narrative symbolical device and her fashioning into an enigmatic icon takes place. Her insertion into traditionally available Victorian gender roles seems to be a successful one: a passively obedient character in the beginning, she frightfully develops into the mother of madwomen as soon as she struggles with the role of the fairer sex she has been allotted. Correspondingly, one could argue that on the one hand, this transformation into an emblematic character completely expels her from the orderly system of the court alias the Symbolic Order, but on the other hand offers her – via death by drowning –the opportunity of finally attaining the Real.

Unfortunately, Polonius appears to miss the tragic irony of his own game; his instructions to stay away from Hamlet, then tempt but reject him anew, further aggravate the already disordered state of mind of the love-sick Ophelia. Carroll Camden argues that Ophelia’s fate has been misinterpreted by a vast number of critics posing Polonius’ death as the reason for her madness. Instead, she focuses on the star-crossed love story between Hamlet and Ophelia that breaks Ophelia’s heart and eventually causes her to run mad (247-8). Beheld from a psychoanalytical angle, one should not forget about Ophelia’s repressed sexuality, the libidinous energy that inevitably must sooner or later find an outlet.

Ophelia herself expresses her despair at the unjust rejection and cruel treatment she receives from Hamlet in the famous nunnery-scene. Following Hamlet’s soliloquy, Ophelia enters the stage to pity and ponder about Hamlet’s indeed disturbingly bizarre thoughts and actions. As Hamlet repeatedly repels her and even denies the love she thinks he has tended – and still tends – for her, Ophelia is moved to desperate outcries, ‘O, help him, you sweet heavens!’ (Shakespeare 3.1 132), ‘Heavenly powers, restore him!’ (Shakespeare 3.1 140). After Hamlet’s impolite exit, Ophelia adumbrates her most deplorable situation in a soliloquy wherein she characterises herself as a lady ‘[...] most deject and wretched’ (Shakespeare 3.1 154). Even more so, she believes to be the reason for his madness and bemoans her naivety leading her to respond positively to

Hamlet's supposedly fake flatteries. The bawdy language and openly sexual offers Hamlet directs towards Ophelia in subsequent scenes⁶⁸ certainly do not miss their target. Though Ophelia keeps as calm as she ought to, it might be suspected that his behaviour fits with the image Laertes and Polonius have evoked in Ophelia's mind. Already the next important scene featuring Ophelia testifies to the transformation in character she has undergone. In madness, the repressed material breaks through, prompting Ophelia to regain – or reassume – the power that has ever been hidden and kept from her. Unabashedly, Ophelia voices in vulgar language the ugly truths concealed beneath the preppy surface of Elsinore, thus distressing the entire court as well as her brother as she freely breaks with norms and conventions characteristic of the Symbolic Order.

4.2. Suffering the Female Malady

While certain concessions can truly be made to the claim that with Ophelia, one voyeuristically witnesses the corruption of '[...] a spotless creature made salaciously attractive through her exposure to lewdness and obscenity' (Morris 603); that is to say, the audience might experience a somewhat satisfactorily delight in seeing an innocent young maiden going wild, I attempt to issue the claim that one should not underestimate the strength Ophelia gains in her madness. In this respect I want to point to Carol Solomon Kiefer, who refers to feminist and psychoanalytical epistemological lenses, which, when applied to the case of Ophelia, shed an entirely new light on this eternally puzzling Shakespearean character: 'Once seen only as a pathetic, innocent, submissive, and dutiful daughter, sister, and lover, Ophelia is now also perceived as a figure of strength, a heroine whose madness is seen as an assertion of self, an act of rebellion against patriarchal control' (12). Hence the assertion that the delicately drawn character of Ophelia does not only serve as a '[...] document in madness [...]' (Shakespeare 4.5 176), but also as a powerful role model, shall be forwarded and elaborated upon.

One of the most prominent changes – and within the scope of this paper also one of the most crucial features – to be observed in Ophelia's behaviour as "madwoman" is her ingeniously defiant refusal of norms and conventions as regards patriarchal language in particular and socio-linguistic behaviour on a more general level. Having

⁶⁸ 'Lady, shall I lie in your lap?' (Shakespeare 3.2 114), 'That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs' (Shakespeare 3.2 119), 'It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge' (Shakespeare 3.2 247)

previously been locked into conventionally established and generally accepted mechanisms of speech and behaviour and having used phrases provided by a pool of readily available phallogocentric tokens of speech⁶⁹, Ophelia moves beyond the borders of what is socially acceptable – and notably, acceptable in women – by retreating to the stage of ‘[...] semiotic babble [...]’ prior to meaning and sign, (Showalter 157), a realm governed by the nonsensical, yet exceedingly symbolical aspect of language resisting concretely shaped definition. Ophelia’s withdrawal to this pre-oedipal stage constitutes her utmost potency as well as her greatest weakness in so far as she subverts the patriarchal order by flatly rejecting the Name of the Father, that is, phallogocentric language (Showalter 157), but nonetheless fails to secure herself a stable position within the court as representative of the Symbolic Order. Ironically, it is exactly her revolutionary force setting her apart from the rest of the mendacious cast that ultimately expels her from the stage into the pseudo-mythical feminine realm of romantically distorted watery death. So basically, her rejection of the patriarchal system on an unconscious level openly manifests itself as the rejection of paternal language (Showalter 157) that can in her insanity no longer be controlled or indeed hidden away.

Prior to Ophelia’s appearance in the fourth act, her immodest and highly unusual behaviour following her father’s death is announced by a Gentleman, giving account of what was to be believed constituted the signs of madness: ‘She speaks much of her father, says she hears / There’s tricks i’th’world, and hems, and beats her heart, / Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt / That carry but half sense’ (Shakespeare 4.5 4-7). Judging by the report of the Gentleman, a wholly new way of envisioning the madman was gradually gathering shape as ‘[...] disturbing images of wild, dark, naked men [were] replaced by poetic, artistic, and theatrical images of a youthful, beautiful female insanity’ (Showalter 10). As it seems, insanity no longer solely denoted the immensely sinister, fearful aspect of the deeply enigmatic human psyche, but could as well signify frail, feminine beauty, as awesome as it was pitiful. Along with this went an increasing correlation of madness and femininity that saw the ‘[...] madwoman as the victim of parental tyranny and male oppression [...]’ (Showalter 10), much as Ophelia has fallen prey to the power plays enacted in Elsinore. By the same token, this female irrationality and hysteria, supposed to lay the foundations for female insanity,

⁶⁹ ‘Madam, I wish it may’ (Shakespeare 3.1 42), ‘How does your honour for this many a day?’ (Shakespeare 3.1 91), ‘No, my lord’ (Shakespeare 3.2 114), ‘Ay, my lord’ (Shakespeare 3.2 116)

designated an '[...] unknowable and untamable sexual force' (Showalter 10), a supposition that can justifiably be applied to the case of Ophelia, who, bereft of her womanly sexuality, despairs of energy that she cannot, and must not, handle properly. That sexuality does assume a pivotal role indeed can be shown in a close analysis of Ophelia's "semiotic babble" that shall be carried out below, along with an examination of how Ophelia manages to disrupt existing power structures. In order to be able to do so, I consider it necessary to refer to theoretically defined, conventional rules of socio-linguistic behaviour that will then be contrasted with Ophelia's actual attitude towards her communication partners.

Traditionally, participants of any communication are expected to heed to a number of unwritten rules in order to show politeness and good manners; the presupposition for a successful interaction to take place is that both speakers are '[...] able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations [...], which, when subjected to closer scrutiny, '[...] provide[s] us with some insights into how more is always being communicated than is said' (Yule 112). "Politeness" in socio-linguistic behaviour is employed in the sense of respecting another person's self-image (Yule 119). When actively engaging in a conversation with one or more participants, people usually adhere to the guidelines defining the activity of turn-taking:

Typically, only one person speaks at a time and there tends to be an avoidance of silence between speaking turns [...] If more than one participant tries to talk at the same time, one of them usually stops [...] For the most part, participants wait until one speaker indicates that he or she has finished, usually by signalling a completion point' Yule 128.

Given these guidelines for co-operative behaviour in interactions, it is easy to see that Ophelia both detaches herself from the community and writes herself out of the script she is anticipated to fulfil and thus catapults herself into a position differing from the one she occupied in sanity. She employs unique rules, appropriating phrases to her own use as if her aim was '[...] to speak not only against, but outside of the specular phallogocentric structure, to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of masculine meaning' (Felman 153); a target she cannot hit satisfactorily since her audience consists of members completely subsumed by the patriarchal order. Yet by forcefully discovering ways to '[...] break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract' (Kristeva *Women's Time* 204), Ophelia

achieves to lay bare the hypocrisy governing Elsinore, if only this is expressed via cryptic truths her audience cannot access.

According to the stage directions, Ophelia enters “distracted”, posing aloud a question directed to nobody in particular. Indeed this raises the question whether she actively perceives her environment – which, when answered negatively, would completely deprive her of any agency – or whether she (unconsciously?) chooses to ignore the hegemonic group that previously withheld autonomy and agency from her. ‘Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?’⁷⁰ (Shakespeare 4.5 21), Ophelia asks unfocusedly, thereby perplexing the already alarmed listeners. Probably feigning empathy and interest, Gertrude asks Ophelia in a quite patronising fashion how she is, to which Ophelia neither listens nor responds. Instead, she starts singing a little song about true love. Enquired about the purpose of the song, whose meaning remains rather opaque to the bystanders, Ophelia answers, ‘Say you? Nay, pray you, mark’ (Shakespeare 4.5 28), which could be considered the first token of impoliteness directed towards authority as the quite informal reply does not appear to be the apt answer one should give to a Queen. Uninhibitedly, Ophelia perpetuates in her rebellious attire, even applying the imperative as she orders the Queen to listen to her without letting her finish her comment. Ophelia’s oddly bewildering songs of no immediately detectable context, largely tell of true love and the pain that comes with parting. It may be imagined that this is her fashion of coping, now publicly, with the loss of Hamlet’s love, who is now “dead” to her (Camden 251), mingled with instances of grief over the loss of her father, who is indeed physically “dead”. One of her last lines before the King enters the conversation, ‘Larded all with sweet flowers’ (Shakespeare 4.5 36), foreshadows her own death she will experience garlanded with flowers. Even the King fails to receive the amount of respect his position would naturally grant him; almost repeating his wife’s question, he is scarcely noticed as Ophelia ‘[...] responds to his greeting in the conventional fashion [...]’ (Camden 251); a formulaic greeting that could be addressed

⁷⁰ Ophelia’s question truly underscores Carroll Camden’s argument that not Polonius, but the unhappy love-story between Ophelia and Hamlet serves as the actual source for Ophelia’s madness: ‘Surely she is not talking of her father here, since the words fit neither what we know of Polonius nor what a girl would say of a father who fails to understand her [...] Rather it is to Hamlet that her words apply [...] Hamlet, then, is the “beauteous majesty”; it is upon Hamlet that her mind in its madness dwells’ (250). Though I must admit that part of Camden’s argument is explained in a more commonsensical than academic fashion (Camden merely imagines what an adolescent girl would do, which is not likely to suggest expertise) and thus cannot be fully trusted, I would agree with the supposition that Ophelia might refer to Hamlet when giving clues about love and sexual innuendos as there are no signs of a possible Oedipal complex discernible.

to anyone. Following the King's question, Ophelia starts her "semiotic babble", stringing together random sentences that seems to be located at '[...] the limits of the symbolic order [...]' (Barzilai *Lacan* 229) in a colourful jumble neither King nor Queen might entangle. As her language slowly eludes the systematically mapped realm of phallogocentric language, Ophelia truly must appear "mad" to King and Queen who fail to make sense of pre-Symbolic articulation. Although her deliberate juxtaposition of sentences and phrases does not fit any readily available meanings, one could maintain that her statement 'Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be' (Shakespeare 4.5 41) in fact disguises a lambasting critique of the prevailing circumstances in Denmark. Probably, Ophelia laments the fact that amongst others, King and Queen engage in hypocritical games in order to deceive those around them, as yet unaware of the damage they are about to wreak. As Ophelia and her speech remain shrouded in mystery, this is only one of several potential interpretations. What indeed can be assumed with confidence is the fact that Ophelia's alleged disobedience testifies to a retreat into the Imaginary, that is, into a psychological state '[...] before the fear of castration produces a superego submissive to the interdiction imposed by the father' (Barzilai *Lacan* 234).

As the King derides Ophelia's madness as mere '[c]onceit upon her father' (Shakespeare 4.5 43), (and by doing so, also excuses her immodest behaviour), he assumes the position of the '[...] contractor who builds meanings out of disparate, "empty" elements' in order to '[...] repair the paternal function [...]' and '[introduce] a sequential, relational logic into a discourse that is marked by discontinuity and fragmentation [...]' (Barzilai *Lacan* 239). Representing the institution of patriarchy, he '[...] pronounces [his] expert, professional discourse, without even noticing the conspicuousness of [his] flagrant misogyny' (Felman 141). And notice it he need not, for he represents the head of the hierarchy at Elsinore, holding the power to decide about right and wrong. In fact, however, he must not admit that he, too, fails to "read" Ophelia, and thus all too easily assigns to her the female malady because ultimately, '[m]adness and women, however, turn out to be the two outcasts of the establishment of readability' (Felman 142). His interpretation is proven fruitless as Ophelia cuts short on him to start singing one of her bawdy songs about illicit sexual love, '[...] the effect of which underlines strongly the chief cause of her madness' (Camden 251). Basically, the coarse verse she is citing tells the unlucky tale of a young maiden, who, having given

herself to the man she loves, is rejected by him for the reason that she has given up her virginity so easily. Hidden beneath the surface of the bluntly sexual, plainly one-dimensional song is a thoroughly reflected piece of social criticism questioning the unequal footing of men and women. Focus of the little tale is the still hotly debated topic about the inherently different sexuality of men and women, which forms the basis for the idea that the man is allowed to engage in sexual intercourse without having to fear that his reputation might get damaged, whereas for women, doing the same entails being equated with fallen women. In one of the previous chapters I was referring to Dale Spender and her elaboration on this dilemma, who deduces that an asymmetry, whereby the man is seen as potent, while the woman becomes a bitch in public opinion, has been enhanced as a result of man being in charge of language. As it seems, this debate has been as relevant in the seventeenth century as it is nowadays, which truly entices one to ask whether an erasure of the perceived differences between the sexes will ever be possible. But since it is neither my task nor my ambition to solve this eternal struggle, it better be noticed how sensitive Ophelia appears to have been to questions of gender and agency. That she sympathises with the woman who has lost her virtue and thus probably her only chance to find happiness in marriage, can be assumed with fair certainty as Ophelia cites, ‘Young men will do’t, if they come to’t, / By Cock, they are to blame’ (Shakespeare 4.5 58-59). Little surprisingly, Ophelia’s bawdy language prompts the King’s outcry, ‘Pretty Ophelia!’ (Shakespeare 4.5 54), as he is utterly astonished to hear such crude language coming from the mouth of a Lady. Overpowered by Ophelia’s newly acquired revolutionary strength, ‘[he] does not succeed in halting the heroine’s bawdy ballad [...]’ (Rhodes 17), neither is it possible for him to silence the unruly lady and recreate her in his own vision as a virginal, sentimental and submissive maiden. The only reaction his appalled remark triggers is Ophelia’s obscure because ambiguous promise that she will make an end on it (Shakespeare 4.5 55); which can be read as an appeasing assurance that she will stop voicing unwanted truths in order to end his distress, or as a sinister prophecy that she will no longer face the falseness and pretence of Denmark’s court, choosing death as the only acceptable alternative. Before retreating, Ophelia gives a last speech wherein she thanks her audience for their counsel (is she indeed not in command of her own speech or mocking her audience?) and bemoans her father’s death – which provides Claudius with sufficient reason to presume that this might have brought about her madness.

However, when thinking of the lyrics Ophelia had been reciting before, it seems much more likable that '[t]hese coarse and uninhibited lines are the sort which might unconsciously and naturally float to the top of Ophelia's muddled mind if her thoughts had been dwelling on Hamlet's love and on possible marriage to him' (Camden 252), a door that has been closed to her as it has been for the tale's maiden – if only for a different reason. Support for this daring, yet in Freudian terms only too understandable argument can be found in Morris, who states that '[t]here can be little doubt that a partial cause [for Ophelia's insanity] is the death of her father [...] but the major cause must be laid to her loss of Hamlet, which she refers to [...] in terms of the loss of the delights of physical love' (601). Thus Ophelia might have unconsciously chosen this song processing the awful fate of a lovesick maiden because she herself is '[...] frustrated in her love for Hamlet and in its physical fulfillment' (Morris 601), or to be more precise, the impossibility of the fulfilment she seeks.

As Ophelia re-enters, she is already awaited by Laertes, who, immediately after his arrival, has been informed of his father's death and his sister's madness. Before actually catching a glimpse of his sister, Laertes, deeply distressed and taken, utters some enigmatically encoded higher truths about the nature of love, which again establishes a latent bond between Hamlet and Ophelia. Ophelia continues in singing nonsensical songs underscoring her madness as they contain bits and pieces reminiscent both of a pre-symbolical babble devoid of orderly, definite meaning as in patriarchal language⁷¹ and children's rhymes, which additionally infantilises Ophelia in her madness and thus seems to snatch power away from her; some lines of which clearly revolve around her father's death⁷², while others seem to be directed towards Hamlet⁷³ or no one in particular at all⁷⁴. Uttering infantile tokens of speech, Ophelia openly voices her wish to retreat into a stage defying the Symbolic Order, or even unconsciously declares her already ongoing withdrawal. This supposition is more closely explained by Barzilai, who maintains that '[i]n such regressive states, the unstable ego tends to produce echolalia – that is, an echoing infantile discourse' (*Lacan* 238).

⁷¹ 'Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny' (Shakespeare 4.5 163)

⁷² 'They bore him barefaced on the bier [...] And in his grave rained many a tear' (Shakespeare 4.5 162; 164), 'His beard was as white as snow / All flaxen was his poll / He is gone, he is gone [...]' (Shakespeare 4.5 192-94)

⁷³ 'Fare you well, my dove!' (Shakespeare 4.5 165)

⁷⁴ 'You must sing: 'A-down a-down' / and you: 'Call him adown-a.' / O, how the wheel becomes it! / It is the false steward that stole his master's daughter' (Shakespeare 4.5 168-171)

Ophelia then starts with one of her most meaningful deeds, the distribution of flowers; symbolically charged in so far as every item is '[...] inserted into a sort of chain of continuous references to other units [...]' (Eco, 66). Indeed, it needs to be registered with care how sensitively and thoughtfully Ophelia handles this self-constructed task; the deeper insight she must have gained equips her with profound knowledge about human nature and its fallacies which are to be unveiled as Ophelia allots flowers highly charged with symbolical and socio-historical meaning to the right person. With an astonishingly calm clarity that has been missing – at least to her audience – beforehand, Ophelia supplies Laertes, Claudius and Gertrude with specifically chosen plants that often carry an ambiguous meaning pivotal to the character and the masquerade that is being enacted. Choosing her brother as the first to receive her gifts, Ophelia explains, 'There's rosemary, that's for remembrance - / pray you, love, remember - / and there is pansies, that's for thoughts' (Shakespeare 4.5 173-75), which Laertes instantly and falsely disdains as being the product of a disordered mind. Only outwardly oblivious to the actual meaning of the flowers being handed out, Laertes does not lay great stress to his sister's words; however, in Shakespearean times it should have been widely known that Ophelia's herbs and flowers can also be read as a '[...] shocking enumeration of well-known abortifacients and emmenagogues'⁷⁵ (Newman 227). Thus it can be supposed that Ophelia's audience is appalled by her openness and chooses to disguise her action as an instance of insanity. Newman does not wish to suggest here that Ophelia might have used or even needed those plants; in fact, she merely seeks to unravel the hidden, surprising dimension to the act of flower distribution (Newman 227). It is noted of rosemary that it was used for abortion, as were fennel, rue and violets, which will be distributed by Ophelia only instances later (Newman 229-30). A riddle that remains as yet unsolved is the occurrence of remembrance and thoughts that Ophelia hints to; what exactly shall be remembered, one is tempted to ask? Is she referring back to the conversation led prior to Laertes' departure, when she cautioned him to take heed of his own warnings? Or is she talking about the future she has some darkly secret access to, already knowing that she will be dead and gone then, and simply asks him to remember her? In combination with

⁷⁵ 'These particular herbs were thought to act as emmenagogues, i.e., in the terms used in Elizabethan England, substances taken by mouth as tea or tisan, or applied locally with massage to induce menstruation [...] or as abortifacients, substances used similarly to provoke abortion. Then, as now, there is a fine line between starting a potentially missed menstrual period and avoiding an unwanted or inappropriate pregnancy, and the same substances were often used for both purposes' (Newman 228).

“thoughts”, one might suspect that probably, Ophelia demands of Laertes to be more thoughtful when it comes to women in the future. But since Ophelia seems to voice higher truths, or freely combines the semiotic material that works its way from the unconscious to the surface, a definite interpretation can never be reached. Things are less ambivalent in the following cases: to Claudius, Ophelia hands fennel and columbines (as has been explained before, fennel was known for its abortive function; in this case, it can be suggested that Ophelia rather hints to the double nature of the herb as corresponding to Claudius’ duplicitous games), for Gertrude and herself, she chooses rue. Significant at this point is Ophelia’s remark, ‘O, you must wear your rue with a difference’ (Shakespeare 4.5 180), since the rue was also called the ‘[...] chaste herb’, and ‘[...] known for its characteristic of suppressing desire’ (Newman 231). Thus it follows that Ophelia unashamedly – or probably she is unconsciously taking revenge? – exposes Gertrude for her inappropriate desire for Claudius, recommending that she take the chaste herb in order to have these illegitimately bawdy desires repressed. Turning again to her brother Laertes, Ophelia furnishes him with a daisy, an action that goes without a comment. Conventionally, the daisy is known to represent the Sun as well as the virtues innocence and virginity, and is said to ‘[...] adorn[s] the lawns of Paradise’ (de Vries 127); a realm that Ophelia possibly wishes to enter in the near future. On an allegorical level, Ophelia’s intention may be to remind Laertes of her sincerely innocent nature, thereby erasing the possible doubts he may have entertained when taking his leave. In her warm-heartedly sisterly fashion, Ophelia may have made her point clear and does not feel like appending any further explanation. While it must be admitted that some of the flowers do carry a quite mysterious, ambiguous meaning, matters are more certain with respect to the last flower that Ophelia mentions, but, significantly, does not hand out: ‘I would give you some violets, / but they withered all when my father died’ (Shakespeare 4.5 181-82). An emblem of grief and mourning, the violet assumes a place on a metalevel uniting past, present and future as it refers back to Polonius’ death and analeptically points towards Ophelia’s own death that will be mourned by Laertes with the following words, ‘And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring!’ (Shakespeare 5.1 233), probably wishing to do his sister a last favour by remembering her words and advice.

Most certainly, Ophelia’s distribution of flowers cannot be simply explained as springing from her deranged mind; instead it should rather be proposed that this act be

read as a text, written in a profoundly symbolical, skillfully chosen language, intertwined with anger and grief at the prevailing circumstances that cannot be undone as long as the forces of the Symbolic Order are thoroughly intact. Bridget Gellert Lyons epitomizes this suggested reading as she avers, 'In the confused meanings she ascribes to her flowers in her madness, Ophelia expresses in its most extreme form the gap between an ordered world of shared symbolic meanings and the murky world of intrigue and mental disorder that exists in Denmark' (63). Ophelia instinctively may wish to bridge that gap, or even, regardless of the gross impossibility of that task, to *be* that bridge, as much as the psychotic wishes to mend the irrevocably broken world of language. That Ophelia will not be able to do so is evident as she stands in diametrical opposition to the world she has disconnected from. Withdrawing into a semiotic realm, Ophelia represents a '[...] mythical world of natural fertility and innocence [...]' that cannot possibly be reconciled with the '[...] urban or courtly world of deception and calculation' (Gellert Lyons 63). The stark contrast between these two worlds that can positively be identified as Imaginary and Symbolic Order, most strikingly surfaces in the double nature one can allot to the emblem of the flower. Essentially being products of a happily intact, pastoral environment, flowers also fit into a chain of rather worldly associations: 'picking flowers, young girls as flowers, "deflowering" [...]' (Gellert Lyons 65). Hence Ophelia may adorn herself with flowers suggestive of a halo of innocence surrounding her; however, in giving away those flowers, she metaphorically deflowers herself and thus connects herself more closely with the false, scheming world of Denmark. Ophelia's confusion as to which world to belong to, or how to reconcile this schism, shows in the confusion that governs her distribution. The analogies she attempts to forward seem out of place and broken as has been hinted to in the text above; it is never quite clear what exactly she wants to express. Admitting on the one hand that there are stable links to be established between flowers and their meanings (for instance, naming violets as symbols for grief), 'Ophelia [...] is in fact drawing attention to the confusion that such linkings can create [...]' In some instances, she does not assign any meanings to the plants she distributes, although these plants [...] can have [...] widely different meanings' (Gellert Lyons 66). Perhaps, however, it is not uncertainty or disorder that prohibits Ophelia from achieving clearly formulated interpretation; indeed it should be maintained that Ophelia intentionally refrains from expressing truths that are in harmony with the people addressed and one another in

order to highlight the incongruity between Denmark and an idyllic, intact world of orderly meaning. The duplicity dominating Elsinore is not only demonstrated via the mysterious distribution of flowers, but also surfaces in Ophelia's use of language, a topic that has been elaborated on before. By repulsing the Law of the Father, Ophelia both departs from the Symbolic Order and the world of language. As has been pointed out, her language has become disintegrated, insubstantial and illogical; pieces of bawdy and infantile speech have been blended into a dense discourse, whose effect is to '[...] reveal the fragmentation of the worlds to which she can relate imaginatively' and to manage a debasement of '[...] both courtly and country values' (Gellert Lyons 68). Ophelia's statement given immediately after the distribution, 'For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy ...' (Shakespeare 4.5 184), eventually epitomizes the long anticipated, inevitable clash between the two worlds that have been existing side by side all along. Finally, the existence of these states is affirmed as a '[...] dramatic contrast between Ophelia as the potential heroine, pure and marriageable, of romance, and the actual lust and danger of the Danish world that Laertes and Polonius, as well as Hamlet, insistently impress upon her imagination' (Gellert Lyons 69). Her seemingly "dirty mouth" does not suggest that Ophelia has become an unruly, fallen woman, but functions as an outlet for expressing '[...] emblematically the gap between the free world imagined in pastoral or comedy and the unsavory world of Denmark' (Gellert Lyons 70). Ophelia literally becomes this "doubleness" that she is unable to cope with and that will eventually tear her apart. Having cherished purity and innocence all her lifetime, Ophelia can no longer control her drives in her madness as her '[...] subconscious mind [...] finds oral expression while she is in an abnormal condition [...]' (Morris 602). It follows that Ophelia would probably never have uttered these obscenities deliberately in order to trouble the court. Another proof for the hypothesis that the lost love for Hamlet and not the death of her father has fatally influenced her mental sanity can be detected in her reference to bonny sweet Robin, which Morris identifies as '[...] one of the cant terms for the male sex organ' (601). This unmistakably phallic allusion that Ophelia gives so freely verifies that Ophelia must have truly loved Hamlet, and, as a natural consequence, must as well have desired him physically; moreover, her bawdy remarks '[...] imply that her suppressed desires were so strong that they helped to force her over the brink of sanity' (Morris 602). To make his point irretrievably clear, Morris ends his article on the argument that '[t]he only conclusion that can be deduced [...] is that [...]

Shakespeare provides a clue to part of Ophelia's malady: sexual frustration' (603), hence opening up the play to the possibility of a Freudian reading. Beholding Ophelia's case from this angle, one might imagine that Ophelia was unable to cope with her illicit desires and thus suppressed the awkwardly inappropriate material. As Ophelia must have been unable to come to terms with her sexuality – possibly because she was not expected or even allowed to do so – the repressed material kept coming to the fore again and again, forcing her to voice her thoughts again and again, furnish them with deeds and eventually, banish them for good. For socio-political reasons, it must have been impossible for Ophelia to overcome this repetition compulsion by processing her libidinal energy, so that the only way to escape this prison seemed to be death.

