

# SIGNATURES

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# Gerede's Lebensraum: Heidegger, Language, Performance, Eugenics

S.I. Salamensky (Williams College, Massachusetts)

Through the recent publication of Martin Heidegger's private papers (attesting to, among other things, boosterism for "racial hygiene" <sup>1</sup>), the speculative philosopher's investment in Nazi pragmatics is rendered, finally, unquestionable. This biographical revelation should spark massive critical reinvestigation of Heidegger's philosophic works as well. As Jean-François Lyotard protests,

[A]ny deduction, even a mediated one, of Heidegger's "Nazism" from the text of *Sein und Zeit* [*Being and Time*] is impossible, and ... in proceeding in this way one succumbs to as sinister an antic as the 'investigations' at the Moscow 'trials.' Moving from the book of the philosopher to the agitation of the rector is not fruitful ... Still, it is no less inconsistent to argue that *Sein und Zeit* is manifestly an apolitical work .... One might as well say that only those works possess any political quality that determine concretely, prescriptively, and exclusively the proper program for the realization of the idea of politics that they will elaborate philosophically.<sup>2</sup>

It should not, however, be overly reductive to note that these newest revelations reconfirm Avital Ronell's brilliant detection of politically-charged complications in Heidegger – for instance, pronounced lacunae or "disconnects" in his technolitics – or that they reinforce what I have ventured elsewhere and will pursue to further ends here:<sup>3</sup> that Heidegger's writing on public sphere language, conflating epistemological processes with the genetically-based rhetorics of his Nazi context, is confused within itself – simply poor philosophy. More importantly, however, Heidegger's problems with public sphere language intersect with crucial issues in critical theory today.

The Heidegger passage most centrally in question – an odd, brief, but powerfully-felt, it would seem, moment in *Being and Time*<sup>4</sup> – decries everyday, "idle" talk, or *Gerede*, as an insidious, viral societal and philosophic ill. Expression by the "average understanding," as Heidegger hears it, "perverts"<sup>5</sup> the Dasein – our existential state of "being-in-the-world" – that it, misguidedly, attempts to represent. Talk, our quotidian 'blah-blah-blah' – that endless, incessant cultural engine – undermines the role, or rule, of authoritative dicta (philosophy and *poesis*),

corroding the public consciousness through subterranean, unmonitorable, ungovernable acts of transmission.

*Gerede* arises, in Heidegger, as at once dismissably marginal to the Dasein and threateningly central. A certain loose, frivolous, and yet dangerous volubility – gossip, blarney, *blague* – has historically linked to the “chattering” masses, or classes, constituencies that would be denied the right to be heard (the woman, the queer, the Jew, the “native,” and so on).<sup>6</sup> Similar problems regarding authority, voicing, subversion, and – in an ideational, but most provocative and potent sense – “sexuality” and “race” arise in Heidegger; however, in Heidegger they appear not as contingent but as ontic to the operative structures of utterance itself. The *Gerede* passage permits a glimpse into the manners in which linguistic interventions into culture, the Jew as slippery, undecidable, self-racinating performative icon, and the nature of performance itself have been imaged, or imaged.

“Discourse,” Heidegger warns,

belongs to the essential constitution of being of Dasein, and also constitutes its disclosedness, but has the possibility of being idle talk [*Gerede*], and as such of not really keeping being-in-the-world open in an articulated understanding, but of closing it off ...<sup>7</sup>

*Gerede*, as the past participle of *Reden*, “to speak,” means, literally, “that-which-has-already-been-spoken.” Everyday talk is positioned, in Heidegger, as pretence at true representation, ersatz expression, at once insufficient and excessive, etiolated verbal junk.

“Idle talk” is not, in Heidegger, wholly odious in itself, as it is for Kierkegaard, who fears neighbourly visits in case pernicious chitchat might occur.<sup>8</sup> For Heidegger, the very usage of language at all embeds implicit knowledges, and has a certain “average intelligibility”: deriving from shared mass consciousness, it provides a basis for communitarian understanding. It is in this commonness and commonality, rather than simply in *Gerede*’s basic make-up, that its dangers lie. *Gerede*, inherently lacking a “primordial” link to Dasein, further functions “by gossiping and passing the word along,”<sup>9</sup> in a manner of communication not untied to viral communicability.<sup>10</sup> It infects language and consciousness, and thus the Dasein, beyond its own humble bounds, traveling from average to elite discursive networks, and from speech to writing:

Idle talk is constituted in this gossiping and passing the word along, a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand on increases to complete groundlessness. And this is not limited to vocal gossip, but spreads to what is written, as “scribbling.” In this latter case, gossiping is based not so much on hearsay. It

feeds on sporadic superficial reading: the average understanding of the reader *will never be able* to decide what has been drawn from primordial sources with a struggle, and how much is just gossip. Moreover, the average understanding will not even want such a distinction, will not have need of it, since, after all, it understands everything. The groundlessness of idle talk is no obstacle to its being public, but encourages it. Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without any previous appropriation of the matter. Idle talk is something which anyone can rake up.<sup>11</sup>

Mimicking or mocking “appropriation” (which is explained elsewhere by Heidegger as not just conceptual “ownership” of Dasein, but also ownership by Dasein, citizenship within Dasein), *Gerede* engrafts itself into higher cultural status and permanency, eluding and eliding legitimate strictures of entitlement and privilege. Nomadic, “rootless” – a prime Heideggerian keyword in passage – idle talk harvests what it can “rake up” from a “ground” it has not worked, throwing off what it cannot use, and moving faster than toiling, tilling rhetorics. The principle from which it speculates is parasitic, larcenous, its holdings tenuous and counterfeited.

Most problematically, no one really cares. The mass, Heidegger laments, is deafened to its loss by talk’s arrogance, camouflage, and ubiquity, in a public ignorance at once negligible and

fearsome. In supposing it knows, the mass establishes itself as a site of a kind of knowledge – if not of its repressed finer instincts, then of, in Jacques Lacan’s term, its all-comprehensive hermetic “knowledge of languages,”<sup>12</sup> or the private, cherishing and cherished feel of the addictive bond<sup>13</sup> – that philosophy cannot comprehend (get a handle on, surround, crack). In fulfilling conditions relevant to its need, talk – consciousness’s junk food, unsound but satisfying – in effect situates itself as, at best, equi-vocal with philosophizing. Philosophy cannot survive, Heidegger’s concern implies, if hindered in accessing its final territory: the public mind.

As Dasein is always already imbricated in *Gerede*, true and false manifestations of the existential *radix*, or root (a frequent Heideggerian term) cannot easily be differentiated by the masses – or, even, perhaps, by philosophers. Heidegger rues it:

Dasein can never escape the everyday way into which [it] has grown initially. All genuine understanding, interpreting and communication, rediscovery and reappropriation come about in it and out of it and against it. [In no case is] a Dasein, untouched and unseparated by [*Gerede*’s] way of interpreting [set before the open country of a “world-in-itself” so that it just beholds what it encounters] ... The they prescribes [a manner

of] attunement, it determines what and how one “sees.”<sup>14</sup>

*Gerede* “seduces” its way into Dasein’s geniture, separating (*seducere*, to separate) Dasein from philosophy, usurping philosophy’s preserve, its *Lebensraum*, the “open country.” Unwelcome, yet organic, idle talk shoots up and reproduces itself – hardy, rank – as unnaturally natural, decadent dynamic. Everyday discourse is at once originary, anterior, the primal form from which higher rhetorics have emerged and against which they must be maintained, and derivative, fallen, participle to that which it can only – unintelligibly or illegibly, but in some crude, blunt form, effectively – repeat.

As the form of utterance most spontaneous to hand, *Gerede* retains the immediacy that Plato cites in privileging the vocative over the inscriptive. For Plato, the relative veracity of the expressive form, the signifier, lies in its degree of proximity to that which it signifies, the object. Real meaning, by contrast, for Heidegger – it might be noted – emerges only after great communicative labor, a well-worked-over, lapidary document. Everyday mass chatter, in Heidegger’s reading, is its at once weak and dangerous, in its too-quick, ersatz, shoddy quality. However, for both Plato and Heidegger, the base problem is, finally, less of the word’s pretense to representation than one of

mass reception – and less one of communication than communicability. Plato banishes the poet from his Republic less for his trade *per se* than for its possibility for mass deception.

*Gerede*, while technically recordable,<sup>15</sup> carries the greater sense – in Heidegger’s anxieties – of what Peggy Phelan calls the “unmarked”: the uninscribable or traceless.<sup>16</sup> Undecidably originated, multi-aspected, its pathways, endpoints, and methodologies legion and irregular, it wields the enigmatic, ‘guerillistic’ power of absence, the place of the feminine, queer, subaltern, unseen, and/or unmasterable: the cultural space, for Phelan, of performance itself.

In what is perhaps the passage’s most pointed moment, Heidegger traces mass talk to mob credo, with the final character of action: “Things are so because one says so.” The insurgent in Heidegger’s republic, is not, *pace* Plato, the high-rhetorical dramatic poet, but the unskilled, common practitioner of language, who, in pretence to effect, enacts what s/he pretends. The threat of *Gerede*’s performance lies, for Heidegger, in the covert openness through which the philosophic project is vanquished: infiltrated, overrun, degenerated.

