

ARTICLES / SAGGI

IN SPITE OF D'ANNUNZIO: RECODING FEMININITY IN *TRIONFO DELLA MORTE*

Lidia Hwa Soon Anchisi

Sommario

Ad un'analisi critica, la figura di Ippolita Sanzio in Trionfo della morte sembra oscillare tra rappresentazioni ideali e spirituali. Mutuando da Adriana Cavarero la nozione di "furto concettuale", è possibile rileggere il corpo erotico di Ippolita come sistema semiotico capace di sfuggire al fallocentrismo del suo creatore. Così, malgrado sia frutto del pensiero maschile, Ippolita contribuisce alla rappresentazione della soggettività femminile che può essere interpretata fuori dai canoni tradizionali del sistema patriarcale. Infine, l'oscillazione di Ippolita minaccia la nozione di opposizioni incontaminate su cui si fonda la struttura binaria occidentale.

It would seem to make little sense to search for representations of femininity within male authored texts if indeed sexual difference complicates male knowledge of women. For if traditional representations of women are male fabrications then one must conclude that they are removed from reality. Yet, what if it were possible to find symptoms of what appear to be resistances, within such

misrepresentations of women, in spite of what one would take to be authorial intention? Then these sites of misinformation become a valuable tool with which to deconstruct such representations.¹

According to Shoshana Felman, in her book *What Does a Woman Want*, patriarchal culture has taught us to identify with the male dominant perspective, which is always taken as a measure of the universal (5). How, then, can one successfully uncover the female mind if it has been subjected to centuries of misidentification? Felman believes that texts are self-transgressive with respect to the ideologies that consciously produce them (5). This is why she trains herself to “*tune into the forms of resistance present in the text [...] in other words [...] seek to trace within each text its own resistance to itself, its own specific literary, inadvertent textual transgression of its male assumptions and prescriptions*” (6). While such self-transgression might appear to be undetectable, it becomes visible through the active involvement of the readers who, in our case, are women (6). Of course the risk of searching for textual resistances in male-authored representations of femininity is that if they appear to be subversive subjects, these figures are nonetheless products of a higher male authority (the author), and all expressions of self-transgression could easily be construed as intentional and, more importantly, male, which in turn undermines any concept of a female resistance. In order for me to interpret these signs as resistances to male misconception, it will be necessary to remove the female character from her context and relocate her to a controversially new one. In other words, I boldly intend to perform the kind of “conceptual theft” Adriana Cavarero performs in her work *In Spite of Plato*.

Cavarero explains the process of re-appropriation of male-authored female figures in the following manner:

¹ Although I am aware of the Derridian inference that the term “deconstruct” bears, I would like to specify that my use of the terms is purely to denote the notion of undoing a construction.

[...] my hermeneutical project consists of investigating the traces of the original act of erasure contained in the patriarchal order, the act upon which this order was first constructed and then continued to display itself. This is how my technique of theft works: I will steal feminine figures from their contexts, allowing the torn up fabric to show the knots that hold together the conceptual canvas that hides the original crime. (5)

The stolen figures are then rearranged on the canvas of a new symbolic order thus providing an alternate text and context in which women can be viewed. The premise through which Cavarero justifies her theft lies in the relationship between the female reader and the female character (1-9). When the reader is a woman and a feminist, suggests Cavarero, there is a relation of identity and recognition between her and the woman in the text: both are trapped in a masculine conceptual universe. However, it is precisely because of this relation that the female reader is afforded the possibility of altering both the reception and the political usefulness of the texts she interrogates. She may refuse to accept at face value the male author's representation of the female voice and instead read as a woman reading women-in-text. To illustrate her point, Cavarero returns to the myths where Western philosophical thought systematically suppressed the female presence and she rereads them in the light of female experience. Because the masculine symbolic system cannot genuinely represent that experience, it is the task of feminist subjects, the new readers of these male-authored texts, to render visible different figurations of female subjectivity. It is such rereading that I will perform in Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Trionfo della morte*, for Ippolita provides a pertinent site in which resistance is visible through a new reading of her actions.²

² The possibilities of finding symptoms of resistances are numerous throughout much of Gabriele D'Annunzio's work. It is simply for a question of brevity that I have chosen to limit

this essay to a single novel.

