Gender, Race and Reading: Relationality in Alice Munro, Joan Riviere, Jane Campion and Alice Walker

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Abstract

This thesis considers the question of femininity in psychoanalysis and cultural life, through an analysis of how short stories by Alice Munro and Alice Walker and film by Jane Campion stage and engage with it. In chapters one and two, I argue that Munro’s stories in *Open Secrets* assemble myths of feminine survival that take on a truth value as plausible alternative descriptions of culture to those stories which psychoanalysis describes as ultimate. As such, “The Jack Randa Hotel” and “Open Secrets” provide a complex commentary on gender and its relationship to questions of knowledge. My contention is not so much that Munro’s stories “resist” or parody psychoanalytic understandings of gender, as that they disclose latent possibilities in the original that are not fully available to distanced, linear/discursive thought.

Correspondingly, my work considers psychoanalysis not as a closed or discrete set of textual practices, but as a cultural text open to continual signification and resignification by successive generations of writers – and thus, ameliorative reinterpretations. This approach offers a way of moving beyond the false dualism of a “psychoanalytic” perspective which
disregards the claims of history and an historical one which reifies a transparently self-available subject – by embracing, in order to qualify, the validity of each.

Chapters three and four consider the normativity of “whiteness” in the construction of gender in the West, as it bears on a specific psychoanalytic text and concept (chapter three) and shows up in the grammar of Jane Campion’s film (chapter four). Chapter three reads Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade” (1929) in terms of how it encodes this norm. Chapter four considers the implications of my reading of feminine masquerade in chapter three for film theory. I analyze how Campion’s In the Cut deploys signifiers of racial difference to foreground its white female lead’s crisis of subjectivization. In a final chapter, I conclude the thesis with a reading of Alice Walker’s “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells,” which speaks to the possibilities for (or limitations on) solidarity between white and black women, and to the omissions of white feminist theory with which Campion’s film contends.
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1. Objectivity in Post-Positivist Realism and Psychoanalysis
Introduction

What would it mean to consider psychoanalysis as telling meaningful truths about social reality, but not the only truth? What is the role of literary and cinematic texts in such an endeavour? This thesis considers the way in which fiction by Alice Munro and film by Jane Campion dialogue with psychoanalysis on questions of gendered subjectivity. Along the way, I take up the way in which the construction of femininity as in question in the psychoanalytic narrative (as well as in the cultural formation that it both explains and is a product of) is framed through an assumption of normative “whiteness” that places under erasure, and enacts the racialization of, non-white subjectivities and especially women. This association hearkens back to structures of Euro-colonial slavery and its aftermath and is ongoing, as Bhabha argues¹ – a fact which presents unique challenges to reading as an ethical act through which the present tense of history is conducted.

In psychoanalysis, the question of what femininity is is fundamentally unanswerable; the attempt to answer it instead motivates or sets in motion desire as the wish to penetrate an enigma or secret. In his famous lecture on “Femininity,” Freud writes:

Throughout history, people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity […] Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem—those of you who are men; to those of you who are women, this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem. (342-43)

Freud’s construction of the topic of his lecture condenses a series of propositions. By suggesting that the “nature” of femininity is a “riddle” for those in the audience who are men, Freud considers that the question of what femininity is cannot be answered. Femininity is fundamentally in question or is, itself, a question – somehow equivalent to the attempt or the desire that it sets in play to answer or discover “it.” As Shoshana Felman writes, because women are the question, in Freud’s discourse, they cannot ask it, cannot “be the speaking subjects of the knowledge or the science which the question seeks” (“Rereading Femininity” 21). The representation of femininity is equivalent to the thing itself, or there is no such

¹ According to Bhabha, the colonial era is still with us; thus, its effects cannot be construed as object of a knowledge that remains, itself, un-displaced (94).
distance between signifier and signified specifying a female subject as the referent of the question, “What is a woman?” Female desire is instead recruited into the story of the male subject as enigma – that which constructs the male quest for identity and self-definition by its elusive nature, or reciprocal missing-ness.

Yet the very finality of this seeming exclusion – one which begins with a statement of limitations on knowledge, but expands to assert the prerogative of the quest for it as defining the masculine position – contains its own reversal, or asks to be read against itself. Felman considers Freud’s letter to Marie Bonaparte, in which he writes: “The great question that has never been answered and which I have never been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is “What does a woman want?”2 Acknowledging that this question may not have an answer or be accessible to any man or woman in Western culture, Felman yet asks what the possibilities are for it to be re-appropriated (re-read, re-written) as a question asked by and for women? (What Does a Woman Want? 3) If the answer within Freudian discourse is that there are seemingly none, this answer equally contains its own insistent echo; “According to whom?” or to what objective observer outside of culture, reporting on it?

The question of gender is thus transferred onto the space of literature, possibility, the inventive, that which might be, rather than or as a continuation of what merely is. As Stephen Heath notes, theory’s proximity to the prerogative of truth-telling, as it regards even the attempt to de-center the perspective of the observer as inevitably subjective, inadvertently contributes-in to a phenomenon in which it is assumed that what supposedly “is” will “always be.” Psychoanalysis “seems to fix things forever in the given, and oppressive, identities, with no connections through to the social-historical realities that it also seems accurately to be describing” (Heath 56).

On the other hand, literature, as Derek Attridge writes, “always seems to present itself in the final analysis as something more than the category or entity it is claimed to be” (5). Because

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it exceeds the rational models that are brought to bear on it, literature causes us to attend to, or formulate the consequences of limiting our understanding to those models. This raises a question as to what the potential is for literature to express truths about the social as open to the future and to the possibility of progressive change that are not otherwise available to modes of meaning-making premised upon a split of reason from imagination, observer from observed.

Because literature is not tied to the reproduction of objective truth – a rhetorical claim that institutes a logic of (implicitly gendered, and racialized) subject-object relations – it may help to uncover some of the potential that is latent or glimpsed in the Freudian narrative but that is not fully available to its distanced, linear/discursive presentation. This potential recuperates or speaks to the possibility of a future to the cultural narrative of gendered subject-formation resting on the objectification of femininity; to the possibility, in other words, of (imaginative and psychic) survival. Its “uncovering” is also partly an imagining, or is creative, in that it denies or revises the split of reason from imagination that psychoanalysis inherits and on which it rests, even as psychoanalysis tries to account for the inter-implication of the two by describing psychic life as the outcome of processes of fantasy.

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3 Attridge considers that literature, as aesthetic practice, is not so much the opposite of truth-telling discourse as its supplement. He observes that in “the twentieth century, a number of thinkers—among them Heidegger, Adorno, and Derrida—have attempted to understand artworks in ways that challenge the separation between the domain of the aesthetic and the search for truth” (14). This challenge implies, however, a corresponding shift in what is meant by truth, which “is no longer to be understood in the terms which once enabled it to appear as the privileged preserve of science, of the non- or even anti-aesthetic.”

4 For an analysis of the masculinist character of modern scientific objectivity, see Benjamin, Bonds of Love 189. For a discussion of Enlightenment rationalism as providing the basis for modern racism, see Ferguson 16-17.

5 The objectivist structure of Freudian psychoanalysis has been extensively critiqued in post-Freudian attempts to account for the phenomenon of the countertransference in psychoanalytic work. In academic writing on psychoanalysis, this discussion grows out of Freud’s case history of Dora, “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” (1905). See the essays in Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, eds., In Dora’s Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism.

6 The theory of the unconscious, in other words, provided an unprecedented framework for thinking about the supposedly rational subject as literally, at a certain level, unknown to herself – beset by repressed fantasies which influence her experiences and motivations outside of conscious volition. However, the same idea of the unconscious posits an observer whose own perspective remains uninvolved. See Judith Butler’s discussion of the countertransference in Giving an Account of Oneself for a postmodernist variation on this dichotomy (57). For an analysis of the humanist foundations of Freudian psychoanalysis, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen.
Munro

In chapters one and two, I explore these ideas as they arise in readings of two of Alice Munro’s short stories from her 1994 collection, *Open Secrets* (1994). Munro’s work has always invited reading in psychoanalytic terms because of the consistency of its preoccupation with the struggle of a female protagonist to establish her identity in the face of small town norms that deny her this privilege as a woman. That being said, Munro’s stories “do no simply await psychoanalytic decoding,” as Naomi Morgenstern writes (“Seduction and Subjectivity” 68); it is rather the surplus that they present to such an attempt that makes them so interesting, and constitutes their specific dialogue with psychoanalysis.

*Open Secrets* stands out within Munro’s work for its treatment of gender in terms of questions of narrative form. Her experiment with alternate realities in “Carried Away” represents a digression from her trademark realism; and Munro comments in an interview that the stories in *Open Secrets* “don’t close in the way people expect or want them to”; thus, the collection is “not a good introduction to my work” (Interview with Smith and Pleuke 225). The idea of the open secret is a formal structure that relates to this unexpected quality of the stories. Contrary to the idea of hidden secrets – feminized and liable to exposure – within patriarchal discourse, as we saw in Freud’s “Femininity,” the “open” secret suggests what is so familiar as to be unspeakable, or mistaken for reality. The open secret *is* the repression of femininity, in the stories – that which cannot *be* the subject of the story because it instead determines what is representable.

Accordingly, the stories – which seem to present straightforward narrative surfaces with the highest fidelity to mimetic realism – “aren’t about what they seem to be about” (Munro, Interview with Smith and Pleuke 225).7 The stories literalize or repeat limiting norms of gender; yet the events that they depict do not “happen” or refer (in a stable way) to the

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7 As I discuss femininity in terms of a theme of disguise or masquerade in chapters three and four, it is significant that this is a formal structure in Munro’s stories in *Open Secrets*: the stories are themselves “disguised.” This added dimensionality of these particular stories, which is not present in the same degree in some of Munro’s earlier stories, accounts in my view for their progressiveness in regards to gender. It has affinities with the concept of intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis, as discussed by Jessica Benjamin (“Beyond Doer and Done To”) and others.
individuals whom they happen to. A young girl in the title story “Open Secrets” disappears; her doing so casts into a mode of representation the “lack” of all of the women who populate the narrative’s edges. Yet her disappearance does not symbolize the repression of femininity to a reader whose perspective remains apart. Instead, the inability to attribute concrete motivations to singular characters places us as interpreters within the story, displacing its (prior) organization by gendered norms of narrative activity.

The open secret is thus a narrative or formal presentation of the assertion expressed in Lacan that there is no outside to the psycho-cultural divorce of femininity and subjectivity, which instead constitutes the social. In “Intervention on the Transference,” Lacan writes:

As is true for all women, and for reasons that are at the basis of the most elementary forms of social exchange (the very reasons that [Freud’s patient] Dora gives as the ground for her revolt), the problem of her condition is fundamentally that of accepting herself as object of desire for the man. (99)

It must be acknowledged that Lacan’s remark is not unreserved chauvinism, as it expresses something that is true about culture. But it may also not be the final or the only story; and, the manner in which this is the case is the subject of Munro’s stories, which reframe psychoanalysis as one aspect or account of a shared cultural inheritance to which they also contribute.

**Riviere, Campion and Feminine Masquerade**

If women are – as the psychoanalytic narrative alleges – excluded as subjects, this exclusion seemingly constitutes what can be told or can be or become a story (which women cannot be the subjects of: Felman writes of women as subjects who do not “have as yet, precisely, an autobiography” [What Does a Want Want? 14]). In psychoanalysis, the exclusion of femininity is the measure of constitution of the social as organized around the incest taboo and the oedipal contract, in which the boy is promised a woman of his own in exchange for giving up the mother. As the condition of social relations, this exclusion cannot directly be
represented, because there is no external position from which to view it as separate from our own frames of reference (which the exclusion instead constitutes).  

This is a narrative problem as well as a theoretical one. In narrative terms, it is a problem of representing femininity as well as, autobiographically, of how to separate oneself from images in the popular culture that deny one’s value or construct it in terms of what it is for men (a problem of emancipation). Chapter four on Jane Campion considers this latter issue of representation as the organizing theme or principle of her 2003 film *In the Cut* – at the same time as I argue that the film and its engagement with questions of representation and distance are, in some senses necessarily, personal and autobiographic interpretations of its auteur’s relation to the cinema. If there is no distance from the representation of (“divided,” etc) femininity in the social imaginary, then femininity is or becomes the representation – or in other words, masquerade. Mary Ann Doane renders this question in terms of spectatorship, or the lack of distance of the female spectator from the images she views (or in a sense does not, if this lack of distance forecloses her as a spectator) (*Femmes Fatales* 35).

Yet, filmmakers and authors are also spectators and readers, and so, I argue, Campion’s film is a record of a filmmaker’s fraught relationship with a cultural and cinematic heritage in which she is, as a woman, placed on the side of the object – negotiating the conflict between the social role of femininity and her position as a director behind the lens. This position is figured in *In the Cut* in terms of a transgression of cinematic codes that occasions a cascade of events that enigmatically figure an expected retribution (of the kind that Joan Riviere, whose work I take up in chapter three, also represents).

The issue of femininity as its representation, or masquerade, I consider at length in chapter three, with an eye to bringing to the fore the specific set of historical pressures that influence Joan Riviere’s writing of her psychoanalytic text, “Womanliness as a Masquerade” (1929) – an article that clearly displays the kind of autobiographical investment or running undercurrent that one would in a sense expect of a text on its subject, femininity, that seeks to

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8 In Judith Butler’s work, the subject is interpellated by norms imposed, as it were, from outside and takes up a relationship to these as they grant access to the social.
obtain and indeed claims an objective, distanced perspective. (Riviere’s text has been described as one of the most well known examples of case history writing understood to have a basis in its author’s life [Harris, “Analyst” 261]). This kind of supposed hysterical identification has historically been more associated with women, as “feminine” etc unreliability, but it is worth noting the point that Athol Hughes makes that all theoretical writing is so invested [“Personal” 899] – Freud’s foundational case history of Dora [1905] being an even more prominent example.)

The theme of autobiography and “women’s lives” is a necessary but not a sufficient lens for considering questions of gender representation. In the last thirty years, black and Third World feminists have consistently highlighted the way in which norms of gender in the West are racially constructed. This construction is repeated in narratives of gender oppression which do not consider the intersecting and mutually determining influence of gender and racism, as well as class, sexual and age-based oppressions.\(^9\) In her article on black female spectatorship, “Oppositional Looks,” bell hooks writes that black women are located outside of the drama of white male subjects and white female objects that Laura Mulvey’s theory of the cinema proposes; thus they can view it without identifying with either the victim or the perpetrator (235). Doing so has potential political significance, as it deconstructs this drama’s privilege to signify ongoing truths of cultural life. The intimacy of race to the discussion of gender and spectatorship suggests, as Jane Gaines argues, that gender cannot be analyzed without race as bearing on structures of representation (Gaines 25, Chaudhuri 43).

In chapters three and four, I consider how the psychoanalyst Joan Riviere and filmmaker Jane Campion negotiate autobiographical conflicts around entering male-dominated professional spaces through the use and manipulation of signifiers of racial difference. In “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” Riviere stabilizes a description of femininity as masquerade through a reference to a fantasy of black masculinity that is nominally that of her patient but that Riviere herself does not consider in terms of its racial meanings. This

\(^9\) More recently, transgender rights activists have foregrounded the way in which the construction of femininity in unhelpful ways is linked to discrimination against non-gender conforming individuals. Julia Serano writes that patriarchal logic is put in crisis in the presence of the trans female body, which disavows male privilege by electively choosing femininity as preferable. This makes it interesting that one of the major sites of trans phobia has, according to Serano, been the feminist movement (15-18, 233-45).
produces a crisis of interpretation: do we read her text in terms of the way in which it simultaneously evokes, and places under erasure, the history of racial violence in the United States and England? Or in terms of the history of psychoanalysis and Riviere’s compromised position as a female analyst and analysand between Ernest Jones and Freud? I suggest that each of these readings precludes the other, insofar as they designate equal but opposite structures of victim and oppressor. Yet it is not possible to occupy both positions at once (or else, as James Baldwin suggests, it may only be possible to occupy both positions as once). The way in which the text splits off the possibilities for interpreting it presents ethical challenges which point up how history is carried forward or is “present,” as Baldwin writes, in “all that we do” (Price of the Ticket 410). At stake is the non-distinctness of the individual reading subject from the crisis of knowledge and power that “Womanliness as a Masquerade” both enacts and represents. I suggest a reading of responsibility that involves – like my readings of Munro – a revision of a narrative of gender oppression in the context of Riviere’s development of her concept of “feminine masquerade” (a narrative that is also the article’s – and the concept’s – implicit subject). This reading foregrounds or restores the agency of white femininity that is lost to its construction as victimized within the patriarchal narrative, a construction which both occludes the subjectivity of racialized women and provides the imaginary basis for the scapegoating of racialized men.

Chapter four on Campion’s In the Cut looks back to chapter three in the sense that the psychoanalytic concept of masquerade influences ideas about the gaze, film and spectatorship (for example, Heath, Fletcher, Johnston). Yet if the concept is problematic in the ways I underscore in chapter three, this suggests that it cannot be used (whether directly or indirectly) to ground film interpretation. How do the ideas considered in chapter three and the critique of masquerade that I offer bear on thinking about film and in particular female spectatorship? How do they (or do they) offer any kind of resource for thinking about an impasse in feminist film theory around the idea of female spectatorship as foreclosed – that is, around the split of the male spectator and female or feminized object of Laura Mulvey’s reading of the cinema – as focussing white norms of femininity?

10 In “The Fire Next Time,” Baldwin describes the oppressor as victimizing him/herself: “Whoever debases others is debasing himself. That is not a mystical statement but a most realistic one, which is proved by the eyes of any Alabama sheriff” (Price of the Ticket 369).
As with my readings of Munro’s stories, I consider Campion’s *In the Cut* as engaging with rather than determined by theoretical ideas of gender and (in this case) spectatorship. Campion’s film oeuvre forms a likely companion to Munro’s stories, in general but specifically in *Open Secrets*, due to the way in which, in both artists’ works, the exclusion of the feminine from the position of speaker/viewer becomes the outline of a central protagonist’s struggle to emerge as the subject of “her” story. In both the film and stories, the doubling or indeterminacy of numerous female characters who represent versions of each other as well as themselves points up the way in which our own frames of reference are internal to the dialectic of gendered subject-object positions that the texts appear to specify. This gives the effect that the stories or film are not about what they seem to be about, but enigmatically figure our own activity of watching and reading. On the one hand, then, Munro and Campion form a likely pair for analysis due to the intensity of the way in which the question of gender in their work is propelled into the arena of form. The major effect of this shared propensity is that both artists’ works are not so much about gender as a theme as they are more prominently about the ways in which we engage with culture.11

This fact occasions the progressive potential of both artists’ works, but it does not guarantee it. In chapter four, I consider how Campion’s *In the Cut* articulates a seemingly progressive feminist agenda through an “unconscious” or semi-veiled appropriation of “blackness.” This appropriation speaks to the film’s allegiance to structures of popular culture and romance. I read this allegiance in terms of a defense structure, common to Riviere’s discourse of masquerade, that brokers or renders palatable a claim to subjectivity on the part of a woman.

11 It might be argued that no correspondences can be drawn between the work of an author in the short story tradition and a director of feature length films, as a film, unlike literature, is a product of the conjunction of many voices and differing roles, as well as studio oversight. Further, to compare literary with film narrative risks minimizing the distinctive formal features of each medium. My argument for doing so, nonetheless, in this thesis derives from the bearing that the idea of feminine masquerade has both on thinking about narrative (as determining the hero of the masculine quest for identity) and spectatorship (as constructing femininity as object of the gaze). Underlying each is the formal or narrative structure of the Oedipus complex. In “Desire and Narrative,” Teresa de Lauretis draws a correspondence between essentially folk narrative structures and conventions of narrative film, as these share a genealogy in the various iterations of the Oedipus plot (which she argues reflect competing forms of patriarchy). See also David Bordwell’s case for an interdisciplinary film criticism in *Post-Theory*. Bordwell considers that film criticism should forge links with non-filmic disciplines, such as narrative theory, because to restrict analysis in this regard based on an idea of a fully distinct film form is ultimately foundationalist (38-40).
by figuring it as an *other* (and therefore acceptable) masculinity – or in other words as
“black.” Such a defense requires, however, that the Africanized characters in the film be
subordinated to the role of representing elements within the white female lead’s crisis of
subjectivization – or, in other words, as in Campion’s film *The Piano* (Pihama), gives the
impression that the racialized characters within the film do not exist from their own side.
Campion’s film is nominally self-aware and critical of this appropriative dimension, which it
arguably comments on as a commonplace of film. This momentary self-reflexiveness,
however, is not enough to override but simply in some ways authorizes (or places under
erasure) its presence in the film itself.

**Walker**

In chapters one and two, I consider that Munro’s stories speak back to psychoanalysis. In the
final chapter, I provide a reading of a short story by Alice Walker, “Advancing Luna—and
Ida B. Wells.” Walker’s story, I argue, both concerns relationships between black and white
women and the possibilities for (and limitations on) solidarity between them; and it *speaks
back*, itself, to the colour-blindness of much white feminist theory (including film theory)
which Jane Campion’s film engages with, and is an expression of. Walker’s story is a
working through of the impossible position in which the representation of gender violence,
specifically rape, often places black women. Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens, in
their introduction to *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women*, describe the
stereotype of the black rapist and the phenomenon of Southern white male chivalry as the
central drama underpinning the oppression of black men, and black and white women, and
the privileging of white men in the United States (6). Angela Davis describes how the
women’s movement historically alienated black women by publicizing the issue of rape in
ways that stereotyped black men. Black women were thus hampered in their efforts to protest
gender violence within their communities because of the possibility that these efforts could
play in to the hands of white racism. On the other hand, the construction of the “typical” rape
victim as an upper class white woman obscured (and facilitated) the continuing sexual
exploitation of black women by white men, institutionalized under racial slavery (Davis 182).
Alice Walker’s “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” is both a personal and fictional account of the implied author’s response to hearing her white friend’s claim that she was raped by a black man. It works on the level at which stereotypes cannot be directly disproved because, as Bhabha argues, they are tautological – relying on an excess of proof in the first place, or on the claim that the knowledge of the other that they assert needs no proof. Hence they can only be performed, and thus made self-strange. The story works through the conflict that ensues between the narrator’s belief in the truth of her friend’s story (“I soon realized that [Luna lying] was unlikely”); her anger (“Who has even properly acknowledged that [the black woman] and not the white woman in this story is the most likely victim of rape?”) – and the impossibility or near impossibility of separating the issue of a specific rape which may or may not have happened from the stereotypical associations that it almost immediately sets in motion (92-94). The narrative arc takes the shape of the narrator’s working out of a speaking position in relation to the story that Luna tells her – one which honours the narrator’s blackness and her femininity, in connection with (and by taking Luna’s story to the safety of) a loving relationship with black men.

Walker’s “Advancing Luna” speaks to the issue of interracial rape that comes up in both Riviere’s and Campion’s texts (as related to the question of female agency), and that I found myself, in my readings, unable to gain a critical distance from – in the sense that Bhabha’s analysis of stereotypes suggests that it is only by a creative form of mimesis (rather than an analytic stance) that these can be transformed. My reading of Walker speaks to and is in a certain sense a reading of the limitations in my own writing in chapters three and four.

In terms of its relevancy to psychoanalytic theory, Walker’s story (like Munro’s stories in Open Secrets) restores a plurality of feminine and masculine voices and subject-positions. “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” implicitly reads or comments on the psychoanalytic concept of the gaze, as it defers its own ending to a future in which gender and racial equality

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12 In this way, the other in his or her alterity is assimilated to the image that the colonial subject constructs. See Bhabha, “The Other Question,” and David Huddart’s description of mimicry as a potentially subversive response to colonial stereotyping (39-40). Bhabha writes that the stereotype claims a prior knowledge of the other. Hence, to interrogate it requires a critique that questions the relationship between discourse and power – without which, analysis in terms of an understanding of power as fixed and prior repeats the structure of empirical knowledge that the stereotype asserts.
will have been reached. Thus the story pulls to itself, or pulls itself up on, an idea of the gaze as open to the movement of time.

Summary

Overall, my thesis offers a perspective on psychoanalysis as a cultural text that has important resources to contribute to thinking about and working to rectify structural inequalities in the social body, at the same time as psychoanalysis is susceptible to repeating these same inequalities as a measure of its own self-construction as objective truth. I consider that theory’s proximity to the prerogative of truth-telling, as it regards even the attempt to de-center the perspective of the interpreter as inevitably subjective, contributes-in to a phenomenon in which it is assumed that what supposedly is will always be. Fictional forms such as literature and film enter in here as providing the possibility of intervention into the reproduction of (e.g., authoritarian) “truth,” because they are not tied to criteria of objectivity. On the other hand, my analysis does not seek to part ways with psychoanalysis in a global sense. Such would hardly be possible, if psychoanalysis is itself a cultural text open to the future and to its continual signification and re-signification, including by literary and film examples such as those on which I draw.
Chapter 1
Interpretive Crisis and the Time of Reading:
Alice Munro’s “Open Secrets”

Of her 1994 collection, *Open Secrets*, Munro remarks: “The stories in *Open Secrets* aren’t about what they seem to be about. Clearly some people find this quite disconcerting” (Boyce and Smith interview 225). In this chapter, I focus on the title story to the collection, a seemingly straightforward detective or mystery story about a girl who goes missing that becomes anything but straightforward—a meditation on the limits of narrative, on the gendered conventions of storytelling, and on the question of femininity as itself missing at the level of narrative constructions of desire and agency within Western white patriarchal—and specifically, here, Canadian—literary conventions. Munro’s work has often been discussed in terms of her concern with representing the unrepresentable;\(^\text{13}\) with the ways in which our lives break out of the plots that we construct for them; with the relationship between the self and the stories that are told about it, or not, often through the intermediary agency of alter ego figures or plots (Carrington, *Controlling* 109-111). Of *Open Secrets*, Coral Ann Howells notes that, although the stories offer the same challenge to the limits of realism that Munro’s fiction always has, “it is now more difficult to separate reality and fantasy because different dimensions of experience appear to overlap” (*Alice Munro* 120). Donna Bennett likewise remarks that, although the stories exhibit what critics have described as Munro’s characteristic free usage of time, with frequent shifts from a present to one or more past perspectives, and back again, the temporal framework of storytelling is broken up in *Open Secrets*, becoming many-faceted, even kaleidoscopic in its travels away from the present (indeed, what really *is* the present in some of the recent stories?) into various pasts (and each character may have a distinct past) and even into possible futures. (The future is surprisingly available in Munro’s fiction: her narrators are capable of sudden proleptic moves, even into the next

\(^{13}\) Ajay Heble, for example, writes that Munro’s fiction “operates as both an instance and a criticism of narrative,” and “while Munro clearly remains attracted to language because of the possibility the words can reflect meanings which already exist ‘out there’ in the world, she is also painfully aware of the fact that writing can never simply be an unquestioned means for ‘getting at’ real life” (4, 5-6).
In this chapter, I consider how in the title story “Open Secrets,” the overlapping of different dimensions of experience and projection of the story’s narrative movement beyond its seeming conclusion engages a specifically feminist poetic. That is, I argue that the story constructs a narrative image of femininity out of its negation within the bounds of the storyworld – a narrative construction that Munro repeats elsewhere in *Open Secrets* in “The Albanian Virgin” and “The Jack Randa Hotel,” as well as in a later story, “Runaway.”

In pursuing this focus I draw both on psychoanalysis and narrative theory. Rather than interpret “Open Secrets” in terms of a psychoanalytic or narratological reading, however, I argue that the story exceeds any pre-determined paradigm for making meaning of it. Thus it suggests a critique of psychoanalytic notions of subjectivity and of the authority of psychoanalytic (as well as narratological) interpretive regimes. I consider ways in which the story provokes readers to enact the gendered codes of its world, seemingly *reading us*. I then turn this reversal of the expected relation between reader and text back toward psychoanalysis itself, considering its notion of the countertransference and newer ideas about the relation between analyst and analysand as unfolding in term of a series of enactments of trauma (Mitchell, *Relational Psychoanalysis*).

Drawing upon David Herman’s work on storyworlds as jointly constructed by an author and a reader who brings to the text his or her own frames of reference, both literary and real world (*Story Logic* 16-17), I consider interpretive crisis – the reader’s perception of his or her enactment of the story’s gendered codes – as shifting the terms of the storyworld.

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14 Here I draw on Teresa de Lauretis’s reading of Stephen Heath’s notion of “narrative image” in cinema. De Lauretis argues that the feminine position within narratives governed by an oedipal logic is as a portion of plot-space; specifically a position “figuring the (achieved) movement of the narrative toward that space,” or in other words narrative closure (140). The narrative image of “woman,” in this reading, is “not just an *image* of woman but the image of her narrative position … suggestive of the join of image and story, the interlocking of visual and narrative registers effected by the cinematic apparatus of the look” (140). Munro’s “Open Secrets” engages the register of the visual in its concluding image of a photograph of a vanished woman, “displayed … in public places” (159). The image makes remarkable the narrative position of femininity as excluded from (the) story. This in turn displaces, I will argue, the story’s concluding movement onto a narrative future for its protagonist.
shift, I argue, involves the reader in the construction of a utopian narrative “future” beyond
the end-stopped dualities of masculine desire and feminine lack. In this way Munro’s “Open
Secrets” functions generically as a piece of literary and cultural theory. That is, it does not so
much directly critique psychoanalysis in favour of an alternative hermeneutic, as it a) suggests that psychoanalysis *constructs* the reality that it describes, and b) offers the reader
alternatives as a conscious co-participant in the construction of the meanings of
“masculinity” and “femininity” within the interpretive milieu of the story’s plausible world.

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*It was on a Saturday morning*

*Just as lovely as could be*

*Seven girls and their Leader Mrs. Johnstone*

*Went camping from the C.G.I.T.*

“And they almost didn’t go,” said Frances. “Because of the downpour Saturday morning…
Then it would’ve been a whole other story.”

(“Open Secrets” 129)

Like many of Munro’s stories, “Open Secrets” begins as a story told by one character to
another – here the housekeeper Frances to Maureen, her cousin and employer. A girl,
Heather Bell, has disappeared on the annual camping trip and hike of the C.G.I.T., which
stands for Canadian Girls in Training. The story is interspersed with stanzas from a rhyming
poem describing the hike and Heather’s disappearance, as well as with refrains from songs
that the girls on the hike sing. Frances reveals to Maureen her own speculations about the
circumstances of Heather’s disappearance; and Maureen reflects upon her own time as a
young girl on the hike. As in “The Albanian Virgin,” which precedes “Open Secrets” in the
collection, readers learn about Maureen only through the circumstances of her hearing about
Heather’s disappearance from other people – first Frances, then two visitors who arrive at
Maureen’s house to discuss their suspicions with Maureen’s husband. Alvin Stephens is a
respected lawyer in the town of Carstairs; a husband and wife arrive at Maureen’s doorstep one morning with possible information about Heather’s disappearance.

The trope of the open secret works in the story as a doubled displacement of meaning or of readerly expectation which takes up the classic Munrovian theme of the relationship of reality to the stories we tell ourselves. At the level of the realist detective/mystery plot, a husband and wife Marian Hubbert and Theo Slater arrive at Maureen’s doorstep to relay information to Maureen’s husband, Alvin Stephens. The lawyer has recently suffered a stroke which has left him with a speech impediment; however, he maintains a small law practice for clients in town and, more importantly, represents in the town imaginary respectability and incontrovertible knowledge of the law. We learn at the beginning of the story that Marian and Theo own a farm at which the girls on the hike stop, shortly before Heather goes missing. To the audience of the lawyer and Maureen, and with Theo sitting silently, Marian relates a story of suspicious behaviour that she had witnessed, on the part of a third man, the day after Heather’s disappearance – a man who, similarly to the lawyer himself, has recently become afflicted with a speech impediment and bizarre habits after the death of his wife. Leaving women’s clothing and lingerie lying around his house; behaving belligerently in stores; degenerating into uncommunicativeness – these behaviours have combined to isolate Mr. Siddicup as a target for town gossip:

She had been thinking about the other reason the women stopped going to see Mr. Siddicup. They didn’t like the clothes … They were there week after week and the women started to wonder: Did he leave them lying around to suggest things? Did he put them on himself next to his skin? Was he a pervert?

Now all that would come out, they’d chalk that up against him. (152)

Marian plays on Mr. Siddicup’s status as an outcast in the town imaginary, his muteness and inability to defend himself, to frame him as a probable suspect of the mystery. Mr. Siddicup appeared at her farm, Maureen relates, and spilled water all over himself from a pump in a bizarre state of agitation, pointing to the woods and river in the direction of the hike and Heather’s disappearance.
The lawyer directs Marian and her husband to the police. In this reading, the open secret is Maureen’s perception that Marian knows more than she is letting on, that her account is theatrical and, thus, motivated.

Marian pushed back her chair so abruptly that it almost fell over … her husband held his coffee cup in both hands and kept his deferential eyes on her by an effort of will. Something flashed in his face—a tic, a nerve jumping in one cheek. She was watching him in spite of her antics, and her look said, Hold on. Be still.

Lawyer Stephens, as far as Maureen could see, had not glanced up at all. (148)

Maureen is privy to the social construction of truth about Heather’s disappearance, by means of the use of a scapegoat figure and play on Lawyer Stephens’s authority (Marian puts on her display, suggestively, “in front of the silver tea service presented to Lawyer Stephens in appreciation of his many years’ work for the law society”). Maureen watches the couple leave her house and sit down on a wall not far off. Theo takes Marian’s hat and kneads his fingers into the feathers in a gesture, perhaps of anxiety, that nonetheless provokes Marian’s anger and Maureen’s disgust:

He bent over and started to stroke it in a comforting way … as if he were pacifying a little scared hen.
But Marian stopped him…

Maureen felt a shock. She felt a shrinking in her bones. (154)

If Maureen intuits, and the story prompts us to consider along with her, Theo’s complicity in a plot of kidnapping and sexual abuse, yet this story of the social construction of “the truth” about Heather’s disappearance itself stands in for, or suggests another register of the disappearance of the feminine term itself, as the measure of the construction of the social order. Mr. Siddicup does not “go off,” after all, until he loses the containing function provided to him by a wife—the function that Marian plays for Theo, covering up his crime; the function that Maureen does in another sense for the story’s other verbally challenged
character, the lawyer. In an interview, Munro describes her concern with the ways in which “women adapt to protect men” (Boyce and Smith interview 227).

Stephens’s profession as lawyer dovetails with an idea of the law of sexual difference which is constructed around the lawyer’s newly discovered sadomasochistic need to project abjection onto his wife. Maureen worries that Frances might overhear their sexual relations:

[Frances] might stand outside the door and then she would have to hear the noises—Lawyer Stephens’ panting and grunting and bullying, the hiss of disgust with which he would order Maureen to do this or that, his pounding of her right at the end and the command he let out then, a command that perhaps would be incoherent to anybody but Maureen but that would still speak eloquently, like lavatory noises, of his extremity.

“Ta’ dirty! Ta’ dirty!”

This came from a man who had once shut Helena in her room for calling her brother a shitty bastard. (154)

The passage constructs sexual desire, language and power in relation to a preferential masculinity. The daughter is punished for expressing herself against her brother in colourful aggressive language that her father then sexualizes and requests from Maureen. As such she (the daughter, Helena) is separated from her violence/will/self. In The Second Sex, de Beauvoir writes: “violence is the authentic proof of each one’s loyalty to himself, to his passions, to his own will; radically to deny this will is to deny oneself any objective truth” (331). Maureen, on the other hand, becomes the sign of (femininity as) this separation from self—its equivalence with the underside of words or with a position from which words do not communicate meaningfully or command social authority. In “talking dirty” she effectively becomes like the dirty words she uses, a becoming other-than.oneself that signs the social order of meaningful self-expression, of masterful possession of language (indeed, of women) as masculine.

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15 I am indebted to Rosalie Weaver’s consideration of the resonance between “Open Secrets” and The Second Sex.
Maureen’s alienation from her aggression in relation to her husband’s violation is represented as a projection onto another plot of a displaced punishment. She imagines an impersonal scene in which a hand – the sleeve of which matches Theo Slater’s cream-coloured jacket – is “pressed down, unresistingly, but by somebody else’s will—it is pressed down on the open burner of the stove where she is stirring the custard in the double boiler, just long enough to scorch the flesh on the red coil” (158). The custard, its milk and eggs representing a feminine metaphor of fecundity (Howells, “Telling” 49) is what Maureen thinks about “through her husband’s rampage” along with “the fingers moving in the feathers, the wife’s hand laid on top of the husband’s, pressing down” (156). The passages set up a point of convergence among the various crimes and scenes of going missing (Carrington, “Talking” 602, Weaver 243). The custard and the eggs and the missing punishment of the husband – “What she sees now isn’t in any life of her own” (158) – suggest dissociation and survival across breakages in being, in self-continuity – “Today she managed better than usual. She was able to look into the bathroom mirror, and move her eyebrows, her lips and jaws around to bring her expression back to normal” (156) – the contracted, private heartbeat of the feminine as a displacement onto other plots, activities, lives.

In one sense, then, related to what I argue is the story’s critique of the psychoanalytic myth of sexual difference, the story frames the law itself as perverse – Stephens’s sex act with his wife, her own absence from it mirroring Heather’s disappearance, her absence from her story, as a making remarkable of the division of sex and speaking roles into masculine subject and feminized object. Stephens’ authority to represent the law, to conduct himself in the world of action is based on his private projective identification with femininity as itself privatized and negated/formed into social currency. He goes on an errand “to the Police station, to find out what has been reported, what is being done.” Maureen offers to accompany him: “No. He is going on a serious errand and it would diminish him to be accompanied or transported by a wife” (159).