New critical attention has accrued, of late, to “speech acts,” the operations through which language manifests as material

action. Jacques Derrida, Stanley Cavell, Shoshana Felman, Judith Butler, and others have explored a wide range of cultural anxieties attaching to language's "performative" propensities.<sup>17</sup> Investigation, following J. L. Austin, has largely focused on "illocutionary" ("I promise ...") and "perlocutionary" ("Please ...") statements, the utterance of which, in "felicitous" instances, causes or prompts specific ensuing events. *Gerede*, in Heidegger's characterization, appears infelicitous, less directive than Austin would demand; as the chaotic quality Heidegger assigns to its provenance and structure precludes a clear agency or cause-and-effect use, *Gerede* seemingly falls short of conventional speech-act dictates. In addition, as far as Heidegger would be concerned, the grammar-driven, citational, imperative speech-act statement can be heard to lie outside his criteria for authentic articulation – descriptive difference-making, the only linguistic action, in Heidegger's formulation, of interest.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, something apparently threatens. What is there to fear, for Heidegger, in what might be dubbed a "talk-," or "*Geredes*,-" act?

Felman, in engagement with Gottlob Frege and others, notes a sense in which the "constative," or descriptive statement (the agency implicit in which Austin both recognizes and elides) enacts performance in the very fact of its iteration. The assertive invention of a common descriptive statement – the unspoken ["I assert that"] preceding the statement 'It is

raining'" – where authoritative-sounding discourse embeds implicit epistemological doubt, by omission positions the constative in the realm of "objective" knowledge, where it effectively roots itself, performatively "establishing certainty" (Latin *constare*), therefore producing its own "truth." "The fact of saying," as Felman quotes Lacan, "remains behind what is said in what is heard."<sup>19</sup> The "Don Juanian" qualities Felman locates in the performative (its propensity to "engage" situationally and successfully *sans* heed to foundationalist notions, preparation, or following-through; its erection of a law of desire as against a "truth" of knowledge) pique Heideggerian anxieties as to what the constative performs. As with Don Juan – or, historically, the Jew – *Gerede*'s peripatetic, polysemic, easy dissemination and hybridity is both its weakness and its vital strength.

Idle talk works its way through being-in-the-world, in Heidegger's account, via stealth and deception, felicitously abetting and abetted by common sloth. The "average" shy, or flee, from existential anxiety, and with that from true philosophical rigor. However, talk's slickness or slyness alone fails to explain its curious attraction – what renders it ripe for dalliance, beyond the "tranquilization" of distraction. Felman characterizes speech overall as

the true realm of eroticism....To seduce is to produce language that enjoys, language that takes pleasure in having 'no more to say.' To seduce is...to prolong, within desiring speech, the pleasure-taking performance of the very production of that speech.<sup>20</sup>

On a spectrum of language *in toto*, as Felman describes it – phatic, self-nourishing, self-signifying, its meaning textural or based in endless differentiations rather than reference – idle talk, in its languorous laxity, exaggerates these properties. *Gerede* is (as I have elsewhere coined it, for want of a better term) the most “languagey” of utterance. Heidegger detects *Gerede*’s “emptiness,” but not its concomitant “fullness.”<sup>21</sup> Talk’s pleasure, though never explicitly mentioned, appears merely as the ruse through which it travels, rather than as its source, its destination, its essence.

Heidegger’s great philosophic headache is that words deceive. Yet he continues, perversely, to regard language as transitive, expecting transparent referentiality, and therein locating *Gerede*’s failure. Despite appreciation, elsewhere, for Stephan George, Georg Trakl, and other modern poets (that is, for their craft in expressivity) Heidegger’s poetics, in this same way, evade the major movement of his century. Talk’s robust flourishing in the face of its seeming inadequacy indicates,

seemingly, what Derrida describes as an “infelicitous,” anti-phallogenic, self-referentiality of not simply *Gerede* but all language in general. Heidegger is jealous, for philosophy, of talk’s stolen hold on the referent as, in a sense, a limited resource. Talk’s scandal is the same that Felman reports as Don Juan’s: performatively subverting the law of foundations, and/or getting away with it.

Heidegger appeals to a rule of knowledge *Gerede* rudely and blithely talks over; instead he might – rather more fruitfully – contrast talk’s attraction with (less philosophy’s rectitude than, finally,) philosophy’s pleasures. Indeed, *Being and Time*, of all texts, may best demonstrate the agonizing delights of cognition, communication, and instruction: play, withholding, delaying, deferring, disclosing, withdrawing, connecting, exploring a body of knowledge from every conceivable angle with exquisite intensity, deliberateness, and, in Heidegger’s vital term, “care.”<sup>22</sup> Heidegger’s very method is a paean to an ecstasy of philosophic rigor.<sup>23</sup> The difficulty, then, is that preference of pleasure – taste, desire – *non est disputandum*; it can, at best, be regulated.

As Avital Ronell recounts, in 1934 Martin Heidegger was telephoned by the National Socialist Storm Trooper Bureau. As a philosophical question, Ronell asks what was said and why he “took the call.” Later, as Ronell discusses, Heidegger denied, or

failed to address, the event, attributing the issue to “slander,” or rumor – *Gerede* – that Heidegger, helplessly, dismissed as simply “beyond” him. His support of the Nazi movement, he explains, has been misheard by “fools, stool pigeons, and spies.” Talk has – Heidegger defends himself – evaded and exceeded the bounds of the authoritative word.

Heidegger’s *Gerede* passage, put forth as an ethical plea, bespeaks itself – on its own, as well as in conversation with the author of now-public letters – instead as an aesthetic (*chaque à mon goût*), hauntingly ethnologic, and, finally, uncannily eugenicist dictum. The figure of the Jew is, here as elsewhere through history, bound up with – at once and interrelatedly – economics, sexuality and language.

In cross-examination by *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger protests that any writings or statements with what may be misconstrued as genocidal connotations are solely expressive exercises, unlinked to Third Reich ideologies, and divorced from Third Reich actions.<sup>24</sup> Philosophy, in the final analysis, is harmless, innocent, ineffectual discoursing: just “idle talk”?

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- 1 Heidegger had attempted to appoint a chair at Freiburg for instruction on the subject, linking Greek notions of physical fitness for citizenship in the state to current-day German life and Naziistic notions of racial degeneration: “[A] race and an epoch, according to the inner greatness and expanse of its particular being, gives itself the law to define the sick and the healthy... The German race is now at the point of rediscovering its actual essence... Adolf Hitler, our new great Führer and Chancellor, has created a new state.” Translation from Hugh Eakin, “Out of the Freiburg, into the Fire,” *Lingua Franca* 11:6, (August 2001), 9–11. See *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, 1910—1976, *Gesamtausgabe* series vol. 16), ed. Hermann Heidegger, (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000).
- 2 *Heidgger and “the jews,”* trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).
- 3 Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); see S.I. Salamensky, “Dangerous Talk: Phenomenology, Performativity, Cultural Crisis,” in S.I. Salamensky, ed., *Talk Talk Talk: The Cultural Life of Everyday Conversation*, (New York: Routledge, 2000).
- 4 All quotes are from the Joan Stambaugh translation (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), with page numbers from the original German edition. Occasional clarifications based on the German and the John McQuarrie-Edward Robinson version (New York: Harper, 1962), appear in brackets.
- 5 McQuarrie-Robinson, 212.
- 6 See: Patricia M. Spacks, *Gossip* (Knopf, 1985); Jan B. Gordon, *Gossip and Subversion in the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Echo’s Economies* (London: Macmillan, 1986); S.I. Salamensky, “Dangerous Talk: Phenomenology, Performance, Cultural Crisis,” in S.I. Salamensky, (ed.), *Talk Talk Talk*: Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and many other works; Homi K. Bhabha and Sander L. Gilman, “Just Talking: Tête-à-Tête,” in *Talk Talk Talk*.
- 7 Stambaugh, 169.

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- 8 *The Present Age*, trans. Alexander Dru, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 56.
- 9 Stambaugh, 169.
- 10 See “Signature Event Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- 11 Stambaugh, 169.
- 12 Quoted in *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with J.L. Austin*, or Seduction in Two Languages, tr. Catherine Porter, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 76.
- 13 See Avital Ronell, *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1993).
- 14 Stambaugh, 169.
- 15 See Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1999).
- 16 *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- 17 See particularly: Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Phenomena of Signs*, tr. David B. Allison, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), and *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff, tr. Samuel Weber, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988); Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (London: Blackwell, 1994), and *A Pitch of Philosophy: Autobiographical Exercises* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), and *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- 18 See Stambaugh, 154–161.
- 19 Felman, 29.
- 20 Felman, 28.
- 21 See Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, tr. M.E. Meek, (Miami: University of of Miami Press, 1973).

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- 22 See Stambaugh.
- 23 See Felman on Austin, 102
- 24 Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 13–14.