Many of D'Annunzio's female characters fall into the dichotomous categories of Madonna and Whore.³ Judith Butler points out that because cultural constructions such as these stereotypes have been perpetuated for so long under the guise of ontological truths, sometimes the distinction between what is culturally constructed and what is not cultural productions becomes obfuscated (*Gender Trouble*, viii). If Butler is correct in remarking that the determination of gender treats as origin and cause those identity categories which are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses, then D'Annunzio's female characters need to be treated as cultural productions rather than a realistic interpretation of femininity. Hence, while it might seem counterproductive to use cultural productions as a foreground for an analysis, the project is justified insofar as it is because these productions are constructions that one can pull them apart. I am, thus, positioning myself in part as a "reader," analyzing representations of the female gender that take place in D'Annunzio's text.⁴ The purpose

³ To name a few examples, in *Il piacere*, Elena represents the sexual figure, while Maria is the spiritual figure; in *Le vergini delle rocce*, Violante is the sensual woman, while Massimilla is the pious woman; in *Il fuoco* 'Perdita' is the carnal woman, while 'Arianna' is his spiritual inspiration; in *La Gioconda* Silvia is the spiritual figure, while Gioconda is the sexual lover.

⁴ An early wave of feminist literary criticism positioned women as *readers* of male-produced texts, reading from a different perspective, for it was felt that as women, our understanding of these same texts diverged from mainstream (male) criticism. The subjects of this type of analysis included "the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions of and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history" as well as a concern with the implicit manipulative effect such an exploitative system would have on women ("Toward a Feminist Poetics," 128). This first approach offered a subversive interpretation of the canon, challenging sexist ideology ("Treason To Our Text," 107). Women no longer wanted to identify with negative and fatal images of femininity – images in which they did not recognize themselves to begin with. It was therefore necessary that women gather the courage to publicly express their own unheard opinion: women's voices no longer belonged to the invisible domain of the private (female) individual, rather, they came together to denounce representations of femininity as "structural inconsistency" ("Dancing Through The Minefield," 144-45). It soon became clear that a critique and rejection of the male canon was unsatisfactory, for while it exposed acts of sexism, it did not offer positive and affirming images of femininity with which women could identify. It then became necessary to turn to different texts ("Dancing Through The Minefield," 145). A

of my analysis, however, is not to unearth misleading stereotypes but rather to focus on symptoms of resistances that can be found within these stereotypes. My position, then, would not be just that of a “reader” of male-authored texts: the discovery of a second “text” no longer produced by the author or the male characters also positions the female subject as “writers.” The alter-text in question, while not being a text in the conventional sense, comes nonetheless under the form of a legible body (both figurative and literal) of interpretable signs, a form of literature carrying codes of an alternate symbolic system and therefore must be “read” and “interpreted” according to this different language of corporeality. Perhaps this approach could be described as a controversial sister of “gynocritics,” this time applied to female-authored “texts” found within the male-authored text. It is within this framework that my article finds its theoretical and political justification: if representation is a locus of a certain instability, a “troubled” area, then it serves as an appropriate means for destabilizing gender constructions.⁵

Throughout the novel, representations of Ippolita frequently fluctuate between images of spiritual ideal and images of animal carnality. As a sexual being, Ippolita is inferior, lascivious and cause of

second wave of feminist criticism positioned women as *writers*. This time women produced “textual meaning with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women” (“Towards A Feminist Poetics,” 128). Such an approach included “the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary history; and [...] studies of particular writers and works” (“Towards A Feminist Poetics,” 128). The exploration of the relationship between literary authority and the concept of a sexed individual was brought to the forefront, allowing women’s texts to constitute an alternative to male tradition. (“What Do Feminist Critics Want,” 36).