The story of Maureen’s domestic travails is fleshed out into a broader commentary on issues of gender and representation not only by its dependency, for its telling, on the story of Heather’s disappearance but also by the smaller, more mundane disappearances that dot the
landscape of the other female characters’ lives: Helena’s departure for more presumably felicitous environs, Frances’ writing of a poem which Maureen will not listen to, Marian’s vocation as a maker of women’s corsets, Frances’ maligning of Heather Bell’s mother for “[g]etting off on an expedition of her own” (131) – the way in which these mundane disappearances or refusals of the adult woman converge on a plot of feminine acculturation of young girls. Maureen, reminded of her own experience of the hike, reflects how noisy she had been then. A shrieker, a dare-taker. Just before she hit high school, a giddiness either genuine or faked or half-and-half became available to her. Soon it vanished, her bold body vanished inside this ample one, and she became a studious, shy girl, a blusher. She developed the qualities her husband would see and value when hiring and proposing. (139)

Munro’s commentary on another story, “Boys and Girls” (Dance of the Happy Shades), is suggestive of the imaginative pull of “Open Secrets.” Like “Open Secrets,” “Boys and Girls” concerns the ordering of narrative around a masculine principle, in this case in the daydreams of a young girl who has progressively to contend with her environment’s valuation of her as “only a girl” (127) – a pejorative indication that relegates her to a world of inside-ness and domestic labour that she does not choose. Of the story, Munro writes:

This is what I was trying to say: up until the time she is twelve or thirteen years old a girl feels free, able to think of her future in terms of action, to dream of adventure, heroism, power. With the full realization of her sexual nature a change is forced on her, partly from within, mostly from without. (This was true in my generation and, it goes without saying, in previous generations; I have hopes it is much less true today.) (Metcalf and Struthers 185)

Munro’s commentary suggests her own exploration of the problem of feminine acculturation as a question of narrative activity. In other words, the active expression of desire defines the subject as a narrative presence or “I” striving towards a goal. The necessary or supposed latency of female desire within Western white patriarchy, then, seemingly defines story structure itself around masculine narrative activity and projection of “lack” onto femininity. The vignette of the vanishing girl-woman that Munro describes is also a problem of representation, in other words.
It is here that fiction would seem to venture into places – imaginative reconfigurations or fabulations of possible worlds – that theory cannot. Lauren Vedal, for example, argues that precisely because literature is imaginative, it not only describes what is but holds out the possibility for envisioning change: “Fiction is not limited to what is but rather can include what should be or what might be” (13). Literature as fiction partakes of (or stimulates) the second of two meanings of ‘to imagine’ that Karl Kroeber describes as in popular usage. In the first, the individual is presumed to be “inventing mentally what has never existed and presumably never can” (in this case, imagination means to see or envision something that is illusory or unreal). In the second meaning, the boundaries of what is real versus fantastical are called into question as fully autonomous domains. The individual who is exhorted to “use your imagination” is called on to “employ... psychic capacities to reach beyond what is immediately present here and now and beyond routinized rational patterns toward some novel possibility” (Kroeber 64). The notion of imagination as not opposed to supposedly rational, descriptive thought or to what is real but as actively participant in the construction of “something not yet realized, but realizable” gets at the level at which Munro’s stories offer a critique of limiting constructions of femininity and their echo in psychoanalysis. Because change (surprise, possibility) are emergent properties of what is assumed merely to “be” in a Munro story, the alienation of femininity from story becomes material for the making re-markable of what is therein displaced in relation to other modes of narrative possibility and presence.

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The “story” of femininity does not exist, we have been told; narrative is structured around and oriented toward its lack. Accordingly, Munro’s “Open Secrets” does not tell a particular story of femininity as an education in self-abdication – which does not exist – so much as it juxtaposes one story of a girl gone missing – Heather’s disappearance, which is never placed in the narrative but only circulated as story (gossip) – with the adult woman protagonist’s

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16 According to Kroeber, this movement “toward something not yet realized, but realizable” underlies “every kind of planning, every purposeful human accomplishment; it is in fact the primary power that constitutes culture.”
absence from her story. In other words, the loss of subjectivity that defines the adult woman as an aspiring wife, mother, but not self does not happen to the person whom it happens to, nor is it placed definitively in time (as is either Heather’s disappearance or Maureen’s reminiscence about her experience on the hike). Heather’s disappearance is told and retold as story; as such, it stands in not for Maureen’s story (or that of any of the other female characters), as for the characters’ absence from their stories, desire, agency/aggression. Thus Munro stages or embeds the dialectic of masculine desire/feminine lack itself as the true subject or plot of the story, its missing and half-remembered origins in the split of self from self, its bloody remainder in the after-death rituals of a nearly defunct, local tradition: “It was on a Saturday morning/ Just as lovely as could be/ Seven girls and their leader Mrs. Johnstone/ Went camping from the C.G.I.T” (129).

In this ritual, the reader becomes an active participant. The story opens with a description of the hike, the girls and Mrs. Johnstone stopping off at Marian and Theo’s farm:

[T]he woman brought out Coca-Colas and the man let them take the garden hose and spray themselves cool. They were grabbing the hose from each other and doing tricks, and Frances said that Mary Kaye said that Heather Bell was the worst one, the boldest, getting hold of the hose and shooting water on the rest of them in all the bad places. (130).

Later in the story, Marian recollects: “He [Theo] had to practically wrestle the hose away from them, and give them a few squirts of water to make them behave” (151). In “Talking Dirty: Alice Munro’s ‘Open Secrets’ and John Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men,” Ildikó de Papp Carrington glosses the passage as “sexually symbolic,” arguing: “Thus described, Theo’s active participation intensifies the possibility of hidden phallic connotations in the ‘wild’ horseplay. Is it only a summer game, or … are the girls and Theo acting out another secretly dirty parody of the hymn?” (598)

Carrington reads an oedipal connotation into Marian’s description of the scene. The hose is a phallic symbol; by grabbing it from the girls, Theo effectively participates in a sexualized ritual. As the proper bearer of the phallus, in this regard, the man might be said to put their girls in their (feminine, passive) place. Here a sexual reading intersects with and places under
Carrington goes on to imagine an entire solution to the mystery of Heather’s disappearance based, in part, on the suggestion of sexual symbolism:

Theo is excited by the hikers’ horseplay with the hose, goes off in his truck on Sunday, perhaps looking for the hikers, and accidentally comes upon Heather somewhere in the bush along the river… So Heather and Theo, his simple-minded head full of plans, meet somewhere at or near the falls… By pointing to the river and by pumping water on himself to mime a person plunging to the water curtain, Mr. Siddicup shows [Marian] the location, and by hitting himself, he shows her that Theo, trying to stroke and fondle Heather, has frightened her and accidentally killed her. She is the “little scared hen” that in a flash of intuition Maureen substitutes for the feathered hat. (603)

Carrington’s reading plays in to Munro’s construction of the story as a seemingly straightforward detective narrative. The critic’s performance of reading as, effectively, detective work, turns on the transparency of symbolism to interpretive understanding. Against this, we must ask: when is a hose just a hose? The point is not, on the contrary, that the hose is simply a hose, but that Carrington’s construction of it as more than one – a deduction that is entirely logical from a perspective of the hermeneutic certainty of a tradition of reading-as-detective work that dovetails with psychoanalysis’s investigations into femininity – leads her to over-read Munro’s story, to furnish an entire backstory complete with murderer, motive and crime scene.

This oversimplifies Munro’s complex meditation, through the genre of the detective story, on the relationship between sex and representation. In other words, it is the reading of hoses as phallic in the first place that makes them not for girls, and that therefore sets in motion the plot of the disappearance of the girl who plays too aggressively, is “unfeminine,” must be educated otherwise, to be a “lady,” absent to herself – a viable sexual object for a man like Theo Slater, or a man (in the case of Maureen) like Alvin Stephens. Again in The Second Sex, de Beauvoir describes the ambivalence of patriarchal discourse, which takes women’s resignation to their supposedly secondary status in relation to a husband and the trappings of domestic life as evidence of the inferiority of women. “But the fact is that her resignation
comes not from any predetermined inferiority: on the contrary, it is that which *gives rise* to all her insufficiencies; that resignation has its source in the adolescent girl’s past, in the society around her, and particularly in the future assigned to her” (329, my italics).

De Beauvoir’s remark suggests that cultural influences, including the culture of psychoanalysis, play a role in determining what then becomes retrospectively available to be read as “sexual difference.” Accordingly, analysis of the vicissitudes of growing up as a female or male-interpolated subject must include a reflexive critique of interpretive lenses such as psychoanalysis as knowledge-producing discourse. Munro’s stories in *Open Secrets* provoke this kind of inquiry, as they prompt readers to encounter the text as a projection of our frames of reference. In this, Munro’s loyalty to the short story form is key. Short stories eschew the suspect coherence of the longer form of the novel, its vision of a humanist hero who develops over time. Munro remarks: “I don’t see people develop and arrive somewhere. I just see people living in flashes” (Interview with Hancock 201, quoted in Weaver 140). Munro’s concern with continuity as something that we impose on our lives, with the ways in which we achieve a sense of continuity, and the ways in which it more prominently escapes us, expands in the stories in *Open Secrets* to take in the reader’s projection of a coherent world. Both “Open Secrets” and “The Jack Randa Hotel” (as well as other stories in the collection such as “The Albanian Virgin” and “Carried Away”) turn on a moment in which readers apprehend that the world we are reading about is not the one we thought it was, nor is our relationship to the story what it seemed to be. This characteristic moment in Munro, where what we thought was the world slips and reveals to us our own interpretive expectations, somehow deflated and yet enlarged, or transcended, both represents a perfection of the short story form, and is taken to new levels in her 1994 collection.17

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17 Naomi Morgenstern describes the way in which Munro’s “apparently realist fiction repeatedly and characteristically disrupts itself” as an emerging focus of criticism of her work (“The Baby or the Violin?” 91). She cites Coral Ann Howells, who identifies a principle of supplementarity in Munro’s work, in which the introduction of “an additional insight or detail… unsettles the carefully crafted narrative” (10). This principle according to Howells tends to characterize the endings of Munro’s earlier stories, but increasingly migrates to pervade or unsettle her increasingly flexible and indeterminate stories at every stage of their telling. Morgenstern links the quality of interruption in Munro’s stories to their ethical significance. She describes the way in which Munro’s “Menestheung” both guides and exceeds a reading of it as a psychological tale (74). A call to responsibility occasions a crisis of subjectivity for the main character; yet, Almeda Roth does not simply confuse herself with the other (to an outside objective observer), as the narrative also represents the characters in some ways as versions of each other. Other stories whose impact turns on the meaning of characters as
Munro’s concern with how sexual difference is inscribed in reading suggests the way in which, although interpretive regimes such as psychoanalysis refuse any naturalizing construction of sex as based in biology, yet the conceptualization of femininity in relation to masculinity – for example, in Freud (1924, 1925), as a reaction to a disappointed masculinity – carries forward an argument about women’s inferiority into the sphere of an infinitely self-replicating, historically invariant culture (Fletcher 43, Heath 57). This construction of sexual difference is, in turn, foundational to psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity which, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen argues, inherit a humanist model of the coherent or continuous individual (that figure whose personal development is enshrined in the narrative progressions of the bildungsroman). Borch-Jacobsen points out that the split subject of psychoanalysis is yet projected against a background of greater unity: if I am unknown to myself, yet the I that does not know is the same (my)self that is unknown (6). Thus psychoanalysis arguably carries forward into a modernist thematics of alienation the essential continuity of the humanist, ever-male hero. The goal of this hero is defined in relation to a “femininity” which is reciprocally constructed as signifier in/of the plot of male desire. Munro’s “Open discrete individuals include, in addition to “Open Secrets,” “The Jack Randa Hotel,” “The Albanian Virgin,” “The Bear Came Over the Mountain,” “Friend of My Youth,” and “Runaway,” as well as the autobiographical “What Do You Want to Know For?”

Borch-Jacobsen takes up Heidegger’s claim that the subject is, for the Moderns, “a subject of representation” (5). He then contends that the fact that there is representation in the unconscious suffices to institute the unconscious itself as a subject. This contradicts, in turn, the idea of a subject who is not present to itself, or is displaced in relation to an other knowing, thinking or desiring. In other words, the “other” subject, the unconscious, is accorded – in Borch-Jacobsen’s reading of psychoanalysis – all of the coherency that Freud denies to the ego. This unconsciousness or cleavage then is or becomes, in Freud, the subject: “The otherness labelled ‘unconscious’ is an intimate otherness” (6). This means that “The same subject does and does not have access to a given representation… In this sense, the cleavage or division of the subject that psychoanalysis keeps talking about is articulated against a backdrop of unity, a unitary subject” (6).

See, for example, Peter Brooks’ discussion of desire as narrative engine in Zola’s Nana, in Reading for the Plot. See also Munro’s engagement with the theme of mystery as a negotiation of sexual and textual desire, in her story “Carried Away.” In that story, the central character Louisa attracts the attention of her future husband Arthur Doud by presenting him “with a mystery, and following that up with the information that it would never be solved” (39). The “mystery” concerns Louisa’s interest in a man who died in Doud’s factory, whom Louisa should not have known but did from the correspondence that the man struck up with her while he was overseas during the war. Russell Brown writes:

It is the mystery of Louisa that can hold Arthur’s attention, that will keep him from leaving town just as the mystery novel holds its reader’s attention, keeps him or her from leaving its precincts. (But there’s one difference: in the mystery genre the reader is not usually willing to accept what Arthur here values, the fact that he has been presented with a mystery that will not permit of a solution.) (193)
Secrets,” on the other hand, makes remarkable this status of the feminine as signifier, the absence of the feminine term from the order of narrative emplotment.

Munro herself claims that her work is not consciously symbolic, though “Often people don’t believe that” (Interview with Horwood 129). In a commentary on her short story “Images,” she describes her anxiety at reading criticism of her work that asserted that a cellar symbolized death and burial:

Surely a roofed over cellar doesn’t mean any such thing, I thought, unless I want it to? Surely it’s not that simple? I wrote the story, didn’t I? If I hadn’t sat down and written the story he wouldn’t be able to talk about it, and come to all these interesting and perhaps profitable conclusions about Canadian Literature – well, he probably would have come to these conclusions all the same, but he would have had to dig up someone else’s story (I notice the choice of verb and never mind) to do it – so I get to say, don’t I, whether a house in the ground is death and burial or whether it is, of all unlikely things, a house in the ground?

Well the answer is no, I do not get to say, and I should have known that already. (Metcalf and Struthers 188)

In “Open Secrets,” I would argue that symbolism functions as a kind of red herring, provoking readers into what Stephen Mitchell describes, in the language of interactions between psychoanalysts and analysands, as enactment:

The analyst discovers himself a coactor in a passionate drama involving love and hate, sexuality and murder, intrusion and abandonment, victims and executioners. Whichever path he chooses, he falls into one of the patient’s predestined categories and is experienced by the patient in that way.

(Relational 295)20

In Munro’s story, reading according to a realist detective paradigm turns the girls’ game into a question of male desire – similarly to Theo’s own evident intrusion – and thus constructs

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20 In Partners in Thought, Donnel Stern remarks that enactments often concern the negotiation of the meanings of socially coded categories such as gender, race and sexuality (41).
the meaning of femininity as lack to the evident detriment of the character (Heather) who must symbolize it for the other female characters who survive her.

However, the way in which the story frames reading as central to the construction of sexual difference also takes it beyond its seeming conclusion in the tangle of women’s status as individuals in relation to a patriarchal order imagined as outside of the individual, prior to (because definitive of) the imaginative possibilities of self-making. In the story Maureen’s sexuality is infantilised – it is as an object that she becomes desirable to her post-stroke, newly disinhibited husband. “Sometimes she would pester him a little and he would say, “Now, Maureen. What’s all this about?” Or else he would tell her to grow up” (155). What is interesting about this is how Munro succeeds in rendering grotesque and extraordinarily unappealing a representation of femininity as sexual object that is normative and unremarkable within white Western patriarchy. In other words, it is the construction of femininity as sexual object that is an “open secret” in the story. The open secret is what cannot be the subject of the story – that which “would’ve been a whole other story” (129), as Frances says, if the hike had been rained out – namely, the marginalization of femininity as the guarantee of (one version of) social order.

In this regard the debasement of the wife character is of a piece with the exile of the daughter, Helena – “an unsettled single woman who came home seldom and got into arguments when she did” (138) – whose name recalls that of the story’s other missing daughter, Heather Bell. Likewise the names of the characters Maureen, Marian and Mary blend into one another. The characters’ indistinctness from one another, both within and across generational gaps – their indeterminacy at the level of differentiated subjectivity or characterological integrity – renders remarkable the global absence of femininity from its (or from the) story. Helena it would seem escapes, like Heather herself.

By going missing for all of the female characters who populate the story’s edges – Maureen “had been living in the house for eight years but she still felt that she got around it on fairly

21 In this regard, the story exhibits what Nathalie Foy describes of the collection as a whole, as its “celebratory” (147) engagement with narrative, a movement “toward respect for inspiration, for the endless possibilities of story, the resilience of narrative, and the magic of half perceived stories” (148).
narrow tracks, from one spot where she felt at home to another” (132) – the figure of Heather makes remarkable – or marks – the supposed missing-ness of femininity from its story. The story takes its seeming denial of opportunities to women for manifestation and makes it remarkable, gives it a story, and so imagines its own narrative transcendence by the very fact of its translation into a mode of presence. Rosalie Weaver signals this redemptive possibility of Munro’s “Open Secrets”: “Our communal power to recreate … the story of women’s lost identity can transform it from one of human failure into a story of human survival” (245).

In “The Political and Its Disavowals,” Zizek remarks the flip into subjectivity of the excluded “part of no part” of the social body as the characteristic gesture of political discourse:

What, for Ranciere, is politics proper? A phenomenon which, for the first time, appeared in Ancient Greece when the members of the demos (those with no firmly determined place in the hierarchical social edifice), not only demanded that their voice be heard against those in power, those who exerted social control… [E]ven more, they, the excluded, those with no fixed place within the social edifice, presented themselves as the representatives, the stand-ins, for the Whole of Society, for the true Universality (‘we – the “nothing”, not counted in the order – are the people, we are All against others who stand only for their particular privileged interest’). In short, political conflict designates the tension between the structured social body in which each part has its place, and ‘the part of no part’ which unsettles this order on account of the empty principle of universality. (Ticklish Subject 187-88)

It is as the conjunction of particular personhood with universal exclusion that Heather’s disappearance translates the supposed “lack” of femininity into a mode of presence and narrative representation. The story relates Heather’s disappearance from the point of view of the girls on the hike who go looking for her, or who would go looking for her if Mary Johnstone did not prohibit them from doing so. Instead, Heather’s disappearance is interspersed with Mary’s talk to the other girls “about boys and urges”; thus (dis)placed, it indexes the (missing) effects on the girls themselves of the talk itself:
“Anybody hiding round here and trying to play tricks is welcome! Come out now and no questions asked! Otherwise we will just have to get along without you!”

Then she launched into her talk, her Sunday-morning-of-the-hike sermon, without any qualms or worries. She kept going and going, asking a question every now and then, to make sure they were listening. The sun dried their shorts and Heather Bell did not come back. She did not appear out of the trees and still Miss Johnstone did not stop talking. She did not let go of them until Mr. Trowell drove into the camp in his truck, bringing the ice cream for lunch. (136, my emphasis)

Again, Heather’s absence from the talk – the spectre of Heather listening from the trees or from beyond the pale of the community constituted by the hikers – suggests the evacuation of femininity itself as the subject of the hike and talk as, effectively, a hostage situation: “There was more to follow, about the uniqueness and specialness of each of their lives, which led of course into what Mary Johnstone called “plain talk” about boys and urges. (This was where they did the faces…)” (158).

Heather’s disappearance would seem, on the one hand, to signify the effect on the girls of the talk advocating circumspection around “boys” and repression of “urges.” Yet the paradoxical slipperiness of symbolism in Munro, of the detail as standing-in by its absence for other meaning, takes as its subject the domain of representation itself. Heather’s disappearance is what it signifies as: a disturbance in the coherency of the visual field, our frame of reference on the story, its splintered representation in the various versions and opinions of Heather going missing, the interspersed stanzas of the ballad poem that Frances writes and Maureen will not listen to her read, the various registers and degrees of disappearance and the way in which they call up others, in other times, places, supplemented by stories of themselves which could almost be real:

Suppose you did see something? Not along the line of Jesus, but something? Maureen has had that happen. Sometimes when she is just going to sleep but not quite asleep, not dreaming yet, she has caught something. Or even in the daytime during what she thinks of as her normal life. She might catch herself
sitting on stone steps eating cherries and watching a man coming up the steps carrying a parcel. She has never seen those steps or that man, but for an instant they seem to be part of another life that she is leading, a life just as long and complicated and strange and dull as this one. And she isn’t surprised. It’s just a fluke, a speedily corrected error, that she knows about both lives at the same time. It seemed so ordinary, she thinks afterward. The cherries. The parcel. (158)

The story ends with a photographic image of Heather that marks her place within the town’s social maps:

Heather Bell will not be found. No body. No trace. She has blown away like ashes. Her displayed photograph will fade in public places. Its tight-lipped smile, bitten in one corner as if suppressing a disrespectful laugh, will seem to be connected with her disappearance rather than her mockery of the school photographer. There will always be a tiny suggestion, in that, of her own free will. (159)

Heather’s mockery is of the photographer; it is not a sign of resistance pertinent to the fact of her disappearance, her disappearance from the story, her disappearance as (or into) image, in the style of femininity’s production as its fantasmatic appearance to the male gaze. In this very lack, her mockery signifies as the trace of agency re-marking the moment of its (the subject’s) disappearance. In this way the story pieces together an image of femininity as fragmentation or lack in our visual field.

The image of femininity as missing from (the) story displaces the story’s conclusion onto another plot, a future for its protagonist Maureen. Thus the story closes not on the lack of the woman nor on her chimerial re-appearance as the sign of a newly transcendent order, but on the coincidence of “real life” with its translation into story:

Maureen is a young woman yet, though she doesn’t think so, and she has a life ahead of her. First, a death—that will come soon—then another marriage, new places and houses. In a kitchen hundreds and thousands of miles away, she’ll watch the soft skin form on the back of a wooden spoon and her memory will twitch, but it will not quite reveal to her this moment when she seems to be
looking into an open secret, something not startling until you think of trying to
tell it. (160)

The story wraps (its protagonist) up into its own narrative premises, the act of telling itself,
the startling ordinariness of telling its own representation of femininity as “not,” displaced
onto another plot for future reading.
Chapter 2  
Enactment or Unreliability? Form and Femininity in Alice Munro’s “The Jack Randa Hotel”

In chapter one on Alice Munro’s “Open Secrets,” I considered how that story is, in Munro’s words, not “about what [it] seem[s] to be about.” I argued that the story’s ostensible plot of a girl’s disappearance stands in for a meditation on the relationship between gender and narrative in Western white patriarchy – specifically, a relationship that excludes the feminine term. This elliptical focus of “Open Secrets” calls into question, I argued, the frames of reference through which readers approach the story and by which they constitute its world. As such, I considered that the story both invites a psychoanalytic reading in terms of gender as an aspect of narrative form, yet, in doing so, takes up the psychoanalytic narrative of sexual difference as an aspect of (or as one account of) a shared cultural inheritance that it itself (e.g. the story “Open Secrets”) also contributes to. In this way, the story functions as or makes possible a commentary on the narrative construction of masculinity and femininity within psychoanalysis.

In the present chapter, on “The Jack Randa Hotel,” I continue this discussion of Munro’s writing as a creative activity of myth-making that at once engages the self-limiting realisms of Western white patriarchy’s gendered codes, and that yet, in doing so, takes these codes beyond their end-stopped calcification in and as theory’s self-replicating truths. “The Jack Randa Hotel” is the story – again only ostensibly – of a middle aged woman named Gail, recently out of a relationship with a man named Will who has subsequently de-camped to Australia with a new, much younger girlfriend. Initially remaining in the town of Walley where she owns a clothing store and cares for Will’s ailing mother, Cleata, Gail finds one day a letter addressed to Cleata in Will’s handwriting. She takes the letter with its return address,

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22 In other words, psychoanalysis constructs femininity as the goal or narrative endpoint of heterosexual male desire. In describing the positioning of femininity within Western patriarchal narrative as a portion of plot-space, a position “figuring the (achieved) movement of the narrative toward that space” (140), Teresa de Lauretis considers that femininity is subordinated to or articulated in terms of a narrative of masculine subject-formation such as that described by psychoanalysis (the little boy’s exchange of his first [oedipal] object, the mother, under the threat of castration, for the promise that he in future will obtain – like his father – a woman “of his own”).
gets on a plane to Brisbane and embarks on an adventure of subterfuge and mistaken identity. The night before her departure, Gail takes on a disguise, cutting off and dyeing her hair, putting on sunglasses and “a dress of a kind she would never usually wear” (141). She also linguistically “disguises” herself upon arrival in Brisbane when she goes to Will’s house and finds a second letter in his mailbox, addressed to a third woman named Mrs. Thornaby and written by Will. The latter woman has recently died, Gail discovers from the post office’s stamp (“Return to Sender: Died Sept. 13” [171]). Gail pockets the second letter and moves into Mrs. Thornaby’s vacated apartment. Disguised as the absent, deceased addressee, she writes back to Will.

“The Jack Randa Hotel” takes up a theme of disguise that Munro explores as a liberating potentiality for women as early as 1982, in *The Moons of Jupiter*. In “Chaddeleys and Flemings,” a mother entertains her three sisters by dressing up in her husband’s clothes and standing on her head. Smaro Kamboureli argues that the mother constitutes herself as a subject in this act by assuming the position of the performer, taking back her body from the proliferation of its images within patriarchal discourse through a gesture in which she disappears momentarily as herself, in order to then re-emerge wearing her husband’s clothes, rather than putting her own on for a husband’s gaze, so to speak (34). The married woman joins her unmarried sisters who were, the narrator observes, “[a]udience and performers for each other … every waking moment” (4). In this regard the wife/mother’s act of disguise turns the law on its head (Kamboureli 34), not only by up-ending herself in the father’s clothes but also by constituting herself as subject of desire, or of the gaze – a look back, in this case, at her own “antic disposition” (*Hamlet* I. v. 174).

Both the first and second parts of “Chaddeleys and Flemings” anticipate the narrative structure of possibility and reversal that forms the emotional center of “The Jack Randa Hotel,” together with “Open Secrets.” In the conclusion to “Chaddeleys and Flemings: 1. Connection,” the narrator, now an adult, receives one of her aunts in her well-appointed Vancouver home. The story weaves itself into a shape of the narrator’s part embarrassment by her aunt and greater chagrin at her husband whose privileged and prejudicial eye scorns the family visitor. The narrator “wish[es] I had met her somewhere else; I wish I had
appreciated her differently” (14). Several pages later, however, and in spite of a Pyrex plate thrown at the husband’s head, we learn that “I was dishonest when I said that I wished we had met elsewhere, that I wished I had appreciated her, when I implied that Richard’s judgments were all that stood in the way” (16). The narrator’s own class pretensions also constrict her welcome. Moreover, she considers, her aunt might “rather be snubbed by a rich relative than welcomed by a poor one” (16).

In the following story, “Chaddeleys and Flemings: 2. The Stone in the Field,” the narrator turns to her father’s sisters, their closed-lipped, shut-in lifestyle forming a contrast to her mother’s sisters’ disinhibition, sense of fun and relative worldliness. Like the maternal aunts, the Flemings are also “[m]aiden ladies” (1). The story, however, entertains the possibility of a suitor for one of the sisters in a man who for several years set up a cabin on the edge of the family property.23 As in the previous story, however, this one closes up its narrative speculations by returning us to the constructed nature of its account, to fiction as telling and re-telling, as perspective:

If I had been younger, I would have figured out a story. I would have insisted on Mr. Black’s being in love with one of my aunts, and on one of them – not necessarily the one he was in love with – being in love with him. I would have wished him to confide in them, in one of them, his secret, his reason for living in a shack in Huron County, far from home… Now I no longer believe that people’s secrets are defined and communicable, or their feelings full-blown and easy to recognize… Now I can only say, my father’s sisters scrubbed the floor with lye, they stoked the oats and milked the cows by hand. (35)

The narrator is interested in Mr. Black and the manner of what she learns was his early death because of what he represents for the possibility of her aunts’ sexuality – for the possibility of a story that would take them, one of them, and by implication the others with her, beyond the dreary, isolated farm and its truncated social and vocational opportunities. This possibility does not come to fruition, as Mr. Black is buried – in a classic moment of

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23 Among other things, the compromised economic position of a man living in a “shack” (35) on the sisters’ father’s property parallels the sisters’ own more hidden class-coded vulnerability as daughters within the tyranny of the patriarchal family. The muted representation of this vulnerability in the women’s taciturn demeanours speaks in place of a more elaborate or explicit description.
Munro’s irony – under a heavy boulder, as if in a sign of the father’s unwillingness to part with his daughters, to let them grow up. However, the possibility that a love affair might have developed, that there might have been “a whole other story” as Frances puts it in “Open Secrets” – a possibility suggested by the very need to keep a dead man under many pounds of Pre-Cambrian rock as if he might spring forth otherwise in new vitality – suggests a trace of the feminine in the very outline of its absence, in the curtailing of possibilities for women in the generation before Munro’s narrator’s own. This curtailing of possibility can only lead to or invite its imaginative translation into a mode of presence. At the same time, however, the story suggests a limit to such a recuperative or restorative vision in the narrator’s inability to locate the boulder marking the dead man’s grave when she visits, trying to find it. In the story’s only moment of sustained pathos for the characters, or for their past newly erased, the narrator concludes: “But the Boulder is gone, Mount Hebron is cut down for gravel, and the life buried here is one you have to think twice about regretting” (35). In a sense the regret for a life never lived (both the sisters’ and Mr. Black’s) cancels out regret for lives ended, suggesting a greater – muted, curtailed – tragedy, the incipient emptiness of its forms.

This early story pair from *The Moons of Jupiter* anticipates what many readers (as well as Munro herself) describe as the formal departure represented by Munro’s stories in *Open Secrets*.²⁴ That is, in both the descriptive element of the mother disappearing inside the clothes in order to re-emerge as her own performance of herself, and in the larger narrative structure of “Chaddeleys and Flemings” of the romantic plot (of the aunt’s love) that was not – a story that, thus evacuated, forms the outline of its protagonist’s (now the niece’s) own generational struggle for self-definition out of the self-limiting abortive past and the possibility of what it might have been – “Chaddeleys and Flemings” suggests the growing interest that *Open Secrets* crystallizes in what might have happened, rather than what did, and in the relationship between imaginative possibility and femininity as a creative act of its own actualization.

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²⁴ See Munro’s interviews with Jeanne McCulloch and Mona Simpson (*The Paris Review*) and Pleuke Boyce and Ron Smith (*Meanjin*).
In other words, in both these earlier stories and in a more substantial sense in “Open Secrets” and “The Jack Randa Hotel,” I am suggesting that Munro considers female desire as related to or as emerging somehow in the translation-into-story of its own evacuation from the structured order of masculine “reality” – a telling which contests the contingent and unequal premises of this reality which is rendered self-strange. In *Open Secrets*, depictions of characters link up the narrative of their individual striving with its translation-into-story, as a greater mythic coincidence of self with its own coming-into-being (e.g. as thus heroic). This everyday heroism of especially Munro’s female characters is directly linked to the limitations and the constraints with which they contend and to the translation-into-story of their griefs or sometimes their failure to transcend these limitations – to the possibility of speaking one’s own containment within or as the measure of limiting cultural codes, and thus making these codes self-different, making them speak for oneself, the story of their own contingent emergence.25

In “The Jack Randa Hotel,” what was a simple act of disguise in “Chaddeleys and Flemings” becomes the occasion or the frame for the larger story itself. The story turns on the enigma of Gail’s desire. What does she want? Does she travel halfway around the world, to Australia, and take on another woman’s identity in order to get back into her lover’s affections? Is she doing it for the fun of it, for the voice her letter-writing affords her? For the purposes of revenge? What is the connection of Gail’s disguise to Cleata, Will’s mother, Gail’s stepping in to the identity of Catherine Thornaby as a kind of stepping into the role of the mother? A role taken on in order to frustrate her former lover, to exchange the position of rejected for that of rejecting party in a plot of oedipal desire? When she gets what she seemingly wants, the story tells us – a reunion with Will – Gail no longer wants it. Who, moreover, is the story’s true lost object, if Cleata dies while Gail is distracted chasing after Will? What is the

25 This sense of a link between femininity and writing in Munro’s work is related to what critics describe as her concern with the relationship between possibility and limitation. Ulrica Skagert describes the interplay between limitation and the emergence of possibility through subjection to it, rather than around or in spite of it, in Munro’s writing. And Mark Levene considers moments in Munro’s stories in which the “freedoms,” or struggle, of author and characters coincide – the work of writing with the character’s “burden … to breathe rather than suffocate within the inherited story by modifying and altering its deterministic nature” (“Free” 146). Munro’s stories explore the space within limiting received narratives as it emerges from the confrontation of the attempt to transcend with the writing of the effort (and sometimes the failure) to do so that is constantly being handed back to the characters as their own specific alchemy.
role of class, the relationship of Gail’s initial sense of not belonging in the elevated company of Will and Cleata, their “really civilized” habits (164), to her later spoof of Catherine Thornaby as the “true, armigerous” offspring entitled – unlike Will – to the family patronym (173)? What is the relationship of class to gender in the story, to Gail’s shifting of her position within the concluded romance plot as a repetition of this plot with herself in charge of its telling? The relationship of Will living with his mother into middle age to the “real [oedipal?] scene” (168) that is hidden from Gail in Australia?

In the psychoanalytic narrative, the prohibition on incest supposedly paves the way for the development in the child of a sense of reality, of the other as existing independently of one’s thought.26 Gail, on the other hand, in refusing to accept the reality that her relationship is over, in taking on the disguise, enters into a world in which reality and fantasy are not clearly differentiated (for example, she imagines a letter in Will’s mailbox in Brisbane only for this plot detail to then materialize in/as narrative “reality”).27 Gail would seem to have bypassed the reality principle, or to be in a quasi-hallucinatory state; yet the confusion of fantasy with reality that Gail’s disguise seemingly entails is dramatized at the level of the narrative structure and constitutes our frame of reference on the storyworld. There is no external interpretive position possible on a narrative in which Gail’s disguise, in a sense, acts out the position of femininity within patriarchal narrative space as self-difference or disavowal of agency and desire, of the position of the narrator.28 Although “The Jack Randa Hotel” is a

26 Bruce Fink describes this process as it is understood in psychoanalysis in the case of boys. The boy supposedly disavows, initially, the mother’s lack by identifying himself with it (“I am what she lacks; she lacks nothing because I am it”). Here lack does not yet exist. When the mother’s desire is named as something beyond the child, it comes into being as a word or term that “can be linked up with other words, joked about, and so on” (52) – a term thus separate from the child who may now turn towards the world and the attempt to obtain for himself “what [the mother’s desire] points to, connotes as desirable, as phallic.” The little girl, however, in this narrative is left with no obvious way to differentiate herself from so-called closeness with the mother (Doane 22-23). Nor does the psychoanalytic account give a sense that it is necessary for her to so differentiate herself or establish her identity. This prerogative is indeed geared towards the masculine subject as that subject’s right or developmental journey – a double standard which mirrors the differential value placed upon masculinity and femininity within patriarchal discourse.

27 Gail also mislabels words – Jack Randa for jacaranda – or hears them in a self-referential way. When she asks a young man about “those birds I see everywhere?” (179), he responds, “‘Galah birds’ … making it sound something like her childhood name” (179). The detail evokes the madness of Septimus in Mrs. Dalloway, who hears the birds in Regent’s Park singing in Greek (31).

28 I.e., one reading of Gail’s disguise is as a form of melancholy or feminine masquerade. Through disguising herself, Gail exchanges the wish to be loved as herself (or indeed the claim to having a self) for the possibility of retaining the love tie by pretending to be the object of her lover’s desire. Thus she exchanges her own “will” or desire for the other, her partner Will. For various reasons, I will suggest that a reading of the story in terms of
third person narrative, I will suggest that the story’s refusal of a distanced interpretive perspective on its unfolding raises interesting implications for the debate in narrative theory around unreliable narration and the concept of the implied author as implying, specifically, a privileged vantage point on the construction of textual meaning. This vantage point, like the psychoanalytic concept of transference, reciprocally constructs or grounds attributions of unreliability (at least, according to rhetorical narratology), an assessment which constitutes a performance of power (according to the cognitive critique) as the measure of its own claim to supposedly objective, because general, validity.

Munro’s story offers a way of opening up this debate through its refusal of a privileged vantage point on Gail’s supposed unreliability, which is bound up with narrative structures that deny women the role of subject. Gail’s disguise, in its impenetrability, its irreducibility to a psychoanalytic interpretation that would precede and shore up a reading subject, in the way in which literal and allegorical readings intersect in the story, neither of them yielding up the “whole story” or a final meaning, implicates the reader in enacting gendered codes, in the production of culture and its discontents. I will suggest that a kind of interpretive clarity emerges, if at all, only in relation to becoming entangled in the story’s – in Gail’s – tricks, and reading our own participation in hegemonic structures which we may seek to contest.

In psychoanalytic terms, the story undertakes a kind of narrative exposition of the question: what does a woman want? It does so by exploring not so much this question as it is posed but the terms in which it is posed, namely as constituting a puzzle for men.29 The plot of deferral of (masculine) desire displaces, at least at first, Gail out of its sights: she is exchanged by Will for Sandy as the “alien and delightful” (167) object. In this regard the story begins at the feminine masquerade is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for its interpretation. The story rather takes as its focus the underlying premises of the cultural narrative of feminine masquerade. I take up the psychoanalytic concept of feminine masquerade in further detail in chapter 3. See footnote 38, this chapter, for an alternate, relational account of female sexual development as it intersects with the gendering of agency and desire within Western white patriarchy.