## **‘I’ and ‘we’ : the black female self in Kuzwayo and Morrison**

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Devi Sarinjeive (Vista University, South Africa)

In reading *Beloved* by Toni Morrison via an autobiographical text *Call Me Woman* written by Ellen Kuzwayo during apartheid times in South Africa, I shall endeavour to show how third person fiction and first person autobiography, both mediated textual configurations, reflect on, illuminate, comment on and also differ from one another in the representations of the black woman’s self, particularly in its revisioning through motherhood. Since these texts are by black women it would not be inappropriate as well to refer to Ogunyemi who uses the term “womanist” to distinguish black women writers from white women “feminist” writers and to broaden the parameters of concern to include questions of race, culture, nationality, economics and politics. Feminism and womanism may share certain beliefs that women as a whole are oppressed to start with, but as Ogunyemi points out there are other major differences between white and black women’s experience of oppression. In consequence, she groups African and Afro-American women writers such as Bessie Head, Flora Nwapa and Mariamma Ba with Margaret Walker, Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, because,

they share similar aesthetic attitudes in spite of factors that separate them. As a group, they are distinct from white feminists because of their race, because they have experienced the past and present subjugation of the black population along with present day subtle (or not so subtle) control exercised over them by the alien Western culture

(Ogunyemi 1985 p.64).

In the two novels selected for discussion “the alien Western culture” is specifically slavery in *Beloved* and apartheid in *Call Me Woman*. The “extra-literary determinants”, life experience, have as Ogunyemi continues, made “the black female novel in English what it is today and partly account[s] for the conflict between white and black women over strategies and priorities in sexual politics” (1985 p.64). Ogunyemi’s essay proceeds to argue her point that womanism is widespread and binds together African and Afro-American women novelists.

However, specificity, situatedness and positionality have, as they have been in feminism, also to be taken into account along with black/white difference in the distinct praxis of womanism. Today as feminisms allow for a multiplicity of perspectives, methods and approaches the specific experiences represented in the focal texts inflect our understanding of womanism. Because of the diversities, nuances and finer shades of meaning involved in the experience and understanding of oppression of the central female consciousnesses in the textual representations it will be shown that there are positions and constrictions within womanism as well, for instance, in the way patriarchy is envisioned and subjectivity conceived.

But before getting into the representations of the self it will be useful first to see how the texts compare broadly. For a start Kuzwayo's text is, as Coullie writes, both about a "generalized black woman and a particular woman" in "neither western nor traditional black autobiographical discourse (while relying on both), by finding a space between these frames" (p.132). Kuzwayo addresses questions of how she understands herself and the conditions of her life. The book involves more than establishing her own power to mean; in drawing from her own cultural sources, she ensures also that 'I', as will be shown, is in some way or other always connected with 'we'. While this may also hold for the fictionalised story of black slaves in *Beloved* in terms of authorship, there is clearly, given what happens to the

self in slavery, more emphasis placed on the unceasing struggle to re-construct identity that has been systematically destroyed.

To add to that, both Kuzwayo and Morrison use the oppressor's language, English, which both threatens and provides spaces in-between for writing back against stereotypical approaches and representations of black women. To put it in Showalter's terms, it is "'double-voiced discourse' that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and dominated" (1985 p.263). Morrison, for example, contests in a circular narrative, in black speech patterns that evoke oral performance, representations of black women by white and black American men writers like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. And Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* is a controlled first person, specifically focused response to Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man*, in which the main story begins, "For neither am I a man in the eyes of the law,/ Nor am I a man in the eyes of my fellow-man" (1979 p.18). Matshoba concentrates on the emasculating and debasing of the African male under apartheid atrocities and laws. In contrast, in *Call Me Woman* Kuzwayo presents women either defying gun-toting policeman (1985 pp.49–50) or taking "the whole responsibility" for the family and life, notably, in rural areas (1985 p.12). However, while Kuzwayo may say, "Women somehow seem to cope with the pressures more successfully than men", her textual rendition of woman requires further

scrutiny particularly in relation to representations in *Beloved* (1985 p.51).

In her novel, the community of the mid-1800s represented by Morrison numbers multiple exiles; it is descended from slaves forcibly uprooted from the homeland and deliberately mixed with other slaves from various regions of Africa to disorientate and confuse; and it has nothing to fall back on except memories and slave experiences. Kuzwayo, as textual configuration, is in another way in a sort of exile in the apartheid townships; the exile of othering and forced removals backed by legislation are recorded by Kuzwayo along with resistance by various groupings of the community before part one of her text. She writes, “Blacks are sojourners” (1985:7); they are named and renamed “natives”, “Bantu” and “plurals” (1985:5); similarly Paul D in *Beloved* says that schoolteacher beat him “to show him that definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined” (p.190).

It is against this background of homelessness, exile, physically and psychically intensified in *Beloved*, that the representation of the self is examined. The physical alienation is reflected in the self-alienation. To start with in the “eyes of the law”, as Matshoba says, the first image of the black woman in the first section of *Call Me Woman* is a prisoner who writes a letter to her mother and mentions other names, ‘Sis Gladys’, Lindy, Buti

Ntshwene, Babone, Tembu Bobo, Ousi Matantase, TJ and K (Kuzwayo p.3–4). In spite of prisoner status, the individual self, remains connected to the communal self, the symbolic base and home. Debra Nkiwe Matshoba, the writer of the letter, who is imprisoned under Section 10 of the Terrorism Act, considers the outside contact it allows her as being “at home”, a phrase bristling with ironies. In this opening section where Kuzwayo describes the various oppressions of apartheid-life. She as writer is part of generalized black suffering which includes that of black leaders such as the traditional “Kgosi, Morena and Nkosi (all meaning king)”, who are levelled down to “‘chief’, an inferior status commanding far less dignity and respect” (p.13).

The sentiment ‘Motho ke motho ka motho yo mongoe’ (‘No man is an island’) in the Setswana language is lived out by the self represented and in spite of the erosion of much of the traditional moral code and values that followed the displacement of “communities, separated families, estranged siblings”, leaving the community “landless, homeless, stateless and dispossessed of all its heritage” (p.17). Legislation, “the eye of the law”, has reduced human beings not only to prisoners, like Debra Nikiwe Matshoba (and Kuzwayo herself who at the age of 63 is imprisoned under Section 10 for being a member of the Committee of Ten in 1977), but also to “villains”,

“scoundrels”, “underdogs”, “outlaws”, and “criminals”, in mass demonisation (p.17).

But certain aspects of the self that are overwritten ideologically continue somewhat in their own way, and as they did before the formalisation of apartheid othering. The ‘I’ of Kuzwayo says in the beginning of the second section, the autobiography proper, for instance, that when she became aware of herself at the age of six or seven years it was as “one of four grandchildren”, all girls significantly, of a middle-class, professional, propertied extended family; Granny was ‘mother’ and Grandpa was ‘Papa’ (p.63). The sense of ‘we’ is encouraged by the wearing of dresses which were made from the same pattern and the same coloured material. There is some awakening of the individual in the children’s lack of enthusiasm for the uniform dress but with grandmother “there was no nonsense about clothes”; at the same time they (‘us’) were “different from the neighbourhood children” (‘them’) (p.63).

Although the communal self, starting with the family self, is nurtured there are also disjunctions, as the one above, in the text which belie the ideal of ‘ubuntu’ (‘Motho ke motho yo mongoe’). The writer seems to present an idealized seamless ‘ubuntu’ front, often as desire when it threatens disintegration, and at the same time to undercut it with the real. For instance, there are moments when the ‘I’ felt ‘alone’ as ‘one Merafe’ or as

the child of divorced parents but they are few and far between; they are not allowed to overshadow the foregrounding of the communal self even when the extended family dominates the regional communal hierarchy; clearly they were the landlords, marked by the different dress of the grandchildren, their education and their Christianity (p.157). Moreover, “as a child from a Christian home” Kuzwayo “was strictly forbidden to associate in any way with the girls who had accepted Lebollo as part of their lives”, that is, traditional lives (p.72). Apart from these disruptions subverting the overall impression the writer wishes to convey of a communal self, at school away from home the self shrinks from being singled out, for instance, in the dress hem incident at St Francis’ College; instead it is eager to join senior students, mentors and role-models for “at the hands of some of the nuns” the young Kuzwayo self felt bitter and frustrated (p.83).

The extended family and its surrogates at school and later life form the matrix for the training of the ideal communal self, particularly the female as will become clearer below. Kuzwayo defensively explains as follows: “Other racial groups may deride the extended family as being backward and outdated, but it is a pillar of strength to black people” (p.99). It is this communal self which is foregrounded, even in a sense de-gendered, de-classed and de-tribalised (all to create the illusion of sameness) to depict not only the ‘ubuntu’ self but

also the black solidarity of brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers, in the face of destructive inroads made by apartheid. The framing sections of the text, parts one and three, generalizing documentaries, serve to reinforce this impression.