4.3. Bride, Mermaid and Wretch – Ophelia's Death as *Tableau Vivant*

The revolutionary power Ophelia has assumed in her madness by way of violating established principles, showing a lack of respect towards authorities and exposing the intrigues at work in Denmark, is efficiently snatched away from her in death. The frame that has been constructed for her in lifetime as obedient daughter, humble sister and innocent maid is re-installed and re-impressed upon her as Gertrude reports in theatrical language the circumstances of Ophelia's tragic yet poetic death. Bereft of agency and voice⁷⁶, Ophelia is imprisoned again in the beautified picture that has been metaphorically painted by male superiors and would continue to be painted of her centuries after the play was published. As Ophelia's suicide happens off-stage, the only account of it is given by Gertrude and thus proves to be a highly subjective and distorted source. Admittedly, her report lacks immediacy and thus empathy; it rather conjures up the impression of a monologue written for theatrical performance (Rhodes 74), wherein setting and action is rendered in minute detail so as to enable a sincerely authentic re-enacting of the scenario. Additionally, the melodramatic account Gertrude gives seems merely to be '[...] prompted by a melancholy recollection rather than by immediate dramatic needs' (Nosworthy 345). One might even tentatively argue that Gertrude's speech permits the transformation of Ophelia into the type of the madwoman as

⁷⁶ William W. Lawrence directs attention to the crucial fact that in '[...] Shakespeare's play Ophelia does not affect the action at all after the Nunnery Scene, *as far as Hamlet is concerned*, excepting in so far as her death spurts Laertes to consent to the King's final plot. In the tragedy of her madness and suicide we are likely to forget that her function in the main plot is over' (413, emphasis in the original). Thus it appears justified to claim that Ophelia has been bereft of her agency as woman; the only purpose she serves after the Nunnery Scene is to exemplify the type of the madwoman and to measure up to the image of the pop culture icon.

pictorial and iconographic allusion figure so strongly that indeed a '[...] visual tableau [...]' (Gellert Lyons 71) is created wherein Ophelia is successfully silenced and killed into art.

The opening words of her report, '[t]here is a willow grows askant the brook' (Shakespeare 4.7 165) in fact disrupt the dialogue as Gertrude apparently switches to prose in order to facilitate a narration of Ophelia's death. In highly poetically phrased language, Gertrude frames the setting of the tragedy as if providing an introduction to a narrative. The '[...] fantastic garlands [...]' (Shakespeare 4.7 167) launch the pivotal detail that features in almost all subsequent depictions to be created of Ophelia, and which were to become one of the key signs of her madness. By the same token, a connection between madness, femininity and nature is established that was never to be broken in the pictures of Ophelia that were composed even centuries later. It has been assumed that "fantastic" has been employed in the sense of "grotesque", since no logical reason for why a suicidal maiden should adorn herself with '[...] crow-flowers, nettles, daisies and long purples [...]' (Shakespeare 4.7 168) can be provided⁷⁷. However, it can be claimed that the broken connections between those apparently randomly picked flowers ties in with the seemingly enigmatic statements Ophelia has uttered before. Her advice, given when dispensing flowers, as well as her deeds seem to be out of place and make little sense to the audience; to Ophelia, on the other hand, her actions must appear meaningful, even if they are not "orderly" and "logical" in a readily understandable sense of the word. Hence, the '[...] emblematic features of this description reveal dissonances [...]' (Gellert Lyons 71) between the pastoral setting the Queen evokes and the sexual allusions she gives, which forms a connection to Ophelia's utterances unravelling the gap between nature and Denmark, two worlds at odds with each other. In this respect there is a latent red thread to Ophelia's madness that can only be detected when carefully trying to decipher the riddles Ophelia gives without disdaining them as nonsensical phrases springing from a troubled mind. The beautification of Ophelia, achieved by initiating the detail of the flower garland, and thus the peaceful splendour

⁷⁷ According to Karl P. Wentersdorf, long purples are highly unsuitable for fashioning them into a garland, since '[...] the stalks droop quickly [...]' and the smell is unpleasant. He continues by explaining that '[...] Ophelia's garlands were made not only of "long purples" but also of "crow-flowers, nettles, [and] daisies."' Some varieties of flowering nettles are also malodorous and would surely be even more unsuitable for making garlands than the arum [long purples]. Crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and arums are indeed an unlikely combination of flowers for a maiden's coronet, and this is precisely what Gertrude implies when she describes the garlands as "fantastic." [...] the grotesqueness of the coronet is intended to emphasize the pathetic madness of its wearer' (416).

of nature, re-inserts Ophelia into the '[...] iconographic presentation [...]' (Gellert Lyons 71) that has been suggested earlier in the play. It appears as if Ophelia is transported back across the threshold she has crossed as if to erase her frightfully disorderly psychological development. Furthermore, the Queen may wish to divert attention from the horrors of death to the loveliness of nature (Gellert Lyons 71), which she places in the focus from the beginning on. Immediately after the first four lines, a sudden rupture occurs as the Gertrude takes to bawdy language and thus implies to bear the potential for madness as well. Of the long purples, she reports that these are plants '[t]hat liberal shepherds give a grosser name / But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them' (Shakespeare 4.7 169-170), thereby drawing upon the phallic insinuations Ophelia has so unreservedly pioneered before. Apart from acknowledging the overtly sexual nature of these unsavoury connotations, there have been heated debates concerning the nature of the long purples. Karl P. Wentersdorf argues in a botanical article that Shakespeare might have been referring to *Arum maculatum*, '[...] the wild arum or Cuckoo-pint' (414). He grounds his argument on the fact that '[...] the most striking feature of the flower is the long purple spadix, and [...] this feature has widely been regarded as phallic in appearance' (Wentersdorf 415) and further elaborates on his supposition by saying that

[...] the name "dead-men's fingers" seems more appropriate to *Arum maculatum* than to *Orchis mascula*, partly because the Arum's phallic spadix is surrounded by a partially opened whitish sheath that could be thought of as a shroud, and partly because the term "finger" can be a euphemism for the phallus. Wentersdorf 416 (emphasis in the original)

Charlotte F. Otten provides a stably founded counterargument to Wentersdorf as she identifies Ophelia's "long purples" with a species of orchids, '[...] most likely the "handed" *Orchis Serapias* or the *Satyrion Royall* [...]' (399, emphasis in the original). In order to prove the accuracy of her theory, Otten supplies five arguments:

[...] the Greek and Latin names, *Orchis* and *Testiculus*, were adopted because the roots resemble testicles and arouse carnal desires; [...] the "grosser name[s]" (Ballocks, stones, cods, cullions, pintell, Serapia's stones, Satyrion) connoted the organs of generation [...]; the name Satyrion [...] an ancient allusion to a satyr [...] is particularly appropriate in the incestuous kingdom where Hamlet refers to Claudius as a satyr [...]; [...] the animals suggested (flies, gnats, frogs, lizards, hares, goats, apes)⁷⁸ were a reminder of the loathsome bestiality of copulation

⁷⁸ At an earlier point in the article, Otten explains that some orchids resemble those animals in smell and appearance (400, 401).

[...]; [...] Serapia's stones [...] was an indication of rank and gross adultery, the kind Hamlet ascribes to Claudius and Gertrude [...] 401-402 (emphasis in the original)

By weaving and wearing these curiously unusual garlands, Ophelia associates herself for the first time most explicitly with the fallen woman. It follows then that the only acceptable alternative for Ophelia, other than openly accepting her sexuality and being deprived of any social standing and good reputation, is to depart from a world wherein even nature has been contaminated by the depravity of sexuality (Gellert Lyons 72). This statement equally entails that a blurring of boundaries has already taken place in so far as the despised aspect of sexuality has entered into Ophelia's semiotic realm where she is not (yet) able to cope with this issue originally meant to exist in the Symbolic Order. Wearing '[...] floral genitalia' (Otten 398) cannot be allowed in a world that strictly adheres to the perpetuation of safe boundaries and in which a virgin decorated with phallic garlands is in itself a paradox contradicting any norms of what is possible and viable. This excess of signifiers, inconsistent in itself, unable to be allocated a securely defined space, is what expels Ophelia from the Symbolic Order into what is generally believed to be her natural element, water. Otten sums up this dilemma as she expresses sorrow for the '[...] virgin Ophelia, who [...] adorns herself with flowers whose sexuality is so apparent that in the wearing of them she appears to bring dishonor upon herself' (402). Having symbolically deflowered herself, Ophelia is caught between the devil and the deep blue Sea; either she continues her subsidiary existence as a madwoman held in scantest regard, or she seeks to regain purity and completion in death, the only power that can grant her '[...] a felicitous escape from the obscenity of a funerary wreath of flowers known as hares bullocks, Serapia's stones, Satyrion, Kingfingers, and Priest pintell' (Otten 402).

Already in the next lines, Gertrude restores the harmony that she initiated, but then disrupted herself when referring to phallic plants and fallen women. Nature is anthropomorphised as Gertrude's account continues in the following manner: 'There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds / Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke / When down her weedy trophies and herself / Fell in the weeping brook' (Shakespeare 4.7 171-74). The correlation of nature and femininity reaches a wholly new dimension as nature itself takes on human traits. In the same instant, Ophelia's death is made to resemble an accident, due to the envy felt by a twig (MacDonald 313). The brook is

weeping – is it bemoaning the death of nature’s daughter? Or should the brook rather be regarded as a part of Ophelia, expressing the sorrows and feeling that Ophelia herself is unable to handle? Either way, the connection is forged so strong that no doubts as to the natural connection between Ophelia and nature can arise. One even feels enticed to acknowledge an incontestable ‘[...] sense of harmony between the humanized landscape and the image of Ophelia as a nymph-like creature who is at home in the water’ (Gellert Lyons 72) that serves to diminish the tragedy of Ophelia’s death. Ophelia merges with the picturesque background of the setting in a way that adds a poetically melancholy dimension to her death; a deep-seated feeling that secretly accepts her death as an aesthetic wish of nature to call home its daughter. Yet another image that emerges from this scene is that of the mad bride, as Ophelia hangs her “coronet weeds” on the branches. The coronet metonymically takes the place of adornment a bride may wear, in particular the veil, as Ophelia probably prepares for an imagined wedding with Hamlet or her symbolical wedding to death; once deflowered, being socially dead.

Having already scrutinised part of the Queen’s relation, it must have become obvious by now that her ‘[...] speech cannot sustain the force of these mythological suggestions, any more than the water can sustain Ophelia’ (Gellert Lyons 72). The speech is in itself incoherent, composed of bits and pieces that help to insert Ophelia into an endless series of iconographical representations at times at odds with one another. This rhetoric of excess, as one may wish to call it, establishes Ophelia as an ‘[...] incongruous figure [...]’ (Gellert Lyons 72), virgin in one instant, water-nymph and fallen woman in the next. Especially the popular because surreptitiously romanticised image of the nymph seems to please Gertrude, as she continues to narrate her story resonating with mythological overtones: ‘Her clothes spread wide, / And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up, / Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds, / As one incapable of her own distress, / Or like a creature native and endued / Unto that element’ (Shakespeare 4.7 174-179). The lines just cited occupy an exceedingly symbolical place in the narration since they irrefutably position Ophelia ‘[...] on opposing sides of traditional notions of femininity: that of the innocent and that of the fallen’ (Rhodes 73). While there are indeed subtle hints given that Gertrude pities Ophelia, accusing the twigs that have broken of envy which aligns Ophelia with innocence; there are as well some faint elements in her speech that ‘[...] complicate Ophelia’s ideally feminine (innocent) character by associating her with a more explicit

sexuality' (Rhodes 74). Particularly the icon of the mermaid would engage the interest and attention of successive generations as they felt both horror and fascination for this mythically seductive creature which deliberately lured men to their cruel deaths. Productions of this image at times even outnumbered such versions as Ophelia-as-bride or Ophelia-as-daughter-of-nature, for the mermaid, '[...] a fantastical and unnatural creature [...] occupied a more decadent place than Ophelia in the Victorian imagination [...]' (Rhodes 74). The layer of madness being attached as Ophelia is pictured as one oblivious of her impending doom even further complicates the conception of Ophelia's character. This child-like unawareness, a youthfully innocent naivety inseparably linked to Ophelia's delicate character, again detaches Ophelia from notions of sexual abandon and wantonness, implying that Ophelia perpetually negotiates between two competing discourses as she '[...] complexly embodies and aids in the regulation of both positive and negative feminine social roles' (Rhodes 74). Gertrude's finishing lines equally propagate contradictory notions of femininity: 'But long it could not be / Till that her garments, heavy with their drink, / Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death' (Shakespeare 4.7 179-181). Finally, Ophelia is transformed '[...] from a madwoman into a mermaid and a "wretch"' (Rhodes 74); though called "poor", she suffers a "muddy death" that ultimately '[...] resist[s] moral resolution' (Rhodes 74) and bars the audience from achieving a satisfactorily coherent image of Ophelia. Gertrude's speech, then, is as ambivalent as the picture that is negotiated of Ophelia after her death⁷⁹, as she is bereft of voice, sexuality and agency for good. The pictures to be drawn, painted or composed reflect the polyvalent ways wherein Ophelia has been imagined in the minds of following generations of artists who almost always endowed her with those '[...] mythical and symbolic meanings [...]' (Gellert Lyons 72) Ophelia was unable to handle in her lifetime and therefore withdrew into madness and death in water as offering some of the comfort that life could not donate.

4.4. Too Young to Die – Ophelia as Pop Culture Icon

For decades and centuries to follow, Ophelia has been fashioned and refashioned as an image based on male imagination of femininity and madness⁸⁰. Her death even now

⁷⁹ Nosworthy argues that '[...] it has to be admitted that the Queen's story, as such, is one that will not endure the test of common sense' (346).

⁸⁰ Jane Marcus accuses and deplores the allegedly natural connection between madness and femininity, identifying them both as social constructions that have been intertwined without justification: 'Like

seems to exude an irresistible, almost preternatural fascination that apparently forces generations of artists to return to this subject ever and ever again. Carol Solomon Kiefer reports of this disturbingly deep-seated allure that '[p]aradoxically, we see and feel beauty in the awful reality of a troubled girl's death by drowning' (11), thereby possibly capturing the charms and horrors arising from the iconic image of a drowning virgin gone insane. She continues,

[t]he scene has a long history of visual representation, beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing to the present. Ophelia is the most frequently depicted of Shakespeare's heroines and certainly one of the most popular and intriguing of all his characters. But it is more than Shakespeare's poetry and the universal fascination with death that accounts for Ophelia's popularity. Hers is the sentimental tale of a victim, young and beautiful. She is an especially intriguing character, however, because of her madness – a madness that is ultimately linked to her femininity. Solomon Kiefer 11.

This madness that seems to play the key role in various depictions of Ophelia is, however, never displayed as a token of power; her self-assertion appears to be completely eradicated after her death. Ophelia is most happily presented as a fair nymph having a '[...] wan, frail look, with a consumptive-like pallor' (Solomon Kiefer 12). Her madness is indicated by her '[...] lost gaze [...]' and '[...] long, dishevelled hair [...]' strewn with flowers or twigs and straw [...]' (Solomon Kiefer 12) which again establishes a subtle, yet undeniable connection to the indissoluble link between nature and woman. The "long, dishevelled hair", nowadays an emblem of beauty, offered ample proof for Ophelia's madness as wearing one's hair openly appeared tantamount to frankly displaying one's sexuality: '[a]nd the more abundant the hair, the more potent the sexual invitation implied by its display, for folk, literary, and psychoanalytic traditions agree that the luxuriance of the hair is an index of vigorous sexuality, even of wantonness' (Gitter 938). Thus it appears perversely logical that when wanting to portray Ophelia as a luring mermaid, one chose to supply her with the '[...] tangled, disorderly hair of the sexually and emotionally volatile women [...]' (Gitter 941) that testified to the '[...] glittering symbolic fusion of the sexual lust and the lust for power [...]' (Gitter 943) that Ophelia was never able to attain.

femininity, madness is a social construction. It is conceived as the opposite of sanity as woman is the opposite of man [...] What does the idea of the "normal" have to do with gender? Is madness a condition of gender? Does woman's very otherness constitute a case of madness?' (1).

The ambivalence that had already governed Gertrude's speech is taken up as these depictions continue to enhance '[...] dual messages about femininity and insanity', for a woman '[...] with her hair down indicated an offense against decorum, an improper sensuality' (Showalter 11). Ophelia's metaphorical defloration is hinted to as she is often depicted holding, dispensing or decorating herself with flowers carrying ambiguous meanings. Far from assuming the place of a revolutionary figure whose disruptive strength allows her to unveil hidden lies and intrigues, Ophelia becomes the young, passive and seductive mad bride dressed in white⁸¹. Remarkably, it is nowhere stated in the text that Ophelia was dressed in white as she marched towards death and salvation; again, this element was added by artists in order to transform Ophelia into a popular type – '[...] that sweet, gentle type of young womanhood [...]' (Vanderlyn 91) rather than into a uniquely drawn, sensitive young woman desperately striving to attain her place in society.



⁸¹ 'As on the Elizabethan stage, Ophelia is traditionally dressed in white [...]' (Showalter 11); 'Ophelia usually wears a long flowing white dress, a sign of her purity and innocence' (Solomon Kiefer 12)

Fig. 1: “Ophelia” by John Everett Millais, oil on canvas 1851-1852

Especially throughout the nineteenth century, the cult surrounding Ophelia and her death was fanned to a white heat; the Royal Academy boasted exhibitions of this subject around fifty times (Solomon Kiefer 12), and it was also during this period that the most popular image of Ophelia was painted. When John Everett Millais begun his portrayal of Ophelia's death in 1851, he was about to create an iconic, almost larger-than-life image of Ophelia that ultimately captured her apotheosis into a cult figure. Particularly aptly, his painting fuses the rivalling notions revolving around Shakespeare's heroine as he combined both the '[...] wild, emotional, and erotic [...]' aspect as well the '[...] idealized conception of the pure and innocent Ophelia, a sentimentally precious, aesthetic object, bereft of sexuality and pitiful in her frail, delicate madness' (Solomon Kiefer 12). Millais ingeniously processes the timelessness of Ophelia's death, the supra-historical component whereby she is left '[...] suspended forever between life and death' (Solomon Kiefer 22). It should be pointed out that this aspect can be considered vastly appropriate since Ophelia never does get explicitly buried in the play so that there is no '[...] representation of female death [...]' (Chillington Rutter 300) to be taken as a model⁸². In the burial scene, her body is not shown, she has become an undead half-presence, haunting generations of artists until Millais finally found the means to preserve this highly unusual state. Subjecting the painting to closer scrutiny, one might suggest it to be an illustration pertaining to Gertrude's monologue, functioning now, however, as a visual sign of the potency of the male genius. Ophelia is no longer the drowning girl, but has become a spectacle, an object of conspicuous consumption with the spectator lingering '[...] voyeuristically [...]' over the beautiful, pathetic spectacle, untroubled by any recognition that he is admiring a corpse' (Chillington Rutter 308). Ophelia-as-spectacle is caught in the act of drowning itself; her pale watery eyes directed pathetically towards heaven, her fingers unnaturally writhed, mouth still half-open suggesting her singing; which, on the other hand, also enhances a sexual reading (Rhodes 97). Hair and dress is voluminously floating in the brook, bestowing a mythological whiff upon the picture as the masses of wavy red hair remind the spectator of a mermaid's sinister charms. Focusing rather on Ophelia's meticulously realised

⁸² That there is no explicit burial scene incorporated into the play can be seen as grounding in the fact that '[...] contemporary attitudes to suicide were more ambivalent and mortuary customs more uncertain [...]' (MacDonald 309).

beauty arrests the picture in its '[...] pathos, innocence, and beauty rather than [in] the unseemly details of her death [...]' (Rhodes 89), but does not erase, however, the creepy effect of Siddal's half-shut, pitifully staring eyes. Ophelia-as-spectacle is in the same instant also Ophelia-as-victim, an icon of passivity floating in this native yet deathly element wherein her life dissolves gently and quietly into a dream of pre-Oedipal fulfilment that only the Imaginary can grant. No longer woman, human nor nymph or mermaid, Ophelia has been transfigured into a '[...] site of memory, fantasy, projection, and desire. Although she continually takes on new forms because she is what one brings to her, Ophelia is embedded or encoded with a specific set of distinguishing characteristics and meanings' (Solomon Kiefer 12).

As is the case with Millais' masterpiece, '[...] the viewer pities rather than fears Ophelia's increasingly uninhibited expression of her perception of corruption in the court and her own unfettered sexuality' (Rhodes 18). Having been framed by various artists and mingled with their perceived notions of idealised femininity, Ophelia's subversive powers have been distorted into mere hysteria and deplorable insanity so that her unleashed powers are softened and thereby greatly reduced in scope. As Rhodes rightly points out, '[r]emoving the signifiers of her madness and repressing her sexuality [...] sentimentalizes and sanitizes Ophelia and contributes to the normalization and naturalization of mental illness as a presumed "female malady"' (Rhodes 18). By drawing a perverted picture of Ophelia as coquette nymph, male painters possibly attempted to soften the strongly sexual powers surging in Ophelia's bosom and thereby alleviated their own anxiety felt towards openly sexual, probably dominant women.

In retrospect, the only way for Ophelia to assume a quantum of agency lay in madness, where all her hidden thoughts and desires uninhibitedly came to the surface. This madness, however, was after her death – and this death seemed inevitable as Ophelia had in her insanity withdrawn from the Symbolic Order in search for the Real, a place where she would candidly live and speak her desires – aestheticised and played down in order to silence Ophelia and reinsert her into the role of a chaste and submissive character. Elaborating on this aestheticisation has hopefully aided in unpacking the '[...] manner[s] in which images of Ophelia [...] were used to feminize madness, naturalize the stereotypical, circumscribed female roles of daughter and virginal, loyal love interest and identify physical beauty with morality' (Rhodes 18).

The key questions, however, that may be posed after having elaborated upon Ophelia's tragic fate,

How can the woman be thought about outside of the Masculine/Feminine framework, *other* than as opposed to man, without being subordinated to a primordial masculine model? How can madness, in a similar way, be conceived outside of its dichotomous opposition to sanity, without being subjugated to reason? Felman 138 (emphasis in the original)

will remain unanswered for now, as there seems to be no escaping conventionally established and acknowledged constructions that provide readily available and understandable reasons for women's – and in this special case – Ophelia's madness.

5. The Curse Is Come upon Her – the Impossibility of Crossing and Overturning Boundaries in Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott”

Alfred Lord Tennyson’s poem “The Lady of Shalott”, constituting one of several texts wherein he sought to process the myth of King Arthur and Lady Elaine, was first published in 1833 and later subtly, yet in interpretative terms meaningfully rewritten in 1842 and finally revised in 1853. Steeped irresistibly deeply in a fictitious medieval world of courtly romance, the poem – despite its smacking of passions and morals belonging to a bygone age – nonetheless seems to be situated outside history, as it justly speaking reveals more about England’s nineteenth century mores than about mysterious Camelot⁸³. Indeed, the imprisoned Lady bears much of the ‘domestic woman’s’ characteristics (N. Armstrong 19), endowed with ‘[...] little direct access to economic or political power [...]’ (N. Armstrong 56), her only reasonably attainable goal being marriage. Even this prospect fades as gratification is eternally deferred, ‘[...] set [...] forever in the realm of romance and therefore at odds with reality’ (N. Armstrong 198). Tennyson’s strategy, then, obviously resides in concealing contemporary discomforts and socio-political problems behind pastoral landscapes and medieval courts; a strategy one might easily label escapism. This can quite straightforwardly be inferred after having read in Udall that nineteenth-century England, in particular the Victorian society that ‘[...] delighted in medieval legends, mingling them freely with Biblical history and elements of ancient mythology’, unhappily ‘[...] sought to escape an accelerating industrial blight by retreating into the mythology of [the] past’ (N. Armstrong 34). Caroline Evans connects such a re-assessment of ancient tropes to the return of the repressed, as artists ‘[...] intuitively reinterpret past images of instability in the present’ (*Emblems* 94)⁸⁴. Mentioning the return of the repressed, it becomes evident that the

⁸³ ‘One could argue, if one were to read the poem as a modernized medieval tale, that the setting renders irrelevant the nineteenth-century aesthetic and social categories fundamental to the reading of the poem proposed in this paper. Or one could argue that this setting, removing the narrative situation of the poem from the historical era in which the poem was written, is meant also to remove the artistic or even the sexual problems the poem poses from the flux of history, to suggest that those problems are simply inherent in art or sexual difference in general. Both of these arguments rely on an assumption implicit in the historical distance that the setting imposes between the narrative situation of the poem and that of its audience: the dilemma the poem describes is *universal* and *supra-historical*; it confronts all women and/or all artists in all eras’ (Chadwick 29, emphasis mine).

⁸⁴ Actually, Caroline Evans writes about ‘designers’ and not ‘artists’, since her article revolves around ‘[t]he return of the repressed in fashion imagery today’. I have appropriated this quote to my own ends, arguing that both poems and fashion items are tokens that are created with a deliberate aim in mind, however infused with unconscious (repressed) motives.

poem perfectly lends itself to a psychoanalytical reading; however, it is Lacanian psychoanalysis and not the Freudian one that shall be applied to unveil the poem's mysteries. And mysterious it proves to be indeed:

It [the poem] studies to create a form which, as Ruskin was later to say, appears not to know its own meaning. It is curiously unaccountable and sourceless. Its strategy is to be opaque, proffering and evading interpretation simultaneously [...],

states Isobel Armstrong in a detailed reflection upon Alfred Lord Tennyson's famous poem "The Lady of Shalott" (50). Countless coatings of symbolism have given rise to controversial claims, speculating about the very purpose the poem might want to fulfil: does the poem seek to conform to patriarchal values, upholding a solidly paternal world founded upon Victorian values and dogmas, or are the dissident whispers that ghostly haunt the stable Victorian setting witnesses of an attempt to subvert nineteenth century mores?⁸⁵ The poem, much like its eponymous protagonist, seems indeed thwarted, torn between unattainable goals and at unease with itself. This all too evident cacophony is what prompts the following consideration of the poem's stance towards femininity and sexuality in a world that literally 'curses' women striving for subjectivity. Though critics have read Tennyson's poem as potentially subversive – and I do not endeavour to deny its seditious potential – and the ending as possibly triumphant, I would argue that via self-fashioning done by copying from already established models, and a simple inversion rather than deconstruction of existing categories, gender dichotomies are re-enacted merely than transgressed. The psycho-analytical order of states, semiotic (Imaginary) versus symbolic (Symbolic Order) is left scrupulously intact, although attempts to point to cracks within this self-enclosed system manifest themselves. On a journey away from a partly ideal, feminine state – possibly the semiotic *chôra*, as one may wish to call it – through mirror-stage entailing tragically disillusioning discoveries and the transgression of the thetic barrier towards the omnipotent Symbolic Order, it becomes clear once more that the bubble of the Real wherein the Lady might wish to continue a self-determined existence must necessarily burst.

⁸⁵ Among others, Carl Plasa gives rise to such speculations, concluding his article with the statement that '[...] Tennyson's poem emerges as no less centrally fractured, or "cracked from side to side," than the mirror within it, precisely unsure in fact as to quite which side of its own covert political and socio-sexual debate it is on – that of patriarchy and reaction or women and subversion' (260).

5.1. The Poem “Cracked from Side to Side?”⁸⁶

The primary dichotomies whereon the narrative is fleshed out are the oppositional pairs semiotic/symbolic, alias Imaginary/Symbolic Order, man/woman, life/art. Right from the beginning onwards, the binary pairs are employed in a highly conventional manner, before they come to be overturned as the narrative draws towards its tragic close. At the height of the poem’s subversive potential, gender dichotomies are reversed only to be safely re-installed at the very end, deferring the Real endlessly beyond reach⁸⁷.

A securely divided existence of semiotic *chôra* and Symbolic Order is affirmed already in the opening lines of the poem that plunge the reader into a highly elaborate, though admittedly pseudo-medieval agrarian setting, picturesquely invoked via pastoral, idyllic fairy-tale scenes. Both ‘[...] barley and [...] rye [...]’ (Tennyson 2) and a ‘road’ (Tennyson 4) running towards Camelot speak of male craft and productiveness, whereas Shalott is introduced as a feminine, flowery space, immediately conjuring up reminiscences of the “natural” connection between nature, art and femininity⁸⁸. An ever flowing, changing nature heavily contrasts, and is complemented by, the static interior that the Lady, as much an epitome of Shalott as Lancelot is of Camelot, seemingly involuntarily inhabits (Shannon 210). Whereas the outside world appears to be busy and working, time stands still in Shalott – it is cut off from knowledge, experience, and, as one feels, also from space and time, a free floating signifier in an otherwise intact pastoral little world. However, the problematic crack in the picture appears when considering the role Shalott assumes for the Lady and her already mysteriously cast fate. What is Shalott, this sequestered island, remote from the world and still locked into a symbiotic relationship with it, for its inmate? Being compelled by some unknown power to an immobile existence within ‘[f]our grey walls and four grey towers’ (Tennyson 15), the setting bears connections to a private, domestic space designed as woman’s common lot. On the other hand, the very enclosure that darkens the sunny sky outside unmistakably calls the semiotic *chôra* to mind, a ‘[...] womb, source of creativity and fulfilment’ (Gribble 22). It comes little surprising then, that Shalott should be defined

⁸⁶ I have borrowed this subheading from Plasa’s article with the same name wherein he questions the ambivalent sexual politics of Tennyson’s poem.