⁵ I am borrowing the notion of a “troubled” gender from Judith Butler’s book *Gender Trouble*. While it is clear that Giorgio makes Ippolita responsible for both dressing and undressing, we can separate the author of each act, by claiming that the act of dressing reflects Giorgio’s desire to be Ippolita’s creator, while the act of undressing is not only threatening and therefore undesirable for Giorgio, but it becomes symptomatic of Ippolita’s rejection of patriarchal manipulation.

ruin and death: “con una inconcepibile intensità egli oramai nella persona d’Ippolita vedeva soltanto l’immagine astratta del sesso; vedeva soltanto l’essere inferiore, privo d’ogni spiritualità, semplice strumento di piacere e di lascivia, strumento di ruina e di morte” (819). As a spiritual being, she becomes luminous, free of any base and carnal attributes:

E avveniva alfine su la soglia del rifugio il miracolo; poiché l’impura, la corruttrice, la implacabile Nemica, la Rosa dell’Inferno, si spogliava all’improvviso d’ogni peccato e si faceva tutta monda per seguire il compagno fino all’altare. Divenuta luminosa, ella illuminava la tenebra sacra. (862)

Interestingly, the passage from carnal to spiritual or from spiritual to carnal takes place under the form of an undressing: in the above quotation, Ippolita “undressed herself” from all her sins. In a different passage, Ippolita “rientra in una casa a me ignota, rientra nella sua vita volgare, si spoglia dell’idealità di cui la vesto; diventa un’altra donna, una donna comune. Io non so più nulla di lei” (658-59). The garments, then, allow her to subsist as two-fold. The choice of garment, however, is not arbitrary, for as a sexual being, Ippolita is clearly threatening for Giorgio, while as a spiritual being, she bears nearly divine qualities and is therefore unthreatening. Further, as a spiritual being, Ippolita appears to be the product of Giorgio’s imagination (“Vedeva ora Ippolita vivente corrispondere all’ideale figura di lei, ch’egli nutriva nel cuore” 666), his creation (“Ella è una preziosa amante; è la mia creatura” 807), while as a carnal being, he no longer knows anything about her, she is unknown to him. Giorgio’s constant attempts to depict Ippolita as a spiritual ideal can be explained as an attempt to validate his role as creator and her existence as his creation. Her appearance as a sexual body is threatening, for as such she escapes Giorgio’s creative

grip and therefore is unknown and unknowable.⁶ If Giorgio is the “tailor” of the spiritual garment, and if Ippolita becomes unknown to him when wearing the carnal garment, then it might not be so presumptuous to assume that Ippolita is the tailor of the carnal garment. Although such an assumption is arguable, there is nonetheless a mark that Ippolita leaves in the carnal garment which comes under the form of a contamination of the ‘fabric’, as we shall later see, for her shuttle weaves its way through the threads. But for the moment I shall focus on the implications of wearing and removing the spiritual garment.

Giorgio imagines that Ippolita voluntarily chooses to “wear” the image of luminous perfection: “E quella muta e terribile eloquenza prendeva per il giovine questa significazione distinta: Io [Ippolita] sono sempre l’invitta. Tu [Giorgio] hai conosciuto sul mio corpo tutti i godimenti di cui ha sete il tuo desiderio senza fine; ed io mi vestirò delle menzogne che senza fine produrrà il tuo desiderio” (918). By interpreting Ippolita’s actions to mean that she chooses to wear the image he offers her, Giorgio deceives himself into believing that she willfully adopts his image of spiritual perfection. If we take into consideration the use of the first person subject pronoun, combined with indicative mode (“io sono” and “io mi vestirò”), then the text, rather than the context, becomes the locus in which a transfer of intentionality is effected. She thus becomes the free agent who transmits to him the desire to enrobe herself in spiritual idealness. While this “transfer” of authority might initially be a psychological ruse to make Ippolita appear to want to be ideal, because Ippolita is also given the power to “undress” herself, we also get a sense that Ippolita is rejecting her representation of spiritual ideal. Although it is

⁶ It is important to note that the sexual body with which Ippolita threatens Giorgio’s creativity must not be understood as a genuine representation of femininity, for it is just as much a male fabricated stereotype as the spiritual sister. Rather, as we shall later see, it is the fact that her body presents a point of resistance that makes it possible to reread the sexual body in different terms.