Even when differentiated like Miss Minah Tembeka Soga, “who was outstanding in her contribution when the constitution and policy of the Convention were drafted”, it is to enhance the togetherness of women and men “for the advancement and liberation of the African nation in South Africa” (p.101). The communal self engendered traditionally by the extended family upbringing is, because of divisive and oppressive apartheid practices, privileged. As Charlotte Maxeke, the first National president of the National Council of African Women exhorts in her presidential address to the second conference in Bloemfontein on 8 December 1938: “This work is not for yourselves – kill that spirit of ‘self’ and do not live above your people, but live with them. If you can rise, bring someone with you” (p.103). The black consciousness movement is part and parcel of this communality, “a concept which has created awareness among blacks about who they are and were, and helped to build up the determination to regain their strength and personality as a nation – for young and old alike” (p.47). The communal self, synonymous with black solidarity, is paramount for traditional continuity and survival and resistance to apartheid othering.

In Derridean terms, perhaps, this is a deliberate deviation; the self as he conceives it is constructed in dialectic with projections from others in the world around one. The ‘I’ is determined by those outside who say ‘me’ to me and help constitute the self, the ‘I’ striven for. This is reversed in Kuzwayo’s representations where ‘we’ is emphasised more than ‘I’, a practice elucidated by Nhlapo below especially in the case of women (Derrida 1985:51).

In more extreme circumstances the slave community in *Beloved* operates in a way that varies somewhat with Kuzwayo’s community. To begin with men and women slaves do not even belong to themselves but, in a manner much worse than apartheid displacements, are “moved around like checkers”, who are never “loved”, but “bought”, “loaned out”, “stored up”, “mortgaged”, “won” or “stolen” or “seized” (Morrison p.23). If they run off they are “brought back” or “hanged” (p.23). In everyday slave life of test and trial where the suffering of men and women is in almost every way the same slaves have to watch out for themselves and for one another if they can as the men, Paul D Garner, Paul F Garner, Paul A Garner, Halle Suggs and Sixo of Sweet Home do (p.11).

Those who are seen to rise above the group are frowned upon as Baby Suggs discovers after providing a feast for ninety people (p.136). She feels the “free-floating repulsion....” from

her “friends and neighbours” (p.138). Because she gets above herself no one even bothers to warn her about the approaching slave-catchers pursuing Sethe (p.157). Sethe, too, incurs their wrath for killing her child, her self-isolation and self-sufficiency. She pays with “eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life” (p.173).

But while behaviour with others is more or less homogenised and controlled by disapproval and ostracism the individual self is not overtly suppressed or down played as in Kuzwayo’s text. While the communal self is centred in *Call Me Woman* the focus in *Beloved* is on the recovery of Sethe’s individual self in damning circumstances and exile from the African identity base, some sense of which may be gathered from the Kuzwayo text. The impulse to integrate and conform with the community is superseded by the greater need to recuperate some sense of self after prolonged, unceasing dehumanization. The community has a claim on Sethe but not before she can claim “herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (p.95). She had once had “iron eyes and backbone to match” which schoolteacher had punched out (p.9). Her experiences are embodied in her flesh; milked, raped and beaten her body writes itself into recovery with its body fluids in the text. Sethe is given voice in the text and her body is also accepted as “legitimate text which

can be used to inscribe itself out of multiple conscriptions” (Busia 1990:103).

Moreover, to go on living Sethe has to “keep the past at bay” (p.42). But when Paul D tells her Halle, who could not help her, had seen her being milked and raped by schoolteacher’s two nephews while he (schoolteacher) stood by she just manages not to “break, fall or cry each time a hateful picture drifted in front of her face” (p.97). His own sense of self is so destroyed that Paul D “shut down a generous portion of his head, operating on the part that helped him walk, eat, sleep, sing” (p.41).

The othering which causes the emptiness within is for Baby Suggs “the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home” (p.140). Sethe circles around the empty and dreaded spaces within herself even as she struggles to take control of her own life. After the flight from Sweet Home she says, “I did it. I got us all out .... me using my own head. But it was more than that. It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before” (p.162). Her greatest act of love she, paradoxically, is driven into as a slave-on-the-run is to kill her toddler to save her from being dragged back into slavery. As she says, “She my daughter. She mine .... She had to be safe and I put her where she would be” (p.200).

Counteracting slave definitions in simultaneously enslaving terms is a constant battle which has to be tackled day by day. When Beloved, the embodiment of her own self-destructive consciousness, arrives Sethe loses the precarious hold she has on some sense of self and “sat around like a rag doll, broke down, finally ...” (p.243). “She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it” (p.250). Sethe “yielded” because of her guilt, her need to expiate even though “what she had done was right because it came from true love” (p.251). Torn up within by the apparent senselessness of the killing “it was as though Sethe didn’t really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out” (p.252). When Beloved is eventually driven away by thirty of the community’s women summoned by Denver their singing “broke over Sethe ... she trembled like the baptised in its wash” (p.261).

There is an antidote to the dehumanizing effects of the “‘Look’ every negro learned to recognise along with his ma’am’s tit” (p.157); it is, as Baby Suggs, the “unchurched preacher” teaches Sethe and the other ex-slaves to love and heal themselves continuously and in the face of multiple ongoing otherings, ‘looks’ (p.87). This is essential because in spite of judgemental, objectifying, othering ‘looks’ from slave owners and even one’s own kind the self – dynamic, complex and resilient – has the capacity if given the chance to react, oppose, negotiate in the

continual re-arranging of itself, as it forms and reforms constantly under internal and external pressures and influences.

Like the Sethe self, the Kuzwayo self is not unified, complete and whole, indeed more so because of the importance given to the communal self. The individual self, the ‘I’, which is for the most part of her youth and schooling underplayed or deferred, is, however, forced to the forefront when Aunt Blanche explodes the sense of family and communal motherhood by casting her out into the world with the words, “There is no home for you any more here” (p.105). The sense of home that is equated with the wholeness of self is shattered as the protagonist is othered into “a stranger, an intruder” losing “all sense of personal direction and identity” ...(p.107). Kuzwayo writes “I felt so rejected by the people and surroundings I had once cherished as part of my very being” (p.107). Nhlapo explains:

[The] African value system does not perceive women as separate entities but always as adjuncts to the family. A woman’s personhood is lost in the group much more than a man’s is subsumed under so-called community principle

(1991 p.120).

Nhlapo writes, moreover, of the “non-individual nature” of African marriage and that “group interests are framed in favour of men” (1991:113). In light of Nhlapo and Derrida Kuzwayo’s representation of self needs to be adjusted to clarify that the woman-self is trained to be more ‘we’ than the man-self, which is more ‘I’. The explanation given by Nhlapo helps to understand why Kuzwayo, subsequently, blames herself and tries to appease her aunt in her “own child-like way but all that failed” (p.105). With no other way out within the cultural framework she has internalised and to salvage some sense of her fragmented self she goes to her father whom she barely knows.

At this point, however, Kuzwayo begins to write transgressively, in a sense against herself and her deepest convictions to interrogate the ‘we’ though still in an indirect way. She says, “Thinking always of others can be a burden when one grows older because it becomes second nature or second self” (p.114). For the first time, although in terms of the impersonal “one”, there is recognition of a ‘first self’, the ‘I’, (*pace* Derrida), which has been trained to submerge itself in the ‘we’ of the communal self. Hereafter, as represented in the text, there is continual, more discernible interplay between individual and communal self, first and second selves, as the textual ‘I’ takes control as much as she can over her life-decisions and way in the world; but it is always in association with a couple, a

family, a group, for reasons explicated by Nhlapo above. Significantly the time at Aunt Elizabeth’s in Heilbron is characterised as “a really helpful transitional period of weaning ... away from [her] almost dependent situation in Pimville” with her father (p.116). But the weaning is only from the immediate family to other members of the extended family and other groups – singing, dancing, debating women’s groups where she “learned the basis of decision-making in personal and group matters” (p.116).

Keeping Nhlapo and Maboreke in mind, this period is but a hiatus till she makes her own home with “a life partner” with whom she will “live happily ever after” (p.122). The hope and expectation are fuelled by the traditional construction of the female subject that Maboreke describes. It is worth quoting at length because of its ramifying implications:

Africans in general and African women in particular identify themselves through a maze of relationships, namely, mother to so-and-so, daughter of so-and-so, wife of so-and-so, etc, in which “so-and-so” is always a man. African women are never viewed as separate individuals but rather as appendages of a man ... African women feel this powerlessness when removed from the family wheel, and so attach themselves to the family organism even more tightly. The obligation this family

membership generates is the price women pay for membership of their family.

Societies such as ours are tightly structured, stratified, hedged in by prescriptions, by the primacy of the communal good over individual rights and interest

(Maboreke 1991 pp.228–9).

These definitions, structures and limited choices are transmuted into a romantic dream which dissipates when the Kuzwayo self suffers another blow: she “either pretended [she] did not see them or [she] refused to believe what [she] saw in her marriage and husband (p.124). She goes

through both physical and mental suffering. Day by day [she] realised [she] was being humiliated and degraded, an experience [she has] in recent years come to realise is suffered by many wives the world over, within different races, cultures and religions

(p.124).

It does not however strike her as a fundamentally gender/power issue, a stance she maintains throughout the text, where apartheid oppression takes precedence over black male oppression. For example, her husband’s behaviour towards her is seen as the result of her being “a stranger and foreigner in the community”, the Aunt Blanche episode notwithstanding. When she is more forthcoming about her husband’s cruelty it is to abstract the negative – “the violence, arrogance, meanness and downright selfishness, which prevailed in [her] home” and personalise the positive – “his intelligence, his well-built stature and handsome appearance, his financial acumen – even if this was at the expense of his family” (p.127).