⁸⁷ This indeed becomes more obvious in the second version of the poem, where Lancelot has the last word and smothers the fear the Lady has evoked by re-introducing the patterns that have been at work before.

⁸⁸ ‘It is hardly surprising, then, that in “The Lady of Shalott”, the feminine is repeatedly identified with the private and artistic and the masculine with the socially productive’ (Gill 111).

through and through by feminine images (Gill 111). Surrounded by water, Cixous' master signifier of femininity, and 'a space of flowers' (Tennyson 16), the Lady seems to melt with the natural environment into a single, coherent image, remaining a sheer echo of flowers and river that are visually perceptible whereas she is not. The fact that the Lady herself is not explicitly introduced, but enters the stage only as the "prisoner" of the phallic castle⁸⁹, only ascertains the speculations of her being an appendix, a by-product of nature that cannot really be separated from it. Further tracing this supposition, the Lady becomes a '[...] half-presence [...]' (Gill 111), wholly dependent upon lilies and roses with which to identify in order to be able to speak of an existence at all. When she is finally personally introduced, which does not happen until the end of the poem's first part, she appears as a Lady of courtly Romance, an emblem of the maiden cult, which only too obviously severs the ties that could possibly unite her with the peasant community surrounding her. 'She leaneth on a velvet bed / Full royally apparellèd' (Tennyson 1832 34-35), there is a certain halo of arrogance and aloofness to her (or is it indeed oblivion?) that entices one to ask whether she is fairy or human, and what her place in the community might truly be. All dressed up and nowhere to go, she might as well constitute a being from a separate sphere, yet unconscious of its fate and role in the world. Indeed, the Lady conjures forward the impression of impersonating nineteenth century fantasies of a feminine ideal that is both '[...] corporeal and insubstantial' (Chadwick 19). Fully enclosed by a lively public space she cannot enter, she is wholly allotted the role of the angel of the house ever dedicated to domestic tasks. Paradoxically, it is precisely her femininity that binds her to this '[...] unmoving, unchanging [...]' existence, where she remains detached from '[...] the cycles of economic and sexual exchange' (Chadwick 17); an existence denoting equally a space and a state of mind. All these unviable interdictions imposed upon her serve to deny her subjectivity and even more so, her corporeality. As the poem unmistakably bears witness to, the Lady is but a mere myth – a myth that is deepened in the subsequent versions, where she embodies even stronger some fairy figure whose existence nobody can truly confirm: 'But who hath seen her wave her hand? / Or at the casement seen her stand? / Or is she known in all the land?' (Tennyson 24-26). Purportedly, she might not constitute more than an element of a fairy tale, a legend that has been heard of – or is

⁸⁹ 'The island of Shalott is the object of people's curious gaze, the Lady herself is hidden and displaced as the stanza describing her proceeds' (I. Armstrong 61).

vaguely believed to be true – by the superstitious peasant commune, an epitome of which is launched by the figure of the enigmatic reaper. Emblematic part of the rural community or narrative device, the reaper remains puzzlingly shady grace to his nocturnal whisperings that nevertheless comprise a pivotal role in the first part of the poem. The appearance of the reaper and his seemingly apprehensive rumours as to the nature of the Lady prove to root her even more profoundly within a traditionally conservative and unsubtly credulous agrarian environment (I. Armstrong 55). The reaper represents a character as ambiguously mysterious as the Lady herself; Shannon puts forward that he, as one of the people ‘[...] most closely attuned to rural superstitions [...]’ (210) functions as a mere tool needful to increase the Lady’s mystifying aura. Is he truly only an instance of folk mythology, or is there a deeper aspect behind this person? Given that he only emerges during the unfathomable twilight hours⁹⁰ and murmurs ‘[b]eneath the moon’ (Tennyson 1832 34), he could equally be considered as a harbinger of death, even a personification of Death itself, reminiscent of the figure of Death as the Harvester, foreshadowing the Lady’s dreadful fate. With the voice of patriarchal interdiction, he introduces the curse, labelling the Lady a fairy, thus diminishing the spectrum of roles available to her considerably. The reaper’s whisper, reaching the Lady’s ears, forbids her to look down to Camelot, which implicitly warns her against the dangers of a role reversal achieved by actively assuming the gaze. ‘She has heard a whisper say / A curse is on her if she stay / To look down to Camelot’ (Tennyson 39-41), Tennyson tells the reader, hence providing a bridge to the aforementioned “whispering” Grim Reaper. Perceiving only the faint echoes as traces of the omnipresent, omnipotent masculine voice, the Lady might automatically assume the lowly uttered rumours to be her curse⁹¹. On a different level, the “curse” can be read as a masked commemoration of conservative Victorian values – arguing for proper behaviour and a complete repression of desire – that need to be upheld, if necessary by force. In this respect, the section concerning the curse, if not the entire poem, can be understood as latently bemoaning the female situation in the Victorian Age; a socio-historical, political reading, however, is not relevant to the purpose of this thesis.

⁹⁰ ‘[...] reaping late and early’ (Tennyson 20)

⁹¹ ‘This whisper precedes the curse-whisper so closely [...] as to suggest that the Lady hears the reaper’s whisper as the curse [...] The reaper’s whisper, crossing the river, becomes the curse, thus taking on the force of a speech act which makes the Lady what it names’ (Chadwick 21).

What to some extent bridges the gap between semiotic Shalott and symbolic Camelot is the meticulously portrayed landscape stretching around and about Shalott. Tennyson introduces to the mind of the reader ‘Long fields of barley and of rye / That clothe the wold and meet the sky’ (2-3), ‘The yellowleavèd waterlily / The greensheathèd daffodily’ (Tennyson 1832 6-7), and among others, a ‘stream that runneth ever’ (Tennyson 1832 12). Regarding this tableau vivant in greater detail, however, one reluctantly needs to admit that all these successions of sensual impressions seem disconnected, broken and almost deathly. Bits and pieces, waterlily, barley, wold, stream, are enumerated and serve to contrast with the achromatic phallic castle, but they open the view to a ‘[...] world dominated by separateness and without promise of continuity and wholeness [...] the pieces dislocate the continuity and create a landscape in which there are openings and discontinuities’ (Colley 370); they are free floating signifiers without any readily available meaning. A ‘[...] synecdochic landscape [...]’, as Colley aptly labels it (Colley 371) surrounds the Lady, thereby still aggravating the burgeoning sentiments of her being displaced, of not belonging, being scattered and fragmented all over the place. Thus it seems only suitable, if not too obvious, that only a piece of the Lady – her voice – should leave the tower in order to haunt the already disunited landscape. “Haunt” might indeed prove to be an appropriate term, as nature itself is alien and frightening (Alaya 281). Waterlily and daffodilly ‘[t]remble in the water chilly’ (Tennyson 1832 8), ‘[...] aspens shiver / The sunbeam-showers break and quiver’ (Tennyson 1832 10-11), as if quite at unease with themselves – a statement that could as well apply to the Lady of Shalott. Trembling, shivering, quivering – in fact these lexemes do not suggest graceful, easy movements as one would conventionally expect to take place in a feminised realm. The tremble might be one of a painfully indeterminable anticipation, telling of sinister suspicions preceding probable changes. Hand in hand with the nascent doubts as to the character of these impending changes go the quivering and shivering, terrors of mind that literally affect the body to move anxiously.

Shalott’s partner and opposite in this poem dominated by binary pairs is Camelot, the place that both road and stream lead to, as if already suggesting that this is the goal ultimately to be reached; the master signifier that will always and necessarily win the game. The descriptions concerning Camelot are few and sparsely employed; listing people rather than objects, which yet further divides active Camelot from static

Shalott. Village-churls, market-girls⁹², a troop of damsels, an abbot, a shepherd, a page as well as knights pass by, reminding the Lady of her missing social life. Conspicuously, these people are almost always referred to by their social function or role they assume within the orderly – and hence masculinely connoted – community of Camelot. Even though individuality seems not to play a vital part, nonetheless they represent a hierarchy of their own and thus instil in the Lady the irrepressible yet self-destructive desire to participate in the Symbolic Order (Alaya 282).

Now that the poem's underlying binary structure into private/semiotic Shalott and public/symbolic Camelot has been made evident, the next chapter shall introduce Lacanian notions of desire and loss that inexorably come into play as the façade of the initial idyll crumbles and the dormant subversive potential breaks to the fore.

5.2. “Tirra lirra” – the Lady as a Lancelot?

So far it has been presumed that the Lady lives in an Imaginary realm, thus being oblivious to the patriarchal interdictions and rules that have confined her within her prison. Having not yet been introduced to the Symbolic Order, her life appears to be perfect as she is utterly dedicated to the task of weaving ‘[a] magic web with colours gay’ (Tennyson 38), knowing little of language, sexual difference and the outside world. Weaving in her shapeless, fluid personal realm, the Lady could happily continue her task forever and ever, would not the mirror's seductive sights – be they magically distorted representations of patriarchy or just unsuccessfully repressed projections of her own dissatisfied mind – interfere and lure her away from her figurative mother's lap. The productively artistic existence can therefore find its fulfilment only at the expense of leading a life in shadows, a psychotic and consequently impossible continuation of the symbiosis with the maternal body. The fallacy whereon the Lady grounds her otherwise content life is summed up by Chadwick, who asserts that ‘[t]he autonomy and independence her isolation grants her, then, turn out to be fundamentally illusory, since she is granted them only at the cost of becoming just as shadowy as the images the mirror shows her’ (18). The crucial gadget, then, the one thing that implants the desire for subjectivity and (sexual) completion beyond her castle in her, is – little surprising, allowing for the heavily resonating Lacanian undertones – the mirror.

⁹² The market-girls' red cloaks are indeed reminiscent of another fairy tale, Little Red Riding Hood, and thus even more strongly connect the Lady to menstruation, sexuality and impending womanhood.

Whereas the 1833 version holds that the mirror simply ‘[reflects] towered Camelot’ (Tennyson 1832 50) and thus reproduces patriarchal Camelot in front of the Lady’s eyes, the revised version gives rise to more ambiguous speculations: ‘And moving thro’ a mirror clear / That hangs before her all the year / Shadows of the world appear’ (Tennyson 46-48). Shadows, which are by their very nature already distorted, suggest a rather sinister worldview, paradoxically appearing in a “mirror clear”. It is again the magic mirror that inevitably instigates the thetic break and by the same token the poem’s first turning point; prefiguring the Lady’s entering into language, knowledge, sexuality and ultimately death. Catching a glimpse on a life beyond her cage, especially on scenes intrinsic to human social life, finally thrust the almost apathetically working Lady into sudden awareness and prompt her to challenge her fate by dismissing her rigidly framed role. An only seemingly deliberate jumble of pictures featuring ‘[a] funeral with plumes and lights’ (Tennyson 67) and ‘[...] two young lovers, lately wed’ (Tennyson 70) rushes by in front of her, enabling her to voice her desire by uttering the famously liberating yet utterly detrimental sentence ‘I am half-sick of shadows’ (Tennyson 71). Especially the two lovers make the Lady understand what she lacks, and furthermore, permit her to name that lack, thereby allowing her to fully apprehend the measure of her perilously looming tragedy⁹³. By speaking for the first time with a voice of her own, the Lady declares herself as an autonomous subject and articulates her own, deeply personal desires, which causes a shift in power relations. Stepping across the thetic barrier, the Lady has experienced the Mirror Stage and hence inescapably left behind the time spent weaving mechanically without reflection for good. In this respect it seems that the kind of “security blanket” that had sheltered the Lady before in her semiotic chôra has been removed, that by leaving the realm of myths and entering into the Symbolic Order, the Lady has also become increasingly vulnerable and susceptible to all too human fallacies. Illusory – or phrased more poetically, “magical” – projections the mirror has delivered to her lead her into believing in an ideally coherent, satisfying life outside the castle. This falsely granted security bestows a certain revolutionary force and bravery upon her; but since the basis whereon her

⁹³ Isobel Armstrong sees this newly gained knowledge as arising from reflection: ‘Reflection and language belong together [...] because the act of reflection is an act of separation of categories and therefore inevitably an act of self-separation. And since language is a system of marks and differences, reflection and language are inseparable. [...] Thus in coming into language we simultaneously come into reflexive self-consciousness’ (98).

hopes are grounded is necessarily a delusional one, her subversive attempts must automatically end in disaster.

The narrative's second turning point is enacted with an even stronger disrupting force as it features 'bold Sir Launcelot' (Tennyson 77) loudly and vigorously penetrating the Lady's private space. The change occurs suddenly and with a kind of violence necessary to cause a rupture into the neatly established system; with the same catalytic force that catapults the infant out of its mother's arms into a traumatic state of alienation within the Symbolic Order, the Lady is seized abruptly by a desire she has never known before. Lancelot, an epitome of all that Camelot stands for, pierces flowery Shalott as he rides '[...] between the barleysheaves' (Tennyson 72), thereby (albeit unconsciously) anticipating the split he is about to cause. It is also Lancelot who fully unleashes the desire for sexuality and marriage that had been surging within the Lady's bosom since the two lovers suggested the promise of wholeness and fulfilment. '[S]tudded with sunlit, phallic imagery [...]', he metaphorically "rapes" the Lady's private space: '[a] metallic phallus, he cracks "from side to side" the "crystal mirror" which has formed the barrier between the Lady's privacy and public Camelot' (Chadwick 23). Allegorically, the Lady is "deflowered"; the orderly patterns get confused and turned upside down. In an act of self-determination as well as self-destruction, the Lady moves from stasis to activity as she crosses the room and looks – against all odds – out of the window down to Camelot. In an almost voluntarily juxtaposition, she sees waterflower, helmet and plume (Tennyson 111-112) as the last pictures reaching her eyes before both her greatest success and her downfall. These elements seem wrongly out of place, and moreover, out of reach for her, as they bear no relations toward one another, except that they stand in an all too obvious asymmetric power relation. The masculine, phallic and metallic helmet forms a stark contrast to the defencelessly fragile flower; the plumes seem arbitrarily pasted into this highly symbolical collage. Almost forming a bricolage, the items bearing feminine and masculine connotations respectively only testify to a '[...] discrepancy in power and value' (Chadwick 24), pointing both backwards to the synecdochic landscape that cannot be mended and forwards to a future wherein the Lady will be as much displaced as flower, helmet and plume are now cut off from their contexts. Yet, this jumble of symbols can be read as associations flashing to the Lady's mind as a kind of shock reaction to the just executed defloration and the impending journey into an as yet

unknown future. As the pieces of a puzzle finally fall into place without making concretely discernible sense, the fragmentation of this passage testifies to a certain madness the Lady experiences as the curse comes “upon her” (I. Armstrong 93). The concurrence of these three signs – both meaningful as associative pictures and meaningless because a rational explanation for this random collection cannot be provided – furthermore points to the disorder and change of roles to take place.

Had the narrative up to now followed quite conventional patterns (the Lady as a fairy living among the flowers, Lancelot as the knight in shining armour complete with heavenly/cosmic, phallic imagery), there seems to take place now a gradual reversal of roles. Contrary to conventional expectations, Lancelot does not carry armours with him, but a (nevertheless phallic) ‘[...] mighty silver bugle [...]’ (Tennyson 88), a musical instrument that connects with the Lady’s previous musical activities. Lancelot is further effeminised – if one chooses to stick to traditional patterns that assign uniquely musical qualities to women – by his singing “Tirra lirra” (Tennyson 107), that finally distracts the Lady’s full attention and directs it wholly and fatally to the outside world. If the production of free floating sounds is what ostensibly unites the Lady and Lancelot⁹⁴, she gains supplementary strength to escape her prison by relying on mutual bonds that unhappily exist only in her imagination. As her aural senses have been stimulated by Lancelot’s singing, the Lady feels compelled to rely on the visual sense as well, in order to complement the picture she has received in her mind. Employing sight, however, proves to be her undoing as the scene presented to the Lady turns out to be ultimately as much distorted as the ‘[...] mirror’s magic sights’ (Tennyson 65) had been. Observing Lancelot’s shield, wherein ‘a redcross knight’ kneels sincerely devoted to his lady (Tennyson 78-79), the Lady assembles the jumble of pictures she has just obtained into an organic whole, a love story without happy ending, however, since it is based on utterly wrong assumptions and hopes. Thus, the emblem of courtly love is perverted into a myth, used unwillingly as a ‘[...] means to manipulation and power’ (I. Armstrong 79), leading the Lady into believing she could have the same, would she just confront the curse and take action⁹⁵.

⁹⁴ ‘His singing, a further point of affinity between him and the Lady, strengthens her will to defy the curse’ (Shannon 216).

⁹⁵ ‘Now continuity and wholeness seem as possible as the promise of eternal faithfulness depicted on Lancelot’s shield [...] That momentary presence pushes the Lady from her loom, her mirror, from her synecdochic and metonymic space, and urges her and the poem forward’ (Colley 372).

As has been monitored above, the binary patterns whereon the poem seems to be built have been shaken and challenged, partly by the Lady herself. Firstly, the male protagonist has been effeminised via his association with feminine attributes (singing, black curls, music instrument); and secondly has the “fairer sex” taken means to defy the patriarchal system that has entrapped her. Having been previously framed by anonymous spectators outside the poem, it is now her who does the looking: ‘She *saw* the waterflower bloom / She *saw* the helmet and the plume: / She *looked* down to Camelot’ (Tennyson 111-113, emphasis mine). The Lady moves from a rather passive witness – honestly, “seeing” would not be defined as something ones does on purpose; rather, pictures and scenes are reflected by means of light and meet the eye – to an active spectator, who swerves the gaze deliberately towards Camelot. Assuming the gaze of an erotically desiring subject – conventionally granted to men – and thereby trespassing on male grounds, the Lady achieves her up to now greatest triumph: the binaries of spectator as subject and object of the look are temporarily reversed⁹⁶. In so far, one could claim for Lancelot to momentarily occupy the female position, the object of desire and the Lady’s hopeful stare. Conversely, the Lady ‘[...] emerges as a Lancelot [...]’ (Colley 372) both penetrating and seizing the space around her; she has acquired masculine traits as it is her who determines the action; even if she is slave to a greater will that has loaded the curse on her. Gone are the slow-paced renderings of landscape, singing and weaving: ‘[a]ction, fullness, and inscription replace passivity, emptiness, echoes, whispers, and rumour’ (Colley 372). Shalott, initially both prison and source of an originally feminine art production, accomplishes its last function as the very space which ‘[...] the hero crosses or crosses to [...]’ (De Lauretis 139) – thereby assigning the space its mythological or symbolic function – is left for good, which becomes especially clear as the Lady’s piece of art is abjected and her primary tool of perception destroyed: ‘Out flew the web, and floated wide / The mirror cracked from side to side’ (Tennyson 114-115). Simultaneously she realises ‘The curse is come upon me’ (Tennyson 116), as if fully apprehending the measure of her frantic action for the first time. Desire for completion and fulfilment of the lost unity, the Real kindly beckoning to her, now urges her forward to eventually meet her fate and forces her to sacrifice provisional, semiotic structures in order to assume her place within the Symbolic Order.

⁹⁶ ‘Appropriating the gaze, the Lady enters the position of the desiring subject and so enacts – at the scopic level – the crossing from “feminine” to “masculine” gender positions originally figured in the projected foray from Shalott to Camelot’ (Plasa 258).

In what follows an account of how the poem's indeed significant subversive potential ultimately proves to be its greatest weakness at the same time shall be given. The next subchapter shall trace how reversing apparently fixed gender positions and foraying into the patriarchally determined, symbolic Camelot furnish the Lady with the potential to disrupt the prevalent order of things; due to the narrow range of possibilities within her reach, however, this potential is suffocated under layers of white garments and utterly dissolved by indifferent Sir Lancelot.

5.3. All Dressed Up and Nowhere to Go: Here Comes the Bride

On her last journey towards Camelot, and, in a further sense, towards self-assertion, fulfilment and subjectivity that, though the laces of the Imaginary confinement have been cut, trigger the Lady's inevitable (not to say necessary, for the patriarchal order) death; the poem reaches the height of its subversive potential that had been latently circulating around Shalott. While this fact is acknowledged by various critics, most of them do agree as well on the fact that this potential is insufficiently exploited by far. Merely exchanging roles and adapting to prescribed role models – like the one of the bride – seems simply not adequate in a solidly founded patriarchy and thus does not suffice to cause a noticeable change. So, it shall be claimed and proven in this chapter that the Lady's attempt to transgress the space originally ascribed and allocated to women is ultimately punished with death. Crossing the soberly fixed lines that keep the spaces apart, then, proves to be the true crime⁹⁷. The Lady's visual transformation by means of clothes and accessories could indeed be called a symbolic resistance to conventionally hetero-normative gender constructions; a ritualistic challenge of the predominant, restrictive discourse; would she not copy and paste from exactly the same, patriarchally informed and narrow-mindedly patterned models she actually seeks to defy.

Finally escaping her prison, the Lady has entered on a speaking subject's position, and, by going public, the duality of semiotic/private and symbolic/public is fleetingly dissolved. Considering the fact, however, that the Lady has to choose between two impossible positions – psychosis and death – truly entices one to question her agency and further leads to speculations about her being in fact interpellated into the

⁹⁷ This very factum ultimately proves the poem firmly rooted in the conventionality it returns to at the end. In Plasa's words, '[...] the narrative of the poem registers its own resistance to the transgression of gender divisions – and hence the possibility of political change – of which that crossing is the sign' (250).

position she thinks she has chosen by herself. In an unpromising attempt to finally fix meaning and by extension, fix her identity to be part of the stable world she has entered, the Lady writes her name on the boat, thus having fully and irreversibly come into language. Drawing strongly upon Lacanian notions of language and loss, Colley views the act of naming as a crucial point:

The written name brings with it hopes of continuity because it is a fixed designator; it also admits differences because the very act of naming acknowledges the presence of the Other and the necessity for that presence to break away from a metonymic relationship with her parent, the island of Shalott [...] and create her own identity. 374.

In the same instant, Colley acknowledges the inextricable ties between naming and death⁹⁸. Having escaped her limited existence within the *chôra*, the Lady is thrust into a world wherein she necessarily has to face ‘[...] the experience of loss [...]’ (Colley 375) and will strive to find the satisfactory completion she will only regain in death.

The opening lines of the fourth part appear to employ a universally conceded and uncommonly popular trope; landscape and femininity merge into a unity, a pattern that has been observed and discussed already in Poe’s “Eleonora” and “Morella”⁹⁹. Tennyson’s description of an autumnally grey and dying landscape (‘In the stormy eastwind straining / The pale-yellow woods were waning / The broad stream in his banks complaining / Heavily the low sky raining / Over towered Camelot’ (118-122)) foreshadows the Lady’s death as well as the terrifying awareness that is going to meet her. All her hopes revolving around attaining a better destiny, a life under the sunny sky of Camelot, have been built upon a fallacy: an escape, a crossing from Shalott to Camelot is indeed illusory, since the two worlds that have existed side by side within her mind turn out to be one and the same¹⁰⁰. As the desired future becomes the despised

⁹⁸ ‘Naming involves death also because it aspires to the ultimate, to fix the margin [...] Names name the death of oneness and are dependent upon representation’ (Colley 375).

⁹⁹ Contrary to “Morella”, however, nature is not at peace; under a dark sky, the water is surging and the winds are howling, probably tracing the Lady’s rebellion against Camelot and her subsequent downfall.

¹⁰⁰ Referring back to the impossibility of possible political change, Carl Plasa states that ‘This process [that the Lady has set in motion] works [...] to transform the future toward which the Lady travels into a repetition of the past she seeks to escape, thus creating the illusion that the patriarchally subversive crossing from Shalott to Camelot is itself illusory, since a future that repeats a past effectively erases the present that ordinarily facilitates the passage from one to the other’ (250). At one point, Plasa quotes Chadwick, who seems to have made similar findings: ‘Lancelot and Camelot seem to appear sunlit only from within the confining shelter of the privacy of Shalott, [...] [o]nce outside those walls, the Lady, unlike Plato’s freed prisoner [...] finds a world just as gray as the one she has left. The radiance and intelligibility of Camelot turn out to have been just as illusory as the mysterious privacy and autonomy of Shalott. A single climate, a single social atmosphere, govern both realms, even though each appears to the other as its opposite (27).

past, surfacing in the grey landscape being a faint echo of the tower's grey walls, the Lady seems to be entrapped again, in a kind of time warp that ironically prohibits her from leading the life she has aspired. Mockingly, the Lady is doomed an outcast by the very society she has desperately but falsely hoped to be part of. Even her last attempt to participate in the community, consisting in appropriating the role of the bride, is bound to fail as alternative options of gender identities are revealed to be out of reach.

Part of the alleged female victory in "The Lady of Shalott" might stem from the notion of a woman leaving the narrow feminine paths laid out within patriarchal systems. Acknowledging the performative aspect of clothes as a way of constructing distinct gendered identities, it is easy to see, however, that the Lady ultimately does not dare going astray from conventional paths. Quite contrary to the mad bride Ophelia, the Lady emerges as a rather conformist bride: '[a] cloudwhite crown of pearl she dight / All ramented in snowy white / That loosely flew, (her zone in sight / Clasp'd with one blinding diamond bright [...])' (Tennyson 1832 126). Thus dressed, the Lady prepares for her final journey, transforming herself into '[...] the culminating highlight of a fashion show [...]' (Seidl 216), which indeed hints to the performative aspect of her appearance. The bridal gown replaces the Lady as protagonist and thus reduces her identity to the function of a "trophy" (Seidl 224) to be conquered by her husband-to-be. In this respect, the wedding dress fails to reward the heroine with '[...] unalloyed bliss [...]', the dress '[...] once symbolic of hope [...]' becomes an uncanny '[...] herald now of death' (Hughes 159). Labelled 'queenly' (Tennyson 1832 133), the Lady might indeed show up being fashionable and coherently dressed. The crown she has wrought synonymously stands for the veil, '[...] the one thing needful to make an elopement more bridal' (Hughes 169). Fatally, the wedding cannot be completed: there is no groom, and no ceremony is undertaken. The Lady of Shalott remains like an abandoned bride at the altar, gradually understanding that the image she has created of herself is both inappropriate and too glamorous to be true. That she has chosen a bridal dress for her escape, however, points to the narrow range of available positions for female agency, which to test will prove fatal. Referring to the impossibility of entering the Symbolic Order as an autonomously speaking, self-assured woman or even artist, Linda Gill accounts for the Lady's choice of the white robe: 'The message seems to be that if a woman will enter into the public/masculine realm, she can only do so as an object whose worth and measure will be determined by the masculine subject who might (if he

chooses) possess her' (115). That is, the Lady essentially has to sacrifice her art and her position as a woman-artist in order to be recognised by a predominantly male, phallocentric audience. For that reason she inserts herself into a readily available role (the bride) and completely exposes herself to the male gaze again. Utterly at the mercy of Camelot's community, the Lady assumes the only acceptable social role a young maiden can fulfil; becoming the object, if not to say, possession, of her future husband. Impersonating '[...] the very bride – submissive and virginal, desired not desiring [...]' (Plasa 259), the carefully laid out gender roles seem safely re-installed. Yet a certain ambiguity towards the institution of marriage as well as a critique of the woman's role as possession of her husband, that goes along with it, is evoked via the Lady's death, '[...] suggesting that marriage, far from entailing the fulfillment of each sex through the other [...] is tantamount, for women, to a form of self-annihilation' (Plasa 260). Thus the poem might hint to the fact that in marrying Lancelot and transforming herself into his art object, the Lady would suffer a symbolical social death. Her actual death, however, unmistakably denotes the futility of assuming prefabricated roles. Simply aspiring to turn binary oppositions upside down is unveiled to be not enough to cause a change, since categories are not questioned and left intact as they are¹⁰¹. Far from appropriating her white "uniform" as an armour of virginity¹⁰², the Lady resorts to white as the colour of absence and negation. The uniform becomes one of insubstantiality, a blank space waiting to be filled with patriarchal instructions and conventions. The bridal dress has become a means without an end:

In its absence of colour, her childish white dress [that of the bride] is a blank page that asks to be written on just as her virginity asks to be "taken," "despoiled," "deflowered." Thus her white dress implies that she exists only and completely for the man who will remove it. In her bridal costume she bears herself as a gift to her groom: her whiteness, vulnerability made palpable, presents itself to be stained, her intactness – her self-enclosure – to be broken, her veil to be rent. Gilbert and Gubar 616.