29 Shoshana Felman quotes Freud’s famous letter to Marie Bonaparte: “The great question that has never been answered and which I have not been able to answer … is ‘What does a woman want?’” Felman asks: “What might it mean … for a woman to reclaim (reread, rewrite, appropriate) Freud’s question? … Can literature in turn claim the question as its own specific question, and consequently be reclaimed by it? Can psychoanalysis? It is in the power of the question to engender, through the literary or the psychoanalytic work, a woman’s voice as its speaking subject?” (What 2-3)
end, at least as far as Gail is concerned. It then *repeats* the plot of seduction, reinstating Gail at the center of Will’s transference – in order to then shift Gail’s position within its unfolding as (incipient) author rather than (discarded) object.\(^{30}\) In this respect Gail’s disguise is more or less obscurely about writing, or about gender as a question of narrative – Gail calling to mind a librarian when she thinks of Mrs. Thornaby; Gail’s disguise primarily consisting in the writing of letters as another woman (for which task she finds a newly discovered aptitude and a “fine nasty style” [178]). In an interview Munro describes her appreciation of women writers from the Southern U.S. such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, Katherine Ann Porter, and Carson McCullers. She then remarks:

> MUNRO: I knew there was something about the great writers I felt shut out from, but I didn’t know quite what it was. I was terribly disturbed when I first read D.H. Lawrence. I was often disturbed by writers’ views of female sexuality.

> INTERVIEWER: Can you put your finger on what it was that disturbed you?

> MUNRO: It was: how can I be a writer when I’m the object of other writers?

\(^{30}\) As I will argue, the story suggests that Gail’s initial failure to retain her partner’s interest is in direct relation to her refusal to take up her socially prescribed “feminine” role as object within the story of the other.
The night before she left, she did a transformation on herself. She cut off her heavy reddish-gray hair and put a dark-brown rinse on what was left of it. … She picked out from her shop – even though the contents no longer belonged to her – a dress of a kind she would never usually wear, a jacket-dress of dark-blue linen-look polyester with lightning stripes of red and yellow. … What sort of woman did she think she was making herself into? The sort that a woman like Phyllis would play bridge with? If so, she has got it wrong. She has come out looking like somebody who has spent most of her life in uniform, at some worthy, poorly paid job (perhaps in a hospital cafeteria?), and now has spent too much money for a dashing dress that will turn out to be inappropriate and uncomfortable, on the holiday of her life.

That doesn’t matter. It is a disguise. (169)

Gail’s disguise is at the intersection of temporal and spatial dislocations in “The Jack Randa Hotel.” The narration shifts into the present tense with its description, marking off the concluded romance plot from the dreamlike present in which Gail is the agent of her action, as another (“Would anybody know Gail? With her dark glass and her unlikely hair, she feels so altered as to be invisible” [170]). The disguise marks a spatial boundary in that Gail wears it on the plane to Australia. In adopting it, moreover, Gail both de-sexes herself (“What sort of a woman did she think she was making herself into?”) and de-classes herself, dressing up as a woman in a working class role, trying to look higher class (“linen-look polyester”).31 With the disguise Gail bottoms out of gendered class codes and an economy of exchange that binds women to their desirability in the eyes of men. Through this act she emerges as the protagonist of her story. However, the coordinates of the world to which this re-emergence refers are correspondingly thrown into doubt. It is this doubt and its connection to the reader’s act of interpretation that I trace, in what follows, and which, I argue, constitutes the motive force of the disguised story’s turn out of its codes.

31 I am indebted to discussions with Mary Nyquist, my supervisor, for numerous ideas in this chapter, including the importance of maternal transference and its placement under erasure in the story, the idea of Gail’s disguise as an act of de-classing and de-sexing herself, and the item of narrative time towards the end of the story, by which the reader’s interpretive activity becomes revealed as bound up with the story’s own representation of feminine devaluation.
The trope of the disguise as it features in the narrative as a dislocation of story, of what I will suggest is our own perspective on the text, cannot be contained through any reference to or discourse of the motivation or desire of singular characters, de-situated from their environ (an environ which includes, I will argue, the interpretive frame within which readers constitute the text). If the disguise parallels and casts into an external form the hysterical role that has been Gail’s in the concluded romance plot, the motivation for becoming other than oneself cannot be traced back to Gail herself. Rather, motivation seems to be spread out over the relationships, or more precisely, limitations on the possibility for relationality, described. The available roles for female characters within the narrative preclude being a subject of it, as evidenced by Phyllis—the female half of a couple beside whom Gail sits on the plane to Australia—who, going along to cheer on the sidelines of her husband’s golf game, would nevertheless not recognize this new Gail as a companion (“What sort of woman did she think she was making herself into? The sort that a woman like Phyllis would play bridge with? If so, she has got it wrong”). She has got it wrong; Gail cannot be a subject of narrative (desire, work) within this discursive milieu without becoming not herself, not a woman. Yet, be(com)ing other than oneself is the definition of disguise. This coding of femininity as disguise, a performance of castration (Montrelay) or foreclosure of stories between and about women, is contagious. We cannot read ourselves outside of the dynamic by reference to an oedipal thematics or unconscious life of the characters which we can stand outside of.

Why not?

On the one hand, as I have suggested, Gail’s disguise seems to be a “perverse” solution to rejection, a melancholic refusal of a refusal, as Judith Butler describes Lacan’s theory of feminine masquerade (Gender Trouble 50): Gail abandons her (gender, class) identity rather than accept the loss of the object. Yet the concept of perversion also designates actions that

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32 E.g., I suggest that Munro represents an hysterical femininity in Gail’s character as a specific instantiation in the individual of a larger hysterical cultural process – here condensed as the frame of a particular romance. Gail and Will’s romance is hysterizcized in the sense that I have been arguing that she responds to her lover’s rejection with disguise or self-rejection – that stance of masquerade which is normative femininity within the psychoanalytic narrative.
deviate from a social structure regulating who can do or say what, when, and where. Gail is “out of character”; Mrs. Thornaby has a voice and a vocation at the price of not being real, not being Gail. In *Story Logic*, David Herman describes storyworlds in a similar sense as mental models for making social meaning: “storyworlds [are] mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which readers relocate—or make a deictic shift—as they work to comprehend a narrative” (*Story Logic* 9). Storyworlds imply rules governing what can appear as a legitimate action and who can be its subject. This sets up what may be the characteristic form of literary action as a transgression of these rules:

An action becomes perceptible and salient only because of the acting situation, or “opportunity for action,” in which it unfolds, and that consists of the state in which the world would have been had it not been for the action at issue (von Wright 1966: 123-24). Hamlet’s stabbing of Polonius takes on significance when it is contrasted with the way the world would have been had he not slain the officious advisor. (Herman, *Story Logic* 14)

In “The Jack Randa Hotel,” the perverse solution of the disguise changes the storyworld that we are reading about. This means that we as readers need to relocate ourselves and our reading in relation to this shift. This relocation involves us in focalizing ourselves as interpreters of the narrative.

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In “The Jack Randa Hotel,” readers are introduced into a storyworld in which masculine and feminine are coded in terms of relationships between subject and object: relationships

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33 See Dollimore 1990 for a reading of the etymology of “perversion” as referring, before it acquired its sexological significance in the 19th century, to a turning away from a “path, destiny or objective” that was “understood as natural or right – right because natural” (3). Thus perversion was often used to define power relations between individuals across socially coded categories according to a discourse of natural law. For example, Dollimore cites Hobbes from 1622: “[for] Women to govern men … [and] slaves freemen … [are] total violations and perversion of the laws of nature and nations” (4).

34 In this respect, perversion obliquely constitutes the storyworld by virtue of its deviation.

35 See also Iser, who argues that literature responds to thought systems or socially produced models for organizing reality, which supply a set of norms that claim universal validity, but in doing so, privilege certain possibilities at the expense of others (71). Literature applies itself to the deficiencies of the given thought system. It does not directly deviate from a given thought system, but causes readers to formulate these deficiencies by making associations among various textual inconsistencies (70-75, 182-83, in Mailloux 54).
between women are not a subject for narrative; women gather to tell stories about men who have left but these stories lack cultural authority, unlike Will’s work at the CBC and NFB. Wives are dissatisfied with apologetic husbands (135), a trip to New Orleans with a girlfriend being the preferred vacation that the representative “wife” character on the plane gives up to accompany her husband on his golf trip. This split of femininity with the role of subject concerns gender as a category organizing divisions of labour (Sedgwick 4). The available roles for women involve watching men do things; Phyllis plays the role of “the wife going along to watch and cheer and have fun” (161); later, Sandy (“one of those long-legged, short-haired, energetic, and boyishly attractive girls. Women.” [161]) arrives to “see how drama was being taught in Canadian schools” (167). The descriptions construct female characters in a conflict between work and gender roles. Gail is alienated from her work by Will; she “used to call the clothes she made “handcrafted,” until Will made her embarrassed about that description” (168). Conversely, she imagines that she “had the upper hand” in their relationship until “they did so much work on the cottage by the river and it turned out that she was better at that kind of work than he was” (167-68).

Readers are thus located within a storyworld that encourages us to read Gail’s will as enmeshed with Will(’s). This assumption is consistent with details about Gail’s relationship: when she initially discovers that Will is cheating on and about to leave her, her response is absurd: “‘You mean it’s not me?’ Gail said. ‘You mean I’m not the trouble?’ She was giddy with relief. She got into a bold and boisterous mood and bewildered Will into going to bed with her” (168, my italics). Gail’s lack of anger suggests the way in which her self-interest is entirely bound up with concern about her adequacy as determined by the other’s assessment. Gail’s own disavowed will is visible only indirectly, through the punning grammar, in which her will is contained in the be-wildering of Will. As a kind of absent character, diverted from her own aims, Gail is already living in a mode of disguise without knowing it. Carrying this argument further, by adopting a disguise “for real” (“That doesn’t matter. It is a disguise” [169]), Gail becomes who she already is. The confusion of activity and passivity in this respect plays out at the level of the story’s dual plot, in which Gail is without a will in both cases: without agency and without a Will (name of her lover).
On the one hand, then, the disguise seems to provide a means of self-expression (Howells, *Alice Munro* 131). Gail finds a “fine nasty style” (178) in the voice of the other woman, and describes herself in the guise of Mrs. Thornaby as “a fashion buyer for a large store” (177), an occupation that resembles Gail’s own work as a clothing designer, with the difference that Mrs. Thornaby assumes a position of cultural authority on account of her work: “I know the world probably as well as you do.” Gail also reverses the class connotations of her earlier relationship with Will: Mrs. Thornaby can claim direct descent from the “noble” Thornabys, which, she assumes, Will cannot. Thus, one reading of the disguise is that it subverts the dialectic of masculine subject and feminine object. By actively producing herself as a spectacle, Gail carves out a position for herself as a subject of work, cultural authority and narrative.

However, such a reading creates as many problems as it resolves. Reading Gail’s disguise as resisting gendered codes reproduces a heterosexist fixation of narrative desire around a masculine libido, merely substituting the imperative of escape from, for the ideal of fulfillment within, the heterosexual romance plot. To read the disguise as transcending the gendered significance of narrative activity, or polarization of gender meanings in terms of subject and object positions, is to posit an ideal reader and an agency behind the disguise engineering this experience (for the reader? For the character?). Such an agency cannot be separated out from Gail herself. If disguise subverts the distinction between Gail as a character in the story and Gail as an actor in her own life, it elides the distinction between our activity as interpreters of her motivations (and behind these, the motivations of the implied author) and Gail’s activity as the author of herself-as-Mrs.-Thornaby, and author of the other woman’s letters.

Instead, other details and symmetries suggest that disguise cannot be understood as a dualistic relationship between masculine subject and feminine object/emerging subject, because it embodies a hidden triangular relationship between these positions and the third figure of the mother. Gail takes on the disguise by intercepting a letter to a dead woman, Mrs. Thornaby, and taking over the latter’s identity and home – an act that echoes the illness of Will’s mother Cleata, whom Will, Gail and the narrative leave dying back home in Walley.
What is the relation of this triangle to its oedipal cousin? Of Gail to the mother? Of the mother’s death to reading? The information that Cleata has died is immediately followed by the collapse of the disguise:

There is a knock at the door… It is the manager calling her false name… “I just wanted to tell you I had somebody here asking questions. He asked me about Miss Thornaby and I said, Oh, she’s dead. …”


dear Mrs. Thornaby,

It has come to my attention that you are dead. (182-83)

Cleata dies while readers are distracted by Gail’s “journey and her deceits” (189), by reading the disguise according to the (bourgeois, heterosexist) tropes of the romance plot in which female characters have the role of disgruntled and marginal objectors to masculine narrative activity.

Gail’s retrieval of a letter to a dead woman becomes the occasion for her assumption of a speaking position. If Will leaves Gail and Cleata at the same time, his relationship with Gail also begins when he returns to live with his mother after being “gone for years, into his own life” (165). The reference to time away from the mother and prior to Gail codes his relationship with Gail, itself in the past tense of the narrative that we are reading, as not a subject for narrative. Will disavows dependency on Gail and the mother by leaving; in a sense he can only be enmeshed (living with his mother as an adult) or independent, without attachment needs (not in love with Gail).

Will’s relationship with Sandy, who could be his daughter, arguably connotes a denial of the mother, in that he reproduces himself by himself. Having done so, he then tries to set the mother up in another woman, Mrs. Thornaby. In the guise of Mrs. Thornaby, Gail refuses to be the prop for Will’s disavowal: “You may be looking for another mother here, but that hardly obliges me to be one” (177). This seems to short-circuit the association of men with independence and women with attachment needs, by revealing Will’s denial of the mother to be a denial of the latter. Yet, the murder of the mother in fantasy becomes a textual reality, and it is Gail as well as Will who has abandoned her. These symmetrical relationships
suggest that the characters are not differentiated from one another, but rather reflect versions of one another, in a narrative of essentially perverse or patriarchal relations. Each character’s failure to achieve a separate center outside of the other sets up a form of relating in which female characters appear as lacking in relation to male characters who are relationally constructed as independent.

The destruction of the mother in fantasy followed by the attempt to revive her evokes the conflicts that D.W. Winnicott and Jessica Benjamin describe as the basis for love and a sense of reality in children. The child who destroys the mother in fantasy also panics lest the action take away the one who is capable of giving meaning to his or her expression of self. When the child discovers that the mother has survived the attack, he or she acquires a sense of the mother as existing outside of fantasy (Benjamin, Bonds 38). This facilitates an understanding of the interdependency of assertion and attachment needs, which Winnicott describes as a transition from object relating to object usage (“The Use of an Object”). If the mother cannot set limits to the child’s omnipotence or survive her destruction by the child, the child continues to see aggression and attachment in polarized terms as omnipotence and self-repudiation, and comes to associate the mother – and later, women – with the latter. Benjamin calls this a false differentiation, in which the individual either denies attachment needs (more usual for boys) or aggression (more usual for girls) (83). Female children are left without an obvious way to assert their own difference: “To the extent that the mother has sacrificed her own independence, the girl’s attempt at independence would represent an assertion of power for which she has no basis in identification” (79). A false differentiation takes place, in which the individual either denies the need for others or denies the needs of the self. This has two effects: an association of femininity with self-effacement gets passed down, and where female agency/desire appears, it is not recognizable.

The above dynamic cannot be represented by a psychological realism in which integrated conscious or unconscious motivations can be traced back to singular characters; what is at stake is instead the relation between representation and subjectivity (or subjective agency). The object (external world) does not exist outside of the pre-subject’s assertion/aggression. Instead, realist codes, which give the illusion of a 1-1 correspondence between a pre-
established, neutral reality and the represented storyworld, are co-extensive with the
gendered dynamic set up by the false differentiation that Benjamin describes. These codes
are also consistent with a classical psychoanalytic description of desire as oriented around a
masculine term. For example, in Lacan, the father exercises castration on the body of the
mother, setting up heterosexual relations in which the boy wishes to have the phallus, and the
girl to be it.36

Gail’s enmeshment with Will is similar to the developmental accommodation that Benjamin
describes as “ideal love,” a vicarious substitute for one’s own agency.37 Yet, such a relation
concerns a larger relationship of non-coincidence between self-assertion and an interpretive
context in which it deviates from a gendered norm of behaviour. Within the storyworld, the
motivation of female characters only signifies in relation to male characters. Towards the
beginning of the story, the community of women who fill Gail’s clothing shop after Will’s
departure breaks into an “underground quarrel” over the revelation that one of their group
placed an ad in the Personal Column (163). The backgrounding of relationships between
women, and thus of the possibility of female ego-ideals, is also signalled thematically by
Gail’s paradoxical flight from Walley and Cleata’s company without a sentence of
explanation. The descriptions suggest the way in which culture precedes and produces desire.
If readers as consumers of culture are likewise primed by conventions that we are not aware
of, it is not clear how to separate these out from a reliable viewing position. The only reliable
perspective that readers can gain is one of our own embeddedness in culturally selective
attentional habits. I will suggest at length that the story’s evident devaluation (or
representation of Gail’s devaluation) of relationships between women speaks to a broader
cultural inheritance involving female readers and textual images of femininity. Munro takes

36 Derek Hook stresses that for Lacan, castration is an effect of the entry into language (the substitution of the
word for the loss of the thing), and in that sense affects all subjects equally (69). However, when Lacan
describes the father as intervening between the mother and the child, the father’s “No” is directed not only
towards the child but also towards the mother who identifies the child as her phallus. Hook writes, “One of the
functions of the father, it seems, is to enforce a certain distance between the mother and the phallic object” (74).
In this respect, the master signifier of the phallus determines gendered subject-positions according to the
postures of being and having.

37 According to Benjamin, when the girl’s identificatory love of the father is thwarted rather than recognized in
childhood, it becomes associated with self-abasement. Later opportunities for assertion and recognition often do
not suffice to undo this tendency; instead identificatory love re-emerges as ideal love, a “perversion of
identification” that “takes the passive form of accepting the other’s will and desire as one’s own agency” (Bonds
122).
up this topic through the way in which the story prompts readers to make an interpretive error, one which resonates with Gail’s own. In this way, Gail’s “will” as enmeshed with “Will” becomes framed as the reader’s mistake, and therefore as fictional. When this loss of perspective becomes the reader’s own, it acquires an imaginative reality. This emergent perspective shifts the parameters of the storyworld or, what comes to mean the same thing, the reader’s relation to it, to what counts as real.

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In the apartment where she lives impersonating Mrs. Thornaby, Gail meets a couple of men, an older man who eventually dies and a younger man whom Gail initially assumes is his son, before deciding that the two are lovers. When Gail later comes upon the older man after he has had a stroke and his companion is nowhere to be found, the man grabs Gail’s hand and she “wonders if she is impersonating the red-haired young man, or some other young man, or a woman, or even his mother” (186). The enchantment of the man clutching Gail instead of an unknown other, so that she experiences being needed as a substitution, is somehow connected to her dis-enchantment with Will.

Yet it is not enough to conclude that the experience symbolizes Gail’s own predicament, thus releasing her from it (Howells, *Alice Munro* 132). It is unclear whether the story’s concluding action actually happens or whether it takes place only in Gail’s imagination. This is a detail that Martin and Ober, in their analysis of the story, do not pick up on, instead reading Will’s appearance at the door as an unambiguously real event. In this regard, they conclude that the story heralds a reunion of the estranged lovers and a “happy wedding” (47), in the tradition of comedy. I argue that this level of certainty is not supported by the text. Rather, the claim to it represents an enactment of the kind of culturally selective reading habit that the story prompts readers to encounter themselves as bringing to the text – a perspective that (thus encountered) is opened up, at least within the bounds of the story’s plausible world, for creative transformation.38

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38 Howell’s reading of this scene on the other hand signals more of the complexity of the reader’s involvement in the construction of textual meaning that I am trying to bring out. On the one hand, she considers that the story
After the coincidence in which Gail sees Will at the moment of the man’s death, she returns to her apartment to find a note from Will:

> When she gets back from the hospital, she finds the note that she is expecting.

> Gail. I know it’s you.

> HURRY. HURRY. Her rent is paid. She must leave a note for the manager. She must take the money out of the bank, get herself to the airport, find a flight. Her clothes can stay behind—her humble pale-print dresses, her floppy hat. The last library book can remain on the table under the sagebrush picture. It can remain there, accumulating fines.

> Otherwise, what will happen?

> What she has surely wanted. What she is suddenly, as surely, driven to escape.

> GAIL, I KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE! I know you’re there on the other side of the door.

> Gail! Galya!

> Talk to me, Gail. Answer me. I know you’re there.

> I can hear you. I can hear your heart beating through the keyhole and your stomach rumbling and your brain jumping up and down.

> I can smell you through the keyhole. You. Gail. (188)

This seems to reverse things; now Will is chasing after Gail. The reality of the exchange is soon called into question, however. Knowing that her disguise has been discovered, Gail runs

ends on a note of feminine melancholy and shows that Gail has not transcended the binary of subject and object, but has merely reversed these terms. This apparent solipsism of the ending — the impossible choice between agency and relationality that we also see in “The Albanian Virgin” — recalls Irigaray’s description of the feminine imaginary: “So there is, for women, no possible law for their pleasure. No more than there is any possible discourse” (This Sex 99, quoted in Howells 135). While the story is open to this interpretation, Howells argues that Munro also suggests an alternative to it in the third meaning encoded in the story’s symbolism as it interacts with and gives a form to Gail’s experiences. This third meaning suggests a beyond to the “contradictory discourses of realism and fantasy” (Howells 135) — a possibility that I also pursue in what follows in terms of the idea of interpretive error and the story’s narrative “tricks” (a term which Martin and Ober ascribe to Gail, and that I argue is mirrored in the form of the story, its play with the reader’s expectations).
for the airport. At the airport, she buys Will a gift, a figurine turtle with yellow dots on its back. The purchase occasions a recollection:

The yellow dots flung out in that way remind Gail of something she saw last fall. She and Will saw it. They went for a walk on a sunny afternoon. They walked from their house by the river up the wooded bank, and there they came on a display they had heard about but never seen before.

Hundreds, maybe thousands, of butterflies were hanging in the trees, resting before their long fight down the shore of Lake Huron and across Lake Erie, then on south to Mexico…

“Like the shower of gold in the Bible,” Gail said.

Will told her she was confusing Jove and Jehovah.

On that day, Cleata had already begun to die and Will had already met Sandy. This dream had already begun – Gail’s journey and her deceits, then the words she imagined—believed—that she heard shouted through the door.

Love—forgive

Love—forget

Love—forever. (189)

The passage is ambiguous on a number of levels. Gail confuses two systems of symbols, mixing biblical and Greek mythology, just as she confuses herself and Will with the elderly man and his lover. Gail’s deceit is of Will, but it is also of the reader: perhaps Will did not speak through the door at all, and the experience of being the object of need, in relation to the elderly man, causes her to fantasize Will coming after her.

The reference to “the words she imagined—believed that she heard shouted through the door” establishes Gail by implication as the author of the earlier statement (of Will’s words through the door) instead of as its focalizer. Insomuch as our recoding of our original reading as a mistake displaces Gail into the position of an author of her text as “fiction,” there is no point in the text at which Gail is “mad”: the repetition that reveals that she was also reveals that she is no longer. It is instead readers who undergo the experience for her of

39 She cannot be the narrator, as the narration is third person.
mistaking her fantasy for textual reality (Gail meanwhile stands on the side like a Beckett character telling us of her “deceits”).

This undercuts any reference point for interpretation, since a fictional character cannot also be the author, and the interpretation of madness cannot be placed anywhere in the text. On the other hand, a purely formal interpretation along the lines that Gail moves between diegetic levels as a “disframed” character (Richardson 105) does not account for the psychological complexity of the reader-character interaction (as well as being undercut by the psychological explanation that we are directly given, that Gail was imagining things). Another way to approach the question of unreliability is suggested by D.W. Winnicott’s essay, “Creativity and Its Origins.” Noting the psychoanalytic commonplace that both men and women are predisposed towards bisexuality, Winnicott describes a male patient of his whom he discovered himself speaking to as a girl:

On this particular occasion I said to him: “I am listening to a girl. I know perfectly well that you are a man but I am listening to a girl. I am telling this girl: ‘You are talking about penis envy.’”

… After a pause the patient said: “If I were to tell someone about this girl I would be called mad.”

The matter could have been left there but I am glad, in view of subsequent events, that I went further. It was my next remark that surprised me, and it clinched the matter. I said: “It was not that you told this to anyone; it is I who see the girl and hear a girl talking, when actually there is a man on my couch. The mad person is myself.”

I did not have to elaborate this point because it went home. The patient said that he now felt sane in a mad environment. In other words he was now released from a dilemma. As he said, subsequently, “I myself could never say (knowing myself to be a man), ‘I am a girl.’ I am not mad that way. But you said it, and you have spoken to both parts of me.”

This madness which was mine enabled him to see himself as a girl from my position. He knows himself to be a man, and never doubts that he is a man. (Reading Winnicott 271)
What does it mean for a narrative to be the narrative of a man as opposed to the narrative of a girl? Seeing that the interpretive context he has brought to bear on the patient’s narrative (that it is the narrative of a man) is not correct, Winnicott displaces himself. Winnicott’s reading thus begins before it begins, in a mistake he is not aware of making, and what he reads are his own interpretive assumptions. Winnicott constitutes himself within a scene of address in which he is speaking to the patient as a girl – constitutes, in other words, an interlocutory scene in which the patient can recognize himself as one – in which doing so makes sense. When Winnicott then names himself as “mad,” the patient recognizes his “madness” in himself as sanity—in alliance with the analyst, who knows him as a girl—in relation to a context that is therein coded as questionable (the idea that gender precedes its articulation in language or interpersonal life). The revelation that Winnicott supplies, that he was hearing the patient speaking as a girl, does not surprise the latter. What Winnicott adds is merely a relational context in which what the patient already knew made sense. The interaction has special meaning because patient and analyst consider that the patient’s mother had wanted a female child and had treated the patient like one: “In other words this man had to fit into her idea that her baby would be and was a girl” (272). The relationally constructed meaning (constructed between Winnicott and the patient) and the classical interpretation of the patient’s separate history here work together. The dual movement of Winnicott’s interpretation works on both sides of language, from the point of view of fixed gender categories (the mother treating the patient like a girl) necessary for communication, and from the point of view of the cultural context that in-vests them.

Winnicott’s vignette resembles the way in which we read “GAIL I KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE!” (inside the door of language / essential femininity). When we find out that we have mistaken Gail’s fantasy (or misrepresentation) for Will’s actual words through the door, the fantasy in question – “I am hearing a man talking when actually it is a woman (pretending, fantasizing, day-dreaming)” – becomes our own. It is we who are supplying an

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40 One might trace an analogy here between the door separating Gail and Will, the significance to the story’s myth of gender of Will’s appearance at the door, and the metaphorical “doors” of sexual difference through which the child passes in becoming a cultural citizen, in Lacan (“The Agency of the Letter”).
inappropriate frame of reference for interpreting the story.\textsuperscript{41} This involves the reader in a displacement in relation to our prior frame of reference on the story, as with Winnicott’s dramatic interpretation of his patient. Reading repeats a scene in which Gail’s will is misrecognized (in this case by ourselves); this hypothetical scene embeds or constitutes the image of Gail’s will as misrecognized\textsuperscript{42} that has been itself missing from – and driving as such – the storyworld (in the sense in which, psychoanalysis instructs, the supposed “lack” or repression of femininity is unremarkable within the bounds of a patriarchal order whose consistency it reciprocally constructs).\textsuperscript{43}

The scene, “I am hearing a man talking, when actually it is a woman fantasizing,” which constitutes the reader as mistaken, becomes the point of reference from which it becomes possible to imagine (i.e. for Gail or for readers to imagine) things as otherwise. Reading reconstructs the meaning, “Where is Gail’s desire? Projected onto the other” – which initially refers to Gail herself – as the reader’s perception or loss. When this loss becomes our own, when it happens \textit{to us} (in the sense that the reader loses Gail, which is also a loss \textit{of} reading, or occasion of interpretive “madness” such as Winnicott describes), the character is not “found” so much as the now enlarged system of the story and its interpretation acquires the possibility for recognizing (finding, locating) a female character’s will in the other (loss). Thus, misrecognition, having been placed in fantasy as our reading, acquires an imaginative reality. Will’s “will” to know that Gail is inside the door (of language), that she is essentially feminine (emphasis on her heartbeat, bodily smell) is also \textit{her} own will to know (herself),

\textsuperscript{41} This is not to say that Gail’s character, as a textual function that has until this point in the narrative conformed to a certain set of narrative injunctions, cannot be read as making an equivalent mistake, but that she cannot do/be otherwise, as a character in a narrative whose textual constraints solicit readers (both within the text [characters] and outside of it [readers]) to project female characters as subjects whose agency is diverted, there being no image of active femininity apart from the disguise. Gail is not legible as a character in any other way. At stake is a question of how to read characters both as people-like constructs with motivations, according to a concept of the implied author and a certain notion of shared beliefs or folk psychology, and as textual functions constructed by readers in the current of the cultural and real world frames that we bring variously to the text.

\textsuperscript{42} E.g., I have been suggesting that Gail herself aligns or subsumes her desire within what she takes to be the desire of the other. In this way her disguise literalizes the split of femininity and agency within Western white patriarchy, within which femininity involves, supposedly, the wish to be the signifier of the desire of the Other (Lacan, “The Meaning of the Phallus” 84).

\textsuperscript{43} Here, as in “Open Secrets,” I am suggesting that Munro represents a storyworld seemingly governed by patriarchal codes in order to then render these codes self-strange by prompting readers to interpret the story in ways that hyperbolize or anticipate them. Thus it becomes a matter “for the books” whether what we think about as patriarchy precedes or is instantiated in and by our expectation of it (a relation that in no ways diminishes the reality of gender oppression much as it opens up its location to question).
both of which converge on the reader’s will to know what is happening in the narrative – who is speaking or doing what to whom.

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With the incident of the door, Munro plays with the authority of narrative discourse, with the different levels of truth that we attribute to different types of narrative sentences. The displacement of readers in relation to our earlier construction of the storyworld, as a more or less internally consistent model of who did, thought or said what to whom (Herman, Story Logic 9), exceeds current narratological formulations of unreliability as either determined in relation to some concept of an implied author (interpretive high ground), or as a projection of readers according to the interaction of frames of reference with textual markers. The idea of relationality as applied to the reader-text interaction provides some suggestions for bridging these views.

In favour of the implied author, Lisa Zunshine argues that the concept is a necessary by-product of readers’ engagement of Theory of Mind as part of the reading process (Why We Read Fiction). Theory of Mind is the mental capacity by which interpreters attribute motivations to others as they navigate their social environment. In this regard Zunshine draws an analogy between basic socio-interactional information processing that individuals conduct as part of their heritage as social beings and inferences that readers make when they suspend disbelief upon taking up a work of fiction. According to Zunshine, readers take in information in the form of a meta-representation, involving a representation [“GAIL I KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE!”] plus a tag designating its source (47). In literature, this source can be characters or narrators. Sources can also be embedded [said Will, narrated the narrator]. Behind all the sources is an idea of the author, designating the creation as a fiction [wrote Alice Munro]. In life as well as in literature, source tags can be stronger or weaker, depending on the degree of trust we have in the information and/or its source. We also store a large amount of information without source tags, as facts, allowing us to expend mental

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44 For a consideration of the concept of the implied author in terms of the notion of the unconscious, see Marcus 37-39.
energy on more potentially new or threatening information. According to Zunshine, when we begin to suspect that a narrator may be unreliable, we take information that we had originally coded with weak source tags and replace it with strong ones so that the information becomes constrained in the inferences that can be drawn from it (63-64). We also look to the source of the deception to determine a motive for its deceiving us.

The concept of unreliable narration is usually used in discussion of first person homodiegetic narration, but has been extended to third person narration. Jean Wyatt describes the nearly unlimited credit that readers conventionally attribute to a heterodiegetic, non-character narrators (Culler 27, in Wyatt, “Love’s Time” 202). In other words, readers direct weak source tags to the narrator designating a given piece of information as the narrator’s representation. In “The Jack Randa Hotel,” until the description of Will at the door, the story is narrated with a high degree of narrativity, through the use of quotation marks and source tags. This gives a strong sense that a story is being told, encouraging readers to take what the narrator says as fictional truth. With the statement, “GAIL I KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE!” the narrativity drops off. There are no tags explicitly designating the metarepresentation as Will’s statement, or as a verbal statement of a character at all; yet, the momentum of the above-described effects disinclines readers to be suspicious of the source of the statement (to place strong tags around the statement coding it as a representation of the narrator).

The story instead provokes a kind of interpretive madness, giving contradictory information about who to attribute the description of Will at the door to (based on the previously set up system of attribution of sources), all the while distracting us from consciously registering this contradiction. The description of Will at the door is given in the same italics as Gail and Will’s letters to one another, and it directly follows the statement that Gail is driven to escape “[w]hat she has surely wanted” (188), both details which would ordinarily encourage readers to consider the description of Will as Gail’s fantasy. Yet it is equally the case that there are no tags explicitly coding the description as imaginary, and all previous meta-texts (letters or other representations possessing a fictional status) in the story have been explicitly differentiated from the main narrative by textual markers, including the immediately preceding, “she finds the note that she is expecting./ Gail. I know it’s you” (188). The story
distracts readers from registering this ambiguity through amping up the emotional intensity of the scene:45 Gail is frantically trying to escape a nightmare-comic Will at the door. Thus, although we may feel a conflict from the contradictory information returned by our source monitoring strategies, it is less likely that we will engage with this conflict intellectually.

Instead, readers tend to take the metarepresentation “GAIL I KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE!” as the verbal statement of Will, as “GAIL I KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE!” [says Will, writes Munro], with no other mediation. Unreliability cannot be detected by tracing it back to an unreliable reflector, behind whom lies a concept of the implied author. There are the textual strategies that impact on readers’ source monitoring strategies as described above, but we cannot identify an intermediary agent responsible for the deception because there is no narrator inside the storyworld to be found. From a narratological standpoint, readers are placed in the untenable position of considering that the implied author is unreliable, as well as engineering the illusion of unreliability.

A number of critics (Fludernik, Nunning, Yacobi and Zerweck) argue that unreliability is not present in the text as a feature to be discovered, but that it is a construction of a reader, who projects an unreliable reflector as a means of resolving perceived inconsistencies in the textual material. Readers’ decisions to construct an unreliable narrator rather than resolving inconsistencies in another way, for example, in terms of the author’s experimentation with genre, will depend on the frames of reference that readers bring to reading. My own reading in this chapter draws upon cognitive narratology’s attention to the socially constructed nature of reading.46 At the same time, taken on its own, a cognitive approach does not address the

45 See Lisa Zunshine for a description of Nabokov’s usage of this strategy in Lolita (107). Zunshine points out that the degree to which individual readers will be taken in varies. This variability accounts, I would argue, for Howells and Martin and Ober’s readings of the conclusion to “The Jack Randa Hotel.” The point is that Munro manipulates readers’ source-monitoring strategies as a means of confronting readers with the contingent nature of their own interpretive strategies – a contingency that bears directly upon, and draws from, cultural constructions of feminine inferiority.

46 Although I do not explicitly consider differences between individual readers in this chapter, as is the focus of cognitive narratology, I take up the question of the socially constructed nature of reading in the sense that, I am arguing, Munro herself prompts readers to encounter their interpretive premises as sharing in a cultural inheritance that they may wish to contest. In chapter three on Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” I consider the implications of the feminist “we,” or the construction of a hegemonic experience of gender oppression as it regards the psychoanalytic concept of feminine masquerade, and the history of this concept’s reception as a resource for feminism.
relational construction of experience in Munro’s story, the way in which character is bounded by the relational field of the storyworld which readers construct as well as being, I will argue, in turn constructed by.

The idea of a two-person psychology provides a bridge between cognitive and rhetorical approaches to unreliability, in which unreliability can be understood as located neither in the text (referring back to a concept of the IA) nor entirely in the reader according to the interaction of pre-constructed frames of reference with textual markers.

1) Reading, we constitute a scene of address in which a man is speaking to a woman: “GAIL I KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE!” said Will.

2) We then (when we find out that this scene is a fantasy of the story’s protagonist) constitute ourselves hearing a man speaking when actually it is a woman. Behind the source tags pointing to Will, we place source tags pointing to ourselves: “GAIL I KNOW YOU’RE IN THERE!” said Will read Erin.

In the process, at once imaginative and interpretive, of being displaced in relation to our reading, we construct an inter-text and ourselves within it, out of the primary text – a sentence that is a superposition of source text and interpretation.

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The frame of the relationship provides a resource for thinking about how interpreters construct and reconstruct themselves in relation to, or as a mode of, interpretation. This suggests that work in relational psychoanalysis, in particular on the embeddedness of the observer in what is being observed, may provide a resource for efforts in narratology to describe the interaction between narrative design and interpretation. Donnel Stern describes the conversational phenomenon of “interlocking,” in which each participant’s conduct “locks” the other into “the unseen or rigidly perceived patterns of the transference and the countertransference” (73):

Because they are mutually embedded, transference and countertransference are reciprocal and inseparable parts of a whole. This interlocking often enough leads to a situation in which alternative patterns of relatedness are invisible to
both participants, and negotiation is therefore difficult … [A common situation] is for analyst and analysand to be locked into an unconscious enactment that neither of them even knows is under way. The rigidity in the interaction, that is, is not apparent to either the patient or the analyst. Quite often, when we look backward in time from a wider understanding, the patterns we conclude were crucial for us to identify – because they were the sources of difficulty or puzzlement in the analytic lock – were not visible at all during the sessions within which they were most influential. Because the analyst had no reason to attend to and formulate such patterns during those sessions, the relevant relatedness was no more conceptually distinct than the air the analyst breathed. (74)

The concept of interlocking can be extended to interactions between an individual and a social milieu in relation to which the individual constructs him or herself, rather than bringing to the interaction a pre-established self.47 Reading can, in this respect, be described by the terms that David Herman uses to describe cognition, as “a supra- or transindividual activity distributed across groups functioning in specific contexts, rather than as a wholly internal process unfolding within the minds of solitary, autonomous, and desituated cognizers” (“Regrounding Narratology” 304).48 The process by which a given reader imagines the intentionality, motivations, and experience of characters cannot be solely traced back to the individualized contribution of that reader’s frames of reference (referring to a pre-existing self who reads). Nor can it be explained in terms of textual constraints created by an author who wishes the reader to undergo a particular kind of experience (a pre-existing self who writes). Munro does describe herself as having an ideal reader in mind when she writes, but at the same time describes herself writing Open Secrets as wishing to “challenge what

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47 This is not to suggest that the possibilities for self-manifestation in discourse are unlimited or are not constrained by factors from an individual’s personal history, as some critics of relational psychoanalysis have characterized the relational position. Butler describes Foucault’s understanding of self-crafting always tak[ing] place in relation to an imposed set of norms. The norm does not produce the subject as its necessary effect, nor is the subject fully free to disregard the norm that inaugurates its reflexivity; one invariably struggles with conditions of one’s own life that one could not have chosen. If there is an operation of agency or, indeed, freedom, in this struggle, it takes place in the context of an enabling and limiting field of constraint. (Giving 19)

48 For Herman, stories are not pre-existing artefacts but participate in larger, socially embedded systems for thinking (328).
people want to know. Or expect to know. Or anticipate knowing. And as profoundly, what I think I know” (Interview with Boyce and Smith 227).