To keep a grip on herself during this traumatic period, like the ex-slaves in *Beloved*, she blocks the memories from her mind; they may also not be dwelt on in the text perhaps because they are considered domestic and not public concerns; black male gender power is also not a priority although she does connect her experience with a much wider gender oppression that she expresses awareness of above. Whatever her reasons she says, “Even now, I find I cannot write in detail about it” (p.124). With that she “decided to save [her]self for [her]self, and for [her] two sons” (p.125). She reminds herself that her mother and teachers had taught her that “unlike a beast, a human being is responsible for her action at all times” (p.125).

But since what she decides constitutes defiance of fundamental cultural precepts she gives it careful thought and after having assessed her marriage “with a minimum of subjectivity” during a short respite at her mother-in-law’s home, to save her life she leaves her husband and two sons, at once violating mother and obedient wife roles (p.130). This is a triumph of self’ and like Sethe’s escape in *Beloved* it is her decision: as agent she writes, “This time, I was not being forced out of my ‘home’; on the contrary the decision was mine” (p.131). At the same time the blow to the psyche is acknowledged but still somewhat tentatively: “All the same, and perhaps I am wrong, I was pushed out psychologically” (p.131). Somewhat like Sethe’s guilt over a more violent act the ‘I’, still in an insecure and uncertain double-bind in *Call Me Woman*, is wracked with “challenging moments of guilt, charged with endless questions [she] could not find adequate replies to” (p.132).

On her return to her father, with “no more castles in the air but a more realistic day-to-day approach to life” (p.132) and though “brow-beaten, helpless and lost” (p.134) she makes new contacts and becomes active in community groups. Her growing confidence in herself is demonstrated in her discreet handling of her divorce, which however still leaves her feeling empty inside. She is nevertheless determined “to blot out [her] past experience” (p.142). In spite of the stigma of divorce she throws herself into the “freedom” that she begins to appreciate,

work in a film of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, and community work for both “[her]self and the community” (p.148). Besides her work with the youth and women, after much thought and persuasion she agrees to a second marriage. At the Transvaal YWCA she grows in stature to become General Secretary although she is scared of the “over-powering” women in the association (p.161). Within the parameters set down for black women she is “Ellen all the time” and not a clone of her predecessor and mentor, Phyllis Noluthando Mzaidume (p.164). In her second marriage and community work she is intent on proving herself; it is to overcome the experience of “a disintegrating home and the unsettling divorce proceedings” and doubts about her “integrity”, her “self-image” and her “worth” (p.181).

Kuzwayo’s need to overcome what she sees as failures, the result of her early en-gendering, is intimately bound up in her acceptance of the notion of black womanhood/motherhood. Her childhood has prepared her for this as it has for woman-jobs such as domestic chores, the making of a ‘home’ for a family and caring professions. She complains that this role is often undermined by “cultural influences from other racial groups, and some of the harsh legislation which has often disrupted family life in black rural communities, as well as the hideous migrant labour system (p.73). But none of this has “succeeded in destroying the commitment of women to

fulfil their role as wives and mothers” (p.73). Further, motherhood is referred to as an “instinct”, which she is prevented from expressing first by her husband, who has custody of their two sons, and then the influx control of apartheid law (p. 185). Her second marriage which makes her Mrs Kuzwayo, along with other forms of recognition, restores her status especially in her “new home; all these built [her] psychologically, emotionally and physically” (p.180). And the call of motherhood thwarted for so long is fulfilled by the birth of her third son, Godfrey Ndabezibha Kuzwayo.

Her work outside the home is still within female boundaries, for instance, child-care, cooking, sewing, knitting, first-aid and self-help. In her text which celebrates the strength, courage and achievements of black women Kuzwayo writes to subvert negative stereotypes of one kind (mainly attributed to the white apartheid state) and in the process of doing so she maintains and reinforces another (the tradition of woman as generalized mother and care-giver). She writes against the image of

The black woman, who through the centuries had been viewed by the white state as unproductive in industry, as totally dependent on her male counterpart, as helpless, unintelligent to the point of being useless and stupid –

the woman who much against her will resigned herself to being labelled a ‘minor’ by the state...

(p.12–13).

At the same time she disrupts what she herself sets up as she did earlier with the ‘ubuntu’ concept. She quotes examples of women who do break out of traditional female occupations, like Mrs Esther Seokelo, who drives a taxi. But this too is immediately overturned when she invokes the mother in the woman taxi-driver who is called to play a conciliatory role at times of crisis when the men in the business “need to settle differences amongst themselves” (p.51). The ambivalence recurs in the case of Mrs Magdalene Sesedi who “became director of a general Dealer’s business ...” yet “was a perfect model of womanhood, full of charm, beauty and dignity”, all in the same sentence (p.103). She also mentions black women in political movements who work with the menfolk; and yet she puzzles over “why there seemed to be no outstanding women in the ranks of the ANC movement at that time” (p.139).

Apart from her first husband and some wayward men mentioned in the text Kuzwayo’s relationships with men are represented as cordial, respectful, encouraging and supportive.

Her stepfather and second husband encourage her to continue her education, for example. At the same time she has misgivings about her sister's husband, Thari Pilane, and the restrictions and taboos that Maria, her sister, will have to endure. She finally gets comfort from the thought that Pilane's "education had liberated him from some of the most restrictive taboos and practices"; obviously her educated lecturer first husband slips her mind when she translates the situation into terms of traditional culture versus western education (p.117). She again ignores the gender dimension and the complicity between male domination and national oppression when she has to get her son's signature for her passport; to her it is another apartheid atrocity (p. 240). Yet it is manifestation of the same male power that has been left unchallenged to grow into violence which women are subjected to in the timiti sessions in Pimville. Although Kuzwayo is sympathetic towards women who break apartheid laws and traditional mores to survive it is compassion that glosses over the abuse of the husbands or lovers who beat them.

In comparison to *Beloved* the sexuality and the sense of body of the generalized mother is elided and eluded. Nonetheless the extension of the mother role and function outside the home "has become a threat to some men" because it "brings women a new kind of equality with their menfolk" (p.261). Driver associates this kind of female empowerment and

female separation with "Western feminism at a certain stage of its history" raising invidious questions about womanism as against feminism (1990 p.231).

Given the male reactions above and Nhlapo and Maboreke earlier the reception of Kuzwayo's speech in defence of youths on trial becomes explicable. A man in court says to her, "You are not an ordinary woman, you pleaded like a man, only a man could speak the way you did" (p.227). Women are not permitted to transgress boundaries set down for them; when they do they threaten and frighten men, as related above, who fall back on customary gender paradigms. In this sense the man in court first places Kuzwayo, as she herself does with Mrs Seokelo and Mrs Sesedi, outside the familiar – "not an ordinary woman", but since there is no such category at hand and she does break bounds he places her in one more familiar – "like a man, only a man could speak the way you did". The need to categorise is ever-present; but the masculinizing is temporary, honorary, a 'sojourn', echoing an apartheid gate-keeping term used by Kuzwayo earlier, and understood as such by both men and women; the male-biased compliment ensures that women keep to their proper place. The mechanism in no way interferes with the man's own definition and sense of self which is, however, damaged by apartheid practices of othering. Matshoba writes, "that component of me which is man died countless times in one lifetime. Only a

shell of me remains to tell you of the other man's plight, which is in fact my own.... To the same chain-gang do we belong", but he only tells part of the story of the male-self under apartheid and omits the effects of that and perhaps earlier male-conditioning which play themselves out in woman-abuse as in the timiti sessions and Kuzwayo's marriage (1979 p.18). At any rate his explication probably explains why Kuzwayo does not at any point openly protest the truncated definition of black woman; she reinforces it in a way, as do most of the women celebrated, by stretching the pre-set roles within the traditional patriarchal framework. Her writing is mainly against the negative stereotype that she predominantly sees as an apartheid construction. Added to which there is in her revisioning and own transgressions, far-reaching at times, a sense quite often of ambivalence and reluctance, as if she is in battle with herself; and for the most part her revisioning is still within old constrictions so that 'mama-Africa' becomes 'super-mama' or 'suffering-mama', and remains confined within the role-range of woman as mother/wife/sister, destined, to some extent, by instinct, by biology, by nature.

While both Kuzwayo and Morrison re-situate their central textual creations in a dynamic rather than the fixed world which has buried and distorted them, the effects achieved differ somewhat. Kuzwayo, for example, carries her subjectivity through an idea of expanded motherhood even as she

transgresses, within limits described above, major patriarchal structures. Morrison, on the other hand, and in the absence of an African identity base within her textual reconfigurations is, however, more challenging and probing as she renames the complications of mothering, sexuality, bodies and male-female relationships in slavery and its aftermath. For instance, black women in American literature have been depicted as "either sexually loose and therefore tempters of men, or obedient and subservient mammies" (Mckay 1997 p.152). But the truth about Ella, for example, is that she had been locked up "for more than a year" by "two men – a father and son" (p.119). "You couldn't think up," Ella had said, "what them two done to me" (p.119). The whore is also forced into becoming a 'breeder', further distorting the image of black woman and motherhood. The result in Baby Suggs case is "eight children with different men" (p.209). Sethe's mother had thrown her white begotten children away, raising questions about the maternal instinct in the face of forced motherhood and slave-rape.