Giorgio who chooses to view this act in such a manner, thus making Ippolita's activity once again only imaginary, by separating the text (Giorgio's fantasy) from the language in the text, it becomes possible to give new meaning to Ippolita's activity: what was originally understood as a behavior manufactured by Giorgio's imagination can also be reread as being manufactured by Ippolita herself. Through this alternate reading made possible through a literal understanding of the text, Ippolita becomes the agent of her actions. She may wear the robe of spiritual ideal, but she also rejects it by removing it, in spite of his desires.

The garment of sexual carnality is also a cover that allows for a removal to take place, and, as we have seen, beneath the base and plebian attributes hide a luminous and ideal presence. Thus, when the ideal garment is removed, we discover a carnal presence, and when a carnal garment is removed, we discover a spiritual presence. Rather than two separate garments that get removed and replaced, Ippolita appears to be covered up in numerous onion-like layers, each one revealing, respectively, a luminous presence and a carnal presence. It is as if the shedding of layers were similar to a power struggle between the carnal and the spiritual, the bad and the good, the unknown and the know, and perhaps ultimately between Giorgio and Ippolita: while Giorgio tries to impose his imagined garment on Ippolita, Ippolita rejects this garment in order to expose her carnal vests. But since beneath that vest lies a luminous image, Ippolita can not maintain her status of carnality and is forced to remove yet another layer.

Moreover, Ippolita's challenge to expose her carnal attributes is compromised by a powerful mechanism of entrapment: the word "rivelare" ("la tendenza fittizia alle cose straordinarie, alla vita trascendente, al mistero – promosso in lei da Giorgio – s'appagava di quei segni che rivelavano un'alterazione profonda," 951) means to reveal, to unveil. Yet *ri-velare* also means to re-veil, that is, to 'veil' a second time. In this case *rivelare* means both to reveal and to re-veil and therefore it is a gesture that both unveils what is concealed and

conceals what is already veiled. A *rivelazione* then can never truly expose, for it simultaneously conceals. The paradox brought forth by the term *ri-velare* exposes a structure that both traps Ippolita in Giorgio's own definition of femininity, as well as protect him from Ippolita's acts of disobedience: if he cannot prevent the woman from removing her spiritual cover, then he must resort to a labyrinthine play on words. However, exposing this subtle means of entrapment actually proves to be useful: once the structure has been made visible, it becomes necessary and possible to search for loose threads. As a female reader, I too shall take on the audacious task of removing and releasing the struggling figure from her inescapable destiny so that Ippolita may "sketch out" her own text. The rereading I propose thus takes into consideration the layers covering Ippolita. If entrapment is possible because images of carnality can never truly be revealed, then given the fact that her layers appear to be infinite – the reader never gets a sense that there is a definitive and truthful representation of Ippolita – it is also true that the image of spirituality can never be revealed. In other words, if I invert the order of what veils and what is unveiled, the multiplicity of her layers allows me to affirm that the removal of her carnal vest does not genuinely reveal her spiritual being, for a revelation, as we have just established, is only deceptive. Hence, the mechanism of entrapment itself is complicated and reversible, by the process of infinite alternating layers.

Thus far we have seen that Ippolita's spiritual appearance comes under the form of a garment made up by Giorgio and placed on Ippolita. However, at times we also get the impression that this garment is a veil, a bandage covering Giorgio's eyes. In the following passage, Giorgio imagines Ippolita's words: "Io [Ippolita] posso in un attimo ritessere il velo che tu [Giorgio] hai lacerato; posso in un attimo rifasciarti della benda che hai tolta. Sono più forte del tuo pensiero. Io so il segreto delle mie trasfigurazioni nella tua anima." (918). Since there is no mention of him being "fasciato," the word "benda" refers to a metaphorical blindfold covering his eyes. He is, therefore, blind, a

condition which he imposes upon himself. A logical assumption, then, would be that his state of blindness implies that he cannot see a real image of Ippolita, but rather imagines it. The image of a spiritual Ippolita, then is the product of a blind vision, and therefore cannot genuinely represent the “real” Ippolita. Further, in a previous paragraph, we learn that the removal or the slashing of the veil exposes the unknowable image of a carnal Ippolita:

Vide sé stesso, nel futuro, legato a quella carne come il servo al suo ferro, privo di volontà e di pensiero, istupidito a vacuo; e la concubina sfiorire, invecchiare, abbandonarsi senza resistenza all’opera lenta del tempo, lasciar cadere dalle sue mani inerti il velo lacerato delle illusioni ma conservar tuttavia il suo potere fatale [...]. (916)

Slashed and removed, the veil of illusions exposes an image which is clearly fearful. It is as if, whenever he gazes through the torn veil he sees her as a carnal being subject to organic deterioration. If Giorgio’s blindfold is this veil then it is also the cover that hides Ippolita’s reality, and the image of perfection is the garment with which she dresses herself, for what he “sees” when he is blindfolded is a figment of his imagination. Restoration of the “benda” would thus imply a restoration of her garment and of his momentarily lost illusion. Without his blindfold, Giorgio is forced to see what is clearly threatening to him, with his blindfold, he no longer is faced with the horrific vision. Hence the fact that the removal of the blindfold reveals an Ippolita who is unknown to him suggests that she is no longer the product of his imagination. In such case, the ideal form of Ippolita is nothing more than a travesty, literally and figuratively. Representation is thus misrepresentation, and the condition of blindness serves distinctly as a means to claim as real his own fabrications. Ippolita’s act of “undressing” is indeed the subversive act of forcing Giorgio to face an undesirable and unknown representation of femininity.

So far, it is Ippolita who replaces the blindfold/garment. And what is even more interesting and pertinent to our analysis is that it is Giorgio who gives Ippolita the active role of mending the torn veil: “Io posso in un attimo ritessere il velo che tu hai lacerato.” Although the garment may be the product of Giorgio’s imagination, it is Ippolita who is given the task of reweaving the veil. The male character’s “loss” of authorship becomes once again apparent: reinserted within this altered and alter text, the act of reweaving the lacerated cloth can be understood in subversive terms: taking into account the tradition of the woven text, it is possible to suggest that the rewoven text bears the distinctive mark of her handwriting, as the shuttle has found its way into her hands. Interpreting this gesture as an exchange of authorship thus becomes powerfully suggestive for the story told in the second text is no longer the same as the one imagined by Giorgio since it is produced by Ippolita. It is ultimately her handwriting that prevails. Hence this tapestry interwoven into Giorgio’s text becomes the image he is forced to see. And this image, I would venture to suggest, is the carnal body that is threatening because it is not authored by him, but by Ippolita instead.

The sexual body she represents when free of her spiritual garment, then, leads us to the “body” Irigaray and Cixous refer to in their works, for the female character “put[s] herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement” (“Laugh of the Medusa,” 334). While the body presented to us by D’Annunzio and his male character, and reproduced by the female protagonists are literary bodies, thus making any analogy with those presented to us by Irigaray and Cixous a precarious one, one must not forget that the bodies about which these two women write appear in and through a textual form, which makes them a product of literature as well. Arleen B. Dallery points out that “[a] woman’s body is always mediated by language; the human body is a text, a sign, not just a piece of fleshy matter” (*The Politics*, 54). One could argue, then, that there is no such thing as a “real” body, especially if “the meanings of the body in discourse