¹⁰¹ As Linda Gill avers, '[...] the gendered binary structures patriarchy produces and relies on are reiterated and confirmed as well, for they are merely flipped-flopped, inverted' (119) and thus leave the model of the master-slave didactic intact. Laying emphasis on this hypothesis, Gill quotes Beth Newman saying that '[...] such an inversion may "register a protest against the gender conventions" but it does not "dismantle them" for patriarchal methods of empowerment and identity construction are repeated and reinscribed' (119).

¹⁰² 'For such a snow maiden, virginity, signifying power instead of weakness, is not a gift she gives her groom but a boon she grants to herself: the boon of androgynous wholeness, autonomy, self-sufficiency' (Gilbert and Gubar 617).

In the last instances of her life, it becomes apparent that the Lady's fancy dress has worn out: the bridal robe, as much as the synecdochic landscape before, is utterly wrong and, ultimately, deathly. The Lady's death – occurring even before her arrival in Camelot – seems to soberly confirm the dead end of her masquerade, proving that she was not able; or indeed not allowed, to draw subversive power out of her fashionable attire. Merely copying and pasting from established role models is eventually punished in a world where patriarchy is thoroughly intact. Perceiving how there is no escaping patriarchal constructions, the Lady of Shalott submits to her destiny and lies down in her boat to die – the snowy white bridal dress becoming her shroud – as the illusion of self-fashioning has worn thin.

5.4. Powers of Horror, Horrors of Power: the Dead Body as Icon

During her last passage on the metaphorical catwalk leading down to Camelot, the Lady reaches the height of her subversive powers before the vigilantly constructed order gains the upper hand for good. Foreseeing her near future with all the resignation of a '[...] steady, stony glance' (Tennyson *1832* 127), she nevertheless manages to cross barriers as she becomes the '[...] bold seer in a trance' (Tennyson 128), which again invokes gender ambiguities that had been hidden under the poem's seemingly conformist surface. Occupying an androgynous position¹⁰³, the revolutionary force attains its greatest success, only to dwindle away a few lines later as the cracked mirror is uncannily restored as the Lady's face (Plasa 258) turned towards Camelot with '[...] a glassy countenance' (Tennyson 130). As it appears, the Lady has moved to a higher mental state, perceiving in an instance of preternatural insight¹⁰⁴ how past, present and future have become one and the threads of her short life have untangled.

Anticipating her voyage to the Real in order to heal the wound that language and sexuality have torn open, the Lady is '[...] chanting her deathsong' (Tennyson *1832* 143), '[...] a carol, mournful, holy / she chanted loudly, chanted lowly' (Tennyson 145-

¹⁰³ Isobel Armstrong elaborates on the dilemma of the androgynous seer – hailed by most critics as a success in terms of reversed binaries – in the following manner: 'Gender differentiation is dissolved or melts into androgyny as the priestess takes on a new form. Perhaps the priestess seems to be capable of entering a new form. On the other hand, she could simply melt into the form of the great Father, and the prime gender becomes the masculine gender' (94). Essentially, this argument would connect to my assumption that a simple reversal of existing role patterns or appropriation of the masculine position does not automatically endow one with ample subversive powers.

¹⁰⁴ 'As the simile [Like a bold seer] implies, besides perceptual clarity, she has gained prescience concerning her destiny' (Shannon 218).

146) consisting of sounds as sensations inherent to the Imaginary she has forfeited. Probably in singing, which is both antecedent to and lacking all the fixed designation belonging to the world of language, the Lady attempts to return to the world of sensual immediacy where meaning is not fixed, but freely floating instead of imposed upon her. Despite the restoration of conventional patterns and the fact that the Lady is locked back into the duality she has struggled to escape from, the Lady might still possess the power to disrupt the Symbolic Order. Eerily and ghostly emerging from the margins where she had been expelled to, the Lady's physical appearance in Camelot testifies to the cracks in the system as the semiotic relentlessly and inevitably bleeds into the symbolic. Her dead body signifies the very abject the Symbolic Order necessarily has to eject in order to keep going. In so far, clearly cut borders have become irreversibly blurred. The apparent disorder the Lady has caused becomes manifest as the knights at Camelot '[...] cross['] themselves for fear' (Tennyson 166) at the sight of the Lady's corpse. The confusion arising in the aftermath of the Lady's death cannot be rationally accounted for by the citizens; the picture of the dead Lady only faintly reminds them of the semiotic, pre-Oedipal bliss they have left behind long time ago¹⁰⁵, and enables them to obtain a glimpse of a realm beyond representation. This fear shared by the community can be seen as grounding in the fact that the Lady is not graspable, and therefore neither her death nor her appearance can be satisfyingly explained. Ironically, the Lady has become the very mirror providing her with visions of Camelot; now, the roles have been changed – it is the Lady who mirrors lack and loss back at the bewildered community. Telling of her superiority is the fact that she, unlike them, comes from and returns to a '[...] world which does not have to depend upon image and name' (Colley 373). Ostensibly, the citizens of Camelot do; which now entraps them in the same sense of displacement and not-belonging the Lady had suffered in her ivory tower. All that is left of her is her dead body and the intangible token of her name, not sufficing for the citizens to make sense of the perverse spectacle they have helped to bring about. Only a little note the Lady has written before her death is found as possibly providing a solution to this riddle; the content, however, '[...] puzzled more than all the rest' (Tennyson 1832 166) and thus escapes any distressed male attempts to unveil this mystery. As a woman, the Lady was not able to effect change, but still, the question

¹⁰⁵ 'When the citizens of Camelot regard her, understandably they are fearful because they fear to see a reflection of their own lack and emptiness' (Colley 373).

arises whether the Lady's physical appearance within the Symbolic Order can be said to entail the end of Camelot¹⁰⁶, as the symbiosis introduced in the beginning and vital for both parties has been dissolved. Following this supposition, the Lady would indeed finally have been able to celebrate a paradoxical triumph; disturbing the Symbolic Order in a rebellion at the expense of the utmost sacrifice. Her death, then, leaves the citizens of Camelot as disillusioned as she has been, poised between impossible alternatives, after breaking free from her prison into a world resembling the one she has just left. While in death, she is released from the illusory dependency upon representation and able to '[enter] a nameless, imageless realm which exists prior to the assumption of metaphor, name or the "symbolic"' (Colley 376), the citizens are violently reminded of the '[...] limitations of the representational world [...]' (Colley 376), left to simply suspect what might become of Camelot now that the counterpart of the binary has faded into thin air. If the poem can be called revolutionary indeed, it is due to its perplexing ending that leaves citizens and readers free to challenge rigidly fixed structures by anticipating a realm independent of, and therefore superior to, representation and naming.

What can indeed be claimed to bestow a whiff of revolutionary force upon the poem – the dissolution of public and private sphere, the threat a woman allegedly poses when assuming a subject position – unfortunately does not hold true for the second, revised version of "The Lady of Shalott". Endowing the Lady's journey with more sacramental (Alaya 286), mythical elements rather distracts the attention away from the deplorable female lot. Her appearance in Camelot is more spectacle than critique of the patriarchal system, as the citizens ask themselves '[w]ho is this? and what is here?' (Tennyson 163), thereby displaying merely curiosity rather than fear and disorientation. Gone is the little enigmatic note, the Lady's last token creating an even denser atmosphere of mystery and misunderstanding; instead of it emerges arrogantly unmoved Sir Lancelot, who, after '[musing] a little space' (Tennyson 168), declares unreflectively with the stern voice of patriarchy, 'She has a lovely face / God in his mercy lend her grace'¹⁰⁷ (Tennyson 169-170), thereby fixing the Lady's as yet mysterious position onto

¹⁰⁶ 'Her presence in Camelot signifies that a rupture between the two worlds or two realms, between the conscious and the unconscious, has occurred. Essentially, her presence indicates that Camelot, too, will end' (Kruger 132).

¹⁰⁷ At this point I disagree strongly with Shannon, who has detected '[...] genuine concern for the Lady and her spiritual welfare [...]' in Lancelot's lazy comment, which he defines as '[...] words of reverence and faith [that] are appropriate to the occasion and a fitting benediction to the poem' (222). In my

a static role. With his uncaringly uttered words, Lancelot has suffocated any potential fear or imbalance the Lady might have triggered when appearing physically. The temporarily confused patterns have been allocated their conventionally ascribed roles anew, the rupture mended again. By '[a]ssigning the Lady a public identity [...]' (Chadwick 23) Lancelot makes sure to perpetuate ancient hetero-normative gender distinctions that do not allow for women to stray from their paths. The Lady's dead body, then, seems to depend upon Lancelot's easy blessing that seeks to continue patriarchal values deeply rooted within Camelot as he transports her '[...]' back across the gender line, from "masculine" to "feminine" positions, subject to object of the gaze [...]' (Plasa 259). Alas the "rite-de-passage" the Lady has enacted has been wiped out, her subversive powers allayed, the curse re-installed as she is attributed the characteristics of the feminine ideal – the lovely face – without agency. Wholly elevated to the iconic position of the beautiful corpse, the Lady '[...]' is emphatically re-assimilated to the criteria of the "femininity" she had previously violated [...]' (Plasa 259). Along with the patriarchal habit of turning women into two-dimensional, stereotypical pictures goes the increase in power discrepancy. While the Lady has proven her undying love for Lancelot by '[...]' literally dying at his feet' (Gill 118), Lancelot flaunts no discernible signs of interest in her as he '[...]' evaluates her based upon her "lovely face" [...]' (Gill 121), utterly oblivious to the fact that he proved to be the beauty's downfall. However, it has to be admitted that Lancelot's agency is limited in a similar way to the Lady's as he ostentatiously adheres to a near-mythical script disseminating the '[...]' mechanisms of subjugation within the symbolic order [...]' as '[...]' both men and women are trapped in the power-structure supporting this order [and] both adopt the roles of either objects or dominators' (Müller 55). In this respect it can be suspected that also Lancelot is pawn to eternal structures that foresee his supremacy over the Lady whom he will never be able to appreciate but for her "lovely face". His all too lazy comment and employment of stock phrases ultimately prove him entangled – if probably not as deeply – in the same power structures as the Lady had been, diminishing both of them to '[...]' eternal victims, playthings of a man-made fate' (Müller 55). Unfortunately it seems that the only way the Lady will ever be able to gain public recognition is to surrender to the dominant discourse arranged in terms of

opinion, Lancelot's words show neither regret nor sadness, but mere indifference as he uses a formulaic, pre-fabricated phrase suiting the event.

dominance and subordination. She literally castrates herself by becoming the object of the gaze again, and contrary to producing art, displays her dead body as the art object *par excellence* (Gilbert and Gubar 43).

This trope of the “beautiful corpse”; ‘[...] a *memento mori* of female helplessness, aesthetic isolation, and virginal vulnerability carried to deadly extremes’ (Gilbert and Gubar 618, emphasis in the original) indeed ‘[...] fueled something like a craze [...]’ (Hassett and Richardson 287) among the Victorians, and in particular, the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who proved frantically eager to provide illustrations to the 1857 Moxon edition of Tennyson’s poems. Paintings by William Holman Hunt, John William Waterhouse and Dante Gabriel Rossetti tracing the Lady’s journey into adolescence, sexuality and death shall be introduced in the next chapter as masculine means of literary killing women into art, thereby preserving her in an everlasting state of availability for consumption as the timeless object of the male gaze.

6. The Beautification of Death – Images of the Femme Fatale and the Beautiful Corpse in William Holman Hunt, John William Waterhouse and Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Considering the Victorian iconography and the prevailing maiden cult of the 19th century, one will notice that there seems to exist a horrifyingly deathly hagiography of women and girls as art objects, '[...] slim, pale, passive beings whose "charms" eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead' (Gilbert and Gubar). Epitomes of the '[...] pale, passive, sickly, sexually objectified, broken, bereft, dying, dead [...]' (Orlando 615) girls in their most richly arranged forms exceptionally densely populate the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This group of ambitious as well as accomplished young artists, founded in 1848, fervently aspired to '[...] creat[ing] a new style of painting inspired by Gothic and late-medieval art' (Orlando 617); little surprisingly, since the Brotherhood's attribute, "Pre-Raphaelite" already hints to their firm conviction that art declined after Raphael¹⁰⁸. The ways wherein the Pre-Raphaelites were looking backwards to a lost, albeit imagined and romantically distorted past, manifested themselves in an abandonment of mimesis – or '[...] "truth to nature" [...] in favor of a pursuit of a highly unnatural ideal' (Orlando 618), which held likewise true for their means of representing women. Renowned painters like John William Waterhouse, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, Ford Madox Brown or Dante Gabriel Rossetti conjured up a gigantic panoptic (Rohde-Dachser 101) of possible versions of femininity – albeit possible only in the male imagination and never in real life. Falling back upon archetypal schemata, Pre-Raphaelite artistry in most cases portrays women as either eerily fragile fairy maidens or archaically sexualised temptresses; sometimes as figures oscillating between these states as if quite unsure which category to slip into. Even the morbid craze fostered around virginity does not upgrade women's, but eventually men's value – as creator, that is, painter, or husband-to-be of an intact maiden – thereby speaking '[...] first and foremost of masculine power' (Müller 68). Virginity thus becomes not a desiring characteristic of women's potency, but a financial exchange value, leaving the virgin only economically relevant to male society. Thus even this aspect of hetero-normative gender constructions is

¹⁰⁸ 'Singling out the art of Raphael as the site where things went astray in visual art, they wanted to retreat to the style of painting produced before him (or "*pre-Raphael*")' (Orlando 618, emphasis in the original).

deeply intertwined with economical power struggles which surfaces in the labelling of woman as “possession” or “good” (Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs 530).

Either way, the women remain nameless ‘anonymous types’ (Orlando 619), far too ‘waxen’ and ‘over-the-top’ (Orlando 618) to be realistic. Indeed, the Brotherhood fanned feminine fantasies to a new obsession: the celebration of the faint woman produced an excess of clichés, a role larger than life, too big, too much to occupy for any real woman. Pre-Raphaelite women were literally ‘[...] killed into art [...]’ (Hassett and Richardson 288), stylised as male ‘[...] fever dreams of doomed yearning or erotic luxuriousness’ (Hassett and Richardson 287) they could not possibly measure up to. Whether it be Shakespeare’s Ophelia or Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott”, male artists made ‘[...] of the legends containers for passions too large, too violent, and too strange for the Victorian parlor, for the novel, and for realism in general [...]’ (Hassett and Richardson 287). Tentatively, it can be claimed that this excessive stylisation of the female body ultimately silenced the real woman behind, as male minds fascinatedly grabbed hold of the schemata, oblivious to the fact that the physically present woman was already slowly slipping away. Presumably, the longing gaze replaced all other sensory impressions with the realisation that the maiden in the picture already perfectly fulfilled any role potentially allocated to her.

Discussing several Pre-Raphaelite paintings featuring Tennyson’s Lady in greater detail, I wish to delineate the strategies whereby women are transfixed into images and thereby become the living dead. What details a painter chooses to highlight, what to neglect, what bits and pieces to distort and add, is vastly telling of the socio-cultural background and the Victorian zeitgeist where painterly versions of female identity were outlined so yearningly sharply and excessively manifold as to lead both men and women into believing that these mute, anachronistic ‘pin-up girl[s]’ (Orlando 619) were indeed desirable figures. Anyhow, the silenced woman served to function as ‘[...] a visual sign of the masculine genius’ (Hassett and Richardson 289), a fetishised icon testifying to male creativity and potency and likewise an immobile, omnipresent token to satisfy scopophilic pleasures.

As regards the Lady of Shalott, I want to discuss two pictures by William Holman Hunt, one by John William Waterhouse and finally one by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. These pictures are indeed not chosen accidentally, but visually retrace the Lady’s journey undergone in Tennyson’s poem from traditionally femininely connoted

yet relatively autonomous Shalott, where one would find the Lady's potentially subversive powers still intact, to the fullness of the Symbolic Order she conquers but in death when melting with the promise of the Real. A problematic crack in the literal picture occurs when assessing the distinct ways wherein Pre-Raphaelite artists sought to solve the dilemma of portraying women as artists and social subjects in the same instant: the Lady is almost always sexualised as a consequence to the artists' distancing themselves from her. Thus, the manifold art works produced by male painters do not depict the Lady as the poem's subject she has initially been, but as object of the male gaze. In this respect, authority is exerted over her as she disconnected from her generative, artistic and productive powers only to be doubly framed; first, by the artist who casts her into the role he wishes to allot to her, and secondly, by the painting itself that arrests her by its very nature in a state of enforced silence and tragically helpless inability.

6.1. “Emptiness and Violation, Terror and Charm, Archetypal and Existential” – the Face of Hunt's Lady of Shalott¹⁰⁹

“Tragically helpless” does designate a modifier certainly applicable to Waterhouse's and Rossetti's envisionings of the Lady; however, an association of this phrase with Hunt's illustration and oil painting proves to be disappointingly fruitless. Hunt's illustration for the 1857 Moxon edition and the infinitely more elaborate and spectacular successor, the oil painting begun in 1886 and finished in 1905, both deeply drenched in Biblical symbolism, ancient mythology and moral allegory, depict the Lady in her most powerful state, the sexual awakening. Thus one could claim that the two portrayals created by Hunt constitute the first stage of the Lady's “Pre-Raphaelite journey” towards self-determinacy and eventually death, wherein she is still in possession of her charms and powers and hence still located within the semiotic realm or the maternal chôra, as the 1857 picture will testify to.

Truly, the illustration for the Moxon edition forms an antithesis to the insubstantial fairy-girl, whose identity cannot be firmly attested, portrayed in

¹⁰⁹ Anja Müller uses this phrase relating to ‘[t]he symbolic, dehumanised face of Greta Garbo [...]’ (71) whom Roland Barthes identifies as ‘[...] one of the central modern icons [...]’ (70). I chose this description as headline for the chapter dealing with Hunt's Lady of Shalott as her face seems to emanate precisely those contradictory characteristics. Her attitude towards her position is ambivalent, and caught in this moment of deep ambiguity, she has attained an iconographic status, almost transcending human limits in her struggle against the inevitable.

Tennyson's poem. Medieval idylls and picturesque, pastoral stillness have been replaced by motion, self-conscious sexuality and violent energy, fully unleashed as the woman's hair is blown all across the room. The look on her face is frightening, even murderous, as the Lady has become the monster-woman whose sexual energy threatens to break open her prison. Head bent downwards, her terrifyingly dark eyes seem fixated upon an unspecified point in the room which only heightens the frenzy in her gaze. Not only the Lady, but her newly acquired subversive powers appear gigantic; this monstrous woman is trapped in her room like in a womb, a cocoon, her metamorphosis fulfilled, only waiting to break free: '[...] a caryatid whose head would burst through the picture's edge were she to look up' (Udall 36). Indeed, this rendering of the once "fairy Lady" bestows the greatest amount of revolutionary force upon her in so far as she occupies the most physical space. As if attempting to break the membrane of the placenta, she is waiting to be born, or re-born with the prospect of joining – or destroying, as her gaze suggests – the outside world. Her chôra is undeniably a feminine place and space, wholly governed by fluidity and movement. Imaginary structures are invoked in that one could forward the claim that the frame of the web that surrounds the Lady might signify a physical manifestation of the thetic barrier that the Lady has to step over in order to come into life, language and sexuality. Still embedded within semiotic structures, the Lady might also be considered subtly dangerous, as her '[...] imaginary is inexhaustible [...] [her] stream of phantasms is incredible' (Cixous *Medusa* 347). As regards the proportions employed in this sketch, the Lady unmistakably recalls Cixous' Medusa; the surging female force within her bosom might indeed instigate her '[...] to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law [...]'] (Cixous *Medusa* 357). A colossal Lady with angrily glowering looks, '[...] a woman who represents the dark side, the obverse of men's idealisation of women [...]'] (Udall 36), Hunt's second work observably testifies to male fears of female sexuality. The sexual energy is almost over-accentuated as the Lady's body, boasting voluptuous, womanly curves that have found no mentioning in the poem, is clothed with a flowing dress that nestles up to her hips and legs as the threads of the loom have completely ensnared her. With a calm, stoic self-confidence she reaches with bare arms and hands to free herself, slowly, almost gracefully as she seems positive to break open her "poetic cocoon" (Udall 36). The painting's most striking feature, however, is comprised by wavy masses of dark hair that completely '[...] fills the upper picture space [...] and best

imparts the release of feminine energy' (Udall 36). The “unleashed” female hair serves to ‘[...] create a sense of abandonment to sensuality and of sudden, violent shock and crisis’ (Poulson 177) as ‘[o]rder explodes into chaos [...]’ (Udall 36). Given the fact that Hunt was a stern moralist, sincerely devoted to the upholding of Christian values, one could conclude that Hunt uses the Lady’s hair to condemn unruly sexuality in women:



Fig. 2: “The Lady of Shalott” by William Holman Hunt, illustration for the 1857 Moxon edition of Tennyson’s poems

The social encoding of hair imagery and symbolism, as well as its specific manifestation as a “Victorian cultural obsession” with women’s hair, vividly come into view in William Holman Hunt’s numerous illustrations of the Lady of Shalott [...] Her abundant hair vibrates with libidinous energy. It is like a vigorous brood of snakes, not like shriveling pinworms. In this imaging of the

Lady of Shalott, Hunt makes an unequivocal statement about her disobedience and loss of virtue. He uses the Lady's material possessions, such as the loom and its cognate, her hair, to provide indices to her moral condition. Barzilai *Lovely Face* 240, 242

As regards the wildly blown about hair, the Lady can be seen to be situated within the eye of the storm, at the very epicentre of a revolution she is to bring about. However frightful and determined Hunt's 1857 Lady of Shalott may be rendered, she has still little chance to stand against the forces of patriarchy since the powers she is about to let loose necessarily will turn against her. The moral message, then, inevitably embraces the notion that a woman following her own sexual desires and passions needs to be punished, if not cast out from society, by a morally superior male represented by both the painter and the institution of patriarchy seeking to perpetuate the hetero-normative discourse, for the threat she poses to the orderly established barriers between semiotic and symbolic, sanity and madness, masculinity and femininity.

Holman Hunt's last rendering of the Lady, an oil painting begun in 1887 and finished by 1905, seems extraordinarily more thorough and lavishly adorned than its predecessors, an epic allegory immersed in Biblical and mythological symbolism wherein Hunt has undeniably perfected his manner of skilfully grasping the dialectic between arousal and virginity, captivity and release, inner and outer space (Sullivan Kruger 117-8). Admittedly, this last and richest illustration cannot be reasonably assessed without having previously acquired a basic knowledge of both context and co-text in order to decipher Hunt's arbitrarily established, highly symbolical encoding. An extensive engagement on behalf of the spectator was presupposed; still, for the sake of a better understanding, Hunt issued pamphlets accompanying the paintings that were '[...] half commentary, half manifesto' wherein he '[...] handled his theological and aesthetic ideas with amateurish zest, if not with school-worthy authority' (Jeffers 243). Although originally meant as a supplement to Tennyson's poem, the oil painting has been regarded as a work containing a story and a structure of its own. The '[...] wheel-like structure [...]' (Udall 34) has been observably appropriated by Hunt as the Lady is standing amidst her loom like a giant spider caught in her own web, posture as well as gestures reminiscent of the 1857 portrayal. However, the brutal look and the harsh facial features have gone, her head is still bent downwards, but bears no monstrous characteristics. Instead, the Lady's face resembles that of a Greek marble sculpture,

perfectly shaped with straight nose and prominent forefront. Her androgyny is what equips her with nobility and authority: '[h]er face [...] is molded like that of an Athena, a caryatid, or a stela figure – this last analogy combining strength with grief over her impending death' (Jeffers 244). She is indeed a strong woman, no half-present, elusive fairy princess, but an artist endowed with '[...] the severe piety of a German Nazarene' (Jeffers 244). Contrary to the rather masculine attire just described, her hair is still wavy and of extraordinary quantity, flying all about her head and the room; yet the space has been expanded so the Lady seems no longer trapped, but able to move and look up within her snare. The dress has retained its flowing lines and conventionally feminine cut. Having adapted the Lady's size to suit the room, the interior is now extensively decorated and almost overcrowded with accessories of truly distinct backgrounds. Hunt painstakingly blends ancient sources, like Christian and Greek mythology, so as to add extra layers of meaning destined to lead the audience's thoughts to speculations about the Lady's fate. The tapestry is itself structured into sections and subsections¹¹⁰, juxtaposed with tokens of various origins, almost always referring to biblical, mythological or universal tropes, such as the perennial struggle of mankind or the surrender to temptation hinting to the protagonist's own fate. However rich and fervently equipped the picture may be, the Lady still remains strangely static and sadly aware of the fact that she inhabits a '[...] world without a future [...]' (Udall 34); forming a stark contrast to the woman in a painting Hunt labelled "The Awakening Conscience". In it, a "fallen" woman rises with open eyes and hopefully shining face as she '[...] experiences a sudden flash of illumination' (Udall 37). She and the Lady are antipodes, undergoing reverse movements as the "awakening" woman does not depend on a world beyond the window since she has found her own source of inspiration. The Lady on the other hand depends on Camelot, a world where Lancelot is riding away instead towards her, which condemns her to imprisonment, escape and death¹¹¹. Hunt's

¹¹⁰ As regards the tapestry, Hunt has creatively assembled symbolically charged scenes so as to indicate the Lady's artistic autonomy and (self)-reflexivity: 'Like an artist with a lively imagination – the artist I would argue the Lady in the poem wants to become – she has arranged whatever figures have unwittingly modelled for her into [...] a representation of virtuous Sir Galahad offering his King the Holy Grail [...] and [...] the not-so-virtuous Lancelot kissing his fingers, an allusion to his adultery with Guinevere, which occasions the King's downfall. To the back of the tapestry are [...] figures of Truth and Justice, which Galahad and Arthur fight for, and [...] one of Charity, which, we may infer, should towards Lancelot and Guinevere be mixed with Justice' (Jeffers 245).

¹¹¹ 'The moral allegory still centers on the calamity of yielding to the devil's own world and flesh: the textile artist, like any other, has the duty of staying chaste inside her studio and ignoring come-ons from people like the playboy-knight of the Round Table' (Jeffers 237).

moral conviction, then, is evident: a woman who figuratively rises after her fall, turning away from the man's lap, unwilling to respond to his advances, may be given a second chance to redeem her faults. The Lady however, both antagonist and literal sister to this woman, as both are split into '[...] multiple avatars [...]' of '[...] monster, fallen woman, redeemed saint [...]' (Udall 38) succumbs to her own personal longings without placing them within a greater frame and thus needs to be punished. Although the duality embodied by the woman found in "The Awakening Conscience" and Hunt's Lady might '[...] mirror a moral duality he [Hunt] found at work in the Victorian psyche [...]' Udall still claims that despite the deeper meanings inherent to Hunt's paintings, '[t]he issues of identity, power, and gender remain frustratingly arcane, even confused' (38), a point that I can only second. Ultimately, it has become evident that Hunt's paintings constitute epitomes of far too rigidly and narrow-mindedly drawn versions of femininity that have been propagated feverishly during the Victorian Age. Still, one might want to make concessions to Hunt, admitting that his versions of the Lady most faithfully depict a creatively generating woman artist, an androgynous "bold seer" striving to break free from the enclosing womb, unluckily falsely believing she might assert herself within a patriarchally ruled society.



Fig. 3: “The Lady of Shalott” by William Holman Hunt, oil painting 1887-1905

6.2. Visions of Impossible Romance – Waterhouse’s Sorrowful Maiden in Virginal White

While William Holman Hunt’s rendering of the Lady comprises the first and firmest stage in the Lady’s journey, John William Waterhouse’s painting necessarily continues this fatal movement by picturing Tennyson’s protagonist poised between the life she has left behind and the future she cannot yet imagine and will inevitably never reach. Thus Waterhouse’s picture, providing a link between Imaginary and Symbolic Order, goes

hand in hand with a diminution of female power that has been sacrificed in order to grasp at least a glimpse of freedom. Furthermore, this entails a weakening of the Lady, reflected in posture and facial expression, as she is trespassing on male territory and therefore not in a realm she feels securely comfortable with. Ultimately, Waterhouse's Lady may be claimed to embody the ideal of Victorian femininity, '[...] an indestructible, ever-ready innocence paired with unearthly beauty and, if possible, renewable virginity [...]' (Müller 66), an icon of a girl reflecting disempowering passivity and regret as she is overpowered by patriarchy even as she attempts to escape it.