In a more 'wholesome' sense of motherhood but in the most trying circumstances Sethe struggles to keep her children. As mother she is put to an extreme test when in an almost inexplicable act of love she kills one of them to prevent the child being taken back into slavery. Her two sons run away from 124 and all she is left with is Denver, her last born. After a time she

stops watching out for the boys' return "and their thirteen-year-old faces faded completely into their baby ones, which came to her only in sleep" (p.39).

Sethe, unlike the Kuzwayo self, confronts the men who threaten her motherhood. Besides the paradoxical infanticide she quarrels with Paul D over Denver because to her "Grown don't mean nothing to a mother. A child is a child. They get bigger, older, but grown? What's that supposed to mean? In my heart it don't mean a thing" (p.45).

Her intense love is described by Paul D as "too thick", presumptuous for a slave women who does not even own herself (p.164). But in her view that is the only type worth feeling: "Love is or it aint. Thin love aint love at all" (p.164). Sethe may have loved too much but she is not a crazy murderer. Stamp Paid explains this to Paul D when he has trouble reconciling the girl he knew at Sweet Home with the fiercely protective mother: "She love those children. She was trying to outhurt the hurter" (p.234).

Her hope, like Kuzwayo's, is to have a family again, Paul D, Denver and herself, where she could feel again, "count on something" and not be afraid that it will be taken away (p.38). But she also has doubts about Paul D, recalling Kuzwayo's reservations about her brother-in-law. She remembers Baby

Suggs saying, "A man ain't nothing but a man" (p.23). A son, however, is another matter as the mother-son bond is more reliable. And she should know as her son, Halle, had bought her freedom working "five years of Sundays" (p.11).

Like the apartheid experiences recorded by Matshoba slavery has, but to a much greater extent, debased Paul D; he tells Sethe that the farmyard rooster, Mister, was "free. Better than me... Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was ... Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (p.72). At the same time Sethe "knew Paul D was adding something to her life – something she wanted to count on but was scared to" (p.95). And "she wanted him in her life" (p.99).

But to really be free she needed to get to "a place where [she] could love anything [she] chose – not to need permission for desire – well now, that was freedom" (p.162). Baby Suggs had been condemned for her sexuality that is automatically associated with the loose black woman stereotype; "slaves not supposed to have pleasureable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them" (p.209). As part of her project to reclaim the self she advises Sethe "to listen to [her] body and love it" (p.209). After the departure of Beloved Paul D helps Sethe recover by washing

her all over as Baby Suggs had done once before. The Paul D-Sethe relationship harks back to Kuzwayo's relationship with her second husband, but with more openness and detail.

Morrison has probed the motherhood role to offset the whore/mammie binary and reveal its more complex aspects. For instance she shows Sethe capable of caring and loving her children even to the point of killing one because of slavery; Sethe and Baby Suggs are also portrayed as sexual beings who are still able to take joy from bodies that have been severely damaged in enslavement. Morrison as well depicts the complications in the relationships of damaged males and females and women confronting the problems brought on by gender power. For instance, she uncovers the connections between patriarchy (white men) and the racism of slavery (Kuzwayo does likewise with white patriarchy and apartheid) and patriarchy (white and black men) and women abuse. Apparently an exception Paul D, who shared Sethe's slave life and had never ill-treated a woman, comes across as being her equal, with the potential to develop their relationship into friendship. He says to Sethe: "It's good you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind", which takes us back to Kuzwayo's relationship with her second husband about which not much is said (p.273).

What Kuzwayo does however is provide details about African identity in Africa which is conspicuously and with good reason absent in *Beloved*. It turns out however that this absence becomes the space within which to make greater gender leaps. It is also the locus for the gaps and evasions of Kuzwayo to be made up for or transformed, in a sense, by Morrison who provides significant details about, for example, woman's sexuality, the damaged manhood of the black male and, hence, the need for restraining criticism. Driver writes that in South African terms woman as mother to the male "must (instead of humiliating men further) restore to them their masculinity" (1990 p.236). And Miriam Tlali says that African women have power, maternal power which African men acknowledge and at the same time try to counteract in order to define their masculinity. It works thus: to find himself the male has to separate himself from mother's strength; mother/wife then has to ensure that she helps him define his masculinity; it is by stroking the male ego that the mother/wife defines herself (1989 pp.74-5). The pains taken to elaborate and sentimentalise the mother concept, harking back to the second half of the whore/mammie binary mentioned in relation to Morrison and Tlali notwithstanding, somehow smack of a whole range of cultural devices to bamboozle and keep women shackled. More gravely it is subordination in pseudo-elevation which provides a hospitable environment

for female abuse such as those recorded by Kuzwayo in her first marriage and the timiti sessions.

The purpose of this discussion was to critically examine the representation of the textual self which also meant taking into account the complexities of gender and race underpinning the processes of reading and writing. In the representations discussed, the self was found to be communal and individual with both converging in motherhood. While both writers write to correct, revise and open up the overdetermined self to other possibilities, it is also in the midst of ongoing and often rigid predetermining.

Further, the point of the comparative critical reading was to point out common characteristics in terms of womanism and where necessary feminism, both of which are much in evidence although they are never directly referred to in the texts; more than that it was to underline the plurality of difference and ontology. The self was found in the text to be not a clear-cut unified single entity but problematized in a complex and often unpredictable network of overlapping and criss-crossing elements. Caught up in words identity appeared not to be a thing so much as an occurrence made possible in “political, theoretical, self-analyzing practice” so that “relations of the subject in social reality” could be “be rearticulated from ... historical experience” (de Lauretis 1981 p.197).

Such a process is continuous, tentative and recursive because of its own dynamics which come into play and are mirrored in the writing process where the subject is always in danger of slipping into object. To elaborate the textual ‘I’ is in continuous production, a shifting construction that in a sense renders ‘I’ abstract the same as ‘we’. As Lacan says, “I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object” (1968 p.63). In a way this undoes what Morrison and Kuzwayo have been striving to achieve, that is break out of objectification; all they do, in a sense, is get into another kind in language, moreso since it is one that is borrowed. Kristeva adds further that, the “subject is merely the subject of predication of judgement, of the sentence” (cf. Wyatt 1986 p.119).

At the same time in writing the ‘I’ continues to produce itself by the statements written which establish subject and objects differentiated from the ‘I’. But the ‘I’, “the symbolic self”, is in “a momentary position in the field of language”; it too is fixed “rigidly defined and compartmentalized and reflects the pretense to permanence of the social institutions in which it is embedded” (Wyatt 1986 p.120). What it finally comes down to in my reading of the two texts is that what we call the self is a series of emanations produced in the interplay between subject and object, between fluidity and permanence and ‘I’ and ‘we’. In short, the self is a ‘sojourner’, forever in-between,

never at an end, home, but at best at way-stations on an ongoing journey.

More significantly in this transversal reading process of the two texts the self is first shown taking its measure from the structural principles of 'exile', denoting alienation and 'home', security and identity. The texts read into each other and help to bring to light a reversal of the 'home' principle, the rigid, unchanging space of gender-binaries. Gender-specific characteristics, roles and functions, are exacerbated by apartheid definitions on the one hand, while, on the other hand, 'exile' graphically and painfully dramatised in Morrison transmutes into potential, free-floating space for the disintegration of male/female characteristics and roles which Paul D begins to exemplify in the creation of another kind of subjectivity. Gender specifics, qualities and categories, over and above biological imperatives, begin to come apart in the space that opens up in Morrison, despite the predeterminations of slavery. In open transversal space in contrast to Kuzwayo's culturally-embedded closed hierarchical space there is constant movement between gender specific characteristics so that the tenderness and compassion of Paul D is not female but human. In this sense the exile space brought on by slavery is transformed from utter alienation to possibility for the ex-slaves, providing room for the development not of gender-specific but human qualities, roles and functions.

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## Construction Sites: The Male, Masculinity, and Kindred Selves

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Maria do Rosário Durão (Madrid)

This study is informed by the idea that men have been increasingly under duress as a result of the cultural and critical shifts engendered in the post-Vietnam, post-feminist and post-Civil Rights decades. It also builds on the belief that, as a result, the figure of the male and notions of masculinity have become increasingly more complex. Wedged in the dialectic of polarized gender denominations, and conversant with prevailing notions of what it means to be a man – which still boils down to being strong and powerful, – male bodies have been turned into “construction sites”, spaces doomed to continual “construction and deconstruction – both ruinous and mysteriously grand” (Lehman, 1993 p.214).

On the silver screen, the result has been a body of work where the male and masculinity are presented as more fluid and inclusive, but also more laden with the tensions and fissures proper to a cultural and political climate that, in the effort to erode men’s historical claim to power and hegemony, ruthlessly questions the body, the place, the role and the figurations of the male, while demanding swift reconstructions and even swifter representations of the past and present figures of men and their associated concepts.