When we locate ourselves within a storyworld that corresponds to a certain set of narrative possibilities, our interpretive position in relation to the storyworld is similar to the countertransference as described by Stern: it is “no more conceptually distinct than the air [we] breathe[ ].” If readers are initially invited by genre conventions to consider a limited set of possibilities for constructing the experience of characters, what more expansive ground is there for readers to become aware of, or to formulate, this limitation? According to Herman, narrative structure contributes to a gestalt or “system for thinking that is generated by (or emerges from) its design as well as its interpretation” (309). Readers participate in the formation of this gestalt; “their interpretations are part of the intelligent system enabled by the narrative” (308). For Herman, who constructs his observations using Edith Wharton’s “Roman Fever,” readers are by implication located outside of this gestalt. The reader, outside of the narrative, is distinct from the reader’s thoughts about the narrative which are themselves a part of the system. Herman does not, in other words, deal with the reader’s self-experience in relation to the story.

Nevertheless, his observations can be extended to a reading of “The Jack Randa Hotel,” in which it makes more sense to consider the reader as constructed in relation to, in the sense of being displaced by, reading. Stern writes: “we reveal ourselves in our own eyes by understanding the other, and we understand the other via what we learn about ourselves” (26). Because we are a part of the gestalt out of which narrative meaning is constructed, when we become aware that the story is not about what it seems to be, we focalize ourselves as interpreters of the narrative, and relocate ourselves in relation to the storyworld which is therein superseded by a new set of narrative possibilities – in the present case, one in which agency and desire are no longer indices of divergent gender positions in language.

The experience of mistaking Gail’s imagination as reality dispels the interpretation that Gail’s “will” has been enmeshed with “Will”’s and in need of differentiation – a perspective which is not so much wrong as it is framed as a reading orientation, one among several
possibilities for constructing Gail’s experience. What emerges is in fact the inverse: Gail’s motivation has remained inscrutable because her fantasy is the text’s reality and is not therefore in a visible relation to it.

Intertextuality and Textual Time

On that day, Cleata had already begun to die and Will had already met Sandy. This dream had already begun – Gail’s journey and her deceits, then the words she imagined—believed—that she heard shouted through the door. (189)

Gail reflects that Cleata’s illness and Will’s affair had already begun at the point, before the beginning of the story, when she sees the golden butterflies with Will, but the claim that her journey had also already begun at this point does not make sense chronologically. However, Gail’s journey and Cleata’s illness both come before the shower of butterflies in the order in which we read them. Both occurrences are thus tied in to the reading process, which is framed as an abandonment. The loss of the bond between women is embodied in Gail’s purchase of the gift turtle at the airport:

Gail is thinking, A present for Cleata. As if her whole time here had been a dream, something she could discard, going back to a chosen point, a beginning
Not for Cleata. A present for Will?
A present for Will, then. (189).

The message of the turtle is that it is not for Will – it is for Cleata – but she is gone.

Gail’s association of the butterflies with the “shower of gold … Confusing Jove and Jehovah” alludes to the myth of Jove impregnating Danae in a “shower of gold,” an image that Elizabeth Barrett Browning uses in Aurora Leigh as part of a mythical conceit depicting female creativity as a rape by male gods. Dorothy Mermin argues that “Aurora apparently accepts the implication of these images, which stand outside of the plot to suggest that, for women, writing is a kind of sexual submission” (211). In calling the image of the shower of gold to mind, Gail summons an interpretive tradition in which the heterosexual desire of men

49 The other images are of Io pursued by Jove, and Ganymede [a boy in a female role] by Zeus’s eagle.
for women is the only basis for creativity. Insomuch as masochistic representations of female creativity establish their legitimacy within a masculine artistic tradition by denying creative value to bonds between women, including bonds of reading, they may be a textual version of what Nancy Chodorow has described as a “‘self-perpetuating cycle of female deprecation,’ in which mothers transmit[ ] to daughters their own anxieties and conflicts about femininity” (1106). At the same time, such images have some value as a representation of a conflicted relation between women artists and their cultural inheritance. Readers may establish bonds of identification with texts that are bound up with, or based in a denial of, their own value (e.g. the value both of the textual bond and therein also of the reader imagining herself through it). “The Jack Randa Hotel” begins with Gail’s shop “filling up with women” who share stories with each other that are peremptorily dismissed by Gail (“Gail’s enjoyment of all this palled rather quickly” [163]). The stories are heard but they are not listened to by Gail. The narrative repeats this placement under erasure of bonds between women by following its protagonist to Brisbane, where the reader does not again hear of Gail’s relationships with other women until she hears from Will of Cleata’s death. Yet this repetition – the construction, effectively, of mourning for women as mourning for men – cannot itself be framed in terms of a concept of Gail’s “unreliability” as viewed from a more unbiased position. Insomuch as a literary tradition disavows bonds between women as a subject for narrative, this disavowal cannot, in a sense, be directly experienced by a reader. It instead defines what is “not-me” or dissociated, and can only become “me” through enactment.

Narrative theory shares with psychoanalysis a history of the difficulty of doing away with a reference point for interpretation. If there is no interpretive high ground in relation to the patient’s transference that the analyst can access in order to read it, how does the analyst become aware of his or her interpretive position? Stern argues that the analyst is divided between a creative self and a self-reflective inner critic, which demands that the analyst’s

50 Here “The Jack Randa Hotel” implies what Butler (Gender Trouble 49) describes as the reversibility of the psychoanalytic notion of feminine masquerade. Specifically, if female homosexuality is the result of a disappointed heterosexuality within the psychoanalytic narrative (Jones, “Early Development”; Lacan, “The Meaning of the Phallus”), it must equally be the case that heterosexuality conceals a disappointed homosexuality.

51 Here I draw upon Harry Stack Sullivan’s notion of “not-me” as a dissociative response to what would otherwise be painful experience, except that it is so threatening to the social constitution of the self that it cannot be incorporated into personal narrative (claimed as “experience” at all).
interpretations meet the standards of public discourse (82). Yet the idea that thoughts happen between people equally informs the act of interpretation, as a social activity that takes place between people more or less cooperatively. The bond between individual readers and texts is always already broken up by, inserted into, queried, displaced, replaced and signified on by other readers and readings, and it is these textual encounters which show us, if we care to look, where we have been.
Chapter 3
Recognizing Masquerade (In Theory): Women, Work and Whiteness in Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade”

Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade” is perhaps the best known example of psychoanalytic case study writing considered to have roots in its author’s own life (Harris, “Analyst” 261). Riviere was in psychoanalysis with Ernest Jones between 1916 and 1921, and also worked with him at the Psychoanalytic Press, translating Freud’s and other writing into English. Their conflicted relationship finds expression in Riviere’s discussion of a female patient who masquerades in her working life out of fear of the retribution of “father-figures” (92). Riviere takes up Jones’s theory of feminine types as a lens through which to view her patient’s boundary-crossing, as a female lecturer taking on a role that still held strong associations with masculinity. The discussion that follows, however, transforms the optics through which it is framed. Developing a basis for considering gender as a role, it resists Jones’s system of classifying gender in a way that is at once personal and theoretical. Riviere’s article is also a masquerade (Heath 46, Machelidon 107), and at such it expresses the contradiction of its emergence: Riviere writes as a woman writing about another woman speaking – she cannot say otherwise – “as a man.”

Other critics, however, have drawn attention to the text’s appropriation of a racially coded figure as a metaphor for conflicts of the patient’s that are supposed to refer to sexual difference in a universal sense (Walton, Niu, Pellegrini). Riviere’s interpretation of her patient constitutes a performance of a racially unmarked viewing position that is carried forward by subsequent readers, such as Judith Butler and in passing, Lacan, who do not consider the role of race in either the patient’s phantasy life or, apparently, that of the text’s author (Butler, Gender Trouble, Lacan, “From Love to the Libido,” “The Meaning of the Phallus”). What do these two perspectives on “Womanliness,” as resistant autobiography and as appropriative in its own right, have in common? Given that the concept of masquerade and the de-essentializing discourse on femininity that it opens up have been so important to second wave feminism, especially psychoanalytic feminism, I am trying to see if this
intersection in Riviere’s text can be used to think historically about the production of a
“white standard” of femininity at a conceptual level of much feminist discourse.

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In “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” Riviere writes of a female patient whose work involves
speaking to audiences, and who would seek out reassurance from “father-figures” in the
audience after each of her performances in the form of compliments and sexual attention
(92). Riviere reads this and other examples of veiling or hiding of technical knowledge, and
joking behaviour, from other women of her acquaintance, as examples of a “masquerade” of
femininity, put on as a defence against the “retribution feared by men” (91), for having taken
on a masculine role. The patient is given as an example of a trend towards women entering
the professions and intellectual life; her masquerade reverses the effects of appearing in what
was still considered a masculine role by (de-)composing her as object of the male gaze
(Doane 33).

The patient is said to suffer from anxiety after each of her performances as to whether she
has said anything inappropriate. Delivering her address in a context in which doing so is a
masculine prerogative places her at odds with her gender role: it is not that she has in fact
said anything inappropriate, as she fears the night after – Riviere adds that she carries out her
lectures successfully – but that she herself becomes so, within the given scene of address, by
composing herself as a subject within intellectual discourse. In response, the patient appeals
to “father-figures” in the audience to recognize her contribution as a woman, but the appeal is
split off from the intellectual display for which it is sought – there being no context for her
professional self-assertion, as a woman – and becomes an apology. This takes the doubled
form of seeking both compliments about her work and sexual attention, a duality that is not
explained by Riviere’s reading of the patient’s behaviour as an attempt to ward off the
retribution feared from men for having unconsciously “stolen” (94) masculinity. Recognition
for her work and recognition of herself as a woman (meaning, in this context, from men) here
converge on the same meaning.
The appeal for recognition without a context for its satisfaction becomes masquerade, by which Riviere means the defensive response to the belief that professional self-assertion represents a theft of male property – a property that Riviere locates in the body as the site of sexual difference (the penis that the patient does not have) (93). The patient masks her supposed theft of power by performing as lacking it. In asserting that this turning away from assertion in masquerade is the patient’s femininity, Riviere repeats in the grammar of the analysis the relational context (of the lecture hall) that produces the association speaker = male in the first place. In doing so, she masquerades before her own “father-figure” in Ernest Jones, aligning herself with his theory of heterosexual versus homosexual feminine types – the latter category understood not in terms of sexual preference for women but as a masculine identification.52 In “Womanliness,” Riviere reads her patient according to Jones’s rubric as “wish[ing] for masculinity” and putting on a “mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men” (35) – but she then takes (as will Lacan) this conflict and the mask itself to define femininity.

Yet Riviere’s interpretation, which appears to disavow affinity with her patient, can also be read as inscribing, in displaced form, the conditions of her own analysis. These conditions

52 In “The Early Development of Feminine Sexuality” (1927), Jones considers women who wish for recognition from men of their equality as claiming physiological identity with them, and as “homosexual” based on an ostensible identification with the father. Refusing to accept the refusal of their erotic claim on the father (identification being here equated with “active” erotic desire), such women are supposed to resolve the incest taboo by refusing “their femininity” instead, understood to mean identification with the mother and with having female sexual organs. The wish for social equality and the wish for physiological identity with men here reduce to the same thing; assertion of difference becomes a desire to castrate. This invalidation of the basis for social change relies on the construction of female homosexuality as a denial of sexuality, as the disavowed love of a man (the father) and refusal to exchange him for an appropriate, male substitute (Butler, Gender Trouble 52).

Together with Karen Horney, Jones was one of the proponents of a theory of primary femininity that diverged from Freudian orthodoxy in assuming a primary female sexuality as separate from the male. Characteristically, Freud charged Jones with misunderstanding the essential premise of psychoanalysis, in this case by reducing sexuality to biology. On the other hand, Freud’s own theory of masculine libido was unable to account for female sexuality except on the basis of a male model; the Great Debate of the 1920s on femininity responds to this limitation. Jones and Riviere are key contributors to this debate. Rather than choose sides, however, “Womanliness as a Masquerade” aligns itself broadly with a classical view. Describing womanliness as a masquerade motivated by the desire to possess masculinity – a desire that must be concealed – Riviere keeps to the outline of a Freudian concept of libido as singular and masculine. (In “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex,” Freud considers that girls start off as “little men” and become feminine, or feminized, as a reaction to discovering that they are not. Femininity according to this view is motivated by envy rather than possessed of any active object-seeking libido of its own [“Some Psychical Consequences”].) For a discussion of the development of Freud’s views on femininity over the course of his writings, see Young-Bruehl ed. and intro, Freud on Women, and Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, chapter 3. For a discussion of Freud’s writing on female sexuality in terms of a parallel history of discontent with his own success in describing what repeatedly eluded him, see Strachey trans. and notes to SE 19: 244-45.
pre-empt the possibility for asserting difference, or saying otherwise (recognizing difference in her patient): “in private [the patient] did in fact, like Ernest Jones’ cases, bitterly resent any lack of … direct recognition” (43, my italics). Riviere is overwhelmingly likely to have been one of the five cases of active femininity/ homosexuality in whom Jones observes “bitter[ ] resent[ment]” in his article of 1927, her analysis having been only recently concluded. The double-voiced communication of “Womanliness,” referring back to the experiences of its author, therefore suggests the need to re-view the theory of masquerade as carrying forward the gendered enactment of Riviere’s analysis with Jones – not so much as an instance of personal incompatibility between two individuals, as a specific instantiation of what Thomas Balazs describes as a crisis in modernism over what role would be left to men once women assumed theirs in the workforce (“Recognizing Masochism” 176-77).

However, any attempt to secure a vantage point for reading masquerade on such grounds is displaced by the “proof” Riviere provides for her patient’s unconscious motivation. The patient’s assumption of a speaking role is supposed to represent to her unconscious a claim to masculinity, embodied in the theft of the father’s penis. The patient’s flirtatious behaviour – “which she herself was hardly aware of until analysis made it manifest” – reverses her guilt by (de)-composing her as the object of the male gaze, the phallus that she previously claimed to possess. Riviere introduces this argument, however, in connection with phantasies of the patient’s that manipulate a racially coded other:

The exhibition in public of her intellectual proficiency, which was in itself carried through successfully, signified an exhibition of herself in possession of her father’s penis, having castrated him. The display once over, she was seized by horrible dread of the retribution the father would then exact. Obviously it was a step towards propitiating the avenger to endeavour to offer herself to him sexually. This phantasy, it then appeared, had been very common in her childhood and youth, which had been spent in the Southern States of America; if a negro came to attack her, she planned to defend herself by making him kiss her and make love to her (ultimately so that she could then deliver him over to justice). (93)
Riviere’s proof for the patient’s anxiety-driven seduction of “father-figures” is an analogy with an early phantasy that elides racial difference, and with it the differing relations that black and white men have to white patriarchal power (Walton 19-20). When it is convenient for her analysis, Riviere interpellates the “negro” of the patient’s phantasy as having the same relation to power that the white father has and that designates, in psychoanalytic discourse, “man” as the (universal) subject whose desire is represented by the law. At the same time, this figure is positioned as claiming power, which means in this context, power over a white woman, only so that she can “deliver him over to justice,” which constructs him as – similarly to the white woman – not entitled to the position he is conjured as claiming.

Failing to consider race as a vector of power between the white female patient and the black man of the patient’s phantasy, Riviere subtracts from view the patient’s aggression towards and desire for power over this figure. The black man can then be read as having the same relation to patriarchal power as the white male audience members whose retribution the patient fears in the present; and her “seductive” behaviour can be read as entirely defensive. By eliding the patient’s aggression, Riviere effectively constructs aggression as a (white) male prerogative: it is as though the black man is already guilty and sentenced in her discussion even as it is clear – but not, evidently, relevant – that the patient has framed him. The black man absorbs the patient’s aggression towards white father-figures, which then becomes associated with masculinity (as possession of the penis). Jean Walton describes this transfer of guilt from a Lacanian point of view, arguing that the patient seduces the black man in order to place him in the same position as her, that of stealing the father’s phallus (the phallus that she performs as being) (22). By eliding racial difference, Riviere reads the patient as performing a “masquerade” of femininity to ward off the retribution feared from “men” in a global sense. Riviere’s construction of the patient’s “femininity” relies upon the proximity of a racialized other, and yet this otherness must at the same time be disavowed in the substitution of white for black male aggressors. In this way, the white woman is constructed as innocent, in the sense of being neither aggressive nor sexual, through the phantasy-narrative’s racialization of an other that establishes her as unraced, and femininity as “white” femininity.
Why does Riviere not take up the patient’s racialized framing of an “other,” or the historical context of her youth, as part of her own discussion of the patient’s femininity as a defensive strategy? What about Riviere’s construct of the “phallic” woman (the patient lecturing, stealing the father’s penis) or femininity as a retreat from this (masquerade, a “compulsive reversal of her intellectual performance” [94]) relies upon a racist phantasy? The patient grows up in an American South that is still practicing lynching at the time when Riviere publishes “Womanliness as a Masquerade” in 1929. During the period of the patient’s youth, the phenomenon was widespread. Martha Hodes connects the outbreak of racial violence, and the construction of the sexual motive, in the Reconstruction period to the traditional association of American citizenship with (white) masculinity that abolition disrupts. Where citizenship entails masculinity and vice versa, and masculinity is itself entwined with a bourgeois definition of heterosexuality in terms of marriage law, the extension of citizenship to black men brought up fears of the sexual “plunder” of white wives who formed the symbolic property of white men (404). Sandra Gunning notes how the imagery of rape becomes a key white supremacist tool in this period: the cause of democracy is refigured as a “social rape,” in support of the continuing right of white men to sole property rights and representation under the law: “American society and civilization came increasingly to be refigured as the white female body: silent, helpless, in immediate need of protection from the black beast” (Gunning 7). In this context, the stereotype of the black rapist and the spectacle of lynching stage the loss and recuperation through aggression of white male political power (7).

On the other hand, Hodes argues that the ideology of white feminine purity was consolidated and intensified during this period in relation to the myth of black male aggression, as evidenced in the rhetoric and activities of white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (409). In this way, white women are constructed as the sexual object of white men through the mediation of the fantasy of the black rapist.53 Similarly, in “Womanliness as a

53 The logic of the stereotype of the black rapist as it co-constructs the stereotype of the vulnerable white woman is tautological: since white women (supposedly) have no desire of their own, therefore any sexual contact between a black man and a white woman must be coercive. And, since white women are therefore at risk of being raped by black men, they are vulnerable on account of their femininity and require protection from white men. Thus, white women do not desire (i.e., the protective aim of white men towards white women, mediated by the figure of the black man, constructs the white woman as not desiring, and therefore as the
Masquerade,” the rape fantasy functions as a means of elucidating relations between the white female patient and her white male audience. In other words, Riviere takes the status of (white) femininity as object as a given, in her analysis,54 and invokes the fantasy of a black rapist as symbolic support. For this reason, in order to put back into consideration either the aggression that the patient directs towards black men in her phantasy, or the related question of how the construct of phallic femininity relates to the myth of the black rapist – not to mention the question of how this economy elides black women, and to what purpose – it is necessary to first ask what meaning the rape fantasy has for Riviere herself.

By assigning the wish to castrate the value of the truth of the patient’s unconscious, established prior to any anticipatory factors or influence from an audience (including the audience of the lecture hall and the analysis), Riviere collapses the relational field in which individuals acquire an understanding of themselves through the eyes of others, and rely on these others for confirming responses in order to claim versions of self (Howell, Dissociative 126). Stephen Mitchell points out the tendency in Western culture or perhaps psychoanalysis for women who are aggressive toward men to be called “castrating,” which reflects implicit assumptions about who is allowed what versions of self. It is as if such a woman, by acting aggressively, is taking away something, something very important, that belongs to men, that makes a man a man. (Hope and Dread 166)55

available object of a sexual rivalry between “men” who are presumed to be white). The myth of the black rapist produces white women as lacking desire and aggression, by rendering any other assumption of self unrecognizable within the white paternal symbolic that the myth rehearses. This includes the assumption of a self who would consent to/pursue sexual relations with black men. Hodes cites evidence that the Ku Klux Klan attacked white women accused of consensual sexual relations with black men as well as of “loose morality” generally (410). On the other hand, disciplinary regulation through the means of violence was typically aimed only at white women of the affluent or propertied classes, as working class white women were considered to be lacking in feminine “virtue” to begin with. This restriction of disciplinary aim can be understood in terms of the dependent relations upon one another of the myth of white feminine virtue and the paternal right of white male property owners. For a discussion of Kate Chopin’s description of black men as the preferred sexual object of white women experimenting with an agentic subjectivity, in “La Belle Zoraide,” see Gunning 16. For a discussion of the imagery of white bourgeois marriage as predicated on a rape fantasy, and specifically as rehearsing the fantasy of rape by a black man in Gone with the Wind, see Sedgwick 8-10.

54 Specifically, Riviere begins by associating femininity with the status of sexual object, only to restate this status as a form of conflict with itself: the patient is said to (de-)compose herself as object of the male gaze after appearing as a subject-within-language, which means to Riviere, appearing “as a man” (wearing the father’s penis).

55 The question of which behaviours constitute acting aggressively for women as opposed to men is a case in favour of this point.
In other words, Riviere does not consider the degree to which the “unconscious” belief of the patient’s that her assertiveness is a theft may be conditioned by the structure of the scene of address (both that of the analysis and lecture hall), or by the way she sees herself being seen by the other (analyst, audience). Yet, Machelidon points out that Riviere, by reading the patient’s intellectual performance as an expression of rivalry with men, propitiates her own “father-figures,” in Ernest Jones and Freud, and thus ensures her own performance against censure (107). The manipulation of a racially coded figure in “Womanliness” must therefore be placed into context with the triangle of relations between Riviere, her analyst(s) and her patient. Riviere selects racially coded phantasies and dreams out of all of the patient’s material to underread on the occasion of needing evidence for her argument in support of Jones’ views. Where the patient’s anxiety becomes too great, a black man appears to take the blame for what the patient or Riviere or the cultural context understand to be her (both the patient’s and Riviere’s by identification) theft of speaking authority from white men. The substitution of a black man for the blame that is supposed to accrue to a white woman obviates the need for Riviere to directly question the association of agency with masculinity that her discussion inherits – conveniently, since to do so would put her into open conflict with her own “father-figures,” an assertion of difference that she has no basis for believing would be recognized, and no means of supporting in herself. Reading “Womanliness” as a disguised expression of Riviere’s conflicts with her own “father-figures” and analysts may therefore shed some light on the role of racial stereotypes in securing a worldview premised around a (white) male libido.

History

In ‘hinting’ what I did in my last letter I didn’t mean any more than to point out to you, what you may have realized to some extent, that your need for self analysis was urgent and extreme. If you now want me to attempt some such analysis for you, I will do the best I can…

(Riviere to Jones, October 30, 1918)

56 Becker suggests that it may not be so much that (white) women are censored for self-assertive behaviours in a way that men are not, but that cultural constructions of femininity as ideally nonaggressive make it difficult for many women to differentiate confidently between assertive/self-protective and aggressive actions. Therefore, they may experience their own assertiveness as a threat (121-23).
I … doubt whether Mrs. R. would attach any weight to the title. She herself speaks a lot about ‘recognition,’ but it seems to mean on the part of yourself, myself, and a couple of others, rather than on the part of the outside public. I am glad to be able to shift this delicate matter onto your broad shoulders! I will write to her gratefully accepting your offer (Verschreiben for “her” because I know it is thanks to you that she has made it), but saying nothing about a title.

(Jones to Freud, April 1, 1922)

Riviere’s biography is bound up with the development of psychoanalytic thought about femininity. As one of England’s first lay analysts, she was in psychoanalysis with Jones between 1916-1921, and began to treat her own patients in 1919. Jones describes her analysis with him as “the worst failure I have ever had” and refers her on to Freud, using the terms that Freud will then use two years later to describe pathological femininity: “She has the most colossal narcissism imaginable, to a great extent secondary to the refusal of her father to give her a baby and her subsequent masculine identification with him” (Jones to Freud, April 1, 1922). Freud in turn diagnoses in Riviere an inability to receive praise and interprets this as a sign of deep unconscious guilt, a conflict between ego and Ideal. This presents as narcissism when the patient projects self-criticism onto others.

At the time of her analysis with Freud, Riviere had been working as an analyst herself for three years and was engaged in translating Freud’s and other psychoanalytic writing into English. Nina Bakman describes Riviere as Freud’s “favourite translator” and argues that Freud’s work did not invariably benefit from the institution of James Strachey as the editor of the Standard Edition (21). Riviere translates with a sensitivity and style that owe much to Bloomsbury and the literary trends of the day (Jacobus, Poetics 36) and that are unparalleled in the later translations of Strachey which render Freud in a more ostensibly scientific mode. Freud and Jones both remark on Riviere’s “unusual intelligen[ce]” (Jones to Freud, January 22, 1922; Freud to Jones, June 4, 1922) and claim to commit to her analysis for this reason,

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57 In “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex,” Freud considers that the girl resolves the Oedipus complex by identifying with her mother and adopting a “feminine attitude towards her father,” in which she wishes to receive a baby from him as compensation for what she does not have. Freud writes, however: “A process of “disavowal” may set in at this point in which the girl denies that she lacks a penis and acts as if she has one” (SE 19: 253). Freud does not elaborate in the essay as to what kinds of acts qualify as “deni[al].”
in Jones’ words, “hop[ing] to win her for the cause” (January 22, 1922). A series of letters from Riviere to Jones in 1918, and later between Jones and Freud while Riviere is in analysis with the latter, provide a view into the relation between her conflicts and the environment in which she works and finds herself with Jones, at the Journal.

In 1918, Riviere writes to Jones during a break in her analysis with him. Jones is off work following the unexpected death of his wife, and Riviere weaves the event into her speculations about her analysis. She has developed transference love for her analyst and accuses him of concealing similar feeling for her – of grieving excessively over his wife’s death as a cover for admitting it to himself:

I see your grief as to you completely selbstverständlich but perhaps you do realise a little that it is too extravagant. (Riviere to Jones, October 25, 1918)

…I regard it as absolutely unquestionable that your wife was to you a substitute for me, in the beginning perhaps even to some extent deliberately and consciously so, though I now have some doubt about this – but at the time it was so obvious (‘the exact opposite’ etc.) that I imagined you saw it quite clearly. (Riviere to Jones, October 30, 1918)

Jones denies the allegations and any imputation of feeling to himself. The emotional cast of the letters makes it difficult to read them without finding oneself participating in their drama. Jacobus, for example, criticizes Riviere for a narcissism which makes her abandon the position of an analysand, claim to know Jones better than he knows himself, and know him to be in love with her.59 This critique raises the question of whether the analyst’s mind is a valid subject for psychoanalysis? For Jacobus, Riviere’s counter-analysis of her analyst undermines Jones’s authority as an analyst and subverts the psychoanalytic process. Yet, when Riviere enters psychoanalysis with Freud four years later, in 1922, Freud criticizes Jones for treating Riviere as a “bad character in life”: “When Mrs. R. brought up her unpleasant reactions you seem to have treated her as a bad character in life, but you never got

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58 Unless otherwise indicated, Riviere’s correspondence with Jones is quoted from Vincent Brome, Ernest Jones: Freud’s Alter Ego.
59 Jones writes to Freud: “To satisfy her vanity, she has always maintained the theory that I also was in love with her but was not honest enough to confess it, but I have never been able to confirm this in my self-analysis” (April 1, 1922).
behind her surface to master her wickedness” (June 4, 1922). If Freud’s assessment is correct, Jacobus’s reading recreates Jones’ tendency to blame the patient for what is constructed in the same gesture as her symptom, established independently of any contributing factors from Jones himself. Yet Freud’s critique of the younger man assumes that there is a correct way to treat Riviere’s “unpleasant reactions” without contributing factors from one’s own personality in the form of countertransference: assumes, in other words, that there is an illness in the first place, belonging to the patient, and therefore also an analyst who can stand outside it in order to read its meaning and usher in a cure. It is at least in some sense the analyst who therefore requires that a patient present as symptomatic (or infatuated?) in order that the analyst may appear as being able to, in theory, cure her. Illness – in the case of Riviere, involving her transference love and conviction that it must be reciprocated – its necessary exteriority to the analyst, is the sign and guarantee of the analyst’s authority, of the analyst’s status as such. Riviere cannot be right in her conviction, or if she is, cannot obtain confirmation of being so, without destroying the analysis conceived as a primarily interpretation-based process, resting on the analyst’s leave to interpret intrapsychic processes.60

Riviere’s letters address themselves to this denial of reciprocity. In her own words, Riviere’s symptom responds, not so much to Jones directly,61 as to his attempt to remove himself as a personality from (and factor in), her analysis – not so much to his countertransference, as Freud would have it, as to his proposal to rise above it. She insists to Jones on the

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60 This dynamic may be at work in the hysteria diagnosis generally. Freud’s case of Dora, for example, garners support for his theory of the unconscious through a presentation of the analyst as knowing the truth of the desire of his “hysterical” patient, and knowing hysteria to be a condition of not being able to speak one’s truth. From a relational point of view, this produces, not so much a demand for an other to speak in place of oneself (as Freud argues), as a “truth” and an analyst who is in a position to know it. The circuitousness of the beginning of Freud’s account, which Lacan observes (“Intervention on the Transference”), points to Freud’s participation in the destabilization of narrative perspective in hysteria, even as he attempts to re-center himself through his account of the treatment. On the development of psychoanalysis as a collaboration between a talking hysterical patient and a listening analyst, see Showalter, *The Female Malady*. Showalter points out that, although women’s narratives entered the psychiatric record for the first time with the advent of psychoanalysis, yet psychoanalytic methods of listening quickly became codified, as evidenced in the case of Dora, in which Freud, “determined to have the last word,” takes the tone of an antagonist (160). On the debate around whether to view the term “hysterical narrative” as pejorative (subjecting its bearer to a regime of psychiatric knowledge) or as incipiently feminist (the narration of a resistance to such a regime that articulates its own exclusion from power), see Showalter, “On Hysterical Narrative.”

61 On the contrary, Jones does not appear as a figure in his own right in the letters external to Riviere’s speculations about him.
subjectivity of his thought: “You yourself see the impossibility of objectivity on your part and on my part the impossibility is just as great” (Riviere to Jones, October 25, 1918). And, she describes her distress as an effect of his impersonality, reminding Jones how she left for England following his marriage and returned several months later, wishing to resume her analysis, with the expectation of the same friendliness to which she had become accustomed with him:

I with great difficulty constrained myself to resuming the analysis (because it was my only means to a knowledge of psycho-analysis which I felt was bound up with my interest in life) under the expectation that your feeling for me would be simply one of friendly indifference. What was my astonishment when I got back after 6 months to find, not this, but a formality and impersonality in you that amounted to “hardness” quite brutal in my then “quivering” and “wounded” state.

…

that torture … that turning back of love – that’s what I can’t go through again.

You must ask yourself why your suffering is now so great. (October 30, 1918)

How can this apparent inversion of the expected relation between symptom and an impersonal analytic frame supposed to pave the way to resolving it be read in terms of – or used to read – classical theory?

Hughes and Bakman consider that Jones initially oversteps the boundaries of proper analytic conduct by lending Riviere his country home for months at a time, leaving his dog with her to take care of on at least one occasion, and phoning her on the occasion of his engagement to Morfydd Owen (according to Jacobus, to ask for her advice) (Hughes, Introduction to Joan Riviere 11, Bakman 24, Jacobus, Poetics 42). In this way, Jones gives Riviere ample reason to become confused about the nature of the analytic relationship, and contributes to the failure of the analysis through his inconsistency. While viewing Jones as the guilty party, this appraisal shares with Jacobus a view that psychoanalysis takes place in an impersonal frame, in order that it may become metaphorical – that the relationship between the two participants
is not real, and does not involve aspects of the analyst’s personality. Withholding this personal presence, the analyst becomes a screen for the patient to transfer unresolved unconscious conflicts onto. The screen theory has been critiqued from almost every corner of post-Freudian psychoanalysis. Irwin Hoffman notes the untenability of the idea that an analysand does not gather plausible inferences about the analyst as a person from the variety of subtle cues by which human beings navigate their social environment (“The Patient as Interpreter” 41-42). In spite of this widespread understanding, however, the screen theory is still retained in modified, “best fit” form by many schools of thought that require the idea of a screen-analyst as a stabilizing reference point from which to consider disturbances that are most easily read as intrapsychic, that is, as pertaining to the analysand only (43).

In my view, Riviere’s letters can be read less profitably through the intrapsychic lens of erotic transference than through the two-person lens of denied recognition, in which the ego is considered to develop through and rely on confirming responses from others (Howell, Dissociative Mind 126). From this point of view, Jones’s denial of emotional warmth might have produced an erotic transference that would not otherwise have emerged as strongly. Jessica Benjamin describes “identificatory love” as the basis for the sense of agency in children (Bonds of Love 100-14). The child idealizes an other and identifies with the power she invests him or her with. Benjamin argues that male caregivers are usually nominated for this role in cultures where mothers are not encouraged to have a separate center outside of their children. The likely father has only to recognize the child’s idealizing affection (“I love father; I am like him!”) in order for his or her sense of effectivity in the world to be confirmed. The father whose own mother does not have such a separate center of subjectivity, and who associates women in general with such a lack is unlikely to be able to recognize his child’s assertion of likeness (of like subjectivity or independence), where that child is a girl (109). When this identificatory love is denied, it may re-emerge later on in adult life as “ideal love” of a man seen to possess the agency that the now adult woman cannot claim, but instead attempts to obtain a vicarious experience of (122-23). In connection

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62 In the classical view, the absence of real cues from the analyst’s personality sets up an environment in which the patient substitutes the analyst for early object relations. The psychoanalytic relationship in this way becomes a metaphor of early object ties, and legible by the analyst. This view of psychoanalysis, on the other hand, requires that the analyst remain un-invested as a real person in the relationship. On the history of the concept of the analyst as blank screen, see Hoffman.
with this tendency, Benjamin asserts that psychoanalysis too often mistakes as Oedipal, and therefore unsatisfiable, expressions of affection that recreate earlier attachment paradigms (115).

The stance of analytic impersonality precludes recognition of the daughter’s idealizing love that might confirm her autonomy in the father’s image. However, the “hysteria” that results from lacking this confirmation cannot be treated by interpretation: affectionate feeling can only be validated by a display in kind. So normative femininity is flanked by illness in the classical view; so Riviere idealizes Jones and seeks to confirm her identity through him in like superiority, expressing the playful wish that psychoanalysis should be reserved for him and her together only: “the thought of sharing you & psychoanalysis with the multitude – a lot of grinning & enthusiastic frumps – though funny, is quite horrible to me” (Riviere to Jones, December 11, 1918, qtd in Jacobus 46-47).63

Throughout her letters, Riviere reproaches Jones for his refusal to acknowledge her affection (appreciation, sympathy, feeling)64 – and describes her response to his indifference as a “contempt and hardness” of her own (Riviere to Jones, October 30, 1918). Jones appears to have applied himself to interpreting this negative reaction, describing back to her (in Riviere’s words) her “narcissism & selfishness & hate & contempt” (December 28, 1918). This he interprets in an Oedipal vein as “to a great extent secondary to the refusal of her father to give her a baby and her subsequent masculine identification with him” (Jones to Freud, April 1, 1922). In other words, Jones refuses to acknowledge Riviere’s affection with an answering expression, which angers her; he then interprets and attempts to defuse this

63 The shift embodied in the two person perspective described by Benjamin brings empathy and recognition to the forefront of psychoanalysis as agents of therapeutic change. Barbara Ehrenberg describes the “affective edge” of relatedness, involving the negotiation of attunement and distance, as the place where psychoanalysis happens, or does not, providing as it does a space in which to revisit early patterns of relatedness. The analysis set up to preclude the opportunity for such a relatedness may deny the analysand the very opportunity for growth that it is supposed to impart. Ehrenberg speculates that the “negative therapeutic reaction” observed in many patients may be an expression of the failure of psychoanalysis to provide such conditions for growth, rather than the sign of unconscious resistance that it is usually understood as.

64 “You only showed me defiance & indifference—how should I suppose that less real than the indifference to my love & rejection of my appreciation & sympathy that you have always shown?” (December 20, 1918)

… “In these letters there has hardly been a single word which was not aimed at showing me your indifference to me & my feelings.” (undated, quoted in Jacobus 46)
anger, taking it out of the context of the relationship and her denied affection by regarding it as incestuous longing, his refusal (in the transferential role of the father) to “give her a baby” – thus aggravating her grievance. Psychoanalytic theory here becomes an agent of refusal, producing the effects that it proposes to find: the desire that follows frustration becomes evidence in confirmation of a theory of incestuous wishes whose corollary, in the impersonal analytic frame, elicits it in the first place.  