actually shape the materiality of the real body and its complementary desires" (*The Politics*, 59). Hence the "real" body one refers to in a phallographic system, is in fact a fictitious and overly determined body. Because the body exists in language, it is a semiotic sign and therefore belongs to the order of the symbolic. What becomes appealing to feminists, then, is that by positing that bodies are built through language, it opens up the possibility of participating, on our own terms and in our own language, in the de(con)struction and reconstruction of ourselves as subjects and our bodies through a language that distinguishes itself from the phallographic nature of the dominant language: "In speaking the body, writing is pulsed by this feminine libidinal economy and projects the meanings of a decensored body to be materially lived. A 'real' body prior to discourse is meaningless" (*The Politics*, 59). The "real" body is meaningless because it is a body without language and therefore without meaning, a body waiting to be marked by language: "Writing the body, then, is both *constative* and performative. It signifies those bodily territories that have been kept under seal; it figures the body. But, writing the body is also a performative utterance; the feminine libidinal economy inscribes itself in language" (*The Politics*, 59). As language rewrites the female body, so does the female body, through its "libidinal economy," rewrite language. It is perhaps not coincidental that the effect of the sight of the "original" Ippolita is an aging hag rather than a seductive beauty: Ippolita carries within her both her own death as well as the ability to induce death. I am then inclined to celebrate the aging hag, not because she is an image of imperfection but because she marks a sight (and site) that is free from male manipulation. Of course, the aging hag is just as much a product of male fantasy as the other stereotypes, but her "lethal" power gains new meaning in this context of sexual difference.

We have seen that Giorgio's attempts to transform Ippolita into a spiritual image of perfection have been unsuccessful. Ippolita has resisted and rewritten her own story. I would like to suggest, however, that there is still another reason why Giorgio is unsuccessful at

permanently enforcing the spiritual image: the female character is a victim of a malady which will cause her to be both inside and outside of her body:

[Ippolita] teneva le mani raccolte nel grembo [...]; e l'immaginazione dell'amante vedeva tra le dita 'la ciocca dei capelli strappati [...]'. Appariva e spariva come quella ciocca [...] il fantasma dell'epilettico; – di quel medesimo che sotto il portico era caduto all'improvviso [...]. Appariva e spariva il fantasma, quasi fosse il sogno della dormiente esternato e reso visibile. (893)

The male character revisits the scene of Ippolita's epileptic attack in his imagination, focusing on the lock of hair, as it "appears and disappears." And in the same fashion the sight of the hair appeared and disappeared in his memory, so does the phantom of another epileptic. And the phantasmatic body of the other person appears and disappears as if it were Ippolita's "externalized dream." Because her dream is compared to the phantom of an epileptic, I argue that this visible and externalized dream-like image is also the externalization of the self that takes place right before an epileptic seizure: preceding an epileptic attack, the victim feels as if his or her ego were no longer centered within the body, but rather floats outside of it, a phenomenon known as "autoscopy" (*Volatile Bodies*, 43). Following autoscopy is the more severe symptom of depersonalization: a psychical transformation in self-conception whereby the victim observes himself or herself with disinterest as if he or she were a spectator. It appears that depersonalization accounts for the phenomenon of the "out of body experience" (*Volatile Bodies*, 76). If D'Annunzio was not aware of such an occurrence, the reference to the externalized dream of the epileptic is quite intuitive and for our purposes, very fortunate, for the

dream of the “phantom” body and the externalization of the self become one and the same. In such case, Giorgio’s inability to fully possess Ippolita is not just the result of a “demonic” disease that has taken possession of her, but also the result of a split that her self has undergone, causing her to be present and absent, inside and outside her body, locked in and free of male representations of femininity.⁷ Hence if her epilepsy appears to be a titillating phenomenon for Giorgio, it is also a way for the female character to extract herself from an image of femininity that is purely manufactured by Giorgio. A “dramatic change in self-conception” could well be a form of refusal and consequent escape (*Volatile Bodies*, 43). Critics such as Susan Bordo have pointed out that women have rejected their restricting representations through forms of psychoses such as hysteria and eating disorders (“The Body And The Reproduction of Femininity,” 15). Psychoses, by having a direct or indirect effect on a person’s body, cause the body to become readable texts, and in these texts one can find the signs of rejections (“The Body,” 16). While epilepsy does not fall into the same category as these psychoses, the events that take place during a seizure allow her body to become an interpretable “text”: to begin with, Ippolita is forced to embody a lifeless image of “sovereign” perfection, a representation that is anything but ideal. Her body (or lack thereof) is thus “deeply inscribed with an ideological construction of femininity emblematic of the periods in question” (“The Body,” 16). The dual form of appearance (body and phantom of body residing outside of the body), caused by the epileptic seizures, presents the victim with a form of escape, thus becoming an expression of a refusal of such ideological constructions. However, as Bordo rightly points out, these forms of protest are also precarious since they call for silence, malady and