The extension of the fields of study to include issues of gender, class, race and even nationhood has, on the other hand, made it impossible for us to depart from a unitary or unifying concept of ‘men’ – and much less of ‘man’. Instead, one must pick and choose from a diverse set of images and speak, for instance, of the John Wayne type Western hero or the Spike Lee rehabilitated Afro-American characters. These are discrete images, however. Each character is made to represent one type, albeit in its more or less splendid complexity. Rarely has cinema, and especially Hollywood, fashioned characters that are divided unto themselves – characters that are literally or figuratively split into two.

But the figure of the *doppelgänger* can be traced back to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, though its best-known literary celebration is Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a screen favourite since 1920, whose latest adaptation, from a feminist point of view, was Stephen Frears’ *Mary Reilly* (1996). Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), Brian de Palma’s *Dressed to Kill* (1980), David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (1999) and Mary Harron’s *American Psycho* (2000), for instance, attest to the sustained power and attraction of the figure of the double, probably

because, as Holmlund says, it “enact[s] the shifting relationships of men to masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, sadism and masochism” (Holmlund 1986: 33). In other words, it is a privileged site for the construction and deconstruction, and the representation and misrepresentation of maleness. This paper shows how the complexities surrounding the male and masculinity are illuminated by the figure of the schismatic male in the following films made in the last two decades of the 20TH century: Alan Parker’s *Angel Heart* (1987), David Cronenberg’s *Dead Ringers* (1988), Peter Medak’s *Romeo is Bleeding* (1994) and Bryan Singer’s *The Usual Suspects* (1995).

*Angel Heart* is a deeply political film. Like other movies released at the zenith of Reaganite conservatism, it too is structured on the overriding belief of masculine domination and power. Yet the first shot of the hero belies this idea. In the role of Harry Angel, he mostly resembles the anti-heroes of *film noir* with his disheveled and despondent mien. As the film progresses, it is the good-looking and elusive Johnny Favorite, who was “Quite famous in his way” and “very powerful” before the War, while his actions in the narrative present point to his being a dangerous killer, that comes closest to that notion.

Like other movies released in the wake of the profoundly revolutionary 60s and 70s, however (William Hjortsberg’s novel,

*Falling Angel*, was written in the 1970s), *Angel Heart* also lends support to the notion of masculinity as performance—or a set of culturally shaped, attainable accoutrements. It is not by accident that Johnny was a performer in a double sense. Literally he was a crooner in a band from New Orleans. And figuratively, his real name was the German-sounding Liebling, inscribing his whole American identity as a façade. But even this identity is not one, as Harry realizes when he cries out in despair “I know who I am. I know who I am” towards the close of the film. He and Johnny are two selves, two identities of the same male, expanding the idea of performance to comprehend the heroic male in general, both the ambitious and successful pre-War hero turned threatening post-War killer and his opposite, the powerless, threatened and survival-anxious post-War antihero.

Consequently, the crux of the movie is the genesis and reason for the male’s divided masculinity. These are transmitted via the unifying theme of religion—the hero’s pact with Louis Cypher, who turns out to be Lucifer incarnate. Cypher’s foreign air, his almost inquisitorial manner, his implicit affinity with black people, and his relation with the various forms and places of non-protestant religion and religiosity, all contribute to his being the epitome of Otherness, reinforcing the political issues of ethnicity and race, already suggested by the hero. The seminal import of World War II – like all wars,

the ritual of masculinity and nationhood *par excellence* – here inscribed into the American context, points to the weight the matter of national identity also has in the economy of *Angel Heart*, while the hero's non-American origins relate the topic of his performative masculine identities to the multiethnic and multiracial genesis of American identity.

“His real name was Liebling... I gave Johnny some help at the beginning of his career,” says Cypher when he first meets Harry Angel. Later, Kruzemark says, “He sold his soul for stardom.” This portrays Johnny Favorite as an ethnic-American who found fame and success in pre-War America – but only in the midst of the Other. The collateral his contract involved, on the other hand, indicates that the cultural backdrop to the actions of American ethnicities, then, was tied up with a conservative worldview anchored in values like loyalty, which Louis Cypher cherishes. Johnny's character, therefore, functions as a pointer to the ethnic American male's debt to his fellow Latino, German or Black males, and not to the absent WASP elite, who, while signalling the structural ideals of the nation, are ready to accept him in their country, but not to assimilate him as one of their own.

But the setting of wartime America seemed to promise assimilation through heroism: “He thought he could outwit the Prince of Darkness. Johnny sold his soul. Then when he made

it big he tried to duck out of it” and “resurface as a soldier,” says Kruzemark. *Angel Heart's* ritual of cutting Harry Angel, the regular American boy's, heart out and eating it is, then, a metaphor for the various ethnic and racial realignments of America's new-arrivals. It acts as an emblem for the temptation to abandon one's racial and ethnic kinships and interactions in favour of an atomised – and apparently innocent and harmless–dream of power and domination, whatever the price. Only, Johnny's ritual was foiled from the start. He was sent overseas as a performer and he was wounded before any fighting took place, being sent home a non-entity, or “a virtual zombie” as Cypher says, precluding even the possibility of sacrificial heroism – the most effective form of heroism in the West. The function of these narrative devices is, then, to voice a deeply conservative, even fundamentalist, opinion of the male hero's attempt at discarding his limiting and troubling ethnic identity for one of normality.

Such *hubris* is paid with anonymity, hardship, anxiety, and the sense of a thwarted and belittled gendered identity. It is also paid with living in a world where the various races and ethnicities, the various Others which used to harbour him, are increasingly oriented towards the vindication of their own group interests, and not those of the white male. In fact, the mid-fifties Harry Angel has been reconstructed in such a way that he is akin to the hard-boiled *noir* anti-hero – with a

crucial difference. He is unabashedly afraid for his life and, in what is the movie's greatest mockery of the male/masculine connection with power and domination, he is even afraid of chickens. But the price he is made to pay, from the mainstream point of view, is also his split identity. Johnny's resurfacing as the shadowy and dangerous figure who seems intent on doing away with everyone – blacks, women, and the white males harbouring some sort of weakness or disadvantage – that comes into contact with Harry and can link him to his past, reads as the conservative reply to a changing, and therefore threatening, situation. The implication to be had from the division of the male and his increasing emasculation in post-War America is that the more disempowered masculinity is, the more dangerous the man behind the mask – or the real, essential male—becomes, lashing out in ever more xenophobic demonstrations of violence against the many Others that define him and keep him from attaining what he believes is his proper, authoritative place in America.

But there is another side to the hero's fate. His becoming a non-entity as a result of his experience in World War II also signals the uselessness of the heroism and contribution of ethnic Americans to the outcome of the War, for their going back to America was not accompanied by an improved social status and way of life. Ideologically, then, this is a radical critique of what ought to have been done in terms of the racial

and ethnic male in the immediate post-War situation, but wasn't. On the other hand, Harry's fear of chickens is a synecdoche for his pre-War association with African-Americans and his appropriation of their music and religion to his own ends. It is also a link to their increasing visibility in the fight for equal rights in the narrative present of 1955 and, implicitly, in the wider 1980s context of the movie. Together with the narrative's *raison d'être* – the hero's soul Cypher wants “to collect” – they bring to the fore the white American male and male culture's historical debt to his black brothers and sisters – a bond whose intimacy is irrevocably signalled when Harry realizes that he is Johnny and, consequently, that sex with Epiphany had really been incest.

By giving the ethnic male's coloured grandchild the last say, or rather, gesture in the picture, the film instates him as the ultimate signifier of the post-Vietnam, post-Civil Rights and post-feminist Other. His contribution to the ideological economy of *Angel Heart* is, therefore, the idea that for the ethnic Caucasian to become aware of his disparate masculinities and the danger they represent for the Other is not enough, as, in the end, learning the meaning of pain and repentance is only the starting point for punishment and, possibly, a new type of male, masculinity, and idea of nationhood.

What these might be remains answered. The dialogue between Harry and Epiphany in multiethnic New Orleans when he says, “It’s quite a cute religion you people got”, meaning the voodoo religion where she is a priestess, to which she replies “Well, nailing a man to a cross ain’t so cute either,” points to an ideal of true acceptance and assimilation of America’s many cultures, races and ethnicities. Other than this, the complexity of the American mosaic in the 1980s and the swiftness of its transformations, including those of gender, leave no room for further speculations. In the final analysis, *Angel Heart* is compelling viewing basically for its archaeology of American masculinity and the split male in the 20TH century.

*Dead Ringers* is a screen version of Barry Wood’s *Twins: a novel*. It is a psychodrama, as the homophone for the twins’ surname, Mantle/mental, indicates, a psychodrama of male bonding among the white, middle-class, professional males of the 1980s. The twins’ psychological traits, by etching themselves as the single differentiating factor and the choice means of their mutual dependence, point towards the topic of male homosociality – the issue of men promoting the interests of other men, through the vehicle of women (Sedgwick 1985 pp.1–3, pp.25–26). The infertility of *Dead Ringers’* women stresses the fact that the Mantle’s success depends on non-intrusion by females. As their invention, the Mantle retractor, made for a “cadaver” and not a “living patient,” denotes, this is

assured by their treating women with the greatest of detachments both in their private and professional lives.