The impasse comes to a head around the question of “womanliness”: what it is, and who gets to say. Riviere appeals to Jones to recognize her capacity for feeling: “Do you realize that in the early days you recognized my capacity for love & tenderness & often said so?” (December 20, 1918, quoted in Jacobus 47). This is coupled with a reproach:

[Y]ou have not seen the woman in me—you will not see it. How striking it was the other day when you said “you are a woman after all” & then turned suddenly & smiling said “What a pity you are not more of a woman”… I am a great deal more of a woman than you know & that is why I said angrily that if I weren’t I shouldn’t be there now. You ought to know that it is my femininity that has saved my life more than once, too. My analysis has been conducted against your resistance as well as against mine. So it is not surprising that I have done most of it.

Jones responds by presenting her with a picture, not of womanly “tenderness,” but of aggression (“narcissism & selfishness & hate & contempt”). Riviere herself answers, in the following letter, in a fog of self-doubt that Jacobus notes for its theatricality (49). She describes “the crash—you said I was hurting you again” (Riviere to Jones, December 28). In other words, Riviere nominates Jones to confirm her womanliness in her capacity to love; when he refuses to do so, “womanliness” becomes instead marked by this refusal. The aggression with which Jones charges Riviere, precipitating this “crash,” is designated in the exchange as masculine, since she is not

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65 Mitchell makes this point about the iatrogenic nature of narcissistic rage with regard to Kernberg’s work with narcissistic patients: “Atwood and Stolorow (1984) feel that the oral rage Kernberg sees in ‘borderline’ patients is actually an iatrogenic consequence of his technical approach. Methodical interpretation of the transference is experienced by the narcissistically vulnerable patient as an assault, and generates intense narcissistic rage, which Kernberg then regards as basic and long-standing, requiring the very procedures which have created it in the first place. From the vantage point of self psychology, Kernberg is continually creating the monster he is perpetually slaying” (“Wings of Icarus” 63-64).
“womanly” to the degree that she is “hurting him again.” Instead, Riviere writes that she is “worthless, utterly selfish, utterly worthless.” Taking on Jones’s view of herself as her own self-image, she also, at the same time describes the mental collapse or “crash” of his perspective into hers:

I said “it is my cynicism directed against myself”—(I said “could you feel that & did you know how awful it was”)—It is my own defence against the truth, the disappointments I continually meet with in you.

Riviere accommodates herself to the “truth” of her continued disappointment by Jones. In doing so, she describes how she limits herself to the version of self that he will recognize her as. Masquerade is the name that she will later give to this performance.

Moving from the private space of the analysis to the public domain of their relations at the Press, Jones’s denial of recognition extends to the domain of work, where it supports the gendering of leadership roles. Yet, the same affectionate bond that Jones denies to Riviere is what he enjoys with Freud and what motivates his industry as Editor of the Journal and overseer of the translation of Freud’s work into English:

Indeed you hardly realize how deep my personal interest is in men who give me so much assistance and friendship as you do. (Freud to Jones, January 14, 1912)

…

You know that it is essentially for you that we are all working, which is why your inspiration and approval means so much to us all. If I can produce a Collected Edition of your works in my lifetime and leave the Journal on a soundly organized basis I shall feel that my life has been worth living, though I hope to do more for Psa even than that. (Jones to Freud, April 10 1922)

When Jones experiences his position with Freud challenged by the intrusion of Riviere into the other’s sphere of affection (“I confess to a kind feeling towards her” [Freud to Jones, June 4 1922]), as will become evident, he displays the same hysterical disturbance of attachment that Riviere does earlier with him.
In 1922, Riviere travels to Vienna to enter analysis with Freud, who receives her with a special welcome as his translator (Hughes, “Letters” 265). Riviere maintains a working relationship with Jones at the Journal throughout her analysis with Freud. The letters between Freud and Jones during this period construct Riviere’s illness and – in Freud’s view - Jones’s aggravation of it, in the context of discussing matters at the Journal, the slowness and poor quality of translations, and Riviere’s industry and ability to help Jones with both if he would get over his anxiety around letting her do so. In a letter from April 1st, 1922, Jones writes to Freud in response to an offer from Riviere to take over the work of revising translations. Jones writes that he is more than happy – indeed he is grateful – to have Riviere take the work off his shoulders, recognizing between him and Freud that “There is no one who could do it as well” – as long, he adds, as she does not receive official recognition for doing the work!

I … doubt whether Mrs. R. would attach any weight to the title. She herself speaks a lot about “recognition,” but it seems to mean on the part of yourself, myself, and a couple of others, rather than on the part of the outside public. I am glad to be able to shift this delicate matter onto your broad shoulders! I will write to her gratefully accepting your offer (Verschreiben for “her” because I know it is thanks to you that she has made it), but saying nothing about a title.

A title designates a place among colleagues. As a placeholder for work, recognition confers reality on it. The alternative, containing recognition within a private, unreal, domestic realm (“the part of yourself, myself, and a couple of others”) traditionally associated with women’s work, operates to gender the workspace as masculine. Much is at stake: Jones cannot formally recognize Riviere if she is to function as an element in the defense style through which he disavows and projects his “feminine” anxieties about his own place. On the other hand, he can be “grateful[ ]” for Riviere’s offer of work as long as she is eliminated as the one making it.66 Jones conceals the gendered nature of his misgiving by displacing it onto others: Riviere herself, who “would not attach any weight to the title,” and the “Americans,” who “would not want another lay person on the staff.” Freud responds to Jones’ objections

66 Jones clarifies his position in another letter: “If her position is that of an assistant to me she will never find me, and has never found me, lacking in gratitude for her help, in generosity towards her wishes, and in admiration for her gifts. But it depends on this provision” (Jones to Freud, May 22, 1922).
piece by piece: “Nor can I lay any stress on the Americans’ reluctance. It is well known through all the world of ψA that Rank the editor of both our Periodicals is a layman” (April 6, 1922). In the letter that follows, Jones reverses his position; now he is the one who is glad that Freud agrees with his proposal: “I see that you agree with me that Mrs. Riviere certainly deserves a title if she desires it” (Jones to Freud, April 10, 1922).

Jones’s distress continues, however, and finds expression in his sketch of a scene of impending chaos at the Journal if he is not appointed as the “clear head” in charge of translation of Freud’s *Sammlungen*, the Collected Edition of Freud’s work that precedes the Standard Edition:

It looks as if, unless the matter is grasped with a firm hand, we may drift into a condition of anarchy about it. At present no one knows from whom to take instructions … You, Rank, Mrs. R., and I all have our own views, many of which are constantly changing. It is plain that the only satisfactory way of working is to institute one definite head … I had assumed that this role would fall to my part, both as editor of the Press and because I am probably in the best position to form an allround opinion… [Mrs. Riviere] seems to be under the impression, however, that she is to replace me in this position. If you wish this, then of course I will agree, but I cannot pretend that it will be with indifference. I should not be able to work under her orders because of the impossible tone in which she issues them. (Jones to Freud, 26 May, 1922)

Appignanesi and Forrester read Jones’s anxiety as concerning a maneuver by Freud to do just this, replace Jones by Riviere as the Editor of the Collected Edition – rather than as the imaginary fear that Freud responds to it as (34). Whatever the case, Freud answers with a delay that is as telling as the long letter that follows charging Jones of being “afraid” of Riviere, a consequence of “the absurd idea that your place or function could be usurped either with me or in the movement at large by some one else and that jealousy is not worthy of you” (June 4, 1922):

Dear Jones,

Whitsunday is near, on that day I shall compose a long letter consisting of three parts, containing in 1 and 2 some analytic remarks on two interesting
personalities, in some practical proposals. Until then make your mind easy about it, there is no tragic element and no break in our relations to be feared. I am all right again.

Affectionately yours,
Freud

(Freud to Jones, May 3, 1922)

With the postcard, Freud writes almost as a dramaturgist, shaping Jones’ narrative into a form that can be acted (“two interesting personalities”; the three part structure). At the same time, he addresses himself to Jones’s attachment needs, both directly and by assigning a genre to Jones’s fear (“no tragic element”). In this way, Freud works to contain the enactment between Jones and Riviere by giving it a form. Thus, I agree with Jacobus (Poetics 54), and disagree with Anton Kris (651), that Freud does not engage in the enactment between Jones and Riviere. Freud casts himself in the role of watching and writing about what he sees, and thus decidedly in the audience – though, to be sure, as an interested observer. In 1922, Riviere is listed on the inside front cover of the International Journal of Psychoanalysis as Translation Editor, a position that she holds until 1937.

The correspondence between Freud, Jones and Riviere around Riviere’s psychoanalysis and work at the Journal provides a view of a symptomatic femininity not as the residue of past, sealed-over incestuous conflicts but in response to present historical conflicts around the gendering of labour – including, in particular, the labour of psychoanalysis. Riviere’s illness is discursively produced in the letters between Jones and Freud, animates their theories as well as her own, and provides one pole of an argument for limiting her role at the Journal (while not limiting the amount of work that she is relied upon to do). The theories of femininity debated in the 1920s and advanced by the three writers are produced in the crucible of this exchange and exchanges like it – between the originator of psychoanalysis, one of his male disciples, and a woman crossing over the patient-analyst divide.
“Womanliness as a Masquerade”

The retribution that Riviere’s patient in “Womanliness as a Masquerade” fears on account of believing that her claim to speaking authority is a “theft” has, in other words, a corollary in Riviere’s relation with Ernest Jones. The connection between these two levels of meaning is not, however, immediately apparent. On the surface, the article seems straightforward enough. Riviere takes as her subject the emergence of women in intellectual life and the professions. Whereas not long before, intellectual pursuits for women were associated with an overtly masculine character, “who in pronounced cases made no secret or her wish or claim to be a man” (91), the women that Riviere considers fulfill every criterion of femininity, in addition to carrying out the duties of their profession “at least as well as the average man” (91). For this reason, it “really is a puzzle to know how to classify this type psychologically.” Riviere carries over the classifying impulse from Jones’s theory of feminine types which she uses as the background for her patient’s boundary crossing, and which distinguishes heterosexual and homosexual “types” of women, while acknowledging the blurring of these boundaries in everyday life. Riviere takes up, in this way, not only the status of the female professional in modern society but its position within psychoanalytic discourse and specifically, the writing of her colleague and former analyst.

As an example of this modernist type, Riviere gives a female patient whose work consists of lecturing to audiences. The patient carries out her lectures in an impersonal style with a high degree of success, only to be stricken afterwards by anxiety as to whether she has said anything inappropriate. Riviere finds that she does indeed become inappropriate on these occasions, seeking out reassurance and sexual attention from male members of the audience. The compulsion is necessary as a way of concealing and atoning for her assumption of a masculine role. The discussion that follows develops a conceptual basis for considering gender as a role; because she begins without such a framework, Riviere lacks – and conjures – a language with which to do so. The patient fears the retribution of men, because

The exhibition in public of her intellectual proficiency, which was in itself carried through successfully, signified an exhibition of herself in possession of
her father’s penis, having castrated him. The display once over, she was seized by horrible dread of the retribution the father would then exact. (93)

Within a signifying economy in which speaking authority entails masculinity and vice versa, the patient composes herself as a sexual object, thereby staging the lack of masculinity that convinces everyone present including herself that she has stolen or claimed no such thing:67 “Obviously it was a step towards propitiating the avenger to endeavour to offer herself to him sexually.” In Lacanian terms, this involves appearing to be the phallus that she does not have, the object that signifies the desire of the male other – and safe in this guise.

Riviere then turns to consider this staging or this masquerade itself to define “womanliness:” Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the ‘masquerade’. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (94)

For whom does the patient’s assumption of a speaking role signify a theft of the “goods”? The patient? Her audience, in the men (lecture hall) and Riviere (psychoanalysis)? Or the audience of Jones that shadows Riviere’s text with its strictures? What is evident from her discussion is that it is above all for Riviere herself that the patient’s behaviour has this meaning.68 By assigning the wish to castrate the value of the truth of the patient’s unconscious, established prior to any anticipatory factors or influence from an audience (including the audience of the lecture hall and the analysis), Riviere collapses the relational field in which individuals acquire an understanding of themselves through the eyes of others, and rely on these others for confirming responses in order to claim versions of self. In doing so, she denies her patient the same recognition for her work that she experiences with Jones.

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67 Within a heteronormative context, to be or appear as a sexual object means to be female. Riviere’s masquerade both reflects and expresses this assumption, which Butler describes as conflating gender with a naturalized heterosexual orientation (Gender Trouble 50).

68 The patient herself is, on the other hand, “hardly aware” of her “compulsive ogling and coquetting … til analysis made it manifest” (93).
This would seem to suggest a connection along the lines that womanliness appears as masquerade where the interpersonal conditions governing the legibility of a female “self” as a subject of agentic expression are missing. (In Riviere’s analysis and work life these conditions are represented by Jones and his defensive style as it interacts with Riviere’s own; in the patient’s, by her analyst Joan Riviere and her audience in the lecture hall.) However, to conclude in this way is already to find oneself within the hall of mirrors that characterizes the masquerade. From what vantage point can such a statement be made? What notion of femininity is reified in the making, bringing us full circle to Butler’s Gender Trouble? What is instead clear from the context out of which the article arises is that such a statement cannot be made by Riviere from the vantage point that she inherits from her analysis with Jones. Instead, she carries forward to her patient a field of understanding in which such a statement is itself masculine or “unwomanly” and therefore, the patient like the analyst is indefensible and must wish rather to castrate by her assertion of self. Only thereby does Riviere avoid the charge of appearing to wish and conceal the same.69

The ironic resonance between Riviere and her patient comes to a head around the themes of recognition and the public sphere. Riviere twice makes reference to Ernest Jones’s cases in describing her patient’s wish for recognition from men as bound up with an apparently painful split between private and public:

she corresponded clearly to one type Ernest Jones has sketched: his first group of homosexual women who, while taking no interest in other women, wish for ‘recognition’ of their masculinity from men and claim to be the equals of men, or in other words, to be men themselves. Her resentment, however, was not openly expressed; publicly she acknowledged her condition of womanhood.

(37)

The question of what constitutes “their masculinity” for these women remains implicit, and thus becomes equivalent to the wish for acknowledgement (“of it”) from men – or in other words, equivalent to the appearance (to the analyst) of having this wish. Thus the two-way

69 This is to say, the observation that femininity appears as masquerade within an interpersonal field structured around the gendered polarity of subject and object is, itself, a critique of this field. To make such a critique would represent an assertion of difference that would signify as “unwomanly” by the very terms of the interpersonal field that the critique seeks to describe: the stance of critique itself implies a subjective viewpoint and a stability that Riviere describes as the definition of masculinity.
structure in which gender difference is constituted around a claim to be recognized as possessing something indefinable (defined only by the structure of the claim itself, masculinity) and a performance of the renunciation of such a claim (femininity) is opened out by the third term of the analyst, who is in the position of hearing the patient’s desire for recognition, and calling it masculine. Rivière’s use of Jones’s types has a chiastic structure: if active femininity is unfeminine, Riviere herself passively adopts Jones’ theoretical formulation and thereby avoids the charge of being unfeminine herself.

Several pages later, Riviere considers “Ernest Jones’ type of homosexual woman whose aim is to obtain ‘recognition’ of her masculinity from men”:

One can see that with less anxiety my patient too would have openly claimed recognition from men for her possession of a penis… [I]n private she did in fact, like Ernest Jones’ cases, bitterly resent any lack of this direct recognition. (43, my italics).

The genre of the case study makes the private public, while supposedly safeguarding the privacy of the patient by concealing her identity. Yet this patient and this privacy are also Riviere herself and her own, if we consider that Riviere speaks of herself writing in “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” as well as of the patient. Rivière’s article mobilizes the tension between her (public) writerly and (private) analysand selves. The public space of the article, in which she adopts Ernest Jones’ categories of which she is a specific example, sets up a point of resonance between the private world of the patient’s analysis with Riviere and that of Riviere’s own analysis with Jones (the space of the “like Ernest Jones’ cases”). Yet the association remains for us to reconstruct. In “Womanliness,” this compartmentalization separates out the patient’s experience from Riviere’s own. That separation – at its paper-thinnest here – is the difference between illness and social critique.

“Race” and the Mask of White Womanliness

Riviere has no context for recognizing her patient either in the history of her analysis with Jones or in the broader history of psychoanalytic writing about women and the “masculinity complex” that distils a cultural moment; her writing rather represents a claim for such a
context. Because this context does not yet exist, Riviere instead sees her patient as suffering from the same masculinity complex that she, Riviere, has been seen to suffer from. Riviere preserves attachment to Jones and Freud by echoing their views, that is, by describing her patient’s assertion as concealing a wish for masculinity and therefore representing a theft of something that belongs to men. The masquerading woman is supposed to cover over the wish for “masculinity” by appearing as sexual object, thus confirming the man by her performance; however, the argument requires evidence that the woman wishes for masculinity in the first place, i.e. in the unconscious. This requires symbolic support for the association of activity with masculinity – support ensuring the common good of such activity, which requires that it be in some measure directed towards members of the “opposite” sex who are not similarly active, in order to justify why they are not, or should or must not be. This requires a fantasmatic aggression from a place designated as “outside.” The passage bears re-quoting:

The exhibition in public of her intellectual proficiency, which was in itself carried through successfully, signified an exhibition of herself in possession of her father’s penis, having castrated him. The display once over, she was seized by horrible dread of the retribution the father would then exact. Obviously it was a step towards propitiating the avenger to endeavour to offer herself to him sexually. This phantasy, it then appeared, had been very common in her childhood and youth, which had been spent in the Southern States of America; if a negro came to attack her, she planned to defend herself by making him kiss her and make love to her (ultimately so that she could then deliver him over to justice). (93)

Why is this fantasmatic aggression from “outside” figured as black masculinity? Recalling that the woman and man in Riviere’s discussion are presumed to be white, the above discussion can be re-stated: in order for a white woman to appear to confirm a white man by her lack – the strategy of masquerade, covering over a wish for masculinity - there needs to be something about a white man’s masculinity, something that the white woman does not have, that forecloses her acting on her own behalf and having her own power. She therefore needs to appear to be in need of protection on account of her femininity, or needs to need to be protected by a white man in order for her supposed weakness to be explained by her
gender – in order for her to be missing something to do with his masculinity (and not his race, which she shares with him). She therefore must require protection by a white man from a non-white man. It is on the basis of this performed vulnerability that the white woman becomes legible as feminine, participates in the privilege accorded to white men, and secures white male power.

On the other hand, the white man in question is called forth as providing protection on the basis of something about himself (whiteness) that the other man does not have (as well as something about himself – masculinity – that the white woman does not have). The opportunity to appear in a protective role positions white heterosexual masculinity in a relation of paternal dominance over non-white, non-male, not to mention non-heterosexual positions, with all of the economic and decision-making privileges that such a positionality affords. At the same time, the fantasized “attack” appears to be about gender rather than about race. In this way, the violence of the dominant term (whiteness) is displaced onto the subordinate term (blackness), thereby authorizing, while appearing to do no such thing, white supremacy. As dread is supposed to cover over a wish in unconscious fantasy, in Riviere’s account the woman interchangeably wishes for and fears sex with a black man. Riviere does not comment on this equivocation; rather, the sinister psychoanalytics of a wished-for attack instrumentalize a theory of (white) femininity as a defense against anxiety and male-envy motivated rage.

It is in this way that the patient’s phantasy serves to “propitiate” the patient’s male colleagues, as Riviere argues. The man socialized on the basis of repudiation of the mother (Benjamin, Bonds of Love) wishes to be confirmed in his narcissistic omnipotence as male, meaning “not-female.” Such an unstable personality organization, which Lynne Layton describes as normative masculinity under capitalist patriarchy, requires women to appear as the sign and confirmation of male omnipotence, or in other words, to appear to lack agency so as to be the (goal of the) agency of the man (147-150). In order to “propitiate” male audience members imagined to have such a defensive style, or assure them that her assertion of professional competency is not a threat, the patient needs to appear to need protection in a sense related to her femininity (and not her race, which she presumably shares with the men).
The phantasy of assault by a non-white man satisfies this requirement. Appearing in the phantasy, she constructs herself as the sexualized object in need of protection that reassures the white men of their own masculine invulnerability. In fact, the phantasy is said to be from the patient’s youth, so that its connection to her supposed behaviour in the workplace (“masquerade”) is speculative. More precisely, the phantasy satisfies or fills in the terms of Riviere’s theoretical argument.

As a frame for her discussion of Riviere, Jean Walton turns to the work of Frantz Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks, as the first sustained analysis of the psychoanalytic discourse around female sexual agency in the 1920s as mediated by the figure of a black male aggressor. Walton identifies, however, a gap in Fanon’s argument as he takes the inversion of sexuality and aggressivity in (white) women to be a given, in order for it to figure as a starting point for his discussion of agentic deviance as projected, by these women, onto black men. Fanon draws on the work of Helene Deutsch and Marie Bonaparte, both of whom respond to Freud’s drive theory in the Three Essays (1905) and who emphasise developmental stages characterized by particular biological functions (oral, anal, genital). The girl’s genital stage is considered to consist of two substages, normally progressing from an active “bisexual” clitoral fixation to the passive/heterosexual experience of pleasure in the vagina. During this stage, Fanon considers that the girl’s aggression becomes inverted when it is not taken up by the father, who is “a libidinal aggressive” (179). This inversion, however, is incomplete: Fanon considers normative femininity to retain traces of a deviant infantile complex characterized at once by murderous wishes towards the mother and by bisexuality:

Our question, then, is whether, side by side with the final achievement of femininity, there is not some survival of this infantile fantasy. Too strong an aversion in a woman against the rough games of men is, furthermore, a

70 Although Fanon is vague as to what might constitute the terms of the father “taking up” the daughter’s aggression, Benjamin’s notion of father-daughter cross-gender identification provides a contemporary suggestion (Bonds 107-113).

71 Like Bonaparte and Deutsch before him, and like Riviere in “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” Fanon’s discussion tends toward a Kleinian emphasis on the (interchangeably male or female) child’s aggression towards the mother, imagined as a wish to disembowel the mother and rob her of her body’s contents, namely the (father’s) penis, faeces, children etc. (Riviere becomes one of the major proponents of Kleinian theory in British Psychoanalytic circles.)
suspicious indication of male protest and excessive bisexuality. It is possible that such a woman will be clitoral. (179)\textsuperscript{72}

In the spirit of the quoted passage in which it is unclear whether bisexuality is, in itself, excessive or whether it in specific instances exceeds a “normal” amount of bisexual (and therefore homosexual) investment, Fanon aligns femininity with infantilism and deviancy: the conflict between aggression and what is thus articulated as “femininity” becomes the paradoxical definition of the (presumed mature, but only ever on tenuous grounds) woman. On the other hand, women who seek to contest the association active/infantile in Fanon’s view resolve the conflict of their gender position by projecting aggression onto the figure of a black man. Earlier in \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, Fanon describes how blackness becomes associated with badness and aggression in the unconscious of both white and black children educated in a colonialist culture (146). Black men are thus liable to be invested with the projected aggression that the girl learns is not for her – both unfeminine and therefore, to her, bad.

Since the girl is at the age in which the child begins to enter the folklore and the culture along roads that we know, the Negro becomes the predestined depository of this aggression. If we go farther into the labyrinth, we discover that when a woman lives the fantasy of rape by a Negro, it is in some way the fulfillment of a private dream, of an inner wish. Accomplishing the phenomenon of turning against self, it is the woman who rapes herself. (179)

The adult “woman” is here interchangeable with the “girl” who resolves the conflict of her femininity and her aggression through the fantasy of rape by a black man: femininity is, as it were, arrested in a timeless state of conflict kept from consciousness through the intermediary of the other-self as rapist. Fanon thus upholds the framework that inscribes femininity in a condition of alienated agency (here, in the masochistic extreme of self-rape), in describing the psycho-cultural conditions for the myth of the black rapist.

\textsuperscript{72} The quoted passage is from Marie Bonaparte, “De la sexualité de la femme,” in \textit{Revue Française de Psychoanalyse}, April - June 1949. Bonaparte has been subject to mixed fascination and derision by contemporary readers as she took her allegiance to psychoanalysis to the point of undergoing voluntary gynaecological surgeries to repair her own supposed clitoral fixation. For an analysis of Bonaparte’s interest in the anthropology of African cultures as an analogy for the European unconscious, see Walton.
A couple of norms intersect here. Fanon’s discussion establishes a heterosexual norm of femininity as conflict and alienation against a “bisexual” alternative that is folded into the structure of the norm, rather than defining this norm by exclusion: normative heterosexual femininity is marked by bisexual regression, and as such it is in a conflict with its culture, insomuch as heterosexual femininity constitutes a feminine ideal within this culture. At the same time, the perspective of male aggression establishes heterosexual “femininity” as white. As has already been seen, the fantasy of interracial rape produces the white woman or in this case, “girl” in relation to a racialized male other, as at once feminine (sexual object) and unracialized. The production of femininity as white constructs black femininity in a relation of textual and sexual “excess.” Fanon cryptically registers the production of black women outside of the field of his vision: “Those who grant our conclusions on the psychosexuality of the white woman may ask what we have to say about the woman of color. I know nothing about her” (179-180).

Sandra Gunning has identified the point of view of male rivalry or aggression as a problematic perspective from which to consider the stereotype of the black rapist (9). Invoking black women’s sexuality in order to place it beyond the limits of representation, Fanon in fact paradoxically colludes with the stereotype of the black rapist, which mystifies, and provides cultural sanction for, the real rape of black women by white men. The sexual exploitation of black women is not available for the meaning “rape” insomuch as it falls outside of the economy by which rape circulates as a theft of the domestic property [wife or (recognized) daughter] of a white middle or upper class man (Davis 172). Thus, Gunning argues that black women are not negated from, but rather “profoundly present” in the ritual of lynching,

since they speak not only … to the sexual excess of white women, but also to the sexual excess of white men themselves[.] After all, black women were regularly victims of white sexual aggression. This fact was consistently masked by the ancient charge that, because she was the female equivalent of the black rapist, the black woman could never be raped. (10)

The spectacle of lynching further disguises the cultural tradition of white male sexual aggression against black women by producing white men in the position of moral avengers
(Gunning 10). Instead, Gunning argues for the need to study the interrelations among all four of the positions marked out, or crossed over, by the appropriation of black male sexuality.

What arises out of Fanon’s account, like Riviere’s, is the relation between the four positions and a heterosexual norm. In assuming this norm, both writers locate themselves within a Freudian tradition that required “active” femininity to have the meaning “homosexual,” in order for the supposed enigma of female sexuality not to disturb the logic of the masculine libido – or, by a modernist inversion, in order for female sexuality to signify, precisely, this disturbance (Young-Bruehl 21). In order for libido to be “masculine,” meaning, in the heterosexual paradigm, “oriented towards a female object,” the active desire of women for men must be phallic and homosexual (Butler, Gender Trouble). This annexing of the meaning of love between women to the meaning, love of men, is made possible by signifying lesbianism as empty, or as referring – together with the “active” love of a man – to a masculine identification (refusal to relinquish the incestuous heterosexual object).73 However, as Fanon’s discussion shows, this explanation simply pushes back the problem of masculine aggression or sexual agency one generation, to the girl whose aggression is not “taken up” by the father, “who is a libidinal aggressive” (179). Instead, the association masculine/aggressive is secured through the fantasmatic support of the black male other (which mystification Fanon’s argument paradoxically appears to rely upon). This support must, however, be disavowed, in order for it not to disturb the construction of masculinity and femininity as independent categories, established prior to constructions of race.

Thus, desire is coded as male and heterosexual, and it is not coded as white insomuch as whiteness is itself coded, in the sexual economy outlined by the myth of the black rapist, as an absence of “race.” Femininity within this tradition appears as the inversion of desire that is re-invested in the wish to be the object of the other’s desire. If women were to desire they would desire other women, but they would then be male, since desiring women defines maleness in a heterosexual symbolic. Because this is not possible, there needs to be some

73 This is the thesis of Jones’s “The Early Development of Feminine Sexuality,” the outline of which is taken up by Lacan in “The Meaning of the Phallus.” For a discussion of the heteronormativity of the masculine libido as conflating gender attributes (masculinity, femininity) with sexual ones (orientation towards a female object, orientation towards appearing as that object), see Butler, Gender Trouble 50.
reason why the women in question do not desire, some symbolic support for the association of activity with masculinity. This requires the spectacle of white women being protected from black men by white men, in the manner already described.\(^{74}\)

In relation to this racialized male other (“the Negro”), the white woman is produced as feminine (meaning, object of desire) at the same time as she is produced as unmarked by race (“the girl”). Where femininity is produced as white, to be female and to look like the racialized male other (metaphorically speaking) is to be produced as un-“feminine,” meaning, not an object of desire. Not to be an object of desire means, within this dualistic framework, to be a subject of desire; yet, to be a subject of desire and female is coded as “unfeminine,” and therefore “unnatural.” The sexualization of black women enables the circulation of “femininity” as a moral category in the service of white male property rights.

\(^{74}\) Judith Butler critiques the heteronormativity of Riviere’s argument as part of her discussion of Lacan and feminine masquerade in *Gender Trouble*. She does not, however, consider how the appropriation of homosexuality factors into the appropriation of “race” in Riviere’s text. The reading that I give of this intersection responds to a question that Butler poses in her following text, *Bodies that Matter*:

What would it mean … to consider the assumption of sexual positions, the disjunctive ordering of the human as “masculine” or “feminine” as taking place not only through a heterosexualizing symbolic with its taboo on miscegenation, but through a complex set of racial injunctions which operate in part through the taboo on miscegenation? Further, how might we understand homosexuality and miscegenation to converge at and as the constitutive outside of a normative heterosexuality that is at once the regulation of a racially pure reproduction? (167)

Butler goes on to consider the co-production of heterosexual and white standards of masculinity and femininity in terms of the classical concepts of the superego and ego ideal.

In her reading of Riviere in *Gender Trouble*, Butler at length reduces the complexities of the relationship between speaking authority and sexuality in Riviere’s text to a drive theory paradigm that masculinizes both. Butler effectively joins Riviere in dismissing her patient’s appeal for recognition and equality in the workplace, by interpreting it to conceal an erotic rivalry with men over possession of a common female love object (54). According to Butler, the patient denies this connection because the option is refused to her in advance by the structure of the scene of address (lecture hall, analysis). Thus, “[a]lthough she fears that her castrating wish might be understood, she denies that there is a contest over a common object of desire without which the masculine identification that she does acknowledge would lack its confirmation and essential sign” (54). Butler’s argument brings out the idea that gender is heteronormatively defined within a “patriarchal” economy, such that masculinity coincides with desire for a woman. Hence Butler argues that the female patient’s masculine *identification* also entails desire for a woman. In making this point, however, Butler takes at face value Riviere’s reading of her patient’s public speech as masculine identification in the first place. As such, the patient’s claim to speaking authority must signify desire for a woman rather than (or as the measure of) the self-referential wish to assume the position of subject within language. The position of the speaker in Butler’s argument is upheld or constructed as masculine, even as Butler would argue for the socially constructed nature of the term (as the heteronormative indication, “desire for a woman”). In correctly foregrounding the elision of homosexuality within Riviere’s article as an example of a broader psychoanalytic discourse on femininity, Butler at the same time places under erasure the complex exchange through which claims to speaking authority are socially coded as masculine.
The sexual economy produced by the fantasy of the black male rapist, and supported by an interpretation of it in terms of male rivalry, enables the sexual exploitation of black women, who, if they are sexual subjects, seemingly cannot be sexually objectified (Gunning, Walton, Niu, Davis). Such an economy carries forward, from racial slavery, the privilege of white male slave owners to sexually exploit black female slaves without their doing so upsetting the moral hierarchy by which white male rights are produced as universal rights (in the sense that white women are produced as property, black men as thieves, and black women as outside of representation by the law altogether). On the contrary, the production of white male-black female sexual contact as outside of representation by white patriarchal law is, like the myth of the black rapist, a sign and guarantee of white supremacist power (Davis 174-76). In “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” the production of (white) “femininity” through the fantasy of a black rapist relies on the concealed figuration of black femininity, in the manner described above. Immediately following the description of the phantasy, Riviere asserts:

> But there was a further determinant of the obsessive behaviour. In a dream that had a rather similar content to this childhood phantasy, she was in terror alone in the house; then a negro came in and found her washing clothes, with her sleeves rolled up and arms exposed.

Greta Ai-Yu Niu considers that the dream both invokes and conceals a black female presence:

> In the text, neither Riviere nor the “intellectual woman” client mentions black women. However, the figure of the black woman emerges most strongly in the dream where the woman is washing clothes, engaged in work that seems typical of a black woman working in a privileged Southern household. (139)

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75 On the other hand, the case of Anita Hill illustrates the impossible position that black women may find themselves in as victims of unwanted sexual attention from black men. In 1991, Clarence Thomas, the Bush administration’s nominee for a Supreme Court appointment, was accused by law professor Anita Hill of sexually harassing her when she worked for him during the 1980s, at the Equality Employment Opportunity Commission. Thomas characterized the media storm that followed the accusation as a “high tech lynching.” Ultimately, Hill’s testimony did little to affect Thomas’s appointment by a hiring committee anxious not to appear racially prejudiced. While white feminists largely rallied behind Hill for taking a stand against sexual harassment in the workplace on behalf of all women, the case has become a touchstone for relations between gender, race and class privilege in America (Gunning 175; Morrison, *Race-ing Justice*).
Niu reads the woman as vulnerable to the sexual predation of the white male head of the dream’s imaginary household, and considers that the text contains a disguised description (whether as critique or as sanction is unclear) of the real vulnerability of black women covered over by the myth of the black rapist.

Without disagreeing with Niu’s conclusions, I want to consider that the suppressed figuration of a black female presence may have an additional meaning related to the construction of black and white femininity in relation to one another. Insofar as social power is organized on the basis of rivalry between men who are presumed to be sexual subjects, the association of black women with sexual subjectivity brings up connotations of social or speaking authority. White women wishing to assert authority may therefore have turned to the image of black femininity as a model for their own power. Angela Davis argues that, on the one hand, the ideology of white feminine purity relegated men to the public and women to the private spheres under the effects of the industrial revolution, in which the move from a farm-based economy to a factory-based economy rendered obsolete much of the traditional household industry of women (18).76 “Masculinity” became associated with strength and social authority measured in the capacity to protect and provide for a wife (and associated children) who could not do such things for themselves. Under this regime, the male head of the household was entitled to speak on behalf of the experiences and interests of his wife. On the other hand, black women under slavery continued to be viewed in terms of their labour and were expected to do as much work as men: it was therefore not expedient to apply the doctrine of feminine vulnerability to them (Davis 8). Black women were instead viewed as strong and capable, and both of these attributes were culturally coded within the prevailing ideology as masculine.

Paradoxically, through their double remove from white male power, black women may have been more able publicly to claim experiences of strength than white women. Davis gives the example of Sojourner Truth’s iconic speech as the only black woman present at a meeting to debate (white) women’s suffrage in Akron, Ohio in 1851. According to the testimony of the chairperson of the debate, many white women were too intimidated to speak at such

76 Davis gives candle-making and weaving as examples.
meetings; some of the same women sought to prevent Truth from speaking when she rose to respond to a claim that women should not be given the vote because they could not even step over puddles or climb into a carriage without the help of a man:

I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have born thirteen children and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman? (Stanton et al., *History of Woman Suffrage* 115, qtd in Davis 61)

Where the image of women as weak is given as justification for withholding the vote, a strong exception constitutes a moral argument in favour of extending it to the group. Truth asserts women’s right to vote on the basis of the same logic used to exclude them. At the same time, her address argues as much against racism as sexism, contesting the exclusion of herself as black from the group of women whose vote was being debated (Davis 63-64). Truth speaks indirectly for herself as African American, and for racial equality, through speaking on behalf of the group of women of which she is an excluded part.

The historical association of female strength with black femininity suggests a possible reason for the phenomenon of white women appropriating black women as models or sources of inspiration for their own emergent sense of social power, especially during nodes of heightened historical pressure on gender roles, such as characterized by first and second wave feminism.77 Ann Ducille critiques the tendency of some white male and especially female academics to fetishize texts by black women, or black women as texts, in what Jane Gallop has described confessionally as a search for an “authentic” black female experience to oppose to a dominant white masculine culture (Ducille 38).78 Ducille identifies in the recent

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77 Sara Evans describes the basis of the youthful second wave feminist movement in the civil rights movement and in young white women’s working alliances with older black women, often based in the community (83). Wini Brienes cites former black female SNCC workers who criticized Evans for allegedly portraying women in SNCC as second class citizens, thus diminishing both the organization as a whole and the work of women within it (33).

78 Writing of Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Ducille describes her initial strong identification with the book, only to discover, in its final chapters, an idyllic narrative “tribute” to a black women whom Rich knew as a child and whom she refers to only as “my black Mother.” Through this claim to the unnamed woman’s care as “mothering.” Rich enacts the very objectification of motherhood that it is her intention to expose: “Even in the midst of her own extended critique of the mystification of motherhood
vogue for writing by black women a troubling return to the 1920s fad of primitivism and the fascination with black women’s bodies and sexuality (22).

This primitivist fascination is evident in “Womanliness as a Masquerade.” The hidden figuration of black femininity that Niu identifies serves the narrative of a white woman (patient) struggling with the conflict between her gender role and her work role as a public speaker, written by another white woman (Riviere) struggling with the same. The full description of the dream and its interpretation is as follows:

In a dream that had a rather similar content to this childhood phantasy, she was in terror alone in the house; then a negro came in and found her washing clothes, with her sleeves rolled up and arms exposed. She resisted him, with the secret intention of attracting him sexually, and he began to admire her arms and to caress them and her breasts. The meaning was that she had killed father and mother and obtained everything for herself (alone in the house), became terrified of their retribution (expected shots through the window), and defended herself by taking on a menial role (washing clothes) and by washing off dirt and sweat, guilt and blood, everything she had obtained by the deed, and “disguising herself” as merely a castrated woman. In that guise the man found no stolen property on her which he need attack her to recover and, further, found her attractive as an object of love. (93-94)

and the objectification of women as mothers, Rich has both mystified and objectified someone she can see only in the possessive case as ‘my Black Mother’” (Ducille 41). At once idealizing the woman as a mother, and depriving her of both voice and subjectivity, Rich in effect takes over her image, appropriating it as a figure of strength for her young self.