⁷ According to Barbara Spackman, epilepsy, as “sacred (and demonic)” prevents Giorgio from fully possessing Ippolita because it “is a disease of possession, and so appears to figure the impossibility of any true priority, any total possession. The woman is already possessed, already of another. The attribution of epilepsy to Ippolita is a recognition of the insurmountable obstacles to the possession of the beloved” (*Decadent Genealogies*, 190-191).

self-destruction (“The Body,” 21): Ippolita may be escaping her limitations, but at the extraordinary cost of epileptic seizures. Of course her malady is the author’s choice which undermines any form of subversive feminine behavior. However, while the choice of epilepsy might originally be inspired by a desire to eroticize and pervert the disease, it inadvertently releases the woman from the entrapping mechanism with which phallogocentric discourse has been able to perpetuate such misrepresentations.

Outside of her self and other to herself, Ippolita may have been robbed of any claims of subjectivity.⁸ Yet a re-investigation of the implications of subjectivity, beginning with the reminder that our present notion of subjectivity belongs to a symbolic discourse that excludes women, perhaps it is no longer in our interest to make such claims. If subjectivity can only be understood within a phallogocentric context, then it is this very form of (mis)identification that women must reject. Thus Ippolita is not truly losing any possibility of acquiring an identity as subject, she is simply refusing to conform to a notion of subjectivity that is foreign to her.

⁸ According to Elizabeth Grosz, “for the subject to take up a position as a subject, it must be able to be situated in the space occupied by its body. This anchoring of subjectivity in its body is the condition of coherent identity, and, moreover, the condition under which the subject *has a perspective* on the world, and becomes a source for a vision, a point from which vision emanates and to which light is focused. Some psychotics are unable to locate themselves where they should be. They may look at themselves from outside, as another might; they may hear voices of others in their heads” (*Volatile Bodies*, 47).

Representations of women as whores, man-eaters, animals with uncontrollable sexual appetites, are clearly fictitious products of male fantasy. Dannunzian portrayals of the *femme fatale*, then, undeniably embrace such a long standing tradition. However, read in a different and gendered context, D'Annunzio's female character, by causing fear within her male counterpart by virtue of her sexually charged body, is a woman who has come back from the "darkness" of her "continent" to "deride", dare I say "laugh" at the male protagonist's constant struggle to cover her up with his own projections.⁹ She is a woman who has slashed a hole in man-made masquerades intended to protect the male gazer. And it is with and through this newly acquired sexual body that resistance can be found. Her body becomes a text written in a 'feminine writing'.¹⁰ The implications of such forms of resistance are

⁹ By "dark continent" I am referring to Hélène Cixous: "Here [women] are, returning, arriving over and over again, because the unconscious is impregnable. They have wandered around in circles, confined to the narrow room in which they've been given a deadly brainwashing. You [meaning men] can incarcerate them, slow them down, get away with the old Apartheid routine, but for a time only. As soon as they begin to speak, at the same as they are taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid. Don't move, you might fall. Most of all, don't go into the forest. And so we have internalized this horror of the dark" ("The laugh of the Medusa," 336).

¹⁰ By 'feminine writing' I am making specific reference to the French notion of an "écriture féminine." In the hypothesis of an *écriture féminine*: rather than asking whether language produced sexuality, the question was inverted thereby proposing that sexuality might in fact produce language. If one could determine such a thing as a male symbolic discourse, that is, a means "through which man objectifies the world, reduces it to his terms, speaks in place of everything and everyone else – including women" then couldn't that also mean that it would be possible to speak in the feminine, that is, to engender a symbolic discourse that is *other* – though not necessarily opposite – to what has up until now been imposed upon women and yet which is foreign to them? ("Writing The Body," 362). French feminists of the seventies such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, believed that change needed to start with women's (re)experiencing of their once denied sexuality (*jouissance*). Expressing their sexuality would call for a new language – since it had never been named – which in turn would allow women to "establish a point of view (a site of *différence*) from which phallogocentric concepts and controls could be seen through and taken apart, not only in theory but in practice" ("Writing The Body," 358). Given the fact that women's bodies and their sexual pleasure have been excluded from male discourse, Irigaray believed that women's bodies and the female *jouissance* marked a possible site from which women's problematic relationship to (a male) language could begin to be solved (*This Sex Which Is Not One*).