Waterhouse's contribution to illustrating Tennyson's poem represents the Lady sitting on a carefully decorated blanket – which obviously represents the tapestry she has been weaving and on a deeper level denotes the loss of art and autonomy – in her boat as she heads towards Camelot. This Lady somehow seems to emanate an eerie, ghostly aura as she returns the viewer's gaze with oddly self-reflexive, but half-closed eyes, as if being fully aware of the future she is travelling towards. Waterhouse's Lady bears nothing of the characteristics of Hunt's '[...] femme fatale witchery [...]' but is exposed to the audience as '[...] a sorrowful maiden in virginal white [...]' (Jeffers 246). Indeed sadness, regret and the awareness of a fated inevitability is manifest in her dreamy gaze; still, as has been suggested, a certain amount of sensuality cannot be overlooked. Lips parted, long red hair swaying about her body and her breasts in particular, this Lady truly represents the dying, deathly maiden that was fetishised by the Victorian society. The dress she is wearing undoubtedly can be recognised as her uncanny wedding dress, clinging tightly to her body in order to accentuate the curves of hips and breasts. Her outfit is undeniably conspicuous in so far as it features what would nowadays be called fossilised attributes of romance - such as a long skirt, tight bodice and girlish ornaments round the neck and on the upper arms – present in wedding dresses that have transformed into near-uniforms (Hughes 175). The band she is wearing around her head could be claimed to synonymously replace the indispensable accessory of the veil. Disturbingly, a black belt is tied around her waist, probably a harbinger of death and doom that alarmingly disrupts the blank surface of the pure white dress. The very fact that Waterhouse wished to portray the Lady in a bridal dress heightens the erotic, sensual appeal, even if one may speak of a '[...] necrophiliac sensuality [...] linking beauty and death [...]' (Jeffers 247-8).



Fig. 4: “The Lady of Shalott” by John William Waterhouse, 1888

Put into connection with the bridal gown, her eyes appear to divulge a deeply desperate yearning for impossibly illusionary romance, a ‘[...] wistful regret that she never had a lover’ (Jeffers 248) and at the same time the already unshakable knowledge that her dreams will all too soon fade into thin air. Inserted into natural surroundings – river, plants and mountains – the Lady has obviously left her mother’s lap, deceived by the mirror’s magically distorted sights of wholeness, and is now forced to come to terms with the alienation and loss, the disintegrated self she is facing. This newly experienced insecurity and helplessness is written in her eyes which makes the Lady all the more vulnerable.

The same care with which the Lady has been painted has as well been applied to the background. The tapestry she is sitting on – gloomily meant to become her shroud (Sullivan Kruger 126) – shows roundels featuring scenes taken from the poem itself. As one of the roundels shows the Lady travelling in her canoe it becomes strikingly evident

that she has been ‘[...] caught in this “web of illusion” and is eventually destroyed by the illusion she had been weaving all along – an eerie reversal that presents the artist enmeshed in her own art, killing rather than sustaining her’ (Sullivan Kruger 127). Not only the tapestry, but also nature echoes the Lady’s fate, dimly foreshadowing the fusion of past and future as the horizon offers a glimpse of an apocalyptic grey landscape, a “nowhere” reminiscent of the castle’s grey walls. The “memento mori” atmosphere forwarded by nature is underscored by the three candles, two of which have been blown out already, the last one about to be extinguished by the wind.

One might be tempted to argue that Waterhouse has delicately interwoven pieces of criticism in response to possibly available female roles. In order to account for this hypothesis, Kathryn Sullivan Kruger can be cited saying that the ‘[...] vulnerability of the Lady’s gaze [...]’ metaphorically parallels the ‘[...] vulnerability of women who step out of their appointed sphere, and the judgement and punishment to which they are then exposed’ (183). Considering the tale from a Lacanian angle, one could conclude that the Lady has left the Imaginary structures behind, experienced the Mirror Stage and is travelling irretrievably towards the Symbolic Order, represented by Camelot, which does not grant her the life she wishes to lead. Consequently, her dreams and hopes might be transferred and projected onto the Real, a realm promising safety and completion, attainable only at the expense of death.

6.3. Killed into Art – Rossetti’s Lady Lizzie

Since both William Holman Hunt and John William Waterhouse have endowed their characterisations of Tennyson’s Lady with their very own artistic specificities, thereby unconsciously yet unmistakably portraying their Ladies uniquely embedded within psychoanalytic structures, it does not surprise to hear that Dante Gabriel Rossetti has probably created the most distinctive illustration for Tennyson’s poem. Given Rossetti’s fascination – or should one say, *obsession* – with death and beauty, it seems obvious that Rossetti has chosen to elaborate on the moment of the Lady’s death, thereby providing the last missing piece of the puzzle that in this chapter figuratively retells the Lady’s ill-starred journey. Perfectly in line with the afore mentioned and discussed art works, this last picture chillingly frames the Lady after her arrival in Camelot, having seemingly peacefully died in her barge.

On the one hand, Rossetti's drawing, a wood engraving dating from 1857, differs from the ones produced by his fellows in so far as Rossetti dismissed the thought of deriving arty inspiration from Tennyson's poem and looked out to find his own source of stimulation. Indeed he modelled his illustration for the Moxon edition on a 14th century miniature, provided for *Lancelot du Lac*, which he found in the British Museum (Jeffers 233). Hence, both the necrophiliac touch and the awe the inexplicably mysterious Lady instils in the spectator even after her death are infinitely stronger than in most other graphic enrichments to the poem. Rossetti's image is sincerely steeped in darkness and mystery, smacking of a '[...] weird medievalism [...]' that could only origin in the peculiar imaginative depths of this artist's mind (Smyser 514). No traces of Hunt's '[...] enchanted regions of faery, unlocalized in time or place [...]' (Smyser 514) or Waterhouse's tenderly fragile maiden are to be found here in this '[...] most enigmatic of all the portraits discussed' (Sullivan Kruger (127)). It seems almost as if the picture was ambivalent towards interpretation; on the one hand, the emphasis can be said to be shifted away from the Lady, on the other hand, she is doubly framed by the male gaze. Firstly, she is blatantly stared at by Sir Lancelot, and secondly, her posture and the whole composition of the picture itself suggest that '[s]he is presented to the spectator, who is cast in the role of voyeur' (Poulson 185). Thus, the Lady is doubly deprived of her agency as both audience and the picture's male protagonist enact power over her that she can neither ward off nor yield. Like a trophy that has been long and desperately yearned for, she has been hunted and finally exposed to the audience to commemorate and celebrate the victory of man over woman, symbolic over semiotic. Justly speaking, the Symbolic character is not be overlooked here as the picture features more men than women – and admittedly, the only woman it features is already dead. According to Elisabeth Bronfen, the gender configuration of active male and passive (dead) female is inevitable as the surviving person is rewarded with feelings of triumph and relief at the realisation of not being dead: the dead body is presented as carefully, horizontally placed and absolutely still, while the survivor stands upright, emanating a sense of superiority and power. Thus it seems only too logical that the corpse must be female, and the survivor male (98). Ultimately, it becomes unmistakably evident that the engraving echoes the Symbolic Order disguised as Camelot's hierarchical, patriarchal order revolving around representative Lancelot in the foreground and less important knights in the shady background. Lancelot's gaze probably mirrors Rossetti's

conviction that '[s]uch beauty [...] should be eternalized' (Jeffers 234) and, as if having entered into dialogue with Sir Lancelot as representative of patriarchy, Rossetti has his Lady literally "killed into art". Her tranquil dead body bespeaks a societal need for conspicuous consumption in so far as her femininity and beauty are wholly fashioned for man's pleasure (Hassett and Richardson 289), which Rossetti has made possible by distorting Tennyson's medieval poem to fit 19th century demands. Unlike Hunt and Waterhouse, who have decidedly (and justifiably, as she is the eponymous poem's protagonist) placed the Lady of Shalott at the centre of action, Rossetti grants his Lady '[...] the least amount of physical space [...]', rather giving emphasis to '[...] those leaning over her boat to peer by torchlight upon her body [...] particularly Lancelot, who scrutinizes the curious cipher of her dead face' (Sullivan Kruger 128). Truly, judging by the spatial composition, Lancelot could be the legitimate protagonist: the Lady is pictured lying at the bottom of the picture, factually at Lancelot's feet, whereas the spectators are squeezed about the upper top, their faces cut off by the picture's edge. Apart from a beautifully drawn, but almost overshadowed face revealing little but '[...] beauty and silence [...]' (Sullivan Kruger 128) and her cautiously placed body – sexualised as the folds of her dress recall the shape of a vagina – little prognoses can be made about the Lady herself. As has been mentioned earlier, there is no particular stress placed upon her as she is presented as a disembodied artist, the only position offered to her within the Symbolic Order. Given that the portrait's primary concerns are beauty and death, the Lady is disconnected from her past as an artist and therefore denied to ever have assumed the status of an autonomous being¹¹². To some extent, Rossetti has even erased the co-text, the original poem, a large part of which does centre on the Lady's lifetime. A second factor that separates the Lady from her creator and the text she was embedded in is the fact that the Lady's face possibly has been modelled on the face of Elizabeth Siddal (Orlando 632). Thus, the Lady of Shalott and Lancelot have become disguised real-life persons, puppets to the historical couple Rossetti and Siddal. The story to be told is no longer Tennyson's, but explicitly revolves around the relationship between the painter and his muse (Sullivan Kruger 128). Lancelot's face allegedly represents that of Rossetti, bemoaning the death of his beloved Lady/Lizzie with mixed feelings of grief, love and fascination that would give way to more profound

¹¹² 'The illustration refrains from linking her to a particular past, as if she had no existence before this moment when she floats into Camelot, to lie beneath the gaze of Lancelot. It as if [sic] the entire action of the poem before this moment were effaced' (Sullivan Kruger 128).

speculations about the '[...] relationships between body and soul, sexuality and destruction, death and immortality [...]' (Bentley 847).

Having intensively engaged with Rossetti's rendering of the Lady of Shalott, many questions as to the extreme popularity of the motif of a young, dead maiden can be answered. As has been pointed out already in the introduction to this section, the bonds uniting Lancelot and the Lady in Rossetti's picture seem to characterize '[...] an ideal relationship and the highest form of Romantic love' (Sullivan Kruger 129). This love will always remain vivid and highly celebrated in the minds of the spectator, since it has never been consummated and therefore never been "spoilt", the mutual feelings can never be undone: '[w]hatever feelings her beauty evokes in him, they will always remain idealized because her ability to act, move, live, speak, or change has been arrested; therefore, she is incapable of altering his feelings for her' (Sullivan Kruger 129). The medievalism originally determining Tennyson's poem has been palpably faithfully taken up by Rossetti since the poem has been appreciated especially for its

[...] elements of the purest and highest romance, the fine presentment in perfect imagery of strange enchantments, the alluring sense of a deeper meaning lurking beneath the image but refusing to be conjured forth, and the weird spell that human emotion throws over the world of nature until its realism is transformed into an ideal beauty more rare than is seen by fleshly eye. Smyser 510.

Ultimately it appears as if Rossetti, by ingeniously intertwining the powers of death and beauty into a hauntingly mythical emblem of eternally faithful love, has found the means to satisfy people's innermost needs for romance and offered them a perfect opportunity for the contemplation of an '[...] endlessly virginal, [...] endlessly available' (Poulson 191) young bride having conquered the forces of decay. Yet by placing his version of the courtly romance of Lancelot and the Lady within an obscurely medieval frame, a safe distance has been established, allowing for the audience to enjoy art without being '[...] conscious of precisely where the complex fascination of these images lay' (Poulson 191). Indeed, all of the artists discussed above have sincerely managed to eternalise Tennyson's poem by making its protagonist an icon of Victorianism's thwarted passions and values; Rossetti, however, daring to deviate from the poetic frame, achieved to extricate and ceaselessly preserve the key elements of what constituted the poem's irresistibly thrilling appeal. While the "art object" of the Lady's dead body must have been a warning that such frantically glorified Romantic quests must inevitably end in death, the Lady's youthfully innocent face wipes away

fears of death and doom by soothingly and silently assuring that still, the quest was worth of continuing (Sullivan Kruger 129).

In this respect, women's defeat by the Symbolic Order has been played down and presented as a natural, even appealing phenomenon that has been repeated for centuries and would continue to be repeated over and over again as if the whole order was caught in a morbidly invariable time warp without escape. By the same token, woman's role is narrowed down to an archetypal schema, which designates a rigorous division between interior and exterior as correlates of Imaginary and Symbolic housing women and men, respectively. Alas a transgression of these spaces must end in disillusionment and eventually death as a way of punishing women rebelling against the conventional order of things. These bitterly unfair circumstances are in the same way experienced by the Lady whose metaphorical painterly journey testifies to the eternally impossible struggle to preserve the stage of the Real as a viable space of female autonomy and liberation.



Fig. 5: The Lady of Shalott by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, wood engraving as illustration for the 1857 Moxon edition

6.4 Resisting the Symbolic Order – Painting a Female Symbolic

Considering the abundance of books and scholarly articles devoted to Rossetti, Millais or Waterhouse, one is easily seduced to conclude that women must have been marginal to the Pre-Raphaelite group; a view that has been passionately defended by the artists themselves. Indeed, they considered their muses as mistresses attempting to produce art, but only ever being able to manufacture products being pale echoes of their own work. The fact that all too often, the creators chose to wed their models proved to be both the end of the woman's career – if it had ever been initiated at all – and a sad confirmation of the prevalent view that women served as decorum to their masters. Yet recently, attempts to research into and re-appreciate the artistry of Siddal, emblem of the Victorian angel-woman fading into death, immortalised only via numerous Pre-Raphaelite paintings (Bronfen 247), and her metaphorical sisters have been gaining solid ground. Elizabeth Siddal can no longer be conceived of in terms of Rossetti's silenced muse and sweet, faint angel in the house, but shall be presented to the public as a capable, willing, even slightly revolutionary woman artist in a time when women were almost wholly confined to the domestic sphere.

6.4.1. Voices From the Grave: Elizabeth Siddal(l)'s Answer to Dante Gabriel Rossetti

The most striking feature anyone engaged in research about Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, muse and wife of the Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti, will be confronted with is the highly patterned, excessive mythmaking connected to the enigmatic historical person. Most critics dealt with, though they subsequently seek to deconstruct prevailing myths in order to bring the “real” person behind to the surface, employ the same almost prefabricated phrases and resort to those pieces of language that foster the cult around “Lizzie” that has been cherished for centuries.

Laurel Bradley for instance begins and ends his article by pondering about Siddal's ‘[...] elusive personality’ (137) that fuels the myth, but poses an obstacle for anyone eager to make known the unattainable, unearthly muse of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Elaine Shefer joins in by depicting Siddal as a woman ‘[...] shrouded in mystery [...]’ (21), repeating the lexeme “myth” when talking about her discovery as well as her

status as “stunner”. In general, one catches the impression that Shefer paints an archetypal picture of Siddal, characterising her as a mysteriously intangible person, outstandingly gifted and desperately trying to process her coming-of-age in art, only to be ultimately broken by cruelly oblivious patriarchy. The legend of the “Pre-Raphaelite stunner” is taken up by Emily Orlando (614), who pictures Siddal as a kind of anachronistic supermodel, laying the foundations for the popularity of later celebrities like Marilyn Monroe (627). Likewise, Jan Marsh assesses this aspect as he aptly classifies the “legendary Elizabeth Siddal” (64) as belonging to those tragically glamorous heroines, whose ‘[...] myth rehearsed the archetype of the beautiful, gifted, reckless, vulnerable woman who was destroyed by her own beauty but thereby saved from the slow decay of middle age’ (Marsh 78).

The most popular story entwined around the young milliner’s daughter undoubtedly seems to be that of her discovery. Quoting a passage stylised in completely overdrawn, almost over-the-top melodramatical language, Marsh refers to the incident when Walter Deverell, as if struck by epiphany, discovered Lizzie in a shop and immediately fell in love with the thought of painting this exceptional young woman (68-9). In Orlando, this highly charged subject only deserves short mentioning; instead, Siddal’s extraordinary talent is focused upon (626). Contrarily, Shefer, particularly eager to apply the word “myth”, unveils the ‘[...] myth of her [Siddal’s] entry into the Pre-Raphaelite group’ (21) to have been a discovery common with sitters for painters, as in fact, Deverell was never struck by Siddal’s beauty, simply considering her apt for a painting he was about to create.

In this respect it appears as if Siddal’s discovery – an act not at all influenced or controlled by herself – and her mysterious death¹¹³ truly seem to be of greater interest than her lifetime as poet and painter. Exhuming Lizzie’s grave after several years in order to regain manuscripts that had been buried with his beloved, Rossetti remarked that the corpse had been as intact as one the day of her death, and that her hair has kept on growing ‘[...] until it filled the coffin, retaining all its glowing colour’ (Marsh 67). This indeed more than ‘[...] macabre event [...]’ not only added up to Rossetti’s self-fashioning as a Romantic poet ‘[...] alongside Keats, Byron and Shelley [...]’ (Marsh 66), but necessarily enhanced the mythmaking around and celebration of the undying

¹¹³ Presumably, after having experienced severe depressions and a miscarriage, Siddal died of an overdose of Laudanum to which she had been addicted for several years (Bradley 141).

love between Rossetti and Siddal. The picture of the desperate, bereft lover was especially appealing in an age glorifying death and the maiden cult; and the up to now relatively neutrally regarded Elizabeth Siddal came to be stylised as an icon whose '[...] death [was] more meaningful than her life [...]', reduced to but yet adored as a '[...] lost love object, visible only as the vanished ghost of the pictures, or as a corpse in its coffin' (Marsh 67). In the following decades, this Poe-like narrative was still further and fancily embellished, always preserving its '[...] distinct sexual charge, as of necrophilia [...] as in the invocation of 'the love that is consummated in death'' (Marsh 67). Little surprisingly, it was Rossetti who eagerly fostered the cult around his departed love, keeping on framing her role for years after her death. Elisabeth Bronfen even argues that Rossetti depended upon Siddal's death, as he was obsessed with the idea of a dead lover, thus claiming, '[s]ie mußte demnach sterben, um die Rolle zu übernehmen, die er ihr in seiner Vorstellung zugewiesen hatte' (250-251)¹¹⁴. One might be tempted to issue the claim that Rossetti re-made Siddal in his very own image of her¹¹⁵, preparing portfolios of her artwork, but burning letters and photographs (Orlando 628). Thus it seems indeed impossible to obtain a truthful picture of the woman Elizabeth Siddal really was, as she got to be represented through Rossetti's filter, and, by deciding what to make known and what to conceal, Rossetti achieved to render an eternally incomplete, highly objective, unilaterally distorted picture of Siddal. Possibly Siddal's response to her role during her lifetime can be found in drawings of Hamlet and Ophelia and Lady Clare, respectively which look as if they have entered into a dialogue. Most obviously, Rossetti imagined himself as Hamlet and Lizzie as Ophelia, which not only increases the myth of their relationship, assembling it to a tragically twisted legend wherein Siddal '[...] ruptur[es] the barriers between art and life and life and death [...]' (Rhodes 101), but also reveals personal feelings that somewhat contradict the public picture of the turtle doves. In the archetypically informed "Hamlet and Ophelia", Rossetti is both lamenting and laying bare the fallen, corrupted nature of women, thereby processing his frustration, anger and grief orbiting his own relationship. As a

¹¹⁴ 'Therefore, she had to die, in order to assume the role he had allotted her in his imagination' (my translation).

¹¹⁵ It should be forwarded at this point that Rossetti used to employ certain characteristics to most women he painted, appropriating them to popular types with '[...] long neck, sorrowful eyes, heavy tresses, and impossibly rosy lips' (Orlando 642). As regards Elisabeth Siddal, it is argued that he "de-animated" Lizzie by painting her over and over again, almost always sitting, reclining, with half-shut eyes and weary face, the sheer embodiment of a melancholy Lady, balanced on the threshold between life and death (Bronfen 249).

counterstatement to Rossetti's '[...] gynophobia or misogyny' (Rhodes 105) and a boldly openly answer to contemporary views about womanhood, Elizabeth Siddal created a portrait of an honest, strong, morally independent "Lady Clare", furnishing the picture with tokens of her '[...] very different conclusions about the fidelity and morality of women' (Rhodes 107). In the same way, Siddal's Lady of Shalott constitutes a loudly protesting response to male envisioning of femininity: diverging from common visual translations of the Lady as '[...] an exquisite corpse to be gazed upon and mourned' (Orlando 632), Siddal's Lady is alive and alert in the first place. Her sketch envisions the Lady interrupted during her work at the loom, hands still at the web, head bent towards the window¹¹⁶, and, most interestingly, away from Sir Lancelot who appears as a simple reflection (and not as an actual person or even protagonist) in the cracked mirror. The look on her face is not startled, frightened, seductive or monstrous, but calm and concentrated, if a little girlishly timid. Neither is she encased within a claustrophobically cocoonish womb, but sitting upright in a purist room bathed in light. The only decorum to be found is a little chest of drawers whereon a cross is placed, bearing witness to her modest and depriving life as a woman artist. Like her face that does reveal no traces of sexual temptation or awakening, her attire is simple and chaste; hair neatly tied back, dress plainly innocent and without ornaments. By envisaging this female artist who is concerned about her work and not occupied with her looks, Siddal has called into life a sketch that '[...] functions as a progressive act of self-portraiture' (Orlando 633); far more progressive, I would propose, than her small "Self-Portrait" of 1854. Staring out from this rather darkish picture is a sickly pale, hollow-eyed and worn out woman without future that has resigned to her fate as eternal muse and mistress. The Lady of Shalott, conversely, portrays as a positive statement both '[...] Siddal the artist and Siddal the woman [...]' (Shefer 27) and can thus be frankly read as way of coming to terms with life as a woman artist in an antiquated society that encouraged women to paint in a '[...] soft-spoken, "feminine" manner [...]' and to '[...] confine themselves to landscapes, still lifes, domestic scenes [...]' (Orlando 634).

¹¹⁶ The window the Lady gazes to is '[...] suggestive of windows of possibility', a trope more elaborately employed in the work of Marie Spartali (Orlando 632).

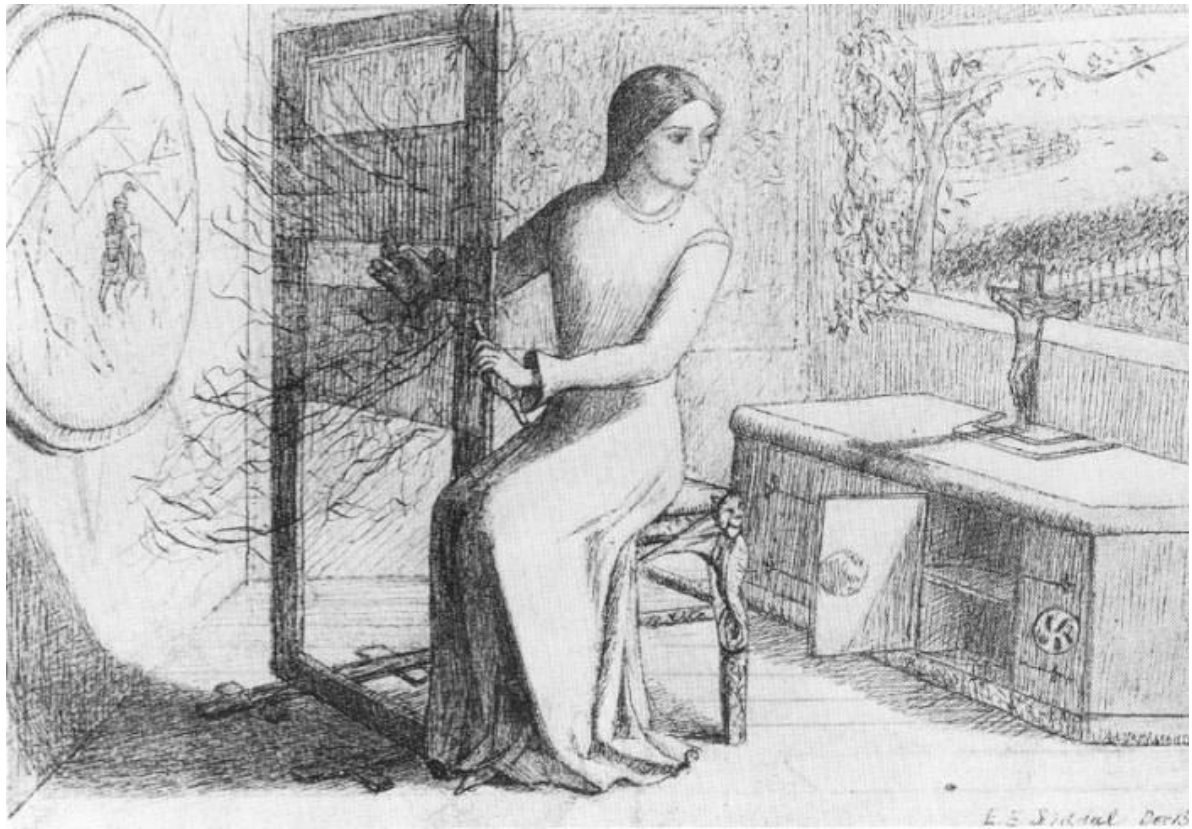


Fig. 6: Lady of Shalott by Elizabeth Siddal, sketch from 1853

Eventually, Siddal's *Lady of Shalott* does not quite illustrate Tennyson's poem, but tells her own story, imprisoned not within a tower, but patronised by Ruskin and unable to step out of Rossetti's shadow. Although Siddal's potential may not have been amply recognised during her lifetime, it can still be speculated that via her drawings, she bluntly sought to escape patriarchal constructions. While Siddal herself '[...] spiritually [...] remained a prisoner, still dressing to please a man' (Shefer 28), her *Lady* survives as an emblem of her thwarted feelings toward and slightly subversive responses to the Victorian spirit.

Correspondingly, Marie Spartali, another member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle whose artistry has not received due respect yet, constantly strove to initiate a new, reformed picture of femininity by way of re-assessing the stories of Tennyson's '[...] world-weary, bereft, and yearning for death [...]' (Orlando 638) "*Mariana*" or Dante's "*Beatrice*", who in Rossetti's portrait – notably, the last portrait of Elisabeth Siddal (Bronfen 256) – is summoned to Heaven via a sexually charged rapture. Facing a similar fate like Elizabeth Siddal, Marie Spartali was reduced to her allegedly unearthly beautiful face, which was praised so excessively that a diminution of character and

talent was the natural consequence. However, by creating effectively truthful versions of femininity and womanhood in the 19th century, Marie Spartali, much like Elizabeth Siddal, accomplished to generate powerful tokens of emancipation serving as challenges to patriarchal hegemony, thereby writing herself out of the fairy tale world she was supposed to inhabit. Instead, both women bequeathed to posterity a body of work wherein they managed to evoke feasible spaces of opposition, promising versions of a Symbolic Order wherein women could assert themselves as artists looking forward to a bright future, which proved them undoubtedly far ahead of their time (Orlando 644). While they may not have – or only too late – enjoyed the recognition they deserved, these two and others proved that there were indeed women who looked beyond prefabricated roles in order to affirm their capability of envisioning alternative ways of living.

7. Tales of Sex and Terror – Angela Carter’s Werewolf Trilogy

Notwithstanding various benefits of French feminism and deconstruction to be discussed in the sections below, the English novelist Angela Carter attempts to go one step further. Often imagined and hailed as a priestess or witch of the Gothic Age (Makinen 20-21), she boldly endeavors to transgress even the limits of theory, imagining a ‘[...] near-prophetic [...]’ (Müller 33), Utopian vision of gender and sexuality independent of already existing theories. Defying prevalent notions of mythmaking, feminism and gender, she vividly draws the picture of an alternative universe, wherein ‘[...] both sexes, though inevitable as such, have the ability to transcend the borderlines that separate them’ in order to merge in an oneiric synthesis that ‘[...] escapes the limits of sexuality and reality [...]’ (Müller 33) and allows them to disentangle from the densely woven web of ‘[...] sex and love, freedom and bondage, prey and predation [...]’ (Atwood 132). Crossing boundaries, Angela Carter incorporates in her text the notion of the abject; that which is repressed, expelled and despised in our society is embraced and acknowledged as an integer part of the human psyche. Accepting that which is unacceptable, Carter’s heroine Wolf-Alice represents progressively revised conceptions about identity and selfhood picturing self and body as ‘[...] permeable, instable, and performative [...]’ (Gutenberg 178) and thus proves to be the most autonomous and successful literary figure portrayed in this thesis.