Elizabeth Abel, in the same collection, describes a similar textual encounter from the perspective of a white female critic. Reading Toni Morrison’s “Recitatif,” Abel considers her assumption that the character with more cultural awareness – the subject-presumed-to-know by the story’s first person protagonist – is African American (473). Addressing her own fantasmatic construction of black cultural authority, and projection of whiteness onto the insecure interiority of Twyla, Abel moves on to consider that one way to deconstruct a notion of a white reader as reading from a racially unmarked subject position is to abandon the assumption that white readers can read themselves outside of their own embeddedness in networks of racial domination other than by a personal encounter with their own tendency to fantasmatically construct a racialized other.

Jean Wyatt describes the harm that white women’s idealizing identifications with African American women do to the possibility of cross-cultural feminist dialogue. Idealization not only denies the separate subjectivity of the other, it also abstracts the other woman’s idealized qualities from the social conditions that foster their development. This “protects the white idealizer from having to confront the adverse material conditions that attach to being black in the United States and the daily insults and injuries of racism” (Risking Difference 108-109). Idealization thus works counter to the possibility either of working to change the racial power structure, or of acknowledging the privileges one gains from it.
The manifest content of the rape fantasy (“she resisted him, with the secret intention of attracting him sexually”) conceals, according to Niu, a figuration of the patient in the stereotypical role of a black female domestic servant, “washing clothes.” In the sense in which all figures in a dream are supposed to represent the self, it may be that the patient “defend[s] herself” by taking on a stereotypical role associated with black women’s labour – thereby rendering her assertion of capability as a working woman into a socially recognizable form.

Disguising her claim to power in this way, the patient appears as “merely a castrated woman,” which reflects the ambivalence of power in a milieu in which black women are able to claim strength and yet doing so is not associated with economic privilege. In the sense in which the state of castration, as lack of penis, is supposed to correspond to a lack of power, the patient’s “castration” as a white woman is only partial in that she is white and she performs “femininity” – the masquerade as castrated – in such a way as to participate in white male privilege (Walton 23). In order for her masquerade as castrated to work, in order for her to hide her power (“masculinity”), the substitution of white for black must remain hidden. Therefore the woman washing clothes evokes an image of black femininity, but this is never overtly stated. The class connotations of the image, however, remain and become annexed to the meaning “womanly” (according to the chain “merely a castrated woman” / working class occupation / domestic labour). This aligns class privilege, which the patient previously claimed as a speaker in a professional milieu, with masculinity as “phallic” power, which it goes without saying is white due to the simultaneous substitution of black for white women. However, Riviere cannot draw out any of these connections because her own assertion of authority in a work capacity, as author of the text, relies on a similar strategy of masquerade. Instead, disguised as the patient disguised as the washer woman, Riviere appears as castrated and, therefore, safe, all the while reserving speaking authority for herself.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have read the manifest and hidden figurations of an Africanist presence in “Womanliness as a Masquerade” as motivated by Riviere’s own conflicts as a writer and
psychoanalyst working within a framework that is itself structured around the production of the (white) female patient as the “other” of the knowing male analyst. I have considered that, based on her personal and professional experiences as a psychoanalyst, theorist and analysand in the 1920s, Riviere has little choice but to give a patriarchal reading, and this reading relies on a heteronormative viewing position and a white supremacist fantasy. Describing the relations among these norms is important to psychoanalytic literary criticism as this criticism continues, to a large extent, to rely on a classical understanding of femininity in terms of masquerade. Turning the text around, however, reading it for its personal investments and historical situatedness, “Womanliness as a Masquerade” provides grounds for reading the drive theory of psychoanalysis as describing a white heterosexist patriarchy – that is, at once accurately describing a certain cultural formation, and yet giving sanction to it, even participating in discursively producing it. Riviere’s text does not make or imply such a critique but rather, by participating in this production, makes it possible to look at the historical conditions that lead to participation.

Having made this argument, I want to suggest one final revision to it, which brings my discussion up to speed with the self-critical or reflexive turn of my readings of Munro in chapters one and two. In “History and Psychoanalysis,” Dominick La Capra describes the tendency of historiographic critiques of psychoanalysis to construct empirical past histories available to understanding (15). These then require, in turn, a psychoanalytic critique of what set of ideological parameters a given project invests. Each of the perspectives of psychoanalysis and history, where taken as a frame of reference for critique of the other, produces a surplus in the insights and perspective that it, in critiquing, excludes.79

For the purposes of my reading of Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” this is significant because the perspective that my discussion offers – on the role of gender inequality in Riviere’s personal and professional contexts as something that bears in turn on her writing and its problematic exploitation of white privilege – in some ways shares underlying structural similarities with the framework of modernist psychoanalysis that I have

79 Foucault comments on this circularity in the construction and critique of forms of rationality, which, he argues, construct themselves on the basis of closure and alienation with a previous form (“How Much”).
argued colludes with a prevailing white heterosexist patriarchy. Specifically, I first construct the individuals in question (Riviere, her patient) as victimized by such a context, in order to then argue that this \textit{causes} them to seek to recuperate agency through a performance of white privilege (in the patient’s fantasy as it is shared by Riviere in her uneven interpretation). Such a reading, however – as Butler has argued about second wave feminism – discursively replicates the denial of agency to women that it then discovers as a theoretical fact.\footnote{For a similar argument in post-colonial criticism, see Bhabha’s critique of Said, revisited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in “Critical Fanonism” (459-460). Bhabha argues that Said’s critique of Orientalism assumes that “power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer” (“Difference” 200, quoted in Gates 459). His own work on the ambivalence of colonial discourse seeks to foreground the agency of the oppressed that is lost to their construction as entirely specified within the discourse of colonial power (Said’s argument that the Orient is a fantasy of the West, which discursively replicates the rhetorical structure of exclusion of the self-representations of the colonized which it seeks to critique). Gates helpfully elucidates the theoretical stakes of an argument about the agency of the oppressed, which he describes in terms of a double bind: “You can empower discursively the native, and open yourself to charges of downplaying the epistemic (and literal) violence of colonialism; or play up the absolute nature of colonial domination, and be open to charges of negating the subjectivity and agency of the colonized, thus textually replicating the repressive operations of colonialism. In agency, so it seems, begins responsibility” (462).} As such, it is a version of the argument that white women, because they are disadvantaged within the power structure, cannot in a meaningful way be agents \textit{of} that structure. At stake is the intervention of discourse itself or the role of the interpreter in constructing a version of history that is not so much false as opposed to true, as it is an action upon and within power.\footnote{Foucault makes this point in an interview in which he claims that he is “no theoretician of power” (“How Much” 254).}

This suggests the necessity of reading from a dual point of view – one which entertains the possibility of historical factors to Riviere’s writing of her article (and to the development of psychoanalysis in and through the exchange in which “Womanliness as a Masquerade” participates, among Freud, Jones, Horney, Riviere and others); and one which appreciates this history as a \textit{retrospective construct of reading}. In this respect, history is, as Elizabeth Clark writes, not so much “‘past,’ vanished and now available only through ‘traces,’ as it is driven by the problems and questions set by the historian in the present” (7).

These problems, in the case of the concept of white feminine masquerade, recapitulate the framework of power in which they are posed. Specifically, the construction of white femininity as victimized is the counterpart to (or implies) the myth of the black rapist and the
sexualisation of black femininity. This suggests the need for a revision of an interpretation of
gender oppression that foregrounds the agency that is lost to its construction as an empirical
truth (prior to its description in and as “feminist narrative”).

One issue on which virtually all of the readings of Riviere’s text to date agree is that
Riviere’s patient’s expectation of retribution from her audience is correct or that there is no
gap between her thoughts on the matter and the reality of the environment in which she
formulates them. By extension Riviere herself, in identifying with the patient and denying the
existence of social factors to the patient’s anxiety effectively reveals an all-too-intimate
closeness with these factors. While I would not want to take an opposite position, I argue for
the reintroduction of a moment of doubt, or a gap between perception and reality large
enough to suggest how, in the case of the masquerade, the former constructs the latter.

I suggest that Riviere’s patient be seen as reacting to the expectation that her audience will
see her assertion of self as castrating as if it were a foregone conclusion. She thus
“masquerades” as feminine, and her doing so constructs the association male = speaker that
fulfills her belief that it is so. Riviere meanwhile shares in the patient’s belief and describes
the psychodynamics of the patient’s performance in just these terms (as unconscious
castration). In doing so, she defends against the fear of retribution from her own male
audience in Jones and Freud. If, on the other hand, Riviere were able to recognize the
aggression that she expects as her perception (not obviating the fact that there may indeed be
actual aggression but differentiating her expectation of it as her thought about a situation
from reality), she would not be drawn to fantasize a scapegoat figure onto whom to displace
the violence of what she sees as the foregone conclusion of her subjective devaluation, in the

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82 The point is not to argue that gender oppression, as a discursive construct, lacks a material basis, as some
versions of postmodernism would almost seem to suggest, in asserting that any and all claims to experience or
identity can only be seen as based upon a prior failure (Moya 5, 68). Instead, as Satya Mohanty argues, it would
seem necessary in the case of thinking about social justice to consider that claims to experiences of oppression
(such as are made in political or identity-based discourses) may be both “socially constructed” or mediated, and
yet have potential truth value (55-56). In other words, the binary opposition of truth and social construction that
is a feature of postmodernist epistemology may not do justice to the difficult work of thinking about multiple,
interacting levels of difference and oppression such as operate in contemporary social reality. See the Appendix
for a further discussion of this issue.
To the extent that the cultural narrative of white feminine masquerade confines white women to the realm of the imaginary, in the sense of defining them in a lack of self-image or relationship of closeness to the image (Doane 23), a perspective on or critical distance from this process is foreclosed. Instead, readings of Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade” have constructed the power they have proposed to resist, largely by failing to consider how, as bell hooks writes, “race and racism determine[ ] the visual construction of gender” (“Oppositional Looks” 313), in both white patriarchy and its articulation in Riviere’s text. To reframe the narrative of white feminine masquerade as an internal construction opens up new possibilities for performing the script (Butler, *Gender Trouble*). Moreover, it seems to me that a perspective which frames the script as a script holds out the possibility of short-circuiting the association of femininity with “whiteness,” in the sense of its being linked to the recruitment of signifiers of racial difference to modulate an anxiety imagined as external to one’s self-constitution (participation in the story of one’s relation to the world).
Chapter 4
Masquerade and Representation in Jane Campion’s *In the Cut*

The concept of feminine masquerade which I considered in the last chapter is of paramount importance to film theory. Stephen Heath, for example, describes the masquerade as in some senses synonymous with the cinema in that it is a theory of the woman as image:

The masquerade is obviously at once a whole cinema, the given image of femininity. So it is no surprise that cinema itself can be seen as a prime statement of the masquerade, nor then that the masquerade as a concept should have a presence today in film analysis, thinking about film… Cinema has played to the maximum the masquerade, the signs of the exchange [of] femininity, has ceaselessly reproduced its – their – social currency: from genre to genre, film to film, the same spectacle of the woman, her body highlighted into the unity of its image, this cinema image, set out with all the signs of femininity (all the “dress and behaviour”). (57)

At the same time, Heath considers that a theory of the cinema that starts from feminine masquerade is problematic. Psychoanalysis, and Riviere’s theory of masquerade as a particular example, “seems to fix things forever in the given, and oppressive, identities, with no connections through to the social-historical realities that it also seems accurately to be describing” (56). In this chapter, I take up the problem of psychoanalytic film theory that Heath outlines from the vantage point offered by my reading of feminine masquerade in the last chapter. In it, I argued that Riviere’s theory of masquerade both responds to and is itself an articulation of an historically specific gendering of the workforce and public sphere. The theory of femininity as masquerade that Riviere develops, moreover, relies on the fantasmatic support of a racialized male other. In the current chapter, I consider what this expanded context may offer to psychoanalytic approaches to film criticism by giving a reading of a film, Jane Campion’s neo noir thriller *In the Cut* from 2003. Critics such as Lucy Bolton and Linda Ruth Williams have described the film as resisting gendered conventions of spectatorship, through the figure of the white female protagonist Frannie Avery who accidentally witnesses a couple having sex in a bar basement. With this scene, Frannie is established as a subject of the sexual gaze.
I will argue, on the other hand, that the film in fact upholds gendered and racialized conventions of spectatorship under the guise of subverting them. The scene in the bar basement that Bolton and Williams identify as central to the film’s visual economy is immediately preceded by a scene above ground in which Frannie meets her black student, Cornelius, and is accused by him of a racialized fascination with him and with African American culture. A question arises as to whether the film intends a critique or exposure of Frannie’s gaze – thus “feminizing” her according to conventions of visuality as structured around a feminine image and masculine look. A second, related question concerns why the gendering of the look in the film should be mediated through a racially coded male figure. What does this suggest, finally, about the racialization of female agency both in the film and in popular structures of romance? The film’s sexual politics, I will argue, are difficult if not impossible to resolve. This difficulty of resolution mirrors that of Joan Riviere’s article on masquerade itself. And, it is best understood if the film is considered as its director Jane Campion’s own masquerade.

As “arguably the pre-eminent female auteur currently active on the international film scene” (Wexman)83, Campion works in a field in which the director’s role – literally, the activity of looking – is highly correlated with masculinity. Her representation of Frannie as female and as a spectator speaks to the difficulty of producing images within artistic conventions within which one is oneself produced as the image. This is similar to the difficulty that Joan Riviere faces in describing the ambitions of female professionals and intellectuals within a psychoanalytic framework where these ambitions (including Riviere’s own) are construed as the pathological effects of a masculinity complex. I will argue that Campion identifies with Frannie in In the Cut, and that, by projecting onto blackness a status as other that male directors tend to assign to women (Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure”), Campion both represents a white female subject of the gaze (herself looking, in the guise of Frannie) and represents that gaze in the narrative logic as cancelled out – or in other words, as appropriately feminine. In

83 Back cover blurb, Jane Campion. Eds Hilary Radner, Alistair Fox and Irene Bessiere.
doing so, Campion recomposes herself and her artistic endeavour within visual conventions in which she is (in being an active spectator, behind the camera) doing “a man’s job.”84

With this reading, I bring together two threads of Campion criticism: work which considers her film in terms of autobiographical connections and in terms of Campion’s engagement with the trope of autobiography or self-crafting; and critiques of Campion’s work, particularly in response to *The Piano* (1993), that see her as employing a problematic colonialist or white supremacist gaze. Reading in this way suggests that sexism – including film industry sexism and sexist conventions of representation – is an element in a racialist-colonialist imaginary. This interrelationship can furthermore be seen to organize the visual field of *In the Cut*. The film and its relation to Campion herself raise questions of accountability for problematic representations. These questions, I will argue, cannot be understood from within the same field of vision as comprises both available film theories and *In the Cut*’s specific engagement with them. Instead, to conclude, I consider a short story by Alice Walker, “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells,” which, I argue, speaks to the exclusion of black femininity by and within much white feminist film criticism as well as a film such as *In the Cut* that responds to it.

“Visual Pleasure” and the Masquerade

Before turning to *In the Cut*, I will consider first the relationship between masquerade and film theories of the gaze, as well as suggest some current debates in and around film theory to which an expanded reading of masquerade may contribute. Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” is widely regarded as establishing the terms of engagement

84 In arguing that Campion’s position as a woman within the film industry has effects on the form that her films take, I am suggesting some similarities between the role of the director and that of the author as shaping the form of their art. Radner and Fox, in their introduction to *Jane Campion: Cinema, Nation, Identity*, argue that the essays in that collection “attest to the ways in which ‘authorship’ continues to be a useful category for the analysis of film—on the model of that offered by cinema scholars such as Janet Staiger, in which the ‘author’ is considered to function as an agent within the confines of a set of narrative tropes and institutions that constitute the culturally written” (xv). On the other hand, the authors point out that the idea of auteursm that is necessarily used implies an understanding “of the cultural function and production of the filmmaker as auteur within the larger context of cinema as a global industry.” In writing about Campion’s films as having autobiographical echoes in the director’s life or (more precisely) relation to the cinema, I am similarly suggesting the trope of autobiography as a mode of self-construction rather than a category with privileged links to a domain of lived experience. In this respect, I am using an idea of implied authorship (directorship), but suggesting that the author or director is in some senses “implied” to him or herself as well as to readers/viewers.
for the debate around gendered spectatorship in feminist film criticism in the nineteen eighties. Numerous critiques have been made of Mulvey’s argument in “Visual Pleasure,” as well as in her follow-up article, “Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure,” from both inside and outside film feminism. Critics of Mulvey have, however, been less able to come up with alternative theories to supplement the gaps they identify in hers (Doane 20; Williams, “Something Else” 483). Mulvey’s position in the larger body of film criticism is similar to that of psychoanalytic film theory as described by Heath, in that it is both apparently indispensable and yet problematic to the degree that, as a theory, its observations remain disconnected from socio-historical realities.85

In “Visual Pleasure,” Mulvey draws implicitly on earlier film theory and the idea of suture in arguing that the grammar of narrative cinema “masculinizes” (31) spectators – or aligns spectators with a masculine viewpoint. According to the theory of suture, viewers are understood to take up and identify with the character to whose look a given shot corresponds. The technique of shot-reverse shot, which often pairs a visual field with an image of a character’s face, converts the first image into a signifier for the second: i.e., we associate the first shot with what the person whose face is imaged in the second shot sees (Chaudhuri 49). In this way, montage links authoritative vision to the perceptual field of fictional characters (Silverman, Acoustic Mirror 12). This linkage motivates viewers to identify with the character whose look the camera seemingly reproduces: in doing so, viewers are repossessed of a sense of visual mastery that is supposedly threatened by the mechanism of film itself (the substitution of an image of an object or reality for the absence of that object) (12).

The idea of suture provides a way to understand the link between film form and the experiences of spectators through the structuring concept of lack. Kaja Silverman points out the association in film theory of the idea of cinema’s structuring lack with ideas of sexual

85 I.e., Mulvey’s argument is nominally historical to the degree that she speaks for the need for alternative filmmaking practices; on the other hand, Gwendolyn Foster points out that her article raises questions – “How are we to apply Lacanian theory to women’s cinema? Is there an essential women’s cinema?” – that “can only be addressed when one confronts the entire history of cinema practice, that is, the totality of film production created by women and men” (“Looking in the Mirror” VII). Foster thus posits a link between film theory and practice that is absent in Mulvey’s somewhat idealistic usage of psychoanalysis as a desituated site for considering the field of film.
difference. Christian Metz, for example, describes the loss of the object that is the condition of cinematic representation as an experience of castration (Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror* 4). In “Visual Pleasure,” Mulvey likewise considers that the fantasy world of the screen refers back to the traumatic birth of desire in the castration complex. Cinema supposedly relieves castration anxiety by offering to the viewer a fantasy of omnipotence. This fantasy may be realized in one of two ways, through identification with the look, or identification with the image. The first corresponds to pleasure in viewing, and involves the libidinal investment of an object (object libido), the second to narcissistic merger of the viewer’s ego with an ideal image, or onscreen representative of action (ego libido). In both cases, viewers are assured of their bodily coherence through the onscreen figure of a woman. In the second instance, the woman is styled after the fantasy of the male hero (visually controlled by him) (19). To the discourse on suture, then, Mulvey adds an analysis of the gendered division of representational labour in narrative film, which solicits viewers to identify unevenly with male characters, looking at female ones. The narrative function of “woman” in this argument is pinned to the relief of male anxiety through fantasies of sexual difference. Thus, in “Afterthoughts on Narrative Cinema” (1981), Mulvey contends that the mythic function of “woman” in Western cinema has been to signify the erotic for “man.”

At the same time, the female figure is supposedly threatening to the visual mastery of spectators in that she evokes, through her visible lack of a penis, the castration anxiety that it is her narrative function to relieve. Mulvey contends that cinema offers two solutions to this problem: first, investigating the woman so as to demystify her difference by finding her guilty and either punishing or forgiving her – a strategy typical of film noir – and second, fetishistic overvaluation of the woman and denial of her “lack.” Both strategies, Linda Williams notes, are “ways of not-seeing, of either keeping at a safe distance from, or misrecognizing what there is to see of, the woman’s difference” (“Something Else” 482).

Critics responding to “Visual Pleasure” pointed out the lack of attention Mulvey gives to female as distinct from male spectators: her use of the masculine third person to designate the spectator discursively enacts the male standard of viewing and the elision of femininity that she ascribes to the cinema. Moreover, while it is relatively easy to see how male viewers may
be pleased by a narrative that encourages identification with a male hero, whose goal is personified by the (eroticised) image of a woman, it is less clear what kinds of pleasure the same structure affords to female viewers. In “Afterthoughts,” Mulvey considers that the position of female spectators is mirrored in melodramas wherein a female protagonist is unable to achieve a stable sexual identity. Drawing on Freud’s observations in “Femininity,” that some women alternate between regressive “phallic” and normative feminine identifications (the latter position haunted by the loss of the former), Mulvey contends that female spectators may similarly fluctuate between identification with a masculine principle of action, and identification with a representation of femininity that is itself internally conflicted.

Critiques of Mulvey’s argument on the grounds that it negates the possibility of a female viewer have tended to risk the charge of essentialism: that is, they share with the narrative cinema that Mulvey critiques a belief in an essential femininity. Doane argues:

This attachment to the figure of a generalizable Woman as the product of the apparatus indicates why, for many, feminist film theory seems to have reached an impasse, a certain blockage in its theorization… In focusing upon the task of delineating in great detail the attributes of woman as effect of the apparatus, feminist film theory participates in the abstraction of women. (78)

Mulvey’s argument, on the other hand, avoids this charge to the degree that it considers narrative cinema as defining femininity around what implied male spectators (wish to) see – that is, in terms of the masquerade. In “Film and the Masquerade,” Doane considers that the opposition Mulvey uncovers between active/masculine and passive/feminine viewing positions may be more precisely one between distance and closeness to the image, with femininity being synonymous, in this culture, with its own image or in other words with masquerade. 86

86 Specifically, Doane argues that women under patriarchy have no obvious way to separate themselves from an image of femininity; thus, they come to be associated with the image, and to relate to themselves in this way. The lack of distance between the woman and her image makes for a failure of distance between spectator and screen (a distance that is the measure and definition of a spectating “position”) (24). Here, Doane introduces the idea of masquerade as providing a way out of the condition of over-closeness with the image. The woman who masquerades as “feminine” effects a separation between herself and an image of herself. In this respect, she becomes a viable figure of gender-consonant identification for female viewers. Doane qualifies this claim in a subsequent paper, however, in which she considers that the strategy of hetero-conforming gender performance
For Mulvey, cinema “masculinis[es]” spectators in the sense that a masculine viewpoint is defined in relation to the anxious exclusion of femininity as one which looks at women (connoting “to be looked at ness”), or in other words, looks at what the viewer is not, or does not identify with, but worries that he or she may become, and thus pleasurably overcomes through the strategies either of scophilic investigation or fetishism. The relation of this argument to an idea of feminine masquerade can be seen in Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, which Mulvey uses as an example of cinema’s production of visual pleasure through voyeurism. In *Vertigo*, the male protagonist Scottie falls in love with the female object of desire Madeleine after he sees her gazing at a painting that mirrors aspects of her own image, and that in this respect appears enigmatically to return her gaze. This mirroring frustrates Scottie’s own look at Madeleine – his attempt to know the truth of her desire, what she is looking at and therefore what she wants, as per his contract with her husband Gavin to get to the bottom of her mysterious behaviour. Madeleine is not so much exposed in looking at the painting by Scottie as viewer or, in some perverse sense, by the painting itself, as her exposure or unveiling by Scottie/the spectator constitutes her as veiled, and therefore as capable of being unveiled in theory. This propensity to being unveiled constitutes, not so much the feminine, as the masculine in relation to the desire to unveil 1) a fantasized woman, in the sense that 2) this fantasy of femininity is itself entirely specified by the veil (masquerade). Thus, it is not so much that Madeleine as a woman is the “looked at,” but that her own look constitutes femininity as a fantasy of the viewer – in other words, in an oppositional relation to the act of looking and fantasizing what one sees. In terms of Mulvey’s argument, there may be female spectators but, insomuch as they are masculinized in looking at/by narrative cinema, their looks constitute femininity as an excluded term.

The categories of masculine and feminine in Mulvey’s analysis rely upon an idea of masquerade; yet, as I showed in my analysis of Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” this idea is historically specific to the increasing numbers of female professionals and workers in intellectual fields that Riviere describes, and to the

limits the woman using it to appearing as an object styled after male cultural fantasy (“Further Thoughts on the Masquerade”).
accommodations they (and/or at least Riviere herself) may have had to make in order not to appear to be encroaching on a male social prerogative. A wrinkle thus arises in the attempt to generalize psychoanalytic readings of specific films to a theory of gendered spectatorship or of the visual construction of gender. This has to do with the fact that psychoanalysis places difference under erasure: to the degree that the sign “woman” signifies difference from “man,” the woman in question is constructed as racially unmarked, which in this culture means white. Yet, as Sandra Gunning points out, white femininity as man’s other (and therefore not a sexual subject) signifies in white Western patriarchy only in relation to a non-white femininity constructed as sexual (10).87

The racialized construction of the white female object of desire can in fact be seen in *Vertigo*, in the theme of the Spanish ancestry of Carlotta, the woman by whose image Madeleine is seemingly possessed (reflected), as well as in the way that the blonde Madeleine is revealed as the brunette Judy. Burchill remarks on the racialized construction of ideals of femininity in *Girls on Film*: “What does it say about racial purity that the best blondes have all been brunettes (Harlow, Monroe, Bardot)? I think it says that we are not as white as we think,” (np, quoted in hooks 232). In revealing the blonde Madeleine as a dyed brunette, Hitchcock references the cinema’s obsession with the female image as a racialized obsession. Madeleine’s masquerade is a simultaneous performance of femininity and whiteness – a show performed in relation to and as a separation from an idea of racially and class-coded femininity that constructs it by opposition.

In *Performing Whiteness*, Gwendolyn Foster asks whether working class whiteness may not be racially coded within the symbolism of American social life.88 She argues, however: “I am

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87 Jane Gaines cites Frederic Jameson’s interpretation of Laura Mulvey’s connection between visual pleasure and male power as the conferral of a “right to look.” She adds: “He does not take this further, but I find the term suggestive and at the same time potentially volatile” (Jameson, “Pleasure: A Political Issue” 7, quoted in Gaines 25). The idea of a convergence of the social definition of masculinity with a right to look is suggestive in the impetus that it gives to describing conventions of heteronormative desire as these are encoded in film. Yet, the right to look has historically been racialized, as some men have been privileged to look, whereas others have “looked illicitly” (Gaines 25). This suggests the influence of race on the construction of cinematic language.

88 See also Alice Walker’s short story “Source,” in which the narrator remarks: “When white people reached a certain level of poverty (assuming they were not members of the Klan, or worse which they very often were), they ceased to be ‘white’ to her. Like many of her quasi-political beliefs, however, she had not thought this
drawn to the idea that lower or working-class whites can be inscribed by signifiers of blackness, but I stubbornly maintain that these signifiers have more to do with an attempt to configure whiteness as a construction that is falsely stable” (77).89 This strategy of configuring a falsely stable whiteness seems to be at work in Judy’s character, the brunette who is hired by Gavin to dupe Scottie. The “real” Madeleine, who is not the object of desire, not another man’s wife or a rich man’s daughter, is working class to the degree that she is herself merely, not positioned as the signifier of another man’s power and class status – or perhaps to the degree that Judy is Madeleine, i.e. is so positioned by the role she accepts to play, she does not have class status in and of herself. This status is rather coded as masculine, and, through a chain of signifiers in which masculinity signifies as white (belonging to the father of the fantasmatically racially “pure” Madeleine just as Madeleine herself belongs), it is coded as white. Thus, intimations of racial and class difference combine to produce the white female object of white male desire, in the character of Judy, who is both not Madeleine and yet, insomuch as the “real” Judy dies when Scottie discovers that she is not Madeleine, is or becomes Madeleine, i.e., that which does not exist outside of Scottie’s imagination. In this sense, the film provides an analysis of the patriarchal construction of white middle class norms of femininity by the cinema; at the same time, it is also an example of this cultural production. As such, Vertigo has similarities to psychoanalysis as described by its feminist readers. Shoshana Felman, for example, argues for the necessity of psychoanalysis to feminist critique, as “an analysis of patriarchy rather than a recommendation for one,” together with Juliet Mitchell (Psychoanalysis and Feminism xiii). At the same time, Felman doubts “that as an analysis of patriarchy, Freudian psychoanalysis is entirely transparent to itself, entirely conscious of its full ideological implications” (What 68-69).90

Vertigo appears to confirm the psychoanalytic construction of femininity as masquerade; and conversely, the idea of feminine masquerade as a de-historicized concept is appropriate to an analysis of Vertigo. What I want to open up, however, is the inter-implication of structures of through. She was afraid to, and this was one of the major failings in her character” (You Can’t Keep a Good Woman Down 144).

89 In order for whiteness to appear as stable, in other words, it must not appear to be internally differentiated by class or ‘other’ markers of difference.
90 Felman’s analysis speaks to the post-modern view of models of the mind as not only describing historically specific forms of subjectivity, but also participating in producing them. For discussion of the influence of postmodernism on psychoanalysis, see Fairfield, Susan, Lynne Layton and Carolyn Stack eds.
visuality with the history of film production. This suggests a need for two linked approaches: 1) an analysis of the racialized construction of gender in film, and 2) readings of individual films that both use psychoanalysis and confront it with its own historicity or disavowed premises.

Such an approach speaks obliquely to a debate in film theory around the validity of psychoanalytic versus other approaches. Noel Carroll and David Bordwell, for example, are sceptical about psychoanalytic approaches to thinking about film as a master language of the psyche, or a way to explain all cinematic experience. Such a critique tends to overlook the fact that filmmakers are also spectators and that films show us how to look at them, or constitute their own theories of spectatorship. On the other hand, I would add that, like psychoanalytic theories, these are partly autobiographical, or the stories of their own progenitors’ experiences of the cinema and of their own participation in it. In other words, I want to query the theory/personal story/fiction divide that prevails in both the majority of film theoretical approaches, as critiqued by Carroll, Bordwell and cognitivist critics, as well as in supposedly anti or “post”-theoretical approaches that reject psychoanalysis and allied paradigms as uncritically-wielded authorities. To do so, I turn to Campion’s In the Cut.

In the Cut

The plot of In the Cut concerns a young English teacher, Frannie Avery, who is almost-witness to the sexually motivated murder of a woman, when she happens to be in a bar with her student at the same time as the murderer and his future victim. Going down to the basement to use the washroom, Frannie (Meg Ryan) accidentally stumbles upon a woman giving oral sex to a man. The man’s face is shrouded in darkness but Frannie sees a three of spades tattoo on the inside of his wrist. Later, after part of a woman’s body is found in the garden outside Frannie’s apartment, a police detective arrives at her door. The victim was last

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91 See, for example, the essays in Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies. Ed. Carroll and Bordwell. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1996. Clifford T. Manlove notes that the critique of film theory resembles issues that gave rise to reader response theories: “Stephen Prince put the problem with psychoanalysis this way: “theories of spectatorship fly well beyond the data … we do have about how people watch and interpret films.” Prince’s desire to locate a real audience is akin to what gaze rise to reader response theory in literary studies. It is clear, however, that theories of spectatorship are concerned not only with how people watch people and what they have to say about it, but also with the social and psychical dimensions of vision and of the visible” (87-88).
seen in the bar around the time Frannie was there with her student. Did she see anything? No, she responds, because now she sees something else: the detective has the same three of spades tattoo on his wrist.

In the film, as in the novel by Susanna Moore that the film adapts, Frannie becomes obsessed with the details of the murder and pursues a relationship with detective Malloy (Mark Ruffalo) despite evidence suggesting that he may be the murderer. Not only does she do so, the fantasmatic support for her attraction to Malloy is the threat he poses. Malloy’s penis is borrowed from the other man, the three of spades tattoo being a kind of phallic signifier: a scene of Frannie masturbating is cut together with the fantasy that she gets off to, images of Malloy’s face and the disembodied penis and tattoo from the bar. Malloy also seduces Frannie one evening after she is mugged on the street, by getting her to repeat the motions of the attack with himself standing in as the attacker. When Frannie associates the mugging to the recent murder, Malloy is sceptical: “It’s not likely your assailant was the murderer, babe. It’s far more likely he was looking for your wallet.”

Frannie’s attraction to Malloy, whom she also fears, evokes the idea of a conflicted female viewer of cultural images of “woman” as a screen for the projection of anxieties common to both sexes (“castration anxiety” in Mulvey, a term which Silverman argues is in fact prior to the discovery of sexual difference and in that respect affects men and women equally [Acoustic Mirror 16]). Frannie embodies an idea of female spectatorship not only in that she is the viewer of the scene in the basement, and we see through her eyes; the film also draws attention to her status as a cultural consumer, through her profession as an English teacher, her frequent distraction by signs and messages in the urban environment (for example, on the subway), and her current book project, a collection of slang terminology. The terms that Frannie collects, she tells her sister Pauline, are “either sexual or violent.” Later, when Malloy interviews her and uses the word “disarticulation” (meaning, to cut someone’s head off) in reference to the murdered woman, Frannie writes down the word and pins it to her bulletin board. Lucy Bolton argues that Frannie’s interest in language represents an attempt to gain “linguistic mastery” over the cultural derogation of femininity that is diffusely echoed in the real violence of the murders, whose perpetrator remains mysterious for most of the
film (63, 67). Elsewhere, the murders are thematically linked to questions of reading when one of Frannie’s students complains that *To the Lighthouse* is a boring book, because all that happens is “One old lady dies.” “How many ladies have to die to make it good?” Frannie asks, and the reply, “At least three,” resonates with events in the film: three at least is also the number of the murderer’s victims in the real world (McHugh, *Jane Campion* 133).

In this way, the film invites reading of its romantic developments and their noir entanglement with the murders as an allegory of the desire of a female cultural consumer. In a milieu in which there is a traffic in dead “ladies,” *In the Cut* seems to suggest, female viewers may be drawn into identifying with a position that they must also reject, insomuch as this position represents, itself, a negation of subjectivity, or of positionality. Yet, along with this rejection goes the narcissistic pleasure of seeing oneself in the image. In *The Words of Selves*, Denise Riley notes that the ego constitutes itself through identifications, on which it depends for its structure (130). Masochism, then, may indeed be economical in the sense of preserving a subject position for the individual under the guise of its negation. It is also in this sense that Mary Ann Doane finds the position of the female spectator in a lack of distance from the image. Where the ego cannot establish itself through the image, in its absence there is no positionality or spectatorship possible vis a vis the image or, in relation to it, vis a vis the bank of cultural images of femininity generally.

Frannie’s ambivalent identification with the woman she sees in the basement, Angela Sands, plays out in her hesitation between fear of and attraction to Malloy, the man whom she substitutes in fantasy for the man with Angela. Frannie’s lack of distance from the image of the soon-to-be-murdered woman is likewise shown in the way in which elements from the murder plot progressively show up in her life: part of the murdered woman’s body shows up in the garden outside Frannie’s apartment, and Frannie’s half-sister Pauline (a version of the self) is the murderer’s next victim. Frannie’s relation to Malloy, as to Pauline, raises questions of representation. Malloy as a man seems to represent a threat to Frannie as a

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92 Riley quotes Judith Butler from *The Identity in Question*: “the subject ‘is a kind of crossroads of identification, identifications which are carried by language’” (135, quoted in Riley 130). Laplanche and Pontalis likewise write: “It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified” (205).
woman, in the metaphorical sense in which femininity may take on the cultural burden of representing, within the sexual contract, a castrated masculinity. Yet, insomuch as this conflict indexes an aspect of representation as propagated through the lack of the woman, it cannot be represented as happening to a singular female subject, Frannie. Instead, it plays out in the relation between the two half sisters, the reticent and barely pulled together English teacher – representing an agency always about to turn into its other – and the sexually obsessed double, who lives on top of a strip club, has no known or represented (or relevant?) occupation of her own, and who fantasizes about “get[ting] married” – representing desire or a process of its expulsion, from the diegesis, as an aspect of femininity (in Pauline’s murder).

The cinematography of *In the Cut* has likewise been read as resisting the traditional alignment of the female figure with the image. Linda Ruth Williams describes Frannie’s act of voyeurism in the bar basement, in combination with what she sees – disembodied male parts – as a transgression of visual convention that suggests a new language for cinematic representation:

> The intense focus on the male organ seen from the point of view of a secret viewer mixes a genre commonplace (female voyeurism) with a cinematic rarity: it is almost as if Campion is, in one astonishing sequence, trying to redress the long history of cinema peeping in on women’s bodies … the scene … makes men see their organs through the diegetic woman’s eyes, and through a woman’s camera-eye … From this moment, though the film unfolds as a familiar erotic thriller, a potentially new erotic landscape has been suggested. (*Erotic Thriller* 419)

Lucy Bolton similarly describes the film as foregrounding or reflecting Frannie’s point of view (77). Bolton describes viewers as seeing other characters through Frannie’s eyes much of the time, as well as techniques that the film uses to heighten the suggestion that what we see is a representation of Frannie’s internal world. For example, a shot of a line of poetry on the subway is edited together with a shot of Frannie looking at it; a voice reads the words on the audio track but Frannie’s lips do not move. This encourages viewers to interpret the voice as representing Frannie’s thought. The last line, “under a thicket of kisses,” is repeated, and then, as Frannie exits the subway, the camera cuts to a shot of a female passenger’s torso,
with the word “kisses” imprinted on her shirt. In this way, the film gives a sense of its world as being filtered through Frannie’s internal process or reverie. Significantly, however, the woman whose body the camera cuts to in the above example is African American. This and other examples like it suggest that the film’s construction of a female look is racialized.