But their success also rests on not being differentiated by others, despite their not being exact replicas, for Elliot is rational and emotionally strong while Bev is more sensitive, Elliot is authoritarian while Bev tends to follow Elly’s opinions, and Elliot is a far more outward kind of person while Bev has a rather introspective disposition. The significance of these dissimilar gendered identities is that masculinity is diverse and male identity inherently vulnerable. So the twins’ capacity to play a ruse on the outside world is merely an effect of their capacity to literally act as a “mantle” for the other – Elly says “You’ll be all right. Just do me.” So the appearance of an invulnerable oneness depends on their using their masculinities not as a divisive element but a means for consolidating their interests even further – as Elliot exclaims “You haven’t had any experience until I’ve had it too. You haven’t fucked Claire Niveau until you tell me about it”.

But when Bev replies that “Then I haven’t fucked Claire Niveau,” prior to turning his back on Elliot and leaving the room, the implication is that, in terms of the politics of gender, male bonding and homosociality can be enfeebled. Furthermore, the vehicle for this undermining is the rare females whose extreme sensibility, sense of independence, and

perspicacity make them into disturbing “mutant women.” What is worse, though, is that male unity is also undermined by the in-built gender impurity of the males themselves, so Bev is the more vulnerable of the two because he incorporates more feminine traits than Elliot does. Furthermore, the fact that Claire’s return entails a greater appeasement for Bev than all of Elliot’s rational efforts at getting him unhooked, signifies that the male’s internal imbalance predisposes him to establish non-homosocial bonds. This is why, on Claire’s return, the anachronistic gynaecological apparatus are suddenly renamed, becoming “instruments ... for separating Siamese twins.” The problem has been relocated. It is no longer the male-female bond, but the male-male one.

If, after the surgery that effectively separates the twins into two separate male/masculine entities, Bev does not go back to Claire, though he is tempted to do so, it is because, without the masculine frame of reference that Elliot symbolizes, there is a danger of the “impurer” male to be engulfed and annihilated by the female – a possibility Elliot’s last course of action, his giving up his masculine identity to become like Bev, only to die at his own brother’s hands, clearly shows. A tentative answer with regard to this picture is that, in the rending drama of gender and gender associations, males are constructed as failures if they abide by the untenable ideal of male bonding. But male survival is no solution either, for it is equated with a

traumatized, enfeebled masculinity. In other words, the movie ends on an unresolved note. If the coming together of the male and female genders invariably entails stressing the differences between men, ultimately atomising their identities, it is also true that the trauma and guilt over such individuation appears to reconstruct the male in such a way as to prevent his performance as a normal individual. Indeed, as the movie’s closing shot of Bev’s vigil over his brother’s dead body demonstrates, it tends to prevent his performing at all – which is another way of saying that, if there is a way out, it is regression.

Susan Jeffords says that male centred movies from the 1990s devote “More film time ... to explorations of their ethical dilemmas, emotional traumas, and psychological goals,” that “What Hollywood culture is offering, in place of the bold spectacle of male masculinity and/as violence, is a self-effacing man, one who now, instead of learning to fight, learns to love” (Jeffords 1993 p.245). *Romeo is Bleeding* is organized around this change. It portrays the characters of Jim Dowry, the omniscient downhearted voice-over, and Jack Grimaldy, the “romantic guy [with] Big dreams [whose] Problem was there was always a little reality between his dreams and his wallet.” Only, contrary to the two previous movies, this decade’s greater awareness of the meanderings and checks on gender and gender interactions turns the process of bringing the two

identities together into a charting of the don'ts in the life of a white heterosexual male from the 1990s.

The first of these is Jack's constant unfaithfulness to his wife, Natalie, and his selfishness and cruelty to his girlfriend, Sheri, displaying an incapacity to love anyone, not even himself as it turns out, despite his exalted self-image. Working for both sides of the law, on the other hand, emphasizes another don't – his complete disregard for ethics, by reason of his excessive love of money. Underlying his behaviour is the third don't – the deep-rooted idea of the male's incapacity to control his urges, be they sexual or not, and of the male's invulnerability and unaccountability. But wrongdoers in the 1990s have a more difficult life, so both men and women soon catch up with him. The first, Don Falcone, demand the old-fashioned fulfilment of the terms of their contract. The second, Natalie and Mona, have not only acquired an apparently unprovoked, but in fact guilt-bred, aura of threat like Natalie does, but are eventually turned into creatures whose hunger for power and sex, and whose insensitivity to their own pain and suffering, as Mona's off screen sawing of her own arm demonstrate s, crafts them into dangerously tempting and unpredictable animals with regard to whom acquiescence appears to be the best approach.

Finally though, even the law catches up with Jack, albeit ineffectually, for Mona's sense of survival trumps even the arm of the law, leaving Jack to pay for his own misdeeds, and some of hers as well. The idea conveyed here is that, in the social and political context of the 1990s, over-confidence and over-ambition on the part of the male only leads to defeat and captivity in a world that is critically on the verge of being dominated by females and female cunning. Apparently, though, the last marker of maleness and masculinity – Jack's sexual prowess – is still intact, as is his dream of love and family life. Even in such demeaning circumstances, survival looks possible, even acceptable, as far as the male is concerned, so long as the basic signifiers of his individual and cultural claim to supremacy go unchallenged. But even this is made to capitulate when, in the final showdown, Mona says that he was “a stupid... a drag fuck”, that he is “a dead man,” and that he will never be able to have sex with Natalie again because his wife is also “a dead woman.” Killing Mona, therefore, stands for eradicating the world of what the movie has depicted as the embodiment of all the evils in society. But this is complicated by the fact that Mona's farewell was only a mock shooting, meaning that the dreaded female is just as much a reality as she is a scapegoat for what is, after all, as much her own doing as the males'.

“In the end things didn’t work out too bad for him. Got a cross for bravery, new residence, and new identity. Jim Daugherty. Five years ago.” This is the irony of the movie, for Jack’s ridding the world of its purported enemy points to the re-enacting of old-fashioned ideals of heroism as the only means to usher in the “new man”. But the more self-effacing, self-conscious and probably more attentive and sensitive new man keeps company only with his old dreams and nightmares. Also, he is far more devoid of purpose than any of his predecessors was, which is to say that the new man is locked in his time, not knowing how to, or not wanting to move forward.

*The Usual Suspects* comes through as a sort of summing up of the situation of the white male in the mid 1990s. He continues to be a perfectly conventional law abider, and law breaker. But he is also physically disadvantaged and even apparently retarded, like Verbal Kint. Verbal’s centrality to the picture, on the other hand, gives an unexpected relevance and authority to his figure, constructing him as the representative, not of a minority, as it would seem, but of some sort of silent majority. He is therefore the symbol of a damaged and debilitated masculinity whose only ability is the capacity to speak—thus his name Verbal. Only, the quicksand world of the 1990s has brought the ideal of speaking the truth under scrutiny. The result in terms of the politics of gender is the erosion of the notions of maleness and masculinity. In the economy of the

film, this means that Keyser Soze is only a myth, and Verbal Kint an elaborate hoax. Any relation of theirs to truth is, as detective Kujan suggests when he says “Convince me. Tell me every last detail,” only the effect of another male’s will to believe.

But the 1990s have not done away with truth and falsehood completely. The last decade of the 20<sup>TH</sup> century still needs a Manichaeian world of good and bad, weak and strong, words and deeds, myth and fact, god and the devil – or, Verbal Kints and Keyser Sozes. So when Verbal says “...a man can’t change what he is. He can convince anyone he’s someone else, but never himself,” he is giving Kujan and us the key to his riddle. Both Soze and Verbal are real – and yet not. Somewhere behind their façade there is a more or less clever, strong or ethical male body. But the novelty is that, for reasons of survival or other, this body can now be moulded, it can be literally (re)constructed, to take on the shape proper to any desired identity and any desired purpose.

In conclusion, only when the male and masculinity have been experienced as utterly inauspicious – and they were increasingly so in the films analysed – can they be reconstructed as auspicious and empowering, or as an occasion for personal fulfilment. In the end, all it takes is a change in attitude. All it takes is the will not to lament the divisions by seeing them as

hindering, but to look on them as an opportunity, possibly an unparalleled one, for the turn of the century male to widen his experience through the knowledge and understanding of his other kindred selves.

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You loved green, not eau de nil  
but jade, cypress, deep dark yew.

You emulsioned your study,  
*Spring Woods.*

Replaced delphinium drapes  
with leaf pattern blinds.

Rolled a grass coloured carpet,  
over every inch of splintered boards.

Sewed moss-toned covers on the  
antique gold couch,  
concealing its mahogany arms.

But the lawn was still brown corrugated paper.

You threw big buckets of grass seed,  
watched from behind a misty pane,

relieved when a few green specks  
peeped from late February soil,

then spent weeks at your bureau,  
fashioning verses to emeralds,

til one day you saw trumpets, yellow,  
rippling like sunshine on water.

You unlatched the rusty casement,  
flooding the room with their light scent,

searched your notebook  
for a clean white page,

sat,  
waiting  
for words to turn to daffodils.