For now, I will return to the ideas brought forward by Cixous and Irigaray, which both center on the problems and ambiguities encountered when attempting to define models of “female sexuality” that Angela Carter dismisses in her work; indeed a polymorphous, elusive quality as has already been shown and will be demonstrated when assessing “Wolf-Alice”. Notions and suppositions provided by Cixous and Irigaray do prove to be a useful tool in order to provide steadfast counterarguments to patriarchal hetero-normativism by initiating an alternative discourse wherein the two sexes can engage. Though these theories may appear effective and refreshing at first sight, they do smack of essentialism and ultimately only reveal a stale reversal of binaries that does not liberate and empower woman, but eventually leaves her entrapped in the same old paternal machinery.

7.4. Models of Female Sexuality

Hélène Cixous' proposition of a constantly changing, bisexual human nature indeed seems to provide for the dawn of the longed for independence of traditional patterns, e.g. the tendency to think in oppositions such as man/woman and the related pairs of 'Activity/Passivity [...] Culture/Nature [...] Head/Heart [...] Logos/Pathos' (*Sorties* 101). Her notion of bisexuality understands itself as an acceptance of the other sex as a deep-seated element within oneself, the refusal to conservatively repress any homosexual element; it is '[...] multiple, variable and ever-changing [...]' (Moi *Politics* 109). Femininity and bisexuality therefore go hand in hand; men, on the other hand, have been '[...] trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality' (Cixous *Sorties* 104). This all-embracing bisexuality as defined by Cixous derives its power from the fact that it endows the subject with the extremely liberating possibility to shift between masculinity and femininity without having to decide which position to occupy (Moi *Politics* 120): 'Liberation from phallocentrism would not negate these differences [between men and women], but would place them into an equal relationship by reestablishing bisexuality (Griffin Crowder 137). Cixous voices her optimism by euphorically announcing, '[...] today, writing is woman's' (*Sorties* 105), which is made more accessible in Moi, who pictures Cixous as proclaiming

[...] woman as the source of life, power and energy and [hailing] the advent of a new, feminine language that ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism colludes with phallocentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women. *Politics* 105.

Cixous' positive image of woman as a creative and potent entity and her way of subtly yet thoroughly connecting text, body and femininity (Babka 202) directly opposes the subsidiary status conventionally ascribed to women within society. Feminist concepts like *masquerade* or *écriture féminine* consciously draw upon this marginal position, '[...] in order to celebrate that marginality' (Mills Conclusion 233); a decisive step that can be read as potentially subversive. Cixous' notion of *écriture féminine* can be seen as rescuing women from silence and absence via the use of the libido as a vehicle for writing (Griffin Crowder 135). Truly, Cixous' proclamations may appear liberating at first sight, however when subjected to closer scrutiny, as undertaken by Ann Rosalind Jones or Toril Moi, Cixous' patterns themselves do not fully escape the trap of

essentialism¹¹⁷. Cixous' invocation of women's '[...] mystically superior [...]' sexuality does stand in a stark contrast to the male '[...] phallic single-mindedness [...]' (Jones 365) it is supposed to overthrow and disempower. The criticism Jones utters grounds itself on the fact that Cixous on the one hand accuses psychoanalysis to blindly presuppose an '[...] anatomical determination of sexual difference-opposition [...]' (Jones 365), but on the other hand herself stridently distinguishes female sexuality from the male one. Similarly, Cixous heavily criticizes Lacanian psychoanalysis that insists on the primacy of the "phallus" within the Symbolic Order, yet retains a '[...] maternal (usually heterosexual) [...]' and thus conformist family model to explain her notion of desire (Griffin Crowder 124). Joining in the criticism, Jones rightly asks, '[I]s women's sexuality so monolithic that a notion of a shared, typical femininity does justice to it?' (369), deliberately dismissing the idea of conceptualizing women's writing as a sheer outpouring of bodily impulses. This sharp focus on the female body and its libidinal drives as represented by Cixous is to some extent shared by Luce Irigaray, who specifically sheds light on female sexuality. Starting by condemning the archaic paradigm that has female sexuality defined in relation to the male one, Irigaray in *The sex which is not one* offers empowering ways of thinking about the female sex genitals. Irigaray assumes the vulva's two lips as bearing the potential to let women experience the infinitely diffuse and subtle sexuality they possess:

So ist zum Beispiel die Auto-Erotik der Frau von der des Mannes sehr verschieden. Dieser hat, um sich zu berühren, ein Instrument nötig [...] Die Frau aber berührt sich durch sich selbst und an sich selbst [...] Die Frau „berührt sich“ immerzu [...] da ihr Geschlecht aus zwei Lippen besteht, die sich unaufhörlich aneinander schmiegen. *Geschlecht* 23.¹¹⁸

Only by recognising and asserting their pleasure can women subvert the phallogentric order that negates their sexuality. What Irigaray fails to do, most importantly, is to regard both sexes – and sexual organs, in this specific case – with equal value. The

¹¹⁷ See '[...] I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man [...]' (*Medusa* 347); 'More so than men who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body' (*Medusa* 356). Moreover, Cixous might be accused of conflating men with reason – as done in the quotation above – and women with nature, mystery, fluidity: 'Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible' (*Medusa* 347), 'Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide [...] we are ourselves sea, sand, coral, seaweed, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves [...]' (*Medusa* 358).

¹¹⁸ 'Thus, woman's autoeroticism differs substantially from man's. He needs an instrument to touch himself [...] Woman, however, touches herself through and with her body [...] Woman "touches herself" all the time [...] as her sexual organ is comprised of two lips, that relentlessly snuggle up to one another' (my translation).

penis in her writing is transformed into a brutal aggressor, “raping” the vulva by parting the two lips by force; whereas the vagina is degraded to a hole only existent to stimulate the penis (Irigaray *Geschlecht* 22-23). The images of sexual intercourse as necessarily amounting to an act of violence conjured up by Irigaray can thus be said to unilaterally distorted. Eventually, Irigaray’s attempt to empower women has backfired, she falls into the very patterns of defining woman she had initially set out to avoid (Moi *Politics* 142). Irigaray has been regarded as a ‘[...] patriarchal wolf in sheep’s clothing’ (Moi *Politics* 146) by colleagues; not only for the fact of reducing woman to her “two lips”, but also language-wise. Always contrasting “woman” with an anonymous audience in her writing¹¹⁹, she introduces a discourse completely informed by oppositions that ultimately smacks of essentialism. Moi is hence forced to conclude that Irigaray’s ‘[...] superb critique of patriarchal thought is partly undercut by her attempt to *name* the feminine’ (*Politics* 148, emphasis in the original). As both Cixous and Irigaray fail in certain respects to overcome patriarchal discourses, a potential way out of the essentialist straitjacket is suggested in the next chapter, which seeks to do away with categories on the whole.

Truly, this approach will prove to be helpful as regards the sexual desires and identities of the heroines that have been introduced in previous chapters. Oscillating between femininity and masculinity, divinity and horror, madness and sanity, the figures under consideration could never be assigned a concretely shaped and logically assessable role or identity – which is why the concept of deconstruction seemed to play a pivotal role in the organisation of this chapter.

7.5. Deconstruction

As has been aptly proven beforehand, the women introduced – Eleonora, Morella or Ophelia – have evaded explicit labeling and thereby challenged antiquated notions of femininity as provided by patriarchal hegemony. As befits the topic, French Feminism boldly questions the basis of language alongside with the institution of subjectivity per se, thereby necessitating the debate about “woman” being ‘[...] a fictional construct of patriarchal discourse’ (Millard 156) that can neither be based on essence nor on

¹¹⁹ Irigaray constantly uses generalisations like ‘they’, ‘them’, or talks about ‘Die Frau’ (as if ‘Die Frau’ existed as an essence), as can be seen in the passage quoted above. Thus it seems not unfair to accuse Irigaray of using the same patriarchal organisational categories she wants to undo. Further, her understanding of female sexuality reads like a broad simplification, implying that *all* women derive pleasure from the fact that their ‘two lips’ relentlessly touch one another.

experience (Mills Intro 4). Taking this assumption as a starting point, the concept “woman” as well as such notions as “the natural”, “the real” or “the human”, need to be deconstructed in order to break with the order that subjugates women (Eagleton Intro 11). Feminist theory opposes restrictive constructions of the category “woman”, maintaining that a subject cannot be conceived of in steady terms. Apart from that fact, it is undeniably questionable as to what qualities or traits should be subsumed under the heading “woman”, which has, in Judith Butler’s terms, ‘[...] become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety’ (*Gender* 3). Likewise, Butler dismisses the existence of a heterogeneous institution one could label “patriarchy”, since such an assumption by necessity entails a common oppression experienced by all women alike. Feminism would truly backfire, were it to presuppose the existence of patriarchy as diametrically opposed to subjugated women. Instead, Butler calls for challenging those categories that ‘[...] contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize’ (*Gender* 5).

As a matter of fact, it seems that a certain degree of eclecticism has been applied within feminist theory. One of the key figures feminists, especially those representing the French line, are indebted to is Jacques Derrida, whose theory of deconstruction ‘[...] defies ready-made categories and clear-cut characterizations’, and in so doing ‘[...] provides a way of rethinking our common conceptions [...]’ (Grosz *Ontology* 75). What renders deconstruction that appealing is the claim that women ‘[...] do not exist *as such* [...] because essence and determinate meanings have gone the way of Man and God’ (Holland Intro 6, emphasis in the original). Deconstruction thus offers itself as a useful tool in order to do away with binary oppositions.

Admittedly, dichotomies and normative gender roles are resented and successfully deconstructed in “Wolf-Alice”; the most progressive concept to be introduced, however, is Kristeva’s notion of the abject, the incorporation of which renders the short story a significantly progressive and revolutionary one.

7.6. I spit myself out – Abject & Abjection

Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection, carefully outlined in *Powers of Horror*, has already been tentatively touched upon in the chapter revolving around Poe’s heroines Eleonora and Morella. For now, the notions of abjection and the abject shall be subjected to closer scrutiny since they assume a key role in Carter’s “Wolf-Alice”. By

forwarding a thoroughly concise synopsis of Kristeva's theory, Wolf-Alice's almost transcendental powers as regards the boundaries between the sexes and the infinitely delicate division between sexuality and perversion shall be made evident in order to evoke a revolutionary picture of what could be possible were we to question established and antiquated norms and constructions.

As has already been pointed out, the abject denotes that which crosses clearly drawn boundaries, especially those separating inside from outside. Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller see this necessity of expulsion and the fear of decay that shall be prevented with exactly this expulsion as grounding in the experience of the '[...] initial abjection of the maternal body that the subject has to perform in order to acquire language and to establish the border between self and (m)other' (8). As this quotation already implies, the human body (and the maternal one in particular) in all its primal untidiness and repulsive ambiguity constitutes a borderline per se in establishing a '[...] physical frontier between inside and outside, between internal drives and desires and fears and outside regulations' (Müller 114). The term abject comprises all that which needs to be expelled – from the body in a concrete sense or from society on a more symbolical level – in order to ensure a safe continuation of the subject status and its participation in society. As regards the body, it is the fluids that conjure up the most affective notions of horror and disgust since there seems to be '[...] something inherently disgusting about the incorporative, immersing properties of fluid [...]' (Grosz *Bodies* 194). Fluids can, by their very nature, not be contained within boundaries; they will perpetually seep and infiltrate without control. Probably this is what evokes this primal fear towards the abject, that it cannot be restricted in '[...] its refusal to conform to the laws governing the clean and proper, the solid and the self-identical [...]' (Grosz *Bodies* 195); it is always and necessarily already *other*, and needs to be detached from the subject in order not to threaten the subject's integrity itself. Kristeva identifies three major areas of abjection, namely '[f]ood, corporeal waste (excrement and blood) and sexuality [...]' (Müller 115) that encompass a darkly looming '[...] threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable' (Kristeva *Horror* 1). The fluids that threaten to disrupt patriarchal organisation by polluting or contaminating the Symbolic Order, are, to be more precise, '[b]lood, vomit, saliva, phlegm, pus, sweat, tears, menstrual blood, seminal flows [...]' that are again inserted into a '[...] hierarchy of propriety [...]'

(Grosz *Bodies* 195). While there seem no notions of disgust being attached to tears due to their poetically purifying function, matters are different with regard to those fluids that menace to dirty the body. Indeed there appears to be a discrepancy in value as far as men's and women's bodily flows are concerned: while men's '[s]eminal fluid is understood primarily as what it makes, what it achieves, a causal agent and thus a thing, a solid [...]' (Grosz *Bodies* 199) and is thus related to its possibly procreative function, women's fluids, that is, the menstrual blood, is put into the category of those things that defile and hence juxtaposed with excrement (Grosz *Bodies* 206). Once again, man is charged with positive values as his fluids are metonymically connected '[...] to a corporeal pleasure and metaphorically with a desired object [...]', woman is coded quite distinctively; '[...] menstruation, associated as it is with blood, with injury and the wound [...]' (Grosz *Bodies* 205) becomes immediately juxtaposed with something '[...] regarded not only with shame and embarrassment but with disgust and the powers of contaminating' (Grosz *Bodies* 206). Notably, the image of blood as source of abjection is so strongly connected to the female body – and even more so, the maternal body¹²⁰, '[...] a monstrous, pulsating, wet, fleshly, and abject spectacle [...]' (Gear 323) – that woman, especially in her birth-giving function, becomes the abject per se. It is the woman's genital organ, the vagina, that is, according to Rachel Gear, posited as the very source of abjection: 'The vagina, in particular, is identified as monstrous mainly because it bleeds, and therefore messes up the boundary between inside and outside a woman's body' (328). In this respect, Gear forwards the image of the "vagina dentata" as an archaic image of man's existential fears as the '[...] vagina dentata suggest[s] a dangerous entrance, a devouring creature, and the fear of castration' (328).

Carter's Wolf-Alice smartly and smoothly eludes her position as abject body as she is kept bluntly oblivious to the organization governing the patriarchal order. Carter deconstructs dichotomies of purity and dirt, propriety and impropriety by having Wolf-Alice embrace the abject as a value-free aspect of human life. Acknowledging dirt and filth and thereby escaping rigidly drawn limitations, Wolf-Alice fully unfolds her subversive potential in so far as '[...] filth is a metaphor for disrespect of authority and rules, for structural chaos and thus carries a political potential' (Müller 123). Contrary to the heroines introduced and discussed before, Wolf-Alice appropriates her innocent

¹²⁰ 'The maternal body perpetually alludes to the powerfully subversive ambivalence of abjection: before the submission to the symbolic and its prohibitive force, before their positioning in a rigid inside-outside distinction, mother and child exist in joyful, incestuous, forbidden unity' (Müller 126).

unawareness to her own meaningful purposes; gaining knowledge about her own, as yet unsexed body, which '[...] in turn, produces interpretive frameworks for understanding the body' (Gear 329). By increasing her insights about bodily representation, Wolf-Alice thus achieves reconciliation with the potential dangers of abjection that appears tremendously powerful.

7.7. Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed – Carter's Werewolf Trilogy

In 1979, the English novelist Angela Carter published *The Bloody Chamber and other Stories*, a remarkable anthology surpassing feminist ideology¹²¹, which comprises ten short stories latently circulating around tropes and topoi extracted from popular fairy tales such as "Little Red Riding Hood", "The Beauty and the Beast" or "Snow White". Essentially, Carter's stories feed from Charles Perrault's 1697 fairy tale collection that she translated prior to writing *The Bloody Chamber*. However, Carter openly voices her dissatisfaction with pseudo-mythic or kitschy traces dominating archaic tales and thus rewrites her tales in what could be called a Utopian setting of post-feminism¹²². Her protagonists, as much archetypal, innocent beauties as in Perrault's times, escape domination via the Symbolic Order by rejecting male dominance and/or appropriating patriarchal power themselves. Outstandingly, the Red Riding Hoods and Snow Whites she ingeniously envisions are not the poor, whimsy maiden of our childhood memories, but strong, sexually active girls who partake in enjoying sexuality and partnership. The stories considered to be most relevant for the purpose of this paper certainly is "Wolf-Alice"; however, "The Werewolf" and "The Company of Wolves" deserve – if only

¹²¹ 'However, rather than further reinscribe dominant male fantasies [...] women writing erotic tales call attention to the dominant cultural fetishization of young girls and the sexualization of women according to such tropes in order to rewrite desire such that it prioritizes women's sexual agency as they see it. The genre itself thus becomes essential to the feminist project of dismantling patriarchal understandings of women's sexuality [...] The question, of course, is whether such erotic reimaginings of classic fairy tales exceed patriarchal definitions of the erotic or whether these women are producing a sexual agency that exists alongside, and perhaps operates with and through, a dominant erotic. [...] I would suggest that, for the most part, even as these women contest the cultural fetishization of sexually precocious young girls and their own status as adult women within such a hegemonic sexual system, they also reproduce fairly traditional patriarchal definitions of the erotic as related to sexual arousal and desire' (Lau 80). With this respect I agree with Lau that a mere inversion of dichotomies which allots the active role to the woman is not enough to challenge the hegemonic order; rather, it blindly leaves patriarchal constructions intact and unquestioned.

¹²² '[T]he wolf trilogy is a set of Little Red Riding Hood [...] stories borne of unfaithful readings, marked by multiple rewritings, full of intricate and intimate betrayals, not only of Charles Perrault's patriarchal "Little Red Riding Hood" but also of the feminist desire to "eroticize" the classic tales, of Carter's own restagings even – infidelities upon infidelities, a luxurious promiscuity' (Lau 78).

brief – mentioning as well since those three stories together form the “werewolf-trilogy” that constitutes the climax of Carter’s *Bloody Chamber*.

Carter deliberately chooses the werewolf as incarnation of unruly sexuality as match for the girl’s awakening sexuality and womanhood. The wolf as initial antagonist embodies a much more deep-seated, ‘[...] stranger, more alienated otherness [...]’ (Makinen 30) than any partner suitable for the protagonists ever might; the animal challenges the girls’ innate desires and thus enables them to embrace their libido as an autonomously yearning subject. That the wolves prove to be the perfect counterparts to Carter’s Red Riding Hoods is evident as the wolves first epitomise the girls’ libido, only to ultimately ‘[...] become exactly that autonomous desire which the female characters need to recognise and reappropriate as a part of themselves (denied by the phallogentric culture)’ (Makinen 31).

A second pivotal aspect pertaining to the trope of the werewolf is his fashioning as “abject” that has already been explained above. By definition, the werewolf is, as the morphology of his name (“man-wolf”) already designates, a hybrid life form, belonging to neither Imaginary nor Symbolic Order and therefore forever situated at the margins of society. Whereas his everyday appearance as man might classify him as citizen of a conventional hetero-normative culture, his nocturnal immoderation, such as ‘[...] cannibalism, uncontrolled violence and/or sexual excess [...]’ (Gutenberg 149) renders him a potential threat to the integrity of any civilised phallogentric society. Thus it seems almost too logical that the werewolf should be inserted into the role of the abject since this figure ‘[...] necessarily disturbs any clear-cut notions of identity [...]’ (Gutenberg 149) and therefore cannot be allocated a safely contained existence. The werewolf continuously transgresses and disrespects established boundaries insofar as he dismisses the repression of primal desires and drives, a trait regarded normal in cultured beings. Additionally, he seems to be inseparably and irresistibly linked to sexual perversion and excess, as well as to libidinous identification with the oral stage in psychosexual development constituting an earlier stage in human development, which allows for the werewolf to be regarded as a developmentally regressive figure, or “subhuman” (Gutenberg 150). Furthermore, the ‘[...] violent corporeal transformation [...]’ indeed situates the werewolf as abject figure as this metamorphosis witnesses the total collapse of boundaries between inside and outside, human and animal (Crofts 118) alongside with an overall deconstruction of the human body. While the brutality and

aggressive sexuality ascribed to the werewolf traditionally identify him as undisputedly masculine (as does his name), a further misdemeanour of boundaries occurs as regards his unmistakably feminine traits, such as '[...] cunning, uncontrollability, non-containment and irrationality', as well as the transformation during full moon, followed by an irrepressible thirst for blood (Gutenberg 151-2). The metamorphosis as collapse of boundaries allots the werewolf the role of the grotesque body, one traditionally linked to women. What most definitely connects the werewolf to the feminine, however, is the '[...] violent incorporation of victims [...]' metaphorically read as a reversal of childbirth (Gutenberg 152). This eerily captivating act of absorption, diametrically opposed to the expulsion of birth, directly links the wolf with the abject image of a birth giving woman and thus achieves a breakdown of gender differences by foregrounding '[...] the fragility of culturally constructed gender roles as opposed to essentialist accounts of gender' (Crofts 120). Ultimately, the werewolf is cast into the role of the '[...] borderliner denied entry into the symbolic order [...]' (Gutenberg 153), a fate typically shared by women reluctant to submit and adapt to male fantasies and projections, as previous chapters have shown. This is not to claim that both women and werewolves share a restrictively subsidiary position forestalling any possibilities of self-realization, on the contrary, it can be asserted that '[...] the abject can be the site of a more sustained resistance to the symbolic order' (Crofts 118). In this respect, werewolves might be seen as revolutionary figures oscillating between semiotic and symbolic, yet able to survive at the patriarchally outlined limits of existence. Especially the twentieth century witnesses a long-awaited upgrading of the socio-psychological position of such outsiders, since werewolves, particularly in the tales of Angela Carter, '[...] are not only typical survivors but could be claimed to advance to the status of icons of identity politics for those who feel marginalized and discriminated against' (Gutenberg 178). In what follows as a psychoanalytical and postfeminist/postgender account of Carter's tales, it shall be made evident how Carter both plays with '[...] bodily and textual transformation, in order to challenge the dominant ideology of the unified self [...]' (Crofts 120) and to battle outdated notions of female sexuality and jouissance.

7.7.1. Castrating the Castrator

At first sight, the opening paragraphs of "The Werewolf" seem to unravel a genre quite different from the folk tales one uses to know by association with the Brothers Grimm;

a setting profoundly steeped in mysteriously sinister Northern mythology, legend and peasant superstition unfolds itself as the backbone of Carter's text. A switch to the authoritative version of "Little Red Riding Hood" then suddenly takes place as the virginal protagonist is told to visit her grandmother. Contrary to Red Riding Hood, this girl sticks to the reality principle and thus fearlessly proves not to be susceptible to superstition. Ultimately, this power enables her to fight her oppressor, the wolf, by asserting her own power against his. She even goes so far as to appropriate the '[...] tools of patriarchy [...]' (Cranny-Francis 91), her father's phallic hunting knife, to her own use and figuratively castrates the sexual predator (Cranny-Francis 92). The ending surprisingly reveals the grandmother to be the werewolf having attempted to feast on her own offspring. This device testifies to Carter's affinity for blurring boundaries and the deconstruction of popular myths by simultaneously framing the grandmother as '[...] werewolf, witch, and woman [...]' (Lau 83). Her oscillation between these categories eventually betrays the grandmother: '[...] she cannot be contained by the singularity of any given category. Instead, her constant slipping between werewolf, witch, woman, from male to female, offers a glimpse into the cracks that belie the myth of an omnipotent language, the myth of total signification' (Lau 83). Red Riding Hood exhibits no signs of empathy as she denounces her grandmother who is subsequently identified as witch, driven away and stoned to death. The girl has obviously most successfully adapted to the conditions of the Symbolic Order by finding a way to embody the phallic power, which secures her a stable position in an otherwise paternally dominated universe. With this opener of the wolf trilogy, Carter has both deconstructed the myth of the phallus' primacy and thus unhinged the phallus from its apparently God-given connection with father and man (Lau 83), thereby opening up possibilities for young girls and woman to thrive within the patriarchal order.

7.7.2. Outwolfing the Wolf

Carter's second werewolf tale, "The Company of Wolves", deviously epitomises that which Carter herself labels moral pornography¹²³, a concept devoted to alternative

¹²³ 'The moral pornographer would be an artist who uses pornographic material as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual licence for all the genders, and projects a model of the way such a world might work. A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes. His business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations of man and his kind. Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to

erotic practices ‘[...] motivated by amoral sexual drives’ (Lau 84). This peculiar Red Riding Hood version features a protagonist similar to the one discussed above; virginal and desirable, yet bold and sly¹²⁴. Freely acknowledging her awakening sexuality, it is the girl who outwits the wolf as she refuses to be his “meat” and thereby erases any possible notions of rape attached to older versions of the fairy tale¹²⁵. As if familiar with the Sadeian model claiming that ‘[...] women can escape lambhood [...] only by adopting tigerhood [...]’ (Atwood 119), the girl unties from her role as victim as she is fully aware of the fact that she is ‘[...] nobody’s meat’ (Carter 118)¹²⁶. As her libido meets his, their sexual desires, perverted or not, meet on equal height in order to form a perfect synthesis that transforms folk culture’s beastly werewolf into a ‘[...] tender wolf’ (Carter 118), holding the girl safely between his paws. Indeed, Carter initially seems willing to introduce the conventional fairy tale discourse, complete with woman as object of the gaze, woman as male fantasy and traditionally coded dialogues¹²⁷. Applying patriarchal constructs only in order to mock and wittily destroy them, Carter then turns around her own constructions, twists and perverts them as the man-wolf becomes the object of the female gaze, minutely and faithfully, albeit subtly ironically described as he strips off his clothes¹²⁸. As Red Riding Hood opts for the beast instead of the man, she artfully withdraws from the narrowly constructed patriarchal frame by assuming authority and agency located beyond the borders of the order she has grown up in. The love scene that follows finally ‘[...] unveils the hegemonic order of heterosexual relations, offering in its stead [...] a sexual moment no longer chained to a dominant erotic that limits the sexual possibilities of men and women but one that emerges from our deepest drives’ (Lau 88). The girl is no longer the desired object, but

the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture even as he entered the realms of true obscenity as he describes it’ (Carter *Sadeian Woman* 19-20).

¹²⁴ ‘Her breasts have just begun to swell; her hair is like lint, so fair it hardly makes a shadow on her pale forehead; her cheeks are an emblematic scarlet and white and she has just started her woman’s bleeding [...] She stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not know how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing’ (Carter 113-4).

¹²⁵ ‘The girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody’s meat. She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing’ (Carter 118).

¹²⁶ References to Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber* will henceforth be quoted as ‘Carter’.

¹²⁷ ‘What would you like? She asked disingenuously. A kiss. Commonplaces of a rustic seduction; she lowered her eyes and blushed’ (Carter 115).

¹²⁸ ‘A crisp stripe of hair runs down his belly, his nipples are ripe and dark as poison fruit but he’s so thin you could count the ribs under his skin if only he gave you the time. He strips off his trousers and she can see how hairy his legs are. His genitals, huge. Ah! huge’ (Carter 116).

desiring subject herself, her desire is, as well as his, amoral and amorphous, free from prohibitions and restraints that might diminish the scope of sexual pleasure(s) to be enjoyed¹²⁹.

7.7.3. Through the Looking-Glass, and what Wolf-Alice Found There

The oddly unruly animal desire strongly surfacing in “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves” and basically all other stories taken from the *Bloody Chamber* collection literally becomes a leading character in “Wolf-Alice” as the titular heroine metonymically represents and embodies this “animal desire” (Lau 88) due to her half-human, half-animal nature. In this last tale of her fairy tale anthology, Carter draws together all previously developed strands of female psychosexuality and conventionally perverse, amorphous desires to paint in vivid strokes a parable of a Utopian, prelapsarian universe freed from constructions constraining human life, thought and ideology. Wolf-Alice ingeniously epitomises the in-between, the abject, fluctuating between human and animal as ‘[n]othing about her is human except that she is *not* a wolf [...]’ (Carter 119, emphasis in the original) that ultimately confirms her superiority over the human race.

Wolf-Alice is a feral child, who, quite like Romulus and Remus, has been raised by wolves in the woods and thus kept oblivious to the organisation of human reality. Situated outside established patriarchal hegemony and hetero-normativism, this darkly futuristic yet almost Gothic fairy tale¹³⁰ features a protagonist completely immersed in the provisional, elusive structures of the Real that heroines like Eleonora, Ophelia or the Lady of Shalott have been desperately striving to attain. Of Wolf-Alice, it is reported that ‘[l]ike the wild beasts, she lives without a future. She inhabits only the present tense, a fugue of the continuous, a world of sensual immediacy as without hope as it is without despair’ (Carter 119). Carter’s romantically allusive prose achieves the impossible in evoking precisely that which escapes definition and description as the dreamily blissful structures of the Imaginary are gathering shape without being determinedly fixed. Wolf-Alice does not seem to exist, but to float within a pre-

¹²⁹ ‘She will lay his fearful head on her lap and she will pick out the lice from his pelt and perhaps she will put the lice into her mouth and eat them, as he will bid her, as she would do in a savage marriage ceremony’ (Carter 118).