Similarly, I will argue that Frannie’s accidental voyeurism in the bar basement in fact confirms gendered and racialized conventions of visuality under the guise of subverting them. The scene in the basement is immediately preceded by a scene on the ground floor of the Red Turtle bar, in which Frannie meets her black student, Cornelius. Frannie has engaged Cornelius to help her with her book on slang. Earlier, I cited Bolton’s reading of Frannie’s study of slang as an attempt to gain linguistic mastery over a culture that she experiences as verbally and otherwise hostile towards women. If there is a kind of power in gaining facility with the terms used to represent women either positively or negatively, Frannie’s phallus is not her own, however. She relies on Cornelius’s cultural expertise: “I got a new word for you. Meow. You gonna write that down? You know you should be paying me for this.” “You think so.” There is an exchange of words, a currency, but Frannie is not paying him. Cornelius attempts to communicate the power relation implied in her reliance on him: “You know, it’s people like you think the brothers are guinea pigs. The way we talk and shit…” Frannie cuts him off with a performance of authority: “Cornelius, are you trying to say that you need an extension?"

Frannie re-labels Cornelius’s communication as relating to their teacher-student relationship. In doing so, she substitutes her legitimate privilege as his teacher for the illegitimate assumption of white privilege that he has just exposed. This allows the latter to continue, as it were, under cover. A question arises as to the film’s relation to Frannie’s action, whether as a critique or as something else. On the one hand, it seems that Frannie cannot acknowledge her appropriation of Cornelius because her usage of him as a phallic extension relies on disavowal: one cannot substitute oneself for another at the moment of being aware of doing so. At the same time, Cornelius’s resistance to Frannie’s usage of him in this way is

93 The first shot of Frannie in the film is of her opening her eyes, which suggests a congruence between what we and she see as a world not far off from her dream.
necessary to construct the meaning of their relationship as one of her identification with his imagined power or cultural fluency. His verbalization of the sense of finding himself as the phallus within her fantasy provides the occasion for her denial, a response which in fact secures the relationship that he describes as disavowed truth (the content of her fantasy). This disavowal is Frannie’s, but it is also the film’s own: Frannie’s action in cutting Cornelius off is connected up to the film’s own grammar as the camera itself cuts, at this point, to a shot of a glass shattering near a woman’s high heeled feet, somewhere else in the bar. Frannie looks on.

In this reading, Cornelius is right to the degree that what he says does not become an aspect of narrative conflict. Frannie’s need to defend against the possibility of what he says being true constructs his communication as a kind of open secret, both to the film and to her imaginary. This structuring of the narrative by Frannie’s refusal of conflict is congruent with Bolton’s reading of the film as a whole as following or reflecting Frannie’s internal process.

On the other hand, Frannie’s voyeuristic look in the basement can be connected up to her enthusiasm for slang, a kind of linguistic voyeurism, which Cornelius exposes. From this point of view, the scene in the basement may constitute a critique of the scene that immediately precedes it above ground. Frannie’s “look” is also an exposure of her look; or, she is exposed in the process of looking. Insomuch as the privilege of looking is coded as masculine, she is seemingly masculinized (a voyeur) at the same time as she is exposed in looking (feminized). In this way, the film seems to uphold gendered constructions of visuality under the guise of subverting them. Or, the film couches subversion in such a way that it relieves the anxiety attendant upon making a claim to inclusion (in the person of Frannie and her look) within a dominant regime from which one senses oneself to be excluded. Frannie is looking, but not really – she is (the) seen; therefore, she may look without her doing so disturbing the implied male viewer’s sense of visual mastery as an imaginary identification with the woman he sees (strategy of projecting “lack” onto femininity and introjecting integration as masculine).
These different ways of reading the film break down around the question of the film’s relation to its protagonist’s whiteness: does the film in fact intend a critique of Frannie’s intellectual ambitions as an exercise in racial appropriation? How and why is the exclusion of the feminine mediated by the racialization of a male other, either by Frannie and/or by the film itself? What is Campion’s relation to her protagonist? Moreover, the triangle of relations among an implied male gaze, racialized male other and excluded female look suggests that the film’s preoccupation with the latter relies upon an identification of femininity with white femininity. What fantasy of racialized femininity norms the film, or organizes its visual field? These questions that the film raises suggest its own attempt to contend with theories of visuality, in that they cannot be resolved within the parameters of available theories of spectatorship, but rather suggest the limitations of these theories. On the other hand, I will argue at length that the film does not offer an alternative.

In chapter three, I pointed out the performative aspect of Joan Riviere’s theory of masquerade as Riviere’s own defense against the anxiety attendant upon being one of the intellectual women in a male-dominated sphere that she describes. Riviere’s theory of masquerade defends against appearing to usurp a male prerogative (claiming intellectual or speaking authority) by describing the other woman’s claim to the same as just such an usurpation (in unconscious fantasy). In arguing thus, Riviere confirms the theories of male colleagues Jones and Freud and of a classical psychoanalytic theory that functioned in some capacity to contain what Thomas Balazs describes as modern men’s anxiety around women’s entry into the intellectual/professional workforce and public life, by ascribing women’s intellectual ambitions to the pathological effects of a masculinity complex (178).

I want now to argue that Campion’s In the Cut has similarly autobiographical echoes in its director’s life and work situation. Like Riviere, and like Riviere’s patient, Campion is one of a small but increasing number of female workers in a male-dominated field – as one of a handful of female directors whose work has attracted big budget funding. She is therefore in a similar position to Riviere and her patient in that the work she does as a director (literally, calling the shots) is highly correlated with masculinity. As “arguably the pre-eminent female
auteur currently active on the international film scene” (Wexman). Campion lacks a bank of available images of women doing similar work at the same level of responsibility; she is in a sense charged with producing these images, in her work, for other women, without having comparable ones of her own to model herself or her work after. This is not to suggest that women have not always been active in cinema as directors, cinematographers and editors, or that Campion does not have important female contemporaries working in Hollywood, on the international film scene, or in independent film. In fact, there is evidence that female film directors are on the rise: for the first time in 2013, Sundance Film Festival reported that half of its features were made by women.

There remains, however, a bias in representations of filmmaking as a masculine activity. The power of the cultural association of femininity with the image is such that the active look, including the filmmaker’s look, is highly correlated with masculinity. This tension between the overcoming of historical gender barriers and their pernicious afterlife in different forms can be seen in the media release for a short film festival showcasing work by women, Media Action’s REPRESENT Project, held in Toronto on March 7th and 8th, 2013. The project, a “forum to improve media representations of women in Canada,” invited three minute short film contributions from women. The festival's website stated: “The girls we know don’t look like what we see on TV. They’re too diverse, creative and complex to look like what we see in mainstream media. We think the media are missing out.” At the same time and alongside this message, the website's visual content featured women behind the camera who were young, conventionally attractive, dressed in party dresses and, in all but one image, Caucasian. The festival’s call for submissions thus concealed a number of messages. At the moment of inviting the potential participant to imagine herself behind the camera, the

94 Back cover blurb, Jane Campion. Eds Hilary Radner, Alistair Fox and Irene Bessiere.
95 In fact, Foster notes that a woman, Alice Guy Blache, directed what many consider to be the first narrative film, La Fee Aux Choux (1896). Foster further cites Anthony Slide’s argument in Early Women Directors that “women in fact ‘predominated in the film industry in many areas until the mid-twenties, when sexism, industry professionalization and monopolization pushed them out of the director’s chair’” (“Looking in the Mirror” III). For work on female film directors, see Ally Acker, Reel Women: Pioneers of the Cinema 1896 to the Present, The Women's Companion to International Film, Ed. Annette Kuhn with Susannah Radstone, and Louise Heck-Rabi, Women Filmmakers: the Critical Reception.
festival’s promotional material positioned her as the image. Evidently the visual effect of having a woman behind a camera is so threatening to cultural constructions of gender that the woman in question must be overtly identified with the image at the very moment at which she looks. Moreover, since ideals of femininity in this culture are white, so the women depicted shooting film were as well. In this respect, the website did not formulate its call for submissions to women so much as either to men or to women reading on behalf of, or as men; and, in so much as it did formulate its call to women, it did so to white women. The festival’s call for submissions had, in other words, a structure of feminine masquerade.

Among other things, the structure of the festival’s call for submissions – a structure of feminine masquerade – suggests the barriers that a female director like Campion faces in working in film – barriers which, I will argue, Campion does not entirely successfully overcome, but which are reflected in the narrative arc of her films, and, as such, form part of her (intentional or unintentional) autobiographical project of self-creation in the medium of film. Numerous critics of Campion’s work remark on the autobiographical aspect of her craft. Virginia Wexman describes autobiographical connections in all of her works up to 1999, though she notes that Campion does not always herself claim such connections in her interviews (Campion Interviews xv). Harriet Margolis describes a short film, “The Audition,” directed by Jane Campion’s sister Anna Campion, in which Jane and her mother play themselves. According to Margolis, the film shows its director and actors as being self-consciously involved in constructing images of personal identity to project to the world.98 And Kathleen McHugh considers that Campion’s adaptation of literary works in her films constitutes an act of autobiography. (In addition to her adaptation of Susanna Moore’s novel In the Cut, Campion has adapted Henry James’s The Portrait of a Lady and the autobiography of New Zealand author Jane Frame, An Angel at My Table.) McHugh argues that Campion represents her adaptations self-consciously as interpretations of the original texts. Campion first identifies with the protagonist of the work she is adapting. From there, McHugh argues, “Campion’s placement of her literal signature within cinematic sequences that theorize the logic of the subsequent adaptation effectively appropriates and signs their

98 In Radner and Fox 39-54.
imaginative work as her own” (“Adaptation” 139). As a result, it is through the distance of the other text and in relation to it that Campion’s work emerges as her own.

Campion’s artistic practice, in this respect, can be compared to an accommodation that Shohana Felman describes women as making in view of their social and cultural positioning as man’s other:

I will suggest that none of us, as women, has as yet, precisely, an autobiography. Trained to see ourselves as objects and to be positioned as the Other, estranged to ourselves, we have a story that by definition cannot be self-present to us, a story that, in other words, is not a story, but must become a story. (What? 14)

Like Mary Ann Doane, who describes female spectatorship in terms of a lack of distance from the image, Felman suggests that women experience their stories vicariously through the stories of other women. Campion, I would argue, sublimates this strategy or mode of self-experience into one in which she herself is the originator of the image of the other woman – in this case, Frannie. At the same time, to the degree that Frannie is without a story (or with “what amounts to the same thing, the presence of too many stories” [Felman 15]), this “with” or “without” stands in not so much autobiographically for Campion’s missing story as for the missing distance between herself and (or as) that missing story.

On the other hand, Hazel Carby makes the point that white, or at least white middle class women have in fact historically had a voice within white patriarchy, because they at least have been able to formulate their exclusion by it as a claim to rightful inclusion (3). The idea of women as lacking a story in a generalized sense must thus be placed under some examination.99 For the purpose of my argument, I will suggest that insofar as it illuminates the condition or angle of address of white middle class woman, Felman’s construction of women as lacking an autobiography is relevant to Campion’s relation to her films. To the degree that an argument based on an idea of “women” implies a standardizable feminine

99 Felman herself speaks to this issue when she represents herself as “speaking not for women but to women” (What? 14). At the same time, a question remains as to what Felman means when she says “women” which characterizes much psychoanalytic feminism.
viewpoint, I will argue that Campion’s film carries forward and exemplifies this standard, or this structure of address.

In an interview, Campion claims: “I like to project myself into the parts, and being a woman I like to therefore have heroines. We don’t have many, you know? So I feel like it’s my job. Not a crusade—just a natural thing to want to do” (McHugh, Jane Campion 158). Campion's statement brings together two interlinked issues, that of identification or autobiography – the distance of the filmmaker from the filmed – and the problem of representing female heroes. These issues are intimately linked in In the Cut: Campion’s representation of Frannie is also a representation of the problem of depicting female agency in a context in which the look is anchored to masculinity. This is an autobiographical problem, or a problem of telling one’s story, in that it (and the film) indexes a lack of available images of female heroism and therefore of female ego ideals to imagine oneself through, or as. In a context in which female agency is “masculine,” moreover, its representation constitutes a claim to or an usurpation of masculinity on the part of the woman represented as claiming it, who I argue is both Frannie and (through a kind of inevitability which I would not call “identification” so much as an alignment with [Frannie as] the representation of a foreclosed or impossible female agency, the representation of foreclosed or impossible female solidarity) Campion herself. As I discuss in chapter two, Munro represents a similar foreclosure of bonds between women, including bonds of reading, and the constitution of a traumatic “femininity” around this haunting in “The Jack Randa Hotel.”

The construction of the visual field of In the Cut around an excluded term, “female agency,” is embodied in Pauline and the murdered women who are killed for their sexuality or (in an enigmatic displacement of violence) for being seen, by Frannie, together with the killer.

100 In other words, given that the traditional hero is male, and that this holds even more for film, Campion’s effort to represent female heroism is also a taking up of the formal problem of representing female agency, i.e., where the look is anchored to masculinity. This problem is, moreover, indistinctly differentiated from the issue of Campion’s own story as a film director (if a story is a re-presentation and relies upon [or effects] a separation between oneself and one’s image, and, if as I am arguing, Campion lacks a bank of available images), from her telling of it.

In mixing the trope of heroism with issues of spectatorship, I am assuming a continuity between essentially folk narrative structures and conventions of narrative film. See Teresa de Lauretis for an argument that these diverse forms share a genealogy in the various forms of the Oedipus myth, forms which reflect competing constructions of patriarchy in the West (“Desire in Narrative”).
Rodrigues. Campion represents Frannie as subject of the look, but shortly after she has exercised her prerogative the woman Frannie sees is killed, almost as if in retribution for Frannie’s assumption of visual privilege. In the film, body parts show up in Frannie’s garden and Frannie fears – and fantasizes – ending up like Angela Sands, the murdered woman, after she is mugged on West Broadway. This fear is shown to be warranted when the murderer’s third victim turns out to be Frannie’s half-sister, Pauline. Pauline’s murder and relationship to Frannie as her half-sister are details that Campion adds to her cinematic adaptation – they are not present in Susanna Moore’s novel, where Pauline is Frannie’s friend and a less central character. Campion’s artistic decision emphasizes the theme of the relation of acts of transgressive looking to the fear of retribution. More specifically, the almost obsessive displacement of violence from Angela Sands onto Frannie onto Frannie’s half-sister (a version of the self) suggests Campion’s own anxiety about transgressing cinematic conventions, as if she is imagining (in the character of Frannie) retribution of the kind meted out to Angela Sands, for representing a female sexual subject. Linda Ruth Williams notes that the scene’s transgressive quality derives from the way spectators see disembodied male parts not only through a woman’s (Frannie’s) eyes but also through a woman’s (Campion’s) camera-eye (419). Joy Press writes that Campion “identified strongly with this character [Frannie] who studies violent and sexual slang, yet uses her intellect as a shield.” Though Campion reports that she was “haunted” by Moore’s novel, she did not consider translating it into a film for awhile, because she was anxious about how it would be received: “‘It was like ... do I want to be hated?’” (52)

Taken together, these symmetries suggest that the circumstances of Frannie’s look at the couple in the bar basement are doubled – she is both empowered and exposed – because they represent Campion’s masquerade, a claim to power or representation of herself doing what she does behind the camera – looking – that must also de-compose itself as object of the male gaze (what is looked at) in order to re-compose itself within a tradition in which Campion is doing “a man’s job.” Frannie’s look is represented as non-threatening (an assumption of “masculinity” and therefore unnatural) through its figuration as Frannie’s appropriation of black masculinity, in the person of Cornelius. On the one hand, this suggests that although the film ultimately upholds conventions of gendered visuality, its doing so is evidence of the
historical specificity of these terms. On the other hand, although Campion is certainly more aware than Riviere is of how “race and racism determine[ ] the visual construction of gender” (hooks, “Oppositional” 234), she ultimately uses the same strategy as Riviere to mitigate against a similar anxiety of encroaching on a masculine preserve.

Before turning to Riviere, however, I want to suggest some similarities between In the Cut and Campion’s earlier film, The Piano (1993). Reviewers of In the Cut have focused almost entirely on the film’s gender politics to the exclusion of an analysis of how race and class work alongside and function to determine gender in the film; critics of The Piano, however, have had more to say about what they see as that film’s colonialist gaze. In The Piano (1993), set in 1850s colonial New Zealand, a young Scottish woman, Ada McGrath, is wed to a man whom she has never seen and sent to live with him, along with her young daughter. She is afflicted with muteness; at the same time, she brings with her a piano which functions as a substitute for her voice. Her patriarchal husband leaves her piano on the beach, not realizing or caring what it means to her. Ada’s neighbour, George Baines, recognizing its value to her, bargains the piano from Ada’s husband Stewart for the price of a plot of land. He then solicits Ada into a sexual contract in which he “sells” her back her piano, a few keys at a time, in return for “piano lessons” which turn, predictably, into sexual favours.

In the background of the film’s central romance is a representation of the colonial history of New Zealand, in particular its settling by white land speculators who appropriated the land from its original inhabitants, the Maori. In the film, Maori men and women live alongside the white settlers. They are hired by Stewart to haul Ada’s luggage from the shore, they attend a play put on by the settlers, and Maori children play with Ada’s daughter. The trope of indigeneity is also made to do symbolic work as a representation of white sexuality. Within a Victorian milieu of repressive sexuality, Baines’s sexual disinhibition is represented through his connection to the Maori, who are in turn sexualized. Lynda Dyson writes:

> With their bold, sexualized chat, the Maori provide the textual echo for all that has been lost through “civilization.” Baines bridges this nature/culture divide. His facial tattoos and his ability to speak Maori signify that he has “gone native”, while his “self-fashioning” and attachments to the land construct him
as a pakeha: a “real New Zealander”. While never relinquishing his
Whiteness, he is able to arouse Ada’s passions because he is closer to nature
than Stewart. (271)

Unlike Stewart, Baines recognizes and respects Ada’s need for her piano (substitute voice),
though – in a perversion of the difference between his character and that of Stewart – he uses
this knowledge to gain access to her sexually (Stewart, on the other hand, in fact mostly
respects Ada’s wishes not to have sex with him).

Maori critic Leonie Pihama argues that the representation of Maori in The Piano upholds
stereotyped and colonial notions of Maori as inferior or primitive, and that these ultimately
function to legitimate the story of the white colonial settling of New Zealand. Maori are
alternatively described as “happy-go-lucky native[s]” (128) or as warlike and naïve, and
Maori women as sexually available (129-30). In the film, moreover, “The Maori characters
are the background against which images of whites are positioned” (130). This back-
grounding functions to sign the filmic universe as a fantasy of the white characters. Ada and
her piano are identified with the land in the land transaction between Baines and Stewart, to
which the Maori object. The land is not Baines’s to give away to Stewart in the first place.
Rather than pursue this theme, however, the film leaves it hanging – much as In the Cut will
leave the character of Cornelius hanging after the aborted sexual scene in Frannie’s
apartment. In doing so, The Piano constructs an analogy between gender oppression (Ada’s
piano as signed over to her husband once they are married) and colonial oppression (the
exchange, between white men, of land that does not belong to them) (Reid 113). By
representing the Maori as objecting to the transfer of land, and then leaving it – much as In
the Cut represents Cornelius’s objection to Frannie in the Red Turtle and then leaves it off –
the film signs white colonialism as a metaphor for the patriarchal domestication and
pacification of the white woman-as-land. In this way, the film functions to legitimate the
colonizing of New Zealand by white settlers, by absorbing the violence of white immigration
and land appropriation within a nationalist romance narrative.

Pihama argues that The Piano is a dangerous film because it neither criticizes nor challenges
dominant depictions of “the way [Maori] are” (130); instead, she argues, the film gives the
sense that Maori do not exist. The same is also true, I will argue, of the black characters in *In the Cut*. In *In the Cut*, black actors do not function as realized characters so much as elements supporting the construction of white characters. The film in fact self-consciously references its appropriation of blackness. Its doing so, however, functions ultimately to legitimate this appropriation or absorb any critique of it as an aspect of the film’s own self-reflexivity. Among other things, this suggests that Campion’s work both absorbs and reflects the structure of white patriarchy, by projecting onto “blackness” a status as other that male cultural production tends to assign to women. The narrative of *The Piano* suggests that white patriarchy produces the (white) woman sans voice together with the imperative to speak about it – including Campion herself in her films. In describing this self-production outside of speech or of the social order, however, Campion’s films mimic white patriarchy or circulate within and as an articulation of it, rather than as a critique. As such, bell hooks argues that Campion’s *The Piano* is similar to other popular forms such as hip hop which, around the time of *The Piano*’s release, was subject to much scrutiny as being sexist, but which hooks argues constitutes an expression of the social environment of white supremacist patriarchy within which such music is produced (*Outlaw Culture* 116).

In both films, the representation of non-white femininity underpins a fantasy of white feminine freedom from “patriarchal” rule (*The Piano*) or representation (*In the Cut*). In *The Piano*, the representation of Maori women as sexually available is counterpointed to Ada’s sexual inhibition. Maori women as such represent the available sexual objects against which the structure of white patriarchal desire is assembled: as (white) feminine more-or-less passive resistance to (consequently male) desire which must be overcome, signing the social order in and as a space of conquest. In *In the Cut*, the construction of the visual field around a contested female look (Frannie’s) relies upon an identification of femininity with white femininity. Similarly to the representation of the Maori women as “background” to *The Piano*’s central romance, this implies the muted presence of a racialized and sexualized female other. On the one hand, I argued above that Frannie’s look in *In the Cut* is constructed as an appropriation of black masculinity, upholding the alignment of “femininity” with what is looked at. There is no female look to speak of, within the combined scenes in the Red Turtle bar and its basement. However, the construction of femininity in a relation of alienated
looking relies upon the presence of a female look elsewhere in the film. Much as Frannie first espies Rodrigues/Malloy engaged in a sexual act in the basement of a bar she visits upstairs with her black male student, so, symmetrically, Frannie and Malloy’s first date, in another bar, is conducted with a young attractive black woman looking on. The dialogue of the scene appears to represent a kind of meta-fictional negotiation around gender. Malloy gives Frannie several options as to who he can play himself, for her, as being: “You want me to romance you, take you to a classy restaurant? No problem.” The discussion ends, however, with Malloy looking over Frannie’s shoulder at what turns out to be the woman behind her: “You stare back at ’em; that’s how you flirt with black girls.” With his comment, Malloy constructs black women as subjects of the look. This is in contrast to Frannie herself, a cut to whose face shows her closing her eyes as Malloy speaks. A final shot captures Frannie and Malloy in the corner of the frame watching the unnamed woman and another couple who have danced into view – Rodrigues, and Jane Campion herself, in a cameo appearance. Rodrigues and Malloy then go on to embrace each other in a parody of same sex attraction: “If loving you is wrong, I don’t want to be right. Don’t be.”

The scene constructs a romantic ideology around norms of whiteness, masculinity and heterosexuality. A white norm of femininity as in a relation of alienated looking/sexuality is constructed through the figuration of black femininity as subject of a look which is excessive (a “stare”). This construction does not so much imply that white women are not sexual subjects, and black women are. Rather, in the scene, white femininity hides its – in this case, homoerotic – sexual look in the hyperbolic representation of black femininity, which is made to bear the charge of excessiveness with which sexual subjectivity is, for black and white women both, associated.

At the same time, Campion appears in the shot framing the black woman as object (“subject”) of Malloy’s gaze together with Frannie’s hypothetical one, if she were to look. This inhibits a coherent reading of the film’s sexual politics. Campion’s cameo in this respect can be compared to Alfred Hitchcock’s appearances in his films. John Fletcher describes Ian Bellour’s take on Hitchcock’s appearances in his films as suturing
character, desire and spectator together in a closed circuit of identification with the camera’s look and its desire (“the camera-wish”) for the enigmatic woman-object of the look. Bellour claims that Hitchcock appears in his films “at the point in the chain of events where the film-wish is condensed.”

I would argue that Campion appears at a similar point in the chain of events in *In the Cut*. However, the “camera-wish” that her appearance “condense[s]” is not so much for the woman-object in the sense of being externally directed – Campion herself is, after all, together with the black woman, framed as this object in the shot – as it is for the woman-object as subject, i.e., for her own look. When they are captured in the same frame, the representation of the black woman is also a representation of something about Campion (her fantasy or desire). This arguably insulates the black woman to a certain extent from the spectator’s gaze, which is aligned with Malloy’s (Frannie’s), by suggesting that the representation of black femininity is the film’s fantasy rather than a reality. However, the extent to which this strategy can function as a critique or commentary on the stereotypical representation of black femininity in popular culture is limited. The representation of black femininity in the film is literally, we are told, about Campion. Since Campion is both in the image and behind the camera, the shot in which she appears has a structure of masquerade, the look that is seen or that looks at itself looking. Campion inscribes her look within the film in a similar way to how, in Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, not the director but the enigmatic object of desire Madeleine establishes her status as such an object (for Scottie) by looking at a painting in which her own image (hair, pendant) is reflected.

That Campion dances with the murderer suggests that she or the camera is somehow in league with an agency that disposes of women – or suggests an analogy between the violence of the murders and the violence of *representation* within a patriarchal visual economy.

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102 In this respect, the representation of the black woman as subject of the look may in some senses be a figure for Campion’s own activity as a director.
103 In *Vertigo*, Madeleine’s look is established in an opposition to itself; this oppositionality to the look/desire itself becomes the specificity of “her” look as feminine. *In the Cut* similarly reflects the structure of the Lacanian gaze. However, since this structure is positioned with respect to the white female heroine Frannie, in other words with reference to her desire, rather than to the white male hero – i.e., since the film’s narrative is displaced in relation to the structure of visual relations which it authenticates (with the plot of the murders thematizing and responding to this displacement) – the film represents black femininity and itself as self-conscious auto-object of its own gaze.
Rodrigues, however, leaves Campion-as-the-barista and begins a conversation with Malloy, in which he jokes, with reference to the unnamed black woman: “All you need is two tits, a hole and a heartbeat.” Malloy replies, “You don’t even need the tits,” to which Rodrigues responds in turn: “You don’t even need the heartbeat.” Rodrigues references or foreshadows the later revelation of his identity as the murderer. That he does so with reference to a black female character suggests the involvement of the white female director in the film’s noir fantasy of “patriarchal” oppression which it appears to be contesting. The black woman would seem to be murdered in fantasy so that Frannie as the white female figure for identification might slip off her barstool, disgusted by Rodrigues, and exit the conversation and association with the victim role generally. At the same time, Campion references the fact that she is in charge of this fantasy, by dancing with Rodrigues. In a sense, Campion separates herself from the sexist gaze of the camera which defines her as object through a fantasy of the black female other as that object.

White Feminine Masquerade and the Myth of the Black Rapist

The film’s fantasy of black femininity has two effects which bear upon the construction of white masculinity and also bring us back to the film’s representation of black masculinity. The scene between Frannie, Malloy and the unnamed woman constructs Frannie’s look-as-negated (her closed eyes) as appropriately feminine. In other words, it constructs femininity as white and asexual. Female sexual subjectivity, on the other hand, is constructed as black. This means both that 1) blackness is associated with sexuality, and 2) sexuality is associated with masculinity. The construction of black femininity as sexual is thus the corollary to the myth of the black male rapist. This can be seen in the scene between Frannie and Cornelius in Frannie’s apartment, where Cornelius visits her after hearing about Pauline’s death. Insomuch as blackness has already been constructed in the metaphorical capacity of representing female desire (as “excess”), when Frannie and Cornelius are in close quarters, she appears as asexual or non-consenting in relation to his appearance as sexual and aggressive. In other words, her desire is not representable within an economy in which it has already been figured as black, as masculine, and therefore as located in him (and thus supposedly assaultive because she, as the embodiment of feminine virtue, does not “want
to”). On the other hand, this means that the scene can as easily be read as signifying Frannie’s (or the film’s) fantasy, as the representation of a real event.

In the scene, Frannie has just been drinking and has fallen asleep against her open refrigerator door. She dreams of her parents’ engagement during a skating excursion; the sound that appears to be Frannie’s father’s skates, about to run over her mother, turns out to be the sound of the doorbell ringing. From the beginning, then, the scene sets up a symbolic association between Cornelius’s designs on Frannie and her inherited sense that sex/marriage is somehow dangerous for women. On the steps to Frannie’s apartment, Cornelius appears to trip Frannie; she looks at him fearfully, but he is only peeling a petal off her leg. She then notices that he has recently been beat up – by a “cop,” he says, but will not say which one. Once inside Frannie’s apartment, Frannie kisses Cornelius briefly, but then rejects him. Cornelius becomes angry, accuses Frannie of “fucking with my head,” and pushes her onto her bed. At this point in the film, given the outstanding murders, Cornelius’s violent expression of anger invites speculation as to whether he may be the murderer. Instead, this possibility is framed as a red herring: the scene is interrupted by Rodrigues throwing rocks at Frannie’s window. If Cornelius is not the murderer of the women, and the man who “rescues” Frannie is, a question arises as to the narrative function of a scene that invites viewers to suspect him.

Numerous aspects of the Frannie-Cornelius sex scene highlight its status as a representation. The scene resists labeling as either an attempted rape or a seeming set-up or invitation to sex that is consensual, until it seems about to turn into sex “for real,” and then it is not. Cornelius’s parting words to Frannie are “You don’t know me,” and he suggests that the role he has been enjoined to play as her jilted suitor is one of her own design: “You’ve been fucking with my head since day one.” In this way, it is unclear who is the victim of what crime, and who the offender.

In this sense, the Cornelius-Frannie sex scene is framed as the representation of a crime, at once “real” within the diegetic space and yet somehow mediating our frame of reference or vision on it. The terms “white female victim” and “black male rapist” that the scene
constructs imply or reciprocally construct a term, “white male avenger.” This role is taken on by Rodrigues, who interrupts the scene by throwing rocks at Frannie’s window. The symbolic function of the scene in securing or constructing white male authority (an exposure of the constructed nature of power that frames it as illegitimate) is suggested in the way that Cornelius is presumed guilty before the start of the scene. He has already been to the police station, where he was presumably profiled and beat up for no other reason than that he is a young black man. Frannie’s maternal concern for him on the steps to her apartment is the prelude to their sexual encounter.

The politics of the sex scene are difficult if not impossible to tease out. Similarly to the representation of femininity in Hitchcock films, In the Cut signals a seeming awareness of the way in which race determines the construction of gender. At the same time, the film’s narrative arc and meaning iterate this construction as an aspect of its narrative design. The last we see of Cornelius is him running down the street, away from Rodrigues. Cornelius’s character is peripheral to the story’s concluding action, I will argue, because it functions to set up or stabilize, metaphorically, this action and its elaboration of racialized ideals of masculinity and femininity. In this way, the inability of the film to function as a critique of the structure of white racism is the equal opposite to the odd difficulty of holding the film accountable – if it is, after all, drawing attention to the culturally constructed nature of the myth of the black rapist, its role in securing oppressive constructions of race and gender.

Like Cornelius’s criticism of Frannie in the Red Turtle bar, which functions paradoxically to expose Frannie’s gaze and to authenticate it as exposed, or as a performance of masculinity, within white patriarchal visual codes, the “rape” scene is ambiguous. The question therefore bears asking whether this scene can in some way also be connected to Campion’s self-representation in and through the film – that is, to her identification with Frannie and to her own position as a white female filmmaker working with and within conventions of the masculine look, as I have been describing. In the last chapter, I argued that the fantasy of sexual aggression from a male designated outgroup member is the symbolic support for the construction of “femininity” (in a white patriarchal economy, white femininity) in a relation of alienated agency. The white woman as imagined “victim” is constructed as in need of
protection from male relations on account of her gender and not her ethnic group membership, which she shares with the white male avenger. In this chapter, I have argued that *In the Cut* constructs femininity in this way for reasons having to do with its director’s position in relation to formal conventions of the medium in which she works. Campion both represents a white female subject of the gaze (herself looking, in the guise of Frannie) and represents that gaze in the narrative logic as cancelled out – or in other words, as appropriately feminine. In doing so, Campion recomposes herself and her artistic endeavour within visual conventions in which she is (in being an active spectator, behind the camera) “doing a man’s job.”

Given these parameters, the attempted rape scene may function to construct femininity as passive in order for Campion’s representation of a female look (herself looking, in the guise of Frannie) not to transgress the conventional association of the look with masculinity. With the scene, the film constructs Frannie in a victim role. Rodrigues materializes to “rescue” Frannie at the very moment she is constructed in this victim capacity. His doing so rather magically or serendipitously – he has come by because “Malloy wanted me to check to make sure you got home all right” – suggests the fantasmatic relation of the construction of white male power to the myth of the black rapist. Cornelius’s character, on the other hand, does not function autonomously: he does not play himself, so to speak. Instead, he functions as a narrative element positioning Frannie in relation to white male power. For a second time in the film, Cornelius himself voices the film’s or Frannie’s appropriation of him: His parting words are “You don’t know me, man.” The fact that Rodrigues, who appears to rescue Frannie, is the very person she has to fear, suggests the way in which, in a white patriarchal economy, the violence of the dominant term (whiteness and masculinity) is displaced onto subordinate terms – Cornelius as the victim of the police and the viewer who suspects him; Frannie as the murderer’s slated next victim.

104 Here I disagree with Kathleen McHugh’s claim that Campion refuses to position her female protagonists as victims (back cover, *Jane Campion*). I would argue that the film deconstructs the opposition victim/agent in the sense that it positions Frannie as a victim (in fantasy, of Cornelius) as a frame for its overall narrativization of a white female relation to the look.
The scene between Cornelius and Frannie sets up the film’s bourgeois fantasy of marriage as the murder of femininity, which plays out in the conclusion as the final encounter of Frannie with Rodrigues. In this respect, *In the Cut* has a similar structure to *Gone With the Wind* as analyzed by Eve Sedgwick. In *Between Men*, Sedgwick describes the reliance of the sexual iconography of white bourgeois marriage on the fantasy of a black rapist. In her reading of *Gone With the Wind*, Sedgwick draws attention to the sadomasochistic description of Scarlett’s wedding night with Rhett Butler. The description is juxtaposed with the earlier plot of Scarlett’s attack by a black man – which is interpreted by the townspeople as sexually motivated because the man touches Scarlett’s breasts to get to the money pouch that he knows she has hidden there and wishes to steal. Sedgwick argues that the attack is so readily interpreted as sexual because there is no difference between the theft of the object and the theft of the white woman as object, waiting to be possessed by a white husband, within the cultural framework out of which the text is written (10). The elision of rape and theft is of a piece with cultural constructions of gender and race which reciprocally secure culturally sanctioned desire (the white, bourgeois heterosexual marriage of Rhett and Scarlett) as a sadomasochistic exchange between figurative or symbolic master and slave. The sadomasochistic flavour of the wedding night is normalized through its capacity to repeat, in an idiom of desire, the earlier scene of the attack which constructs Scarlett as a sexually desirable object in the imaginary of the town. On the other hand, Rhett appears as the victor in an unacknowledged sexual rivalry in which his advantage does not appear to concern white privilege because he incorporates the image of his rival in performing the other’s role in the rape fantasy.

Like Scarlett, Frannie is similarly constructed as sexually desirable object in the scene with Cornelius. In one sense, the film would seem to critique or update a text such as *Gone With the Wind* that idealizes bourgeois marriage. Yet, if the possibility of being married is presented to Frannie at knifepoint in the scene with Rodrigues at the lighthouse, at the same time, *In the Cut* has a similar structure to *The Piano*: both films exorcise a bad white male embodiment of patriarchy (Stewart/Rodrigues) in order that his good other (Baines/Malloy) may whisk away the bride in a fantasy of feminine fulfillment within marriage. In this sense, then, *In the Cut* is in fact similar to *Gone With the Wind*. 
On the other hand, Sandra Gunning has argued that the structure of rivalry between men is not an appropriate point of view from which to read the construction of femininity within white patriarchy (10). As the object of rivalry, the white woman occasions the myth of the black rapist as feminine prize. Yet, white femininity appears as an absence of sexual agency only in relation to a non-white feminine sexual “excess.” In fact, an idea of black femininity is profoundly present in the racialized construction of norms of femininity around an ideal of absence. This is true of the conclusion to *In the Cut*.

In the concluding scenes, Frannie meets the murderer Rodrigues face-to-face, and recognizes his identity when he shows her his tattoo – matching Malloy’s – and she realizes that he, and not Malloy, was the man she saw in the basement. Frannie finally kills Rodrigues with Malloy’s gun, which Malloy taught her to use. In this way, as in the initial scenes in the Red Turtle bar, the film represents “female agency” through a metaphor of masculinity (the phallic gun). In her blood-soaked early morning return along the highway to her apartment, Frannie resembles the Final Girl of slasher films whom Carol Clover argues stands in for male viewers (204).

More importantly, though, the film’s construction of an association between masculinity and agency through the Final Girl image does not stand alone, but relies upon a brief and seemingly gratuitous metaphorical reference to a black bride. The entire scene of Frannie going to the lighthouse with Rodrigues and killing him instead of being killed is bracketed by a cut to an image, as she gets in the car with Rodrigues, of an African American woman in a bridal gown with her hand in a bandage and a mournful expression on her face (this woman first appears earlier in the film on the subway across the platform from Frannie). The woman appears possibly to be waving goodbye to Frannie.