two fold: on the one hand, in spite of the fact that representations of femininity are products of male thought, women can in fact rewrite and recode their stories, and therefore contribute to representations of female subjectivities that can be understood outside of the traditional codes of a patriarchal system. On the other hand, resistance through oscillation threatens the notion of fixed, uncontaminated oppositions upon which the male Western binary structure relies (man-woman, culture-nature, intellect-body, active-passive, good-evil...): the bar that separates opposition becomes ineffective, impotent. Suddenly good is no longer distinct from evil, culture becomes confused with nature, and man is faced with the threatening gaze of Medusa.

(Gettysburg College)

Bibliography

- D'Annunzio, Gabriele 1988 *Prose di romanzi*, eds. Ezio Raimondi, Annamaria Andreoli and Niva Lorenzini. Milano: A. Mondadori.
- Abel, Elizabeth, ed. 1982 *Writing and Sexual Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Braidotti, Rosi 1994 *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Butler, Judith 1990 *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Cavarero, Adriana 1995 *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Aine O'Healy. New York: Routledge.
- 1995 *Corpo in figure: Filosofia e politica della corporeità*. Milan, Italy: Feltrinelli.
- Chomel, Luisetta E. 1997 *D'Annunzio: Un teatro al femminile*. Ravenna, Italy: Long Editore.

- Dijkstra, Bram 1986 *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin de siècle Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 1996 *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality in Twentieth Century Culture*. New York: Henri Holt and Company.
- Felman, Shoshana 1993 *What Does A Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Freud, Sigmund 1963 *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*. New York: Collier Books.
- Goudet, Jacques 1976 *D'Annunzio romanziere*. Florence, Italy: L.S. Olschki.
- Grosz, Elizabeth 1994 *Volatile Bodies*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Hillman, David 1997 *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Routledge.
- & Carla Mazzio, ed.
- Irigaray, Luce 1985 *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- 1985 *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Jaggar, Alison M. 1986 *Gender / Body / Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- & Susan R. Bordo, ed.
- Kemp, Sandra 1993 *The Lonely Mirror: Italian Perspectives on Feminist Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- & Paola Bono, ed.
- Lacan, Jacques 1985 “The Meaning of the Phallus” in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the “école freudienne”*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose. New York: W.W. Norton & Company and Pantheon Books.
- Lauretis, Teresa de 1987 *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- LaValva, Rosamaria 1991 “Immagini della doppia madre in D’Annunzio.” *Italian Culture*. Pittsburgh, PA (ItC): 9, 243-57.
- Miller, Nancy K., ed. 1986 *The Poetics of Gender*. New York, Columbia University Press.

- Paratore, Ettore 1981 "Il Trionfo della morte." *Lettere Italiane*, Florence, Italy (LI): Oct.-Dec., 33:4, 509-528.
- Praz, Mario 1966 *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica*, Firenze, Italy: Vallecchi.
- Roda, Vittorio 1980 "Note sui personaggi femminili del D'Annunzio." In Emilio Pasquini, ed., *Studi in onore di Raffaele Spongano*. Bologna: Boni, 425-427.
- 1987 "Appunti sulla costruzione del personaggio dannunziano." *Annali d'Italianistica*, Chapel Hill, NC (AdI): 5, 87-110.
- Showalter, Elaine, ed. 1985 *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Silverman, Hugh 1989 *Continental Philosophy II: Derrida and Deconstruction*, New York: Routledge.
- Spackman, Barbara 1989 *Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to D'Annunzio*. Ithaca: Cornell UP.
- Valesio, Paolo, ed. 1988 *D'Annunzio a Yale*, "Quaderni dannunziani".

Warhol, Robyn R. 1991 *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary
& Dian Price Herndl, ed. Theory and Criticism.* New
Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers
University Press.