¹³⁰ I chose to label this fairy tale “Gothic” as this term repeatedly props up in connection with Angela Carter. As has been already pointed out, Merja Makinen has called her a priestess of the Gothic Age, and in a book review, Isabella van Elferen refers to a statement given by Carter about ‘[...] the “Gothic times” that Angela Carter stated we live in’ (134).

Symbolic, irrepresentable arrangement that knows as yet nothing of time, space or immaterial human concepts like hope or despair. Within this prelapsarian niche, there is no lack or desire, only notions of drives and sensory impulses without shape that are captured as “sensual immediacy”. Wolf-Alice’s Imaginary is immediate since the knowledge about linear structures and the organisation of time into bits and pieces has not yet dawned on her, which enables her to continue without care or sorrow by relying on her senses as the only tokens relating her to the outside world. Hence it probably would be more justified to claim that Wolf-Alice initially lives in a continuum rather than attempting to describe the particular qualities of her state. A second factor detaching Wolf-Alice from humanity is her inability to master the human tongue¹³¹, which locates her outside the Lacanian paradigm of speech, connecting her more closely to “semiotic babble” and the olfactory sense that Freud positions in a chain of associations with sexuality and the feminine. As these connections do seem to smack of essentialism – linking woman with the olfactory and man with the visual again entraps the two sexes in antiquated dichotomies – it shall be pointed out and explained more carefully later on that Wolf-Alice does not flatly submit to the aforementioned polar opposition, but constructs her own order via empirical experiments (Schanoes 12). That her nose indeed guides her and proves to be more reliable than her eyes might be traced back to the reality that she has been raised by animals, but is not necessarily tied to the fact that she is a biological woman. Contrary to dominant beliefs or anxieties, Carter opens up a space where women’s smell does not threaten the paternal discourse ruling the Symbolic Order, but prompts the erection of a counterworld of freedom and pleasure wherein both Wolf-Alice and the Duke are rescued from human brutality and able to lead an unhindered existence (Lau 89-90).

When Wolf-Alice is found in her den beside the corpse of her foster-mother, she is brought to a convent where ‘[...] nuns poured water over her, poked her with sticks to rouse her’ (Carter 120) led by Mother Superior who insists on teaching Wolf-Alice human behaviour in order to have her show thankfulness. By creating the idea of a convent where “Mother Superior” rules as the Phallic Mother, threatening to figuratively castrate Wolf-Alice by eradicating her blissfully pre-Oedipal innocence and

¹³¹ ‘Could this ragged girl with brindled lugs have spoken like we do she would have called herself a wolf, but she cannot speak, although she howls because she is lonely – yet ‘howl’ is not the right word for it, since she is young enough to make the noise that pups do, bubbling, delicious, like that of a panful of fat on the fire’ (Carter 119).

introducing her to the realm of paternal language, Carter renders obvious the dangers of matriarchy and thereby resents the restrictive notion of purely overturning the hierarchy of binary oppositions. A maternal society might be as insistently and narrow-mindedly caught within the dense web of societal constructions as any patriarchy can be. Representatives of the dominant – and thus metaphorically patriarchal – discourse, the nuns under the “command” of Mother Superior embody those instances ‘[...] that pathologically affirm conservative family values and chastise those who flout or disobey the norms’ (Seet 143). As a last resort, Wolf-Alice seemingly retreats wholly to her natural animalistic behaviour: ‘[...] when the Mother Superior tried to teach her to give thanks for her recovery from the wolves, she arched her back, pawed the floor, retreated to a far corner of the chapel, crouched, trembled, urinated, defecated [...]’ (Carter 120) as if deliberately resisting attempts of humanisation by breaking taboos connected to infantile perverse pleasures (Creed intro 13). By openly expressing disrespect, even a deep-seated contempt, Wolf-Alice in this scene ‘[...] evokes abject terror [...]’ (Müller 123) by dissolving the boundaries that have been cautiously set up for her. Witnessing the girl’s archaic deference to what appear to be the most primitive of instincts, the nuns – thereby assuming the position of the Father – shockingly experience the full unfolding of the ‘[...] powerfully subversive ambivalence of abjection’ (Müller 126) via the female body in all its splendour before the submission to the Symbolic Order. Terrified at the thought of what might happen were rigid distinction between inside and outside, Imaginary and Symbolic to be dissolved, the nuns exert their paternal power and deliver Wolf-Alice to the merciless Duke, an ‘[...] undead ghoulish werewolf [...]’ (Atwood 131)¹³². Thus, Wolf-Alice has cleverly managed to ‘[...] symbolically circumvent[...] the restrictions exerted on female identity’ and ‘[...] so escape[d] the narrow categories of myth and superstition’ (Atwood 131) by using her as yet free and limitless body as a weapon against patriarchal prohibitions.

At the point where Wolf-Alice is left at the Duke’s mercy, Carter introduces a second narrative from then on inseparably intertwined with the first one. While Wolf-Alice fearlessly explores her new surroundings, the Gothic Castle she now inhabits, a ‘[...] fundamentally repressed, unspeakable and tabooed site’ (Berressem 32), and

¹³² Rational reasoning would naturally demand Wolf-Alice’s expulsion, since – as has already been explained – filth shows disrespect for authorities and ‘[t]he rites that dismiss filth as dangerous and destructive do this also by excluding the agent with which this danger is associated: the mother – the woman’ (Müller 126).

continues her existence as one exempt from time and space¹³³, her actions are paralleled with those of the Duke, another social misfit unable to adapt to his environment. Living on the reverse order of things (Schanoes 10), the Duke is as much, if not more, abject than Wolf-Alice; rejected by the wolves, he neither can join the not-human because undead vampires with whom he is associated as he '[...] ceased to cast an image in the mirror' (Carter 120). The Duke shares with the new inhabitant of his castle the lot of linguistic inability, which effeminises him and thus doubly links him to the abject body. Whereas Wolf-Alice slowly but surely forms acquaintances with her newly awakening sexuality and womanhood and her companion in the mirror, the Duke seems to inhabit a niche without time himself; the only exception being that Wolf-Alice has no '[...] direct notion of past, or of future, or of duration, only of a dimensionless, immediate moment' (Carter 122) and therefore embraces newly acquired information with innocently naive curiosity. The Duke, on the other hand, has led his unhappily damned existence for such a long time that he appears to have forgotten all notions of time or other human terms of measurement at all, thereby having estranged himself more and more from the world he once inhabited until the reverse order has completely absorbed him.

Matters change for good as Wolf-Alice experiences her first menstruation with a mixture of amazement and alienation. Out of shame, she uses the little amount of '[...] elementary hygiene [...]' (Carter 122) she has learned at the convent, which implies that she must have some strangely innate, faint knowledge of abjection. Hand in hand with her first menses goes the inevitable arrival of the Mirror Stage. The developmentally decisive, violently disruptive momentum occurs as Wolf-Alice accidentally bumps against the surface of the mirror, thereby noticing her own reflection (although not recognising it as such) for the very first time. Dissimilar to the Lacanian discourse that foresees the initiation into language and the patriarchal order, along with alienation and lack¹³⁴, Wolf-Alice is born into her own Symbolic Order, unhinged from notions of

¹³³ 'In the lapse of time, the trance of being of that exiled place, this girl grew amongst things she could neither name nor perceive. How did she think, how did she feel, this perennial stranger with her furred thoughts and her primal sentience that existed in a flux of shifting impressions; there are no words to describe the way she negotiated the abyss between her dreams, those wakings strange as her sleepings. The wolves had tended her because they knew she was an imperfect wolf; we secluded her in animal privacy out of fear of her imperfection because it showed us what we might have been, and so time passed, although she scarcely knew it' (Carter 122).

¹³⁴ 'The idea that a 'Gestalt' or 'imago' is imposed on the individual by the outside and adopted in a mimetic act, reduces identity-creation from an expression of individual choice to a mere reflection of the web of power in which the self is entangled' (Müller 43). As Wolf-Alice is not enmeshed in the myths

language, separateness or hierarchy and hence does not participate in the ‘[...] pessimistic enacting of the cultural creation of identity [...]’ (Müller 44) in the way that for instance the Lady of Shalott does as her mirror cracks and she urgently seeks to adopt a readily available version of femininity. Even as Wolf-Alice identifies the companion in the mirror to be a mere reflection of her own person, this albeit disappointing discovery does not give way to traumatically yearning feelings of loss and the regretful recognition of her own imperfection. Quite on the contrary, ‘[...] her relation with the mirror was now *far more intimate* since she knew she saw herself within it’ (Carter 124, emphasis mine). Carter hereby unfolds an alternative tale reciting the familiar experience of coming of age without being entrapped within the Symbolic Order; subtly yet determinedly, she criticises the Lacanian paradigm of speech and orderly language as she lets her protagonist uncover the mirror’s mysteries: ‘[s]he rubbed her head against her reflected face, to show that she felt friendly towards it, and felt a cool, solid, immovable surface between *herself and she* [...]’ (Carter 123, emphasis mine). The confusion of syntax, as well as the application of inappropriate grammar hints to the liberating possibility of constructing one’s own Symbolic Order outside the dominant discourse¹³⁵: ‘Wolf-Alice recognizes herself in the mirror not as the ideal coherent self of Lacan’s Mirror Stage [...] but rather as shadow, as reflection, and it is this different recognition that keeps her from entering into the symbolic, maintains her subjectivity outside of language’ (Lau 91). Carter thus counters established views that picture the mirror as tool for oppressing women, and re-reads it as an enabling token that marks Wolf-Alice’s ‘[...] entrance into knowledge, self-awareness, and humanity [...]’, a powerful weapon that ‘[...] catalyses and signifies Alice’s emergence into human consciousness after which she is able to bring the Duke into humanity as well, an achievement signified by his reflection finally appearing in the mirror on his bedroom wall’ (Schanoes 10). It is precisely this self-recognition, triggered by the first drops of blood announcing the advent of her impending womanhood that plunges Wolf-Alice into full awareness of her surroundings. Evidently, she labels and understands her environment by contrasting it with and measuring it

constructed around masculinities and femininities, there is no role she can be ascribed or inserted into, and is therefore free to create her own identity as an “expression of individual choice”.

¹³⁵ Following Berressem’s line of argument, one could argue that Carter’s confusion of syntax ‘[...] explores ways of speaking the unspeakable and thus confronts culture with its abject other(s)’. By doing so, she ‘[...] gives a voice|space to the *abject* [...]’ and thus disrupts not only the text, but the culture from deeply within (31).

against her body, as the periodical return of her menstrual cycle wakes her up to an exceptional possibility of assessing the irrationally elusive concept of time¹³⁶. Having previously managed to continue without notions of space and time, both Wolf-Alice and the Duke must feel a certain latent need for measurement as the story unconsciously calls for the necessity of introducing time. Whereas the passages revolving around Wolf-Alice's gradually developing sexuality and perception are tied to a specific developmental stage, the interruptions describing actions and life of the Duke seem somehow timeless and universal, yet broken, fragmented, out of place; so that ultimately both of them partake in a bizarre '[...] movement in space outside the familiar time-continuum [...]' wherein the '[...] foundations of self and reality [...]' appear to have been dissolved completely (Müller 157). Admittedly, abandonment of linear logic might exert a somewhat liberating fascination at first sight, since the deconstruction of chronology is in feminist terms closely linked to the challenging of the patriarchal order that relies on orderly constructions such as "time" and "space" in order to preserve the carefully erected hierarchical system. On the other hand, however, a total rejection of time causes terror and disorder in Carter's eyes: '[y]et where there is no time and history, there is no future and no possibility of action – neither for women nor men. This lack is seen by Carter [...] as a loss of self-determination and agency' (Müller 160). This is why Carter ultimately combats the feminist enterprise of deserting time altogether and '[...] sarcastically challenges the sense of idolatry that maims much contemporary feminism [...] maternal space 'kills' as much as does paternal time [...]' (Müller 161) which has been rendered explicit at the convent dominated by Mother Superior. As Wolf-Alice starts to create her own temporality, she cleverly circumvents the dangers of patriarchal as well as feminist essentialism by focusing on her body and its relation to the outside world to experience and call into life an alternatively thriving synthesis.

Following the astonishing discovery of time and space, Wolf-Alice is gradually thrown into self-recognition as her womanly sexuality tenderly begins to bud (Lau 90)¹³⁷. The recognition of her humanity and womanhood might be claimed to have

¹³⁶ 'Soon the flow ceased. She forgot it. The moon vanished; but, little by little, reappeared. When it again visited her kitchen at full strength, Wolf-Alice was surprised into bleeding again and so it went on, with a punctuality that transformed her vague grip on time [...] so that you might say she discovered the very action of time by means of this returning cycle' (Carter 123).

¹³⁷ '[...] for now the world around her was assuming form. She perceived an essential difference between herself and her surroundings that you might say she could put her *finger* on [...] She saw herself upon it and her eyes, with their sombre clarity, took on a veiled, introspective look. She would spend hours examining the new skin that had been born, it seemed to her, of her bleeding [...] She examined her new

triggered the separation from her past with the wolves and cut the umbilical cord connecting her to the animality shared by her foster-mother; but what follows this division is not lack, but completion and psychologically healthy self-awareness. Wolf-Alice might have lost the unselfconscious unity with the world and figuratively left her mother's womb, but is indeed not led into a teleologically informed patriarchy since she is constructing her own order that is both Symbolic and Real. Similar to the perception that her mate in the mirror is a mere reflection of her own self, the possibility of experiencing the Symbolic Order without the father appears extremely liberating: 'There is no essential, patriarchal authority to dictate what form the self so constituted must take. Wolf-Alice's emergent subjectivity precipitates her into the realm of subject-object relations that characterises the human condition' (Day 165). Wolf-Alice finds herself in the process of becoming whatever she chooses to become; and in this respect, the humanity that is gathering shape on her is not a loss, but a discovery independent '[...] of all the structuring of identity that comes with human socialisation' (Day 162) opaquely adumbrated by Lacan or Kristeva. Wolf-Alice herself is the measure: 'She goes out at night more often now; the landscape assembles itself about her, she informs it with her presence. *She is its significance*' (Carter 125, emphasis mine). Carter's progressive ascertainment of Wolf-Alice's relationship to nature is indeed a far cry from passages taken from Poe's narratives or Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" wherein nature mournfully heralds the death of the female protagonist. Freed from the master-slave didactic, Wolf-Alice tumbles into the nocturnal surroundings of the Duke, thereby penetrating his private space wherein she becomes his saviour. This total overturn of binaries, hierarchies and established truths further detaches "Wolf-Alice" from the stories, poems and paintings previously considered and offers a powerful '[...] alternative to the dominant myth of singularity' (Lau 92). Shifting from feral child to abject body to the highly controversial role of the bride, Wolf-Alice never occupies a fixed position and nonetheless manages to secure her place in a vastly contested world. The bridal gown tucked behind the mirror – as if only waiting to be discovered by someone worth wearing it – opens up a wholly new dimension to Wolf-Alice as she sees '[...] how this white dress made her shine' (Carter 125). In assuming the role of the bride, Wolf-Alice adorns herself wilfully and decidedly with the marker of difference;

breasts with curiosity [...] but then, to her astonishment, she found a little diadem of fresh hairs tufting between her thighs' (Carter 124).

‘[...] like a *débutante* from the castle [...], she is ‘[...] singing to the wolves with a kind of wistful triumph, because now she knew how to wear clothes and so had put on the visible sign of her difference from them’ (Carter 125). Carter’s description recalls ideas of gender and femininity as performative; Wolf-Alice chooses to be bride, but persistently refuses to be *someone’s* bride, a deliberate choice bestowing upon her an amount of agency that Ophelia or Eleonora might only have dreamed of. Keeping her integrity ultimately saves not only Wolf-Alice herself, but also the Duke that has become a half-presence and is restored to the Symbolic Order only via the revolutionary powers of the bride. Wolf-Alice’s bridal attire bears highly symbolical, even biblical traces as the wearing of clothes alludes to the acquisition of knowledge and self-perception by evoking the momentum of original sin¹³⁸. However, Wolf-Alice escapes the trap laid out in prelapsarian Eden by dissociating herself from Eve in what constitutes the tale’s pivotal scene. With the creation of Wolf-Alice, Carter unravels an allegory of Eden and its fall, anticipating an impossible past-in-the-present as she reveals Wolf-Alice to be the rough diamond of mankind:

She grew up with wild beasts. If you could transport her, in her filth, rags and feral disorder, to the Eden of our first beginnings where Eve and grunting Adam squat on a daisy bank, picking the lice from one another’s pelts, then she might prove to be the wise child who leads them all and her silence and her howling a language as authentic as any language of nature. In a world of talking beasts and flowers, she would be the bud of flesh in the kind lion’s mouth: but how can the bitten apple flesh out its scar again? Carter 121.

This ‘[...] dream of the unbitten apple [...],’ offers itself as a gruesome critique, directed against patriarchy as much as against feminism as Carter unfolds to us a future that might have been conceivable, ‘[...] had humanity not fallen into the construction of itself and of reality that it did fall into’ (Day 164). Paradoxically, the “future” Carter envisions utterly depends upon a past that has never been, encapsulated by the remorseful perception that the apple, once bitten, can never be whole again. Thus the scenario imagined to have been possible proves to be a Utopian one; the only way for Wolf-Alice to ever escape patriarchal constructions is to transform current relations in order to enable a viable future; if not for mankind, at least for her and the Duke.

As Wolf-Alice fills the empty natural surroundings with the beacons of hope emanating from the shiny white dress, the first step towards recovery for the Duke is

¹³⁸ ‘Adam and Eve fashion clothing for themselves after eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil’ (Schanoes 11).

initiated. Since there have hardly been any common moments between the two social misfits – apart from one bizarre scene featuring a brief encounter as Wolf-Alice catches the Duke returning from one of his nocturnal feasts, neither appalled nor moved by the mutilated, grotesque body and the scene of abjection – the tale’s ending is as unemotional as it is awkward. Andrea Gutenberg maintains that Wolf-Alice’s ‘[...] masquerade as a woman fails to work [...]’ as a marker of difference, but however ‘[...] turns out to be a rescuing device [...]’ (169) as she frightens the villagers frantically hunting the Duke. While the white gown certainly prompts the Duke’s rescue as well as his and Wolf-Alice’s entrance into a more human Symbolic Order, the claim that her “masquerade” ultimately fails cannot be wholly acknowledged. It is precisely this oscillation between being bride and reverting to the wolfish state (Gutenberg 163) that saves Wolf-Alice from falling into the rigidly framed constructions of mankind. Neither mad bride nor abandoned maid, Wolf-Alice appropriates her human/bridal attire as the ‘[...] boon of androgynous wholeness, autonomy, self-sufficiency’ (Gilbert and Gubar 617), thus succeeding where the Lady of Shalott in the splendour of her virginal amour has utterly failed. Wolf-Alice does not enter the stage as an object to be possessed or a spectacle to be gazed at, but uses her virginity as a weapon against patriarchy that is denied access to the temple that is her body. Not waiting to be taken, or to be led to the altar as a good to be exchanged between father and bridegroom, Wolf-Alice effectively transports the image of the bride across the line separating passivity from activity. Frightening the frenetic villagers out of their wits as they are led into believing that a dead bride has resurrected to enact ‘[...] ghostly vengeance [...]’ (Carter 126), Wolf-Alice runs from the noise and the smell of bullets with the injured Duke desperately stumbling after her. The image of the wedding is neither deathly, nor broken, but vigorously complete as bride and groom head towards a future that will be valued as ‘[...] a realm of archaic, healthy instincts and tender intimacy [...]’, forming a stark contrast to the ‘[...] human world characterized by brutality and hate’ (Gutenberg 163). Thus, an amorphous, animal sexuality is effectively measured against the human world dividing female from male sexuality wherein polymorphous pleasures are labelled perversions so as to relentlessly ensure the triumphant perpetuation of heterosexuality. Finally, Wolf-Alice redeems the abject body of the Duke¹³⁹ in an act of female birthing

¹³⁹ ‘Poor wounded thing ... locked half and half between such strange states, an aborted transformation, an incomplete mystery [...]’ (Carter 126).

that has him being metamorphosed back into the state of humanity. Cautiously approaching the injured Duke, Wolf-Alice identifies his wound via the smell of blood, a marker of difference as she notices that '[...] his wound [...] does not smell like her wound' (Carter 126), thus repeatedly undoing the bodily hierarchy. Without exhibiting any traces of loathing or repulsion possibly triggered by the view of the abject, Wolf-Alice, the bride and saviour, leaps upon his bed to '[...] lick, without hesitation, without disgust, with a quick, tender gravity, the blood and dirt from his cheeks and forehead' (Carter 126). Fully accepting and embracing the Duke's otherness, Wolf-Alice figuratively gives birth to the Duke, whose newly gained humanity surfaces in the final appearance of his face in the mirror¹⁴⁰. As the story ends on this transformation, the revolutionary potential is left in a void; as if Carter wished to suggest that now, it is our turn to use the power that resides within us. Carter takes up the thread of Adam and Eve again as it becomes clear that Wolf-Alice's animal sexuality and pity, far from human constructions, have saved the Duke from his '[...] unbearable interim state of "wolf, not-wolf"' (Gutenberg 169), thereby posing the hazy question whether it might at last be possible to redeem the allegory of the unbitten apple. Partly in line with models outlined in *The Sadeian Woman*, Carter sketches the victory of '[...] triumphant perversity and an exuberant sexuality' (Evans *Fashion* 151) that neither judges nor asks, but simply accepts. Animal sexuality becomes a weapon directed against hetero-normative categories demanding the expulsion of the abject and the strict maintenance of pre-fabricated, acceptable models of human sexuality in a world that condemns women to victimisation and eternal submission without prospect. Caroline Evans justifiably states in an article slightly touching upon Angela Carter's views about sexuality and perversion, '[...] the woman as aggressor is no freer from the trammels of gender relations than her dialectical sister, the woman as victim. If one is pawn and the other a queen, free to go where she will, nevertheless there is always a king elsewhere on the board, a Lord of the Game' (Evans *Fashion* 157). In the same way, Angela Carter's fiction and character constellations are '[...] neither picturesque nor romantic' (Evans *Fashion* 157); and Wolf-Alice is neither victim nor queen. The Duke is not her husband, her king, her "Lord of the Game", but an equal partner she has brought into being by

¹⁴⁰ 'Little by little, there appeared within it [the mirror], like the image on photographic paper that emerges, first, a formless web of tracery, the prey caught in its own fishing net, then in firmer yet still shadowed outline until at last as vivid as real life itself, as if brought into being by her soft, moist, gentle tongue, finally, the face of the Duke' (Carter 126).

way of dismissing – or is it rather by being oblivious towards? – culturally imposed ideologies and despairingly restrictive norms. Truly, Wolf-Alice has given birth to the Duke, introduced him to the Symbolic; ‘[...] but it is her symbolic, a world outside of language though still shaped by the tongue’ (Lau 91).

In the end, Carter’s tale is not disenchanted at the impossibility of reverting to prelapsarian Eden, but rather heralding a future that might be conceivable were we to question everyday constructions and morals. Anne Cranny-Francis aptly grasps the nascent potential of Carter’s demystified fairy tales when saying, ‘[...] Carter transforms a tale which dramatizes the brutal subjugation of women by a patriarchal order, and the expression of male fears of assertive female sexuality, into a story of the sexual maturation and potency of a woman who rejects male domination’ (93). Even more so, Carter hints to the fruitlessness of efforts attempting an overturn of binaries by having Wolf-Alice completely rewrite and rearrange the existing structures around her. Her power to challenge the Symbolic Order lies in her acceptance of the abject that proves her superior to the allegorical figures of Adam and Eve, particularly manifest in the story’s ending as the exceptional encounter with the imagery of abjection adds to Wolf-Alice’s dissident powers and agency. Finally, the titular heroine achieves ‘[...] a successful and subversive consolidation with abjection’ (Müller 122); a development that challenges the foundations whereon both patriarchy and matriarchy are built upon and thus dismisses the thought of binary oppositions for good, as the boundaries between Imaginary, Real and Symbolic begin to blur and fuse and the masks of masculinity and femininity are taken off.

8. Conclusion

In retrospect, I do believe to be able to claim that women's interaction with the patriarchal, Symbolic Order throughout history and various genres has always been a far more thwarted, twisted and inexpressible process than has been assumed within the strands of theories I have applied as epistemological lenses, as discontinuities and silences within the texts multiplied and thus gave rise to a plurality of interpretations (Saporta 89) regarding (female) subversive strategies and (male) attempts of silencing. Though having chosen distinct verbal and non-verbal texts from various traditions, common motifs such as the association of woman with nature, the image of the (mad) bride or woman's expulsion from the Symbolic Order could be detected.

Taking Edgar Allan Poe's darkish tales of love, beauty and obsession, steeped in a sinister symbolism '[...] at once technique and theme' (Feidelson 43), as a starting point seemed to be a fairly logical decision as it enabled the initiation of antithetical conceptions of femininity as constructed by patriarchy by means of phallogocentric language. Notably, the concept of the abject has been furthered in order to account for the necessity of woman's expulsion from the patriarchal order in order to ban any '[...] potent threat to male power', a force possibly likened to '[...] the perpetual status of the semiotic *chora* and its capacity for disruption' (Seet 151, emphasis in the original).

The two following chapters, sketching the fate of Shakespeare's Ophelia and Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, revolve around the highly charged topos of death in water as a means of gently dissolving life and thus providing the regaining of the lost unity with the Real. Furthermore, both texts feature the decidedly ambiguous motif of the bride: dressed in virginal white, the colour of absence and negation, both Ophelia and the Lady resort to a passivity wherein they are sheer '[...] object of desire and a mutual bond [...]' (Müller 99) that defines them utterly in relation to their husbands. Thus it becomes evident that the "bride" is no more than '[...] a mythical sign [...]' within the community she seeks to establish herself in, the promise of her fashionable attire '[...] representing a verbal contract between persons other than herself [...]' as she becomes '[...] the passive mediatrix through which male society is achieved' (Müller 99). Yet the marriage imagined by Ophelia and the Lady must necessarily '[...] become a farce, the wedding ceremony a comedy of manners and 'money' [...]' rather than the spiritual bond as which it is generally celebrated' (Müller 99). One partner being absent, the other '[...] reduced to a sign [...]' (Müller 99), the dream of happiness in marriage crumbles at the

realisation of how the long-awaited promise of wholeness proves to be no more than '[...] a figment of the mythical imagination which only serves to underscore the oppression of women' (Müller 99).

The topos of woman as object of conspicuous consumption is taken up in the chapter dealing with Pre-Raphaelite paintings providing illustrations to Tennyson's poem. That the Lady of Shalott in the paintings by Holman Hunt, Waterhouse and Rossetti is literally "killed into art" manifests itself as a male strategy of erasing woman's subversive potential, offering in its stead the '[...] primary pleasure [...] derived from peering into a private world [...]' (Seet 150) where woman is forever available as object of the male gaze. Elizabeth Siddal(l) however has offered an alternative envisioning of the Lady's world as a viable space of opposition wherein woman can live and prosper.

A Lacanian, post-feminist study of Angela Carter's "Wolf-Alice" aptly rounds up the investigation as finally, '[...] animal drives, sexual drives, free from the sex/gender system [...]' are re-imagined in a slightly Utopian universe wherein the eponymous protagonist '[...] begins to dismantle the phallogocentric underpinnings of both sex and language', thus offering '[...] an alternative to the dominant myth of singularity' (Lau 92). Contrary to Eleonora, Morella, Ophelia and the Lady of Shalott, Wolf-Alice succeeds in re-structuring her environment until it becomes her own Symbolic Order unhinged from notions of hierarchy, oppositions and the paradigm of paternal language. Ultimately, '[...] the tongues of Carter's women and wolves move us away from language, speech, articulation and into a more sensory realm [...]', '[...] an erotic outside of language as we know it [...]' (Lau 92). The revolutionary aspect to this realm situated outside of language, however, is that Wolf-Alice does not attempt to desert language at all: '[t]o abandon language because it presently reflects masculinist structures is to abandon transformation of all sexist structures in favour of a marginal women's culture' (Griffin Crowder 127). Thus one could claim that Wolf-Alice does not seek to detach herself from "masculine" notions of speech, but transforms and appropriates those to '[...] reflect a new social order' (Griffin Crowder 127). On a metonymical level, Carter's fairy tale simultaneously represents the last chapter and the conclusion of the enterprise I have set myself. With "Wolf-Alice", it has become evident that the only way out of cultural constructions and the rigidly drawn patriarchal order lies in the deconstruction

and re-arrangement of categories that have existed for such a long time that they have become “natural” to us.

9. Bibliography

Alaya, Flavia M. "Tennyson's 'Lady of Shalott': The Triumph of Art". *Victorian Poetry* 8.4 (1970): 273-289.

Althusser, Louis. *Freud und Lacan*. Internationale Marxistische Diskussion 58. Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1976.

Apollon, Willy. "Theory and Practice in the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Psychosis". *Lacan and the Subject of Language*. Ed. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Brache. New York: Routledge, 1991. 116-140.

Armstrong, Isobel. "Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott': Victorian Mythography and the Politics of Narcissism." *The Sun is God. Painting, Literature and Mythology in the 19th century*. Ed. J.B. Bullen. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. 49-107.

Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction. A political history of the novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Atwood, Margaret. "Running with the Tigers." *Flesh and the Mirror. Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*. Ed. Lorna Sage. London: Virago Press, 1994. 117-135.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory. An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. 3rd ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.

Barzilai, Shuli. *Lacan and the matter of origins*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

-----, "Say That I Had a Lovely Face": The Grimm's "Rapunzel," Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott," and Atwood's *Lady Oracle*". *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 19.2 (2000): 231-254.

Bendle, Mervyn F. "Jouissance – 'right off the scale': Lacan, Sexual Difference and the Phallic Order". *Culture, Theory & Critique*. 47.1. (2006): 71-86.

Bentley, D. M. R. "Pre-Raphaelite Typology". *University of Toronto Quarterly* 78.3 (2009): 821-850.

Berressem, Hanjo. "On the Matter of Abjection." *The Abject of Desire. The Aestheticization of the Unaesthetic in contemporary Literature and Culture*. GENUS: Gender in Modern Culture 9. Ed. Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 19-48.

Bradley, Laurel. "Elizabeth Siddal: Drawn into the Pre-Raphaelite Circle". *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 18.2 (1992): 137-145+187.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.

Bronfen, Elisabeth. *Nur über ihre Leiche. Tod, Weiblichkeit und Ästhetik*. Trans. Thomas Lindquist. München: dtb, 1996.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter. On the discursive limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

-----, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Camden, Carol. "On Ophelia's Madness". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.2 (1964): 247-255.

Cameron, Deborah. "Theoretical Debates in Feminist Linguistics: Questions of Sex and Gender." *Gender and Discourse*. Ed. Ruth Wodak. London: Sage Publications, 1997. 21-36.

Carter, Angela. *The Bloody Chamber and other stories*. London: Penguin Books, 1981.

-----, *The Sadeian Woman. An Exercise in Cultural History*. London: Virago 1979.

Casteras, Susan P. "Pre-Raphaelite portraiture: a strangely disordered vision." *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: the Anglo-American enchantment*. Ed. Margareta Frederick Watson. Gower House: Ashgate, 1997. 139-148.

Chadwick, Joseph. "A Blessing and a Curse: The Poetics of Privacy in Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott'". *Victorian Poetry* 24.1 (1986): 13-30.

Chillington Rutter, Carol. "Snatched Bodies: Ophelia in the Grave". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49.3 (1998): 299-319.

Cixous, Hélène. "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays." *The Feminist Reader. Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. London: Macmillan Press, 1989. 101-116.

-----, "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Feminisms. An Anthology of literary theory and criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997. 347-362.

Colley, Ann C. "The Quest for the 'Nameless' in Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott'". *Victorian Poetry* 23.4 (1985): 369-378.

Cooper, Suzanne Fagence. *Pre-Raphaelite Art in the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London: V&A Publications, 2003.

Cranny-Francis, Anne. *Feminist Fiction. Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine. Film, feminism, psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Crofts, Charlotte. *Anagrams of Desire. Angela Carter's writing for radio, film and TV*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003.

Day, Aidan. *Angela Carter. The Rational Glass*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998.

De Lauretis, Teresa. *Alice Doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984.

Derrida, Jacques. *Chōra*. Wien: Passagen Verlag, 1990.

De Vries, Ad. *Dictionary of Symbols & Imagery*. Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing Company, 1974.

Eagleton, Mary. Introduction. *Feminist Literary Criticism*. Ed. Mary Eagleton. London: Longman, 1991. 1-23.

Eco, Umberto. "Social Life as a Sign System." *Structuralism: an introduction*. Ed. And Introd. David Robey. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973. 57-72.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, Elisabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs. "Beatlemania. A Sexually Defiant Subculture?" *The Subcultures Reader*. Ed. Ken Gelder and Thornton, Sarah. London: Routledge, 1997. 523-536.

Evans, Caroline. "Yesterday's emblems and tomorrow's commodities. The return of the repressed in fashion imagery today". *Fashion Cultures, Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. Ed. Stella Bruzzi and Church-Gibson, Pamela. London: Routledge, 2000. 93-113.

----- . *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness*. Yale: Yale UP, 2003.

Feidelson Jr., Charles. *Symbolism and American Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

Felman, Shoshana. "Women and Madness: the Critical Phallacy". *The Feminist Reader. Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. London: Macmillan Press, 1989. 133-153.

Fink, Bruce. *Eine klinische Einführung in die Lacan'sche Psychoanalyse. Theorie und Technik*. Trans. Erik M. Vogt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Fletcher, Richard M. *The Stylistic Development of Edgar Allan Poe*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1973.

Freud, Sigmund. *Abriss der Psychoanalyse. Das Unbehagen der Kultur*. Frankfurt: Fischer Bücherei, 1953.

-----, "Jenseits des Lustprinzips." *Sigmund Freud Studienausgabe 3. Psychologie des Unbewussten*. Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1975. 215-272.

Garai, Jana. *The Book of Symbols*. London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1973.

Gekle, Hanna. *Tod im Spiegel. Zu Lacans Theorie des Imaginären*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996.

Gear, Rachel. "All those nasty womanly things: Women Artists, Technology and the monstrous-feminine". *Women's Studies International Forum* 24.3/4 (2001): 321-331.

Gellert Lyons, Bridget. "The Iconography of Ophelia". *ELH* 44.1 (1977): 60-74.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic. The woman writer and nineteenth-century literary imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984.

Gill, Linda. "The Princess in the Tower: Gender and Art in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott'". *Victorian's Institute Journal* 35. (2007): 109-136.

Gribble, Jennifer. Introduction. *The Lady of Shalott in the Victorian Novel*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983.

Griffin Crowder, Diane. "Amazons and Mothers? Monique Wittig, Hélène Cixous and Theories of Women's Writing". *Contemporary Literature* 24.2 (1983): 117-144.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "Ontology and Equivocation. Derrida's Politics of Sexual Difference." *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Nancy J. Holland. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997. 73-102.

-----, *Space, Time, and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

-----, *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Theories of Representation and Difference. Ed. Teresa de Lauretis. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Gutenberg, Andrea. "Shape-Shifters from the Wilderness: Werewolves Roaming the Twentieth Century." *The Abject of Desire. The Aestheticization of the Unaesthetic in contemporary Literature and Culture*. *GENUS: Gender in Modern Culture* 9. Ed. Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 149-180.

Halliburton, David. "The Tales." *Critical Essays on Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1987. 133-138.

Hassett, Constance W. and James Richardson. "Looking at Elaine. Keats, Tennyson, and the directions of the poetic gaze". *Arthurian Women. A Casebook*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Cambridge Texts in the History of political thought. Ed. Richard Tuck. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991.

Hopf, Ortrun. *Begehren zwischen Imaginärem und Symbolischen*. Thes. U. of Vienna, 2003.

Hughes, Clair. *Dressed in Fiction*. Oxford: Berg, 2006. 157-185.

Irigaray, Luce. *Das Geschlecht, das nicht eins ist*. Berlin: Merve, 1979.

-----, *The Irigaray Reader*. Ed. Margaret Whitford. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Jeffers, Thomas L. "Tennyson's Lady of Shalott and Pre-Raphaelite Renderings: Statement and Counter-Statement". *Religion and the Arts* 6.3 (2002): 231-256.

Jones, Ann Rosalind. "Writing the Body. Toward an Understanding of l'Écriture feminine". *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Kennedy, J. Gerald. *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Kiefer, Carol Solomon. *The Myth and Madness of Ophelia*. Amherst Massachusetts: Amherst College, 2001.

Kilker, Robert. "All Roads Lead to the Abject: The Monstrous Feminine and Gender Boundaries in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*". *Literature Film Quarterly* 34.1 (2006): 54-63.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia UP, 1980.

-----, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia UP: New York, 1982.

-----, "Women's Time." *The Feminist Reader. Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. London: Macmillan Press, 1989. 197-217.

Kruger, Kathryn Sullivan. *Weaving the Word. The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production*. London: Susquehanna UP, 2001.

Kutzbach, Konstanze and Monika Mueller. Introduction. *The Abject of Desire. The Aestheticization of the Unaesthetic in contemporary Literature and Culture*. GENUS: Gender in Modern Culture 9. Ed. Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 7-18.

Lacan, Jacques. *Schriften I*. Olten: Suhrkamp, 1973.

----- *Schriften III*. Freiburg: Walter-Verlag, 1980.

Landry, Carolyn. *Ein Vergleich der Theorien von Freud und Jung anhand der Traumdeutung*. München: Minerva-Publikation, 1984.

Lau, Kimberly J. "Erotic Infidelities: Angela Carter's Wolf Trilogy". *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies* 22.1 (2008): 77-94.

Lawrence, D.H. "Edgar Allan Poe." *Critical Essays on Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1987. 91-101.

Lawrence, William W. "Ophelia's Heritage". *The Modern Language Review* 42.4 (1947): 409-416.

Leach, Edmund. "Structuralism in Social Anthropology." *Structuralism: an introduction*. Ed. And Introd. David Robey. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973. 37-56.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Anthropologie structurale*. Librairie Plon, 1958.

----- *Les structures elementaires de la parenté*. 2nd ed. Paris: Mouton & Co, 1947.

Lopes, Elisabete. "Unburying the Wife: A Reflection Upon the Female Uncanny in Poe's "Ligeia". *EAP Review* 11.1 (2010): 40-50.

Lubbers, Klaus. *Die Todesszene und ihre Funktion im Kurzgeschichtenwerk von Edgar Allan Poe*. Mainzer Amerikanistische Beiträge 4. Ed. Hans Galinsky. München: Max Hueber Verlag, 1961.

MacDonald, Michael. "Ophelia's Maimèd Rites". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37.3 (1986): 309-317.

Makinen, Merja. "Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and the Decolonisation of Feminine Sexuality." *Angela Carter. Contemporary Critical Essays*. Ed. Alison Easton. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000. 20-36.

Marcus, Jane. "Of Madness and Method". *The Women's Review of Books* 3.11 (1986): 1; 3-4.

Margaroni, Maria. "The Lost Foundation: Kristeva's Semiotic *Chora* and Its Ambiguous Legacy". *Hypatia* 20.1 (2005): 78-97.

Marsh, Jan. "Imagining Elizabeth Siddal". *History Workshop* 25 (1988): 64-82.

McCarthy, Kevin M. "Sameness versus Saneness in Poe's "Morella"". *American Notes & Queries* 11.10 (1973): 149-150.

Millard, Elaine. "French Feminisms." *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading*. Ed. Sara Mills, Lynne Pearce, Sue Spaul and Elaine Millard. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989. 153-185.

Miller, Jacques-Alain. "Language: Much Ado About What?" *Lacan and the Subject of Language*. Ed. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Brache. New York: Routledge, 1991. 21-35.

Mills, Sara, Lynne Pearce, Sue Spaul and Elaine Millard. Conclusion. *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading*. Ed. Sara Mills, Lynne Pearce, Sue Spaul and Elaine Millard. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989. 226-235.

Moi, Toril. "Feminist, Female, Feminine." *The Feminist Reader. Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. Ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. London: Macmillan Press, 1989. 117-132.

----- *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen, 1985.

Morris, Harry. "Ophelia's "Bonny Sweet Robin"". *PMLA* 73.5 (1958): 601-603.

Müller, Anja. *Angela Carter. Identity Constructed/Deconstructed*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1997.

Newman, Lucile F. "Ophelia's Herbal". *Economic Botany* 33.2 (1979): 227-232.

Nosworthy, J. M. "The Death of Ophelia". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15.4 (1964): 345-348.

Otten, Charlotte F. "Ophelia's "Long Purples" or "Dead Men's Fingers"". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 30.3 (1979): 397-402.

Ovid. *Metamorphosen*. Latein Lektüre Aktiv. Ed. Helfried Gschwandtner und Christian Brandstätter. 1999. Wien: öbv & hpt VerlagsgmbH & Co., 2003.

Pagel, Gerda. *Lacan zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1989.

Pease, Donald E. *Visionary Compacts. American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987.

Platon. *Das Gastmahl oder Von der Liebe*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1979.

-----. *Timaios*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003.

Plasa, Carl. "'Cracked from Side to Side': Sexual Politics in 'The Lady of Shalott'". *Victorian Poetry* 30.3/4 (1992): 247-263.

Pluth, Ed. "On Sexual Difference and Sexuality 'as such'. Lacan and the Case of Little Hans". *Angelaki Journal of the theoretical humanities* 12.2 (2007): 69-79.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "Eleonora." *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe. Tales and Sketches. 1831-1842*. Vol. 11. Ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978. 635-647.

-----. "Eleonora." *Tales & Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*. Afterw. David Pinching. 1839. London: Collector's Library, 2004. 223-230.

-----. "Morella." *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe. Tales and Sketches. 1831-1842*. Vol. 11. Ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978. 221-237.

-----. "Morella". *Tales & Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*. Afterw. David Pinching. 1839. London: Collector's Library, 2004. 39-45.

"Poe's Criticism of Women Writers." *Poets and Critics, their means and meanings. Including Essays on Browning, Ruskin, Stevens, Heaney, and Others*. Ed. Ashby Bland Crowder. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993.

Poulson, Christine. "Death and the Maiden: The Lady of Shalott and the Pre-Raphaelites." *Re-framing the Pre-Raphaelites: historical and theoretical essays*. Ed. Ellen Harding. Gower House: Scholar Press, 1996. 173-194.

Rabaté, Jean-Michel. *Jacques Lacan. Psychoanalysis and the Subject of Literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.

Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie. "The Sexual Masquerade: A Lacanian Theory of Sexual Difference". *Lacan and the Subject of Language*. Ed. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Brache. New York: Routledge, 1991. 49-80.

Ramakrishna, Devarakonda. "The Australian Gothic and Edgar Allan Poe". *Edgar Allan Poe Review* 9.1 (2008): 49-54.

Reddington, Helen. "'Lady' Punks in Bands: A Subculturette?" *The Post-Subcultures Reader*. Ed. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl. Oxford: Berg, 2003. 239-251.

Rohde-Dachser, Christa. *Expedition in den dunklen Kontinent. Weiblichkeit im Diskurs der Psychoanalyse*. Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1991.

Rhodes, Kimberley. *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture. Representing Body Politics in the Nineteenth Century*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008.

Rickert, Thomas. "Toward the Chora: Kristeva, Derrida, and Ulmer on Emplaced Invention". *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40.3 (2007): 251-272.

Ricks, Christopher, ed. *The Poems of Tennyson*. By Alfred Lord Tennyson. Longman's Annotated English Poets. Ed. F.W. Bateson. London: Longmans, 1969.

Russo, Mary. *The female grotesque. Risk, excess and modernity*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Saporta, Sol. "The Application of Linguistics to the Study of Poetic Language." *Style in Language*. Ed. Thomas A. Sebeok. Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1960. 82-93.

Schanoes, Veronica L. "Book as Mirror, Mirror as Book: The Significance of the Looking-glass in Contemporary Revisions of Fairy Tales". *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*. 20.1 (2009): 5-23.

Schmitz, Bettina. "Homelessness or Symbolic Castration? Subjectivity, Language Acquisition, and Sociality in Julia Kristeva and Jacques Lacan". *Hypatia* 20.2 (2005): 69-87.

Schneiderman, Stuart. "Fictions". *Lacan and the Subject of Language*. Ed. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Brache. New York: Routledge, 1991. 152-166.

Seet, KK. "Mothers and Daughters: Abjection and the Monstrous-Feminine in Japan's *Dark Water* and South Korea's *A Tale of Two Sisters*". *Camera Obscura* 71 24.2 (2009): 139-158.

Seidl, Monika. "British Fashion and Romanticism Today: Where the Present Dreams the Past Future." *Romanticism Today. Selected Papers from the Tübingen Conference of the German Society for English Romanticism*. Ed. Lars Eckstein and Christoph Reinfandt. Trier: WVT, 2009. 213-226.

Shannon jr, Edgar F. "Poetry as Vision: Sight and Insight in 'The Lady of Shalott'". *Victorian Poetry* 19.3 (1981): 207-223.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Holger M. Klein. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984.

Shefer, Elaine. "Elizabeth Siddal's *Lady of Shalott*". *Woman's Art Journal* 9.1 (1988): 21-29.

Sheldon, Amy. "Talking Power: Girls, Gender Enculturation and Discourse." *Gender and Discourse*. Ed. Ruth Wodak. London: Sage Publications, 1997. 225-244.

Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady. Women, Madness, and English Culture. 1830-1980*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Solomon Kiefer, Carol. *The Myth and Madness of Ophelia*. Amherst Massachusetts: Amherst College, 2001.

Spaull, Sue. "Gynocriticism." *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading*. Ed. Sara Mills, Lynne Pearce, Sue Spaull and Elaine Millard. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989. 83-121.

Spender, Dale. *Man Made Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.

Stankiewicz, Edward. "Linguistics and the Study of Poetic Language." *Style in Language*. Ed. Thomas A. Sebeok. Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1960. 69-81.

Sullivan, Henry. "Homo sapiens or Homo desiderans? The Role of Desire in Human Evolution". *Lacan and the Subject of Language*. Ed. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Brache. New York: Routledge, 1991. 36-48.

Sullivan Kruger, Kathryn. *Weaving the Word. The Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production*. London: Susquehanna UP, 2001.

Udall, Sharyn R. "Between Dream and Shadow. William Holman Hunt's Lady of Shalott". *Woman's Art Journal* 11.1 (1990): 34-38.

Van Elferen, Isabella. Review. *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic*. By Fred Botting. *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 21.1 (2010): 132-135.

Vanderlyn, Bertha. "Shakespeare's Gentle Heroine". *Fine Arts Journal* 14.3 (1903): 91-94.

Weeks, Jeffrey. "What Do We Mean When We Talk About the Body and Sexuality?" *Sociology. Introductory Readings*. Ed. Anthony Giddens. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997. 98-101.

Wentersdorf, Karl P. "Hamlet: Ophelia's Long Purples". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29.3 (1978): 413-417.

Wilbur, Richard. "Eleonora." *Critical Essays on Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1987. 138-142.

Wodak, Ruth. Introduction: Some Important Issues in the Research of Gender and Discourse. *Gender and Discourse*. Ed. Ruth Wodak. London: Sage Publications, 1997. 1-20.

Wolff, Anne Lise. "Tod und Unsterblichkeit. Das Leitmotiv von Edgar Allan Poes Werk." Thes. U. of Berlin. Düsseldorf: Diss Verlag G.H. Nolte, 1937.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Penguin Books, 1928.

Yule, George. *The Study of Language*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Žižek, Slavoy. "The Truth Arises from Misrecognition". *Lacan and the Subject of Language*. Ed. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Brache. New York: Routledge, 1991. 188-212.

10. Abstract

Meine Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, ob Julia Kristevas semiotische *chôra*, eine Adaption des von Jacques Lacan entwickelten Konzept des Imaginären, als eine alternative Welt weiblicher Opposition – im Gegensatz zur hegemonischen, männlich konnotierten Symbolischen Ordnung – gesehen werden kann. Somit hinterfragt die vorliegende Arbeit die Art und Weise, in welcher Frauen mit der Symbolischen Ordnung interagieren, sie aufzubrechen versuchen oder letztendlich an ihr zugrunde gehen. Um diesem Vorhaben gerecht zu werden, wird zuerst der theoretische Teil abgehandelt, der sich hauptsächlich auf feministische Theorien, Psychoanalyse und Kristevas Adaption von Lacans Theorien stützt.

Im ersten Teil meiner Diplomarbeit werden daher theoretische Modelle und Konzepte dargestellt. Den Anfang bildet eine kurze Zusammenfassung der feministischen Agenda, wie die Offenlegung von Diskriminierung gegen Frauen im Patriarchat. Zentral für die Fragestellung, die diese Diplomarbeit behandelt, ist vor allem jener Zweig feministischer Theorien, der allgemein als der „französische“ bekannt ist. Da die Repräsentanten dieser Linie Elemente des Poststrukturalismus und der Psychoanalyse inkorporieren, kann ein gewisser Grad an Eklektizismus (auch innerhalb dieser Arbeit) nicht abgestritten werden. Das Ziel dieser feministischen Kritik ist es, die oben genannte Diskriminierung darzulegen, indem naturalisierten Dichotomien – die etwa Mann mit Kultur und Vernunft, Frau mit Natur und Emotion in Verbindung bringen – entgegenzuwirken versucht wird. Das zweite Kapitel des theoretischen Teils skizziert ein paar wenige fundamentale Konzepte Sigmund Freuds, wie etwa die Traumdeutung und den psychischen Apparat, und richtet den Fokus schließlich auf Jacques Lacan und dessen Abhandlungen über das Imaginäre, das Spiegelstadium und die Symbolische Ordnung. Um einen kurzen Überblick zu gewähren, muss festgehalten werden, dass Lacans Spiegelstadium die Sozialisierung des Menschen und dessen Eintritt in die väterliche Ordnung (*Nom-de-père*) initiiert, indem die Mutter-Kind Dyade gewaltsam aufgebrochen und das Kind somit buchstäblich aus dem „Schoß“ der Mutter gerissen wird. Von nun an wird das Kind – und hier ist speziell das weibliche gemeint – für immer verzweifelt versuchen, den idyllischen, harmonischen Urzustand wiederherzustellen, was aber nur im Tod gelingen kann. Eine Verweigerung der Symbolischen Ordnung und ihrer Gesetze führt laut Lacan unwiderruflich zu Psychose und Wahnsinn, was sich unter anderem in desintegrierter

und/oder kindlicher Sprache manifestiert. Kristeva adaptiert das Präödipale und entwickelt das Konzept des Semiotischen, welches, im Gegensatz zum Symbolischen, das mit väterlicher Autorität und Kontrolle verbunden wird, eine weiblich informierte Sphäre, frei von Regeln und restriktiven Kategorisierungen, betitelt. Die semiotische chôra (hier bedient sich Kristeva eines von Platon entwickelten Konzepts, siehe *Timaios*) versteht sich als mütterliches Raum-Zeit-Kontinuum, das sich jeglicher Definition entzieht. Einzig und allein kann festgestellt werden, dass die chôra vor der linearen Zeitordnung und der phallogozentrischen Sprache existiert und sich somit als latent subversives Konzept (auch für mein vorgestelltes Vorhaben) anbietet.

Der theoretischen Abhandlung folgen Analysen und Interpretationen verschiedenster Texte. Da Medialität in dieser Diplomarbeit keine Rolle spielt, wird das Verständnis von „Text“ erweitert, um so auch eine im Bereich der Cultural Studies durchaus gängige Analyse von Bildern als „Text“ zu ermöglichen. Außerdem soll darauf hingewiesen werden, dass mein Ansatz universal und nicht historisch angelegt ist, weshalb auf etwaige Darstellungen historischer Kontexte größtenteils verzichtet wird.

Kapitel 3 legt Augenmerk auf die antithetische Konzeption weiblicher Rollen – illustriert anhand von Edgar Allan Poes Kurzgeschichten „Eleonora“ und „Morella“ – die es der patriarchalen Gesellschaft erlauben, die Frau von der Symbolischen Ordnung auszuschließen. In dieser Interpretation verkörpern Eleonora und Morella die äußerst populäre Dichotomie „Heilige und Hure“; beiden werden essentialistische Rollen zugewiesen, an denen die Frauen schlussendlich zerbrechen (müssen), nicht jedoch ohne vorher auf Lücken und Inkonsistenzen innerhalb der Symbolischen Ordnung aufmerksam zu machen.

Kapitel 4 skizziert das Schicksal von William Shakespeares Ophelia, deren Rolle als „mad bride“ und Wahnsinnige ihr aufgrund ihres impliziten revolutionären Potentials (welches sich beispielsweise auf sozio-linguistischer Ebene manifestiert), welches ihr erlaubt, die (Symbolische) Ordnung von Elsinore in Frage zu stellen, zugewiesen wird.

Kapitel 5 betont die – um den Fortbestand der Symbolischen Ordnung zu sichern – unumgängliche Notwendigkeit stereotyper Genderzuschreibungen, die sich auf der Ebene der Korrelation Mann-Kultur/Frau-Natur manifestieren. In Alfred Lord Tennysons Gedicht „The Lady of Shalott“ muss die gleichnamige Titelheldin erkennen,

dass es schier unmöglich ist, diese binären Oppositionen durch eine reine Umkehr an Werten zu dekonstruieren. Die Übernahme gesellschaftlich approbierter, vorgefertigter Rollen, wie die der Braut, bestätigt das von ihr kritisierte Modell mehr, als es zu unterminieren, und lässt die klischeehaft anmutenden Rollenzuschreibungen letztendlich intakt.

Kapitel 6 schließlich indiziert die Diskussion visueller Repräsentationen der vorhin erwähnten *Lady of Shalott*, die ursprünglich als Illustration für die Moxon Ausgabe von Tennysons Gedichten dienten. Die hier vorgestellten prä-raphaelitischen Bilder (gefertigt von William Holman Hunt, John William Waterhouse und Dante Gabriel Rossetti) präsentieren die Frau als Spektakel, als Objekt, immer bereit, vom (männlichen) Publikum konsumiert zu werden. Die bewusst gewählte Anordnung der Bilder skizziert die Entwicklung der *Lady of Shalott* von ihrem Aufbruch aus der semiotischen *chôra* in die Symbolische Ordnung, wo sie, konfrontiert mit Liebe, Sexualität, Verzweiflung und Verlust, erkennen muss, dass es keinen Platz für sie gibt, und ihre Erwartungen – außer im Tode – niemals erfüllt werden können. Der Anhang dieses Kapitels beschäftigt sich mit Rossettis Muse Elizabeth Siddal (eigentlich Siddall) und deren höchst verstörender, wenn nicht morbider Beziehung zueinander. Zu Lebzeiten kaum als Künstlerin anerkannt oder gewürdigt, hat Siddal doch mehrere Werke – von denen hier jedoch nur „*The Lady of Shalott*“ besprochen wird – hinterlassen, die als laute Antwort einer konstant als passiv, kränklich, leidend stilisierten Frau „gelesen“ werden können.

Kapitel 7 rundet die Arbeit mit einer Analyse von Angela Carters Kurzgeschichte „*Wolf-Alice*“, einer modernen, post-feministischen Adaptation des Rotkäppchen-Mythos, ab. Als theoretische Grundlage dieser Interpretation bieten sich Dekonstruktion und Kristevas Konzept des Abjekt, des gesellschaftlich Ausgestoßenen, da immerwährend zwischen Grenzen fluktuierend und nie eine sichere Position annehmend, an. Carters *Wolf-Alice* demonstriert ihre moralische und soziale Überlegenheit, indem sie vorgefertigte Konstruktionen und Verhaltensmuster (teils auch aus Unkenntnis) kategorisch ablehnt und mithilfe ihres Körpers ihre Umwelt strukturiert. Frei von allen Zwängen (und nicht ganz ohne den Anschein einer Utopie zu erwecken) schildert „*Wolf-Alice*“, wie wir hätten leben können, hätte die Menschheit nicht jene Kategorien entwickelt, die unser aller Denken und Tun beherrschen sowie auch einschränken. Mit diesem Kapitel schließt die Arbeit ab, nachdem verschiedenste

Strategien, mit der Symbolischen Ordnung zu interagieren, vorgestellt und besprochen wurden, keine jedoch als wirklich realisierbar oder „lebbar“ befunden wurde, da jeder hier diskutierte Text letztendlich voll von Kontradiktionen scheint, die eine eindeutige Interpretation unmöglich und sicherlich auch wenig erstrebenswert erscheinen lassen.

11. Lebenslauf

Persönliche Daten

Name: Sophie Schallmayer
Adresse: Senfgasse 1/17/4
1100 Wien
E-Mail: sophie.schallmayer@gmx.at
Staatsangehörigkeit: Österreich
Geburtsdatum: 29. Juli 1988 in Wien

Ausbildung

10/2006 – 04/2012 *Diplomstudium Anglistik (A 343)*
Universität Wien

09/1998 – 06/2006 *Allgemeinbildende höhere Schule*
Sprachenzweig
Englisch ab 1998
Französisch ab 2000

Weitere Qualifikationen

Sprachen
Deutsch (Muttersprache)
Englisch (fließend in Wort und Schrift)
Französisch (fließend in Wort und Schrift)