This image is important because it links the theme of racial difference to the film’s manifest construction of Frannie’s desire as based upon a traumatic Oedipal link to a father who was a womanizer. In a scene in Pauline’s apartment, Frannie and Pauline discuss how many times their father was married and Frannie reveals, “He killed [my mother] when he left.” In terms
of an oedipal reading, this suggests that Malloy must both be and not be the murderer in order for him to satisfy Frannie’s paternal transference and associated sexual ambivalence. This separation out of good and bad men within the adult Frannie’s sexual life is apparently achieved through the narrative trope of the double, with the bad Rodrigues standing in for the good Malloy. In the scene at the lighthouse – whose setting references the staircase scene in *Vertigo* – when the gun goes off and we do not know who has been killed, the camera cuts to a shot of Frannie’s parents’ engagement.

Yet, a representation of black femininity frames and in a sense, absorbs the violence that might otherwise accrue to the white woman encountering a cultural and familial legacy that excludes her, as the bride is excluded as a subject by the ritual of marriage (“Put on a fucking ring,” Rodrigues tells Frannie at knifepoint). This suggests that the Oedipal/psychoanalytic drama as a drama of sexual – meaning gender – difference is determined by constructions of race. The figure of the black bride rather than Malloy’s gun provides the real security for Frannie’s escape from Rodrigues/“patriarchal” representation. In a larger sense, the sequence suggests that in an artistic or theoretical economy in which female agency means some women talking on behalf of the rest, the claim to power that this term embodies is actually a naïve alignment with the power structure. This alignment is inherently self-defeating in that it does nothing to alter or comment on the structure itself, in which white women are subject to white men to the degree that they fantasize their freedom over the subjected body of a non-white woman.

This statement applies to *In the Cut*’s narrative strategies, but it also applies to (white) feminist film theory generally. A reading that starts from the point of view of female agency as its central concern cannot comprehend or critique the position of white women, not to mention all women, or subjects generally – within representation, because it shares the same frame of reference as the representational economy that it seeks to critique; that is, the frame of reference of the fantasmatic triangle, “black men,” “white women,” “white men” that is formed through the elision of black femininity (i.e. allowing critical statements about ‘women’ which are actually about white women to circulate).
Chapter 5
Race, Rape, and Representation in Alice Walker’s “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells”

In chapters one and two of this thesis, I considered how Alice Munro’s stories read or speak back to psychoanalysis. In this chapter, I consider a short story by Alice Walker, “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells,” which, I argue, speaks to the limitations in both Jane Campion’s film and my reading of it, in the previous chapter. My critique in chapter four of the ambivalent reliance of In the Cut’s fantasy of white female agency on a subjugated racial other uncovers a structure of inequality in the film. Such a critique, however, does not contribute in a significant way to the ultimately creative work of transforming this structure (which is at once a constructed one of the film, feeding in to or repeating dominant cultural paradigms, and a reproduction, in the analysis of “it,” of my own discourse). In Playing in the Dark, Toni Morrison described the way in which canonical American literature has historically positioned its readers as white by telling stories of white, usually male heroes whose status as free individuals is counterpointed to (and ratified by) the representation of an unfree Africanist population. On the other hand, she speaks of the work of undoing these culturally held and culturally defining (of “American” identity) associations as not only theoretical but primarily or also creative. If the very language with which writers work is structured by associations which inscribe predictable, racially-inflected chains of meaning, Morrison writes, the work that writers do to “unhobble the imagination from the demands of that language is complicated, interesting and definitive” (13). George Elliott Clarke, similarly, at the opening to his lyrical poetic suite Whylah Falls, decries the ambivalent inheritance of a language that is marked by violence and yet is all that one has: “I know that this traitor

105 This dichotomy of free/unfree is both literal, in the sense of concerning relations of domination and subjugation, and figurative, in the sense that the African American characters within the white-authored narratives of identity that Morrison reads are not represented as existing from their own side, but instead serve to prop up a white sense of self by their supposed lack (or else mediate what would otherwise manifest as conflict between white male and female characters) (77). Morrison’s reading of the unravelling narrative logic of Willa Cather’s Sapphira and the Slave Girl forms a point of reference to my reading of Campion’s In the Cut (or, for that matter, to “Womanliness as a Masquerade”) insofar as, in both the novel and film, a white female character negotiates her own compromised position within the racial-gender hierarchy of American society through leveraging her privilege as white. In both texts, this maneuver applies manifestly to the central protagonist, but comes to encapsulate (in the conclusion to Sapphira and in Campion’s cameo in the bar scene in In the Cut), an auto-referential self-fictionalization of the artist as well.
language can turn/ One truth into another or even/ Against itself. Yet, it is all we have.” This impossible or ironical position in which the imperative to describe individual or collective experiences or history in terms that deny or betray its truth places the artist suggests at the same time the great potential of imaginative texts that, as Jacqueline Goldsby argues, hold out the possibility for modeling that which is lost or secret or bends the mind in attempting to think about violence in North America’s racial history (35, 42).

In keeping with this potential, in this chapter I turn to a short story by Alice Walker as looking back on and opening up that which my more linear analysis in chapters three and four at times only repeats. This is the case in chapter four in the sense that I have been arguing that Campion’s In the Cut does not provoke the kind of transformation of interpretation, or perspective, that Munro’s stories in Open Secrets do – and that I argue, here, Walker’s “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” also achieves. In this respect, my own analysis in chapter four arrives at but is finally unable to move beyond a kind of oppositional critique that leaves the categories of racial and gender inequality essentially intact.106

As I have argued in the introduction and chapter one, the way in which analyses of power in descriptive terms construct it as fixed projects current conditions of inequality into the future.107 This suggests the intimacy and the necessity – as well as the non-exclusivity – of the imaginative act (of transformation) to that work which is deemed merely analytical. In the introduction to the thesis, I referred to Derek Attridge’s brief discussion at the opening of The Singularity of Literature of the increasing challenge that certain twentieth century

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106 This problematic is similar to one that can be seen in feminist psychoanalytic discourse in the 1980s, in which, for example, Jessica Benjamin’s analysis of gender inequality in Freudian psychology in The Bonds of Love is not immune to entrenching the inequalities that she observes, precisely to the degree that her descriptions construct inequality in fixed terms as resistant to change. Yet, as Himani Bannerji writes, it is not enough to express or describe oppression, in order to effect change. Drawing on Marx, Bannerji stresses the agency of the historical subject which, emerging in the context of relations of power that are handed down to it, can only be grasped through a recognition of the “cognitive, practical and transformative relation between our consciousness and the world we inhabit” (Thinking 82). Individuals are “acting-yet-acted-upon agents without whom history would be simply reduced to a self-reproducing Hegelian category.”

107 In claiming knowledge of social reality as a discretely observable phenomenon, radical discourses inadvertently construct it as fixed in the conditions of inequality that they observe. Thus they are unable to conceive of how things might at some point become different from the way they are imagined to be “now.” This inability to conceptualize change inadvertently projects current conditions of inequality into the future. Thus Eric Cazdyn, in a critique of what he calls moralizing critiques of capitalism, argues that these inadvertently “colonize” the future – in an extremely negative way – by constructing the present as not subject to change (“Semi-ology” 32).
philosophers have brought to the notion of truth-telling discourse and the aesthetic as mutually exclusive domains. This suggests that fictional forms “can once again be seen as participating in the telling of truths,” but that truth itself is “no longer to be understood in the terms which once enabled it to appear as the privileged preserve of science, of the non- or even anti-aesthetic” (14). The point in the latter case is not so much the postmodernist qualification that all theories are necessarily personal and subjective. Rather, acknowledging this fact of the constructed nature of theories, as Sean Teuton argues, suggests that theory-making may be engaged in as a consciously creative act of (in my own terms) descriptive transformation (26, 32). If, as Foucault argues, to describe the world as one sees it is “to constitute [oneself] … by a certain number of relationships of power, which weigh upon me and which I also lay upon others” (“How Much” 254), this does not mean that such descriptions bear no relationship to “truth” – or in other words, that knowledge is impossible as such. Rather, it suggests that knowledge itself may be normative, or, a practice in which individuals engage towards an effort at understanding that is continually in the process of being renegotiated.

In this chapter, I argue that Walker’s “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” fosters such a sense of the normativity of knowledge. Its doing so is linked to, or has implications for thinking about and transforming, stereotypes of black masculinity, and black and white femininity, such as underlie past and ongoing structures of violent discrimination, together with the rational frameworks that might be brought to bear on analyzing them. This convergence of the creative act with analytical or truth-telling discourse suggests an overturning of the divide between reason and imaginative processes that is split off and parcelled out to the social roles of whiteness and blackness, masculinity and femininity respectively. Walker’s story, I argue, functions as truth-telling discourse to the degree that

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108 For a sophisticated presentation of this argument, see the essays in *Bringing the Plague: Toward a Postmodern Psychoanalysis*. See also Mitchell and Aron’s introduction to *Relational Psychoanalysis* vol. 1, for a discussion of the similarities and differences between postmodern constructivism and knowledge in the relational paradigm.

109 In other words, as Bhabha (94), Goldsby, Doane (216) and others argue, our conceptual paradigms are internal to the trauma of history which they repeat, in the process of describing.

110 Jessica Benjamin draws on Evelyn Keller in describing the “masculinist” character of modern scientific objectivity. According to Keller, the structure of disinterested rationality is premised upon a dichotomy of mind and nature, which parallels the construction of heterosexual relations as relations of domination between a masculine subject and feminine object (Benjamin, *Bonds* 189, Keller 33-42). Jeffrey Ferguson similarly
it points up what is missing in constructions of the gaze or of power in fixed terms, and suggests a way of imagining these as open to potential change, through its own narrative modelling of a deferred conclusion.

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Throughout the thesis, I have considered the way in which the racialized construction of femininity within Western white patriarchy and psychoanalysis is predicated upon norms of gender and race that have their basis in the history of Euro-colonial slavery, and the subsequent rise of the myths of the black rapist, vulnerable white woman and promiscuous black woman as a response or backlash to the waning of a structure of power as an all-white male preserve. Jacqueline Goldsby, in her analysis of lynching in American life and literature, stresses how the enormity of the violence exceeds the ability to know or understand it. This does not mean that the violence is necessarily “unspeakable,” but that modern social institutions may in some ways be normed by it (rather than the violence being eccentric to these institutions or to the social values of modernity). Goldsby writes that an analysis of lynching as normative of the cultural logic of modernity helps to explain why it has remained such a secret or understudied topic in academic discourse. Once the violence targeted mostly African Americans, who “lacked the legal, civic, and moral authority to repel mob assaults on their collective lives—the history of those deaths could be marginalized from our conventional accounts of the meaning of modernity in American life” (Goldsby 28). Unlike conventional histories, literature is not bound to the reproduction of objective truth. Thus, Goldsby writes that, “Precisely because the work of literature is to imagine what we cannot otherwise know and say about our lives, literary accounts of lynching can help us confront the consequences of limiting our knowledge to the manifest meanings of the violence” (42).

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identifies the structure of Enlightenment rationalism as providing the basis for modern racism. Drawing on historian George Fredrickson, he argues that the Enlightenment concern with erecting a natural science of “man” involved a setting up of civilization over nature. This belied the way in which humans were also a part of nature – a contradiction that writers such as Rousseau and Hume managed by placing “the darker humans … into the camp of nature and the lighter ones into the camp of civilization” (Ferguson 16-17).
Turning to Walker’s short story, I argue that “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” provokes such a confrontation with the consequences of limiting knowledge to the manifest meanings of racist violence. The story does so through the way in which it works through, in its narrative form, the exclusion of black femininity by and within stereotypes of black male aggressivity and white feminine vulnerability. “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” represents an account of a white woman’s accusation of rape against a black man in a context in which relationships between black men and women are prominent. In doing so, the story reframes an accusation against a specific “black” man in such a way that it cannot be used to scapegoat the character as a member of a designated outgroup (i.e., outside of social ties or context). Walker’s story suggests, and is a narrative working out of, the problem of challenging stereotypes, in that it is not possible to defuse a stereotype merely through logical argumentation. Such is the case because stereotypes, as Homi Bhabha argues, are based upon a tautology which represents an individual as having fixed characteristics based upon their membership in a social group (94). These characteristics are offered as needing no explanation, insofar as they conflate the individual with the group; the success of the stereotype relies on its excess of any logical explanation in the first place. For this reason, stereotypes cannot be directly refuted, but, arguably, can only be repeated in a context in which they are transformed or estranged. Walker uses this strategy in “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” in such a way as to decouple the representation of femininity from an association with whiteness, and the representation of blackness from an association with masculinity – associations which continue the legacy of Euro-colonial slavery of which they bear the weight.  

The story concerns the relationship of two young women who meet while working for the civil rights movement on a voter registration drive in rural Georgia. The women become close friends; a year later, after graduating from school, the narrator goes to live with Luna in her apartment. Luna, who is white, tells the narrator that she was raped the previous summer while they were in Georgia by a black fellow organizer named Freddie Pye.

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111 My reading of the story in this regard is in part a response to or critique of the limitations of my more conceptual readings of the appropriation of blackness in “Womanliness as a Masquerade” and In the Cut – readings which do not entirely avoid emplotting the appropriation insofar as they “limit [themselves] to the manifest meanings of the violence,” in Goldsby’s terms.
“What did you do?”
“Nothing that required making a noise.”
Suddenly I was embarrassed. Then angry. Very, very angry. How dare she tell me this! I thought.

Who knows what the black woman thinks of rape? Who has asked her? Who cares? Who has even properly acknowledged that she and not the white woman in this story is the most likely victim of rape? (92-93)

Up until this point, the structure of the narrative has been straightforward; with the introduction of Luna’s account of her rape, the perspective fractures. The narrator describes herself as angry; then a character who is a type (“the black woman”) is introduced. This suggests the narrator’s identification as a member of a racial group as a consequence of hearing Luna’s story, an identification that is also described narratively: “Whenever interracial rape is mentioned, a black woman’s first thought is to protect the lives of her brothers, her father, her sons, her lover. A history of lynching has bred this reflex in her” (93).

The reference to the constructedness of the story and to its characters as characters frames the story of rape that Luna tells as a cultural narrative, one which masks and allows the perpetration of rape against black women. At the same time, the narrator relates that she believes Luna is telling the truth. In this respect, the story induces a kind of split gaze or visual field. On the one hand, readers are encouraged by the narrator’s own belief in Luna’s story to take what she says as true. Luna is herself aware of the historical and political dimensions of narratives of interracial rape by black men against white women, and in a rigidly segregated and racist rural South, relates that she does “Nothing that required making a noise” (92) to defend herself.

On the other hand, the reader’s own tendency to suspend disbelief when reading fiction, in order to interact with the storyworld as narrative truth, is itself suspended or interrupted. The story both suggests that Luna’s story is true, and it also describes the story as a cultural
narrative that is deployed to authorize systematic racial violence (the most likely rape victim in the story is the black woman to whom the rape narrative is told).

David Herman describes storyworld as “mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which readers relocate—or make a deictic shift—as they work to comprehend a narrative” (Story Logic 9). It is this mental model that is denied or scrambled in the story by the introduction of the account of rape told across racial lines by a white to a black woman. This suggests that an objective view on a story of interracial rape by a black man against a white woman is not possible in the current climate of inequality in North America. Insomuch as the fantasy of interracial rape structures the representation of race and gender as positions in narrative space – positions which demarcate a regime of inequality – it is in a sense always already overdetermined. In other words, it is un-representable apart from its situatedness as an authorizing trope of systemic racial and sexual violence. For this reason, the story represents an apparently “true” account as simultaneously a cultural narrative.

The story dramatizes, at the level of its narrative or semantic structure, the impossible position in which Luna’s story places the narrator. Specifically, Luna’s story makes a claim on the narrator to identify with her as a woman that would place her in conflict with her racial identity, her solidarity with the man Luna accuses, Freddie Pye, and with African American men as targeted and victimized by stories like the one Luna is telling. The story represents this impossible imperative on the narrator to divide her loyalties as the obliteration of the position of the narrator itself. The voice of the narrator is rolled into that of the implied author, as the story references the process of its creation: “While writing a fictional account of such a rape in a novel, I read Ida B. Wells’s autobiography three times, as though praying to her spirit to forgive me” (93). The narrator, now a fictional version of the author, Alice Walker, imagines approaching anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells and being counselled against representing the possibility of any allegation of rape by a white woman against a black man being true.
In her reading of the story, Valerie Smith suggests that Wells’s rhetoric in *The Red Record* tended to conflate white female victims with fabricators, constituting a denial that any white female accusers of black men were ever telling the truth (4). Smith considers that this strategy may have indeed been appropriate for a Reconstruction Era United States in the grip of lynching and mob violence as a way of terrorizing black communities. However, she considers that Walker’s strategy may update or “advance” Wells’s own for a contemporary climate.

What Walker does is to reposition or re-present Luna’s narrative in a context in which the narrator, as a black woman, is an interlocutor. The narrator relates a conversation between herself and a black male friend, and from there, articulates a response to Luna’s story as a view worked out between herself and her friend and shared by both of them. The conditions of possibility for what they say are circumscribed by the structure of the scene of address itself, which is between two African American characters, one of whom shares the gender of the alleging victim and one that of the alleged perpetrator. (To put it differently, the categories of victim and perpetrator are given only tenuous reference in the story once the possibility of their circulating as an organizing tool of white racism is removed: the conversation does not include white interlocutors, and the black man whom the narrator discusses the story with is not the alleged perpetrator; rather, he is “a friend … whom I love and who loves me” [98]. This love may be sexual or platonic; the narrator does not reveal which. The fact that it does not seem to matter rather implies an idea of sexual intimacy that is, like friendship, free from imaginary associations with possession.) The relation of the two friends is a condition for their reflection together on the rape: “Since my friend is a black man who loves me and whom I love, we spent a considerable amount of time discussing what this particular rape meant to us. Morally wrong, we said. And not to be excused. Shameful, politically corrupt” (98). Nonetheless, the danger surrounding the uses to which such a statement of wrong might be put strikes fear in the characters and delays, further, the ending of the story:

Yet, as we thought of what might have happened to an indiscriminate number of innocent young black men in Freehold, Georgia, had Luna screamed, it became clear that more than a little of Ida B. Wells’s fear of probing the rape issue was
running through us, too. The implications of this fear would not let me rest, so that months and years went by with most of the story written but with me incapable, or at least unwilling, to finish or to publish it. (98-99)

The conversation is framed in a space that is at once inside and outside of the diegesis. It is outside, because the narrator discusses her writing with her friend, including two endings that she is considering to the story.¹¹² (In this respect, the Luna-Freddie-narrator narrative is framed as a non-fictional but stylized account, which the narrator’s friend is outside of). However, the conversation is also placed inside of the diegesis in the sense that all of the characters share the same world and the conversation influences, or makes possible, the second hypothetical ending that “follows… in a country truly committed to justice” (98). In this respect, the conversation both does and does not take place – or takes place at the border or possible outset of such a country “committed to justice.” The possibilities of fiction are neither dismissed nor offered as a palliative for social problems; rather, fiction is situated as a space from which alternate configurations of narrative perspective – of narrative as perspective – may be imagined. The story does not try to repair a past, but it imagines a future that is not determined by it.

In that space, the narrator imagines her best guess as to what may have happened between Freddie Pye and Luna and why, as she relates earlier in the narrative, Freddie Pye visits Luna at her apartment and emerges from her bedroom one day about a year after the alleged incident. The conditions of possibility of this meeting, a scene of address between an alleging victim and her alleged aggressor, are enabled by the conversation that goes before it. Specifically, the conversation between the narrator and her male friend places the narrator in the position of interpreting, together with her friend, “what this particular rape meant to us” (98). In this conversation, she is at once in loving relation to her black male friend, while also being in relation to the white female friend who alleges victimization by a particular black man. This affects the relation of Luna’s story to cultural narratives of black male sexual aggression. Luna’s victim status as a woman is in part based on the projection of whiteness onto her as a condition of threatened purity, in relation to a blackness imagined in her

¹¹²As described earlier, the narrator is represented as a version of the author, so the story she is also writing is the one we are reading.
aggressor as contaminating it. Sandra Gunning describes how this construction of white femininity is, at least during the era of lynching, linked to fantasies of a white male-controlled American homeland imagined as under siege by newly emancipated black men (7). The white womb is, in this fantasy, the site of racial anxiety and of the signifying chain white-female-body-land-guarantor of male power.

The projection of victimization onto white femininity as a condition of “femininity” is removed by the proximity of the black female narrator to Luna’s account of rape. In narrative terms, this transition is reflected in an alteration in Luna’s characterization. Originally, the narrator describes Luna as stereotypically passive:

Luna was sitting on the back of a pickup truck, waiting for someone to take her from Faith Baptist, where the rally was held, to whatever gracious black Negro home awaited her… *I was struck by her passivity, her patience* as she sat on the truck alone and ignored, because someone had told her to wait there quietly until it was time to go.

*This look of passively waiting for something changed very little over the years I knew her.* (86, my italics)

The “look of passively waiting” may change very little – the narrator similarly wonders why Luna did not scream in self defense to protect herself from the rape – yet, in the imagined reconstruction of a meeting between Luna and Freddie Pye, Luna is provided with a knife to defend herself. Luna shows Freddie her knife and informs him that she intends to use it, should he try to repeat his actions. Unlike Frannie’s gun in the conclusion of *In the Cut*, Luna’s knife is less a substitute penis than a particular woman’s weapon of self defense.

In this way, the proximity of the narrator to her white friend’s account of rape removes the association of white femininity with defencelessness that the rape narrative mobilizes; in doing so, it provides the conditions of possibility for Luna (as representative of white femininity) to meet her aggressor a second time, and confront him from a position of empowerment. This imagined empowerment corresponds to a social structure in which Luna’s word on rape can no longer be used as a justification for racist violence (102).
Likewise, in the story, Freddie Pye is given a story of his own and material circumstances that give him claims to reader empathy. Freddie is from an impoverished background and lacks the formal education and polish of both the narrator and Luna. On the other hand, the story protects Freddie from becoming an object of pity by placing such a pitying response to him inside the text. Freddie has come to New York to do activist work with the civil rights movement, whose leaders use him as a tool in their fundraising efforts— as “authentic” proof of America’s denial of rights to African Americans. Freddie arrives at Luna’s door with no place to stay— unable even to ask the movement leaders for a place to crash for the night. In the sense in which Freddie is “othered” within the very movement that would speak for him and ask that he speak in its name, the reader response that would pity Freddie as this other is discouraged.

Instead, the story gives the characters, and especially Freddie, privacy. The narrator remarks that she could not, or would not, finish the story (99). Rather than represent the characters in a final image of narrative closure— one that might be appropriated by a reader— the narrator hands the story off to the (other) characters, to conclude or “work out” (for) themselves:

I have forced them to talk until they reached the stumbling block of the rape, which they must remove themselves, before proceeding to a place from which it will be possible to insist on a society in which Luna’s word alone on rape can never be used to intimidate an entire people, and in which an innocent black man’s protestation of innocence of rape is unprejudicially heard. Until such a society is created, relationships of affection between black men and white women will always be poisoned, from within as from without— by historical fear and the threat of violence, and solidarity among black and white women is only rarely likely to exist. (102)

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“Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” re-places black femininity as presence within a narrative of black-on-white rape. This shifts the meanings of “black,” “white,” “male” and “female” in relation to “this particular rape” (98)— in the recounting of which “female” no
longer signifies as white, and “black” no longer signifies as male. Valerie Smith argues that the story provokes readers to “confront the circumstances of their own embodiment” (30). I would argue similarly that the story prompts readers to discover the gaze within. This was my experience in reading about the change in Luna. When Luna is armed with a knife, a personal weapon of self defense divorced from any phallic connotations, this seems to shift the meaning of white femininity within the terms of the storyworld, in which it is initially synonymous with passivity. As a white female reader, I am displaced in relation to the possibilities for constructing or embodying myself in the text. “I” therein encounter my embodiment, not in a static sense, but as a displacement between a newly visible (and therefore past) body, and a possible future present/presence. In this way, I discover the gaze – association of white femininity with passivity – within, as my own association, rather than outside “in theory.”

On the one hand, then, the story prompts – or at least it did for me – a felt sense that there is no outside to culture, save for discovering it within (and in a sense, as) oneself, as the measure of one’s gaze. Among other things, this suggests that it is not ultimately useful to itemize the shortcomings of a text such as Campion’s *In the Cut* as if this procedure would yield knowledge or a critique of power as an externalizable process. Walker’s story, on the other hand, in the way in which it invites the reader to locate the gaze within, provides or provokes what Eric Cazdyn describes as a non-moralizing critique of the social structure. Specifically, the story reframes a crisis – not so much the crisis of Luna’s rape but the crisis of representation that it sets in play – and it mobilizes this crisis “toward a radically different future” (Cazdyn 32): in Walker’s words, a society committed to the establishment of justice for everyone (“justice” in this case encompassing equal housing, education, access to work, adequate dental care, et cetera), thereby placing Luna and Freddie Pye in their correct relationship to each other, i.e. that of brother and sister, *compañeros*. (98)

In this way the story imagines a future in which the present social order will be different. In a sense the story, like Alice Munro’s in *Open Secrets*, releases the “gaze” into temporality – not so much into history imagined as a desituated process, as into the time or history of the reader’s specific engagement with the text. The story suggests the need for, and is itself an
example of, not so much a look to a future distinct from a present imagined as past, but a look to a possible future enabled by the fantasy of the look itself.

This “conclusion,” however, is not the “end of the story.” Walker includes a “Postscript” in which the narrator reads the story to a group of African American artists in Havana, Cuba. One of the artists, a muralist, offers a reading of Freddie Pye as paid by his government to rape Luna as a means of sabotaging the Civil Rights movement. The muralist’s alternative reading denies readers even the provisional closure that the narrator’s vision of future justice might seem to offer (if this vision be taken to suggest that justice has been achieved). The story unsettles its own ending, haunts any settled interpretation; at the same time it ends on a note of lightness, of humour, the narrator’s “of course he is wrong” laying claim to a performed authorial high ground of interpretation (104). In this way, the story cedes the (colonialist, patriarchal) desire for one final truth to a vision of knowledge-construction as happening between people, collaboratively, and through the means of storytelling.
Conclusion

This thesis has considered the problem of objectivity in psychoanalysis, starting from the point of view of its bearing upon constructions of femininity – the analogy between the woman as object of heterosexual male desire in Western bourgeois ideology, and the construction of femininity as object of knowledge for the man (e.g., as seen in Freud’s “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” and “Femininity,” and explored in 1980s feminist psychoanalysis in the work of Shoshana Felman [“On Femininity”], Teresa de Lauretis [“Desire in Narrative”] and others). Starting from a reading of Alice Munro’s short stories in *Open Secrets*, and the surplus they present to linear analysis, or to reading in terms of an authoritative perspective, even while the stories seem to allegorize or dialogue with such a perspective, I suggested a relationship between literature and psychoanalysis that revises the traditional/perceived split between aesthetic and truth-telling discourses (Attridge 14). This relationship implied in turn more expansive possibilities for thinking about gender as it is performed in the context of limiting norms (a performance which the literary text also repeats, or that is negotiated between the text and its reception).

My readings in chapters one and two considered that the construction of femininity as object of desire for the man, such as is described in Lacanian theory (“Intervention ” 99), can neither be unequivocally endorsed as a theoretical/conceptual position, nor summarily discarded. The corollary of the claim that literature has a truth-telling function is a reconsideration of theories as stories which have, nonetheless, powerful reality-producing effects. Katie Orenstein speaks to the truth-telling power of the stories we tell ourselves: “The stories we tell determine what we think about what happens, which determines what happens next” (Op Ed. Project). This includes those individual theories that people entertain of their position in the social: Paula Moya describes identities as theoretical constructs which imply claims to knowledge of the way the world is and of the individual’s place within in (8). On the other hand, Alice Walker describes the relationship of agency to the stories people tell themselves about what is possible, as something that often takes a negative cast: “The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any” (quoted in Martin 137).
Theories are stories that individuals are continually in the process of producing as a means of evaluating and navigating their social environment. This suggests the agency – and responsibility – of individuals to shape the world that they want to inhabit. In *We Should All Be Feminists*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie writes: “If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture” (46). The idea that “the full humanity of women is not our culture” – an idea shared by psychoanalysis and feminism, though to different ends (for feminism, as a standpoint to critique, and for psychoanalysis, as an unfortunate inevitability) – is not simply true or untrue in Adichie’s commentary, but hypothetical. It is a story, in other words. And the stories people tell about reality create reality. If we accept the authority of this one as truth, then we fulfill its prophecy. If this story is true, Adichie writes, we must then rewrite it, tell and so create a different one (story/truth/reality).

Chapters three and four considered the bearing of my thinking about gender and the relationship of imagination to social change on racial difference and the norm of whiteness that is encoded in the Western heteronormative construction of femininity. I considered how the idea of femininity as masquerade is doubly encoded in the sense that it acts out or negotiates Joan Riviere’s own ambivalent relationship to her psychoanalytic audience (a strategy of atoning for one’s “lapse’ into subjectivity” [Doane 33] that Riviere attributes to her patient). This complex strategy of defense is mediated by or implies a performance of white privilege (by both Riviere and the patient), in which the violence expected for making claims to subjective autonomy is displaced onto a black male figure – a transfer of guilt for transgressing white male privilege that repeats, in fantasy, the context of the myth of the black rapist and the history of lynching. On the one hand, my analysis in chapter three suggested the insufficiency of psychoanalytic conceptual structures to progressive social thought about race and gender, in that the concept of feminine masquerade is normative of psychoanalysis, rather than eccentric to it. At length, however, I considered a way in which this reading itself must undergo revision, as sharing with the text’s author and her patient an assumption of victimization or lack of power that, I argue, must be seen as securing the context of inequality that it anticipates. Only thereby does the prospect of responsibility to
the other potentially come into view (as a decoupling of a narrative of victimization from presumptive associations with femininity, irrespective of other categories of experience, such as race).

In theoretical terms, my reading indirectly suggested both a way in which feminist relational psychoanalysis and a Zizekian perspective on “lack” and responsibility come together at a higher order level, and a reconsideration of history in intersectional work on race and gender as something that is negotiated in the present, rather than “past” and available to be mobilized towards ideological ends as empirical reality. This chapter also links back up to my reading of gender in Munro, and to knowledge in the relational paradigm, in the sense that, in both my readings of Munro and of Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” knowledge or a perspective on the issues emerges from rather than being foreclosed by a transformation of reading. In this sense, my readings are consistent with a relational understanding of “enactment” as both a barrier to change (in its untransformed form), and an opportunity for it (Stern, Bromberg, Benjamin, Mitchell).

One of the areas that my thesis has not directly considered is the implications of my research on white feminism’s complicity with racism for the crisis of the recent rise in police violence against black men in the United States and Canada, for example, in the shooting deaths of Jermaine Carby in Brampton, Andrew Loku and an unidentified black man in Toronto; or for police indifference to violence against women of colour, as is evident in the death of Toronto woman Sumaya Dalmar. In The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of

113 See, for example, Zizek’s work on enjoying the symptom as it relates to gender in his reading of Freud’s case of Dora (Enjoy Your Symptom! 15), and in The Sublime Object of Ideology 217, revisited in Denise Riley, The Words of Selves 122.

114 In this respect, my discussion moves toward a critique of impasses in historiographic analysis of psychoanalysis that Dominick La Capra describes in “History and Psychoanalysis,” in which the construction of empirical past realities available to understanding requires a countervailing psychoanalytic critique in terms of transference and interpretive desire (15). In critiquing a concept of lack as something that the woman performs for the man, in Lacanian theory, my analysis nonetheless recuperates an idea of limitation at a higher order level, in the need to revise a perspective on gender inequality in Riviere’s text and intellectual milieu as a retrospective construct of reading – not necessarily thereby “wrong,” but partial. The difference between these two positions (on lack) is not trivial, but speaks to differing concepts of objectivity which Satya Mohanty outlines in his critique of postmodernism, in “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity.” My analysis of Munro’s and Walker’s stories has gestured towards this distinction, a more extensive development of which is, however, the subject of another study. See the Appendix for a brief comparison of concepts of knowledge in psychoanalysis and post-positivist realism.
Colorblindness, Michelle Alexander identifies a link between explicit practices of exclusion of African Americans under the pre-civil rights policy of separate but equal, and the contemporary practice of unequal policing of young black men unfairly profiled as criminal. She reads newspaper propaganda that shows a link between the older stereotypes of the black male rapist and promiscuous black woman and the newer construction of black criminality through the rhetoric of the war on drugs (52). These continuities suggest the way in which, although the strategies for policing black freedoms and social mobility may have changed, the overall framework of discrimination has nonetheless been passed on. Janaya Khan draws attention to the fact that the numbers of police shootings of African Americans in 2014 and 2015 exceed the number of victims murdered at the height of lynching in 1892 (“DTRTP Conference”).

In view of the enormity of the crisis, my focus on gender may seem beside the point. My thesis’s lack of a national focus also inadvertently contributes to an obscuring of a problem that Black Lives Matter Toronto raises, that racialized violence is so strongly associated in the cultural consciousness of Canadians with the United States that it is difficult to get a conversation going about its presence here. As Lauren Vedal and Himani Bannerji note, the opportunity that the United States poses to Canadians as a screen for projection of white guilt – amplified by Canada’s self-marketing of its identity as the pre-eminent multicultural nation – inhibits critique of the role of white privilege in Canadian society (Vedal 43). This problematic is correlated with gender in subtle ways. Canada is often implicitly constructed as other or as “feminized” in relation to Britain as a post-colonial nation (a status which it shares with Australia and New Zealand), or in relation to its larger Southern neighbour . However, Bannerji argues, the construction of Canada in this way, along an axis of victimization (for example, in Margaret Atwood’s work Survival) obscures Canada’s dual role as colonizer and the history of suppression of the cultures of the First Nations (“Geography” 296-97).

115 Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” insofar as it evokes the myth of the black rapist and the history of lynching, remains alarmingly relevant for thinking about the continuation of racial (and gender) violence in the present day.
116 I considered the metaphorical association of femininity with colonized space in white patriarchal logic in chapter 4’s discussion of Campion’s The Piano.
My project’s lack of a national focus was partly a result of my coming from the perspective of an engagement with psychoanalysis and its feminist critique, which does not immediately suggest a national focus (psychoanalysis itself offering a description of the subject shorn of cultural signifiers). Nevertheless, this omission has shaped itself around or is symptomatic of a larger cultural amnesia around race in Canada. Yet it may not only be symptomatic, as it also speaks to the difficulty of doing intersectional work in Canada – a difficulty that has to do with an opacity in Canada’s national identity, as regards its colonial history. Lauren Vedal describes the cultural production of “whiteness” in Canada around the idea of an alternative to America, e.g. as the “good,” non-racist/oppressive white cultural hegemony (40-41). In this regard, Vedal signals a concern not with an essentialist notion of national identity – as in John Ralston Saul’s proposition that Canada may be the first truly postmodern nation, the first nation to direct scepticism towards the notion of nation itself (Hulan 187) – but with how countries market their own self-image; or, the commodification of nation. Thus, Canada markets itself as a uniquely successful multicultural tapestry. This, it goes without saying, presents special challenges to the elaboration of a national discourse on domestic racism, especially as regards the very assumption that whiteness is not a cultural norm in Canada, which paradoxically promotes this norm by constructing it as non-existent.117

It can be difficult to see where gender fits in this picture, in which race is associated with Americanness and Canada defines itself by opposition as not-American (Pabst, “Unexpected” 121). If there is no distinctly Canadian brand of feminism, similarly Naomi Pabst observes that, in a text like Black Feminist Thought, in the absence of national specificity, it can be taken for granted that the thought in question is American (“Mama” 117)

As Paul Barrett argues, Canada’s national discourse simultaneously creates a language for speaking about race, and – by constructing Canada in advance as pre-eminently pluralistic – makes it very difficult to talk about racism as something that happens in Canada (“New Solitudes”). This is illustrated in the media, in which, for example, Toronto-based news outlets faithfully covered American Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of the 2015 shooting deaths of young black men such as Eric Brown and Michael Garner. When a Black Lives Matter group was organized in Toronto, however, with protesters camping out in front of Toronto Police Headquarters at Yonge and College Streets, it took mainstream outlets almost a week to cover the protest in any substantive detail (Cole, “Police”). Group co-founder Janaya Khan notes that when organizers initially wanted to mobilize to protest the police shooting death of Jermaine Carby, they perceived that people would not be galvanized around Carby’s death because it occurred in Canada and racial violence is seen as “American.” Thus they adopted the name Black Lives Matter Toronto to stress that racist police violence happens here too (“Interview”).
This opacity in the conceptualization of race and gender in Canada is reflected in my thesis, and is a limitation of it. At the same time, the way in which this is the case also speaks to an opacity in categories of the subject that work outward to concepts of nation and national identity. In this respect, it suggests areas for further research.

If literature does cultural work of imagining the nation, these currents in Canadian national identity should show up in Munro. One way in to a discussion of the connection of race and gender in Alice Munro’s work is her frequent references to an other white-coded space: in “Runaway,” in a character’s trip to Greece; in a character’s journey in Albania in “The Albanian Virgin,” in a reference to the Canadian boreal forest seen through a train window as Taiga, continuous with the Russian boreal forest and bringing up associations of a tragic fate “in a Russian novel,” in “Chance” (Runaway 54); in Dorrie’s move to Australia post-marriage, in “A Real Life”; in Gail’s flight to Brisbane from Walley, Ontario, in “The Jack Randa Hotel.” These descriptions signal the way in which gender is constructed in a specific cultural context and yet this connection cannot be more directly manifested insofar as Canada disavows its connection with “whiteness.” Thus, whiteness is represented as projected on to an other cultural space in Munro’s work. The references also, further, sometimes encode (not always progressive) references to racialized or colonized peoples in the other cultural space, as if in a ghosting of Canada’s disavowed history of colonization. In this respect, although I have been arguing for a distinction of Munro’s stories from Jane Campion’s more

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118 Pabst describes the way in which, in Alice Walker’s oft-anthologized definition of “womanism,” in In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens, a reference to Canada sets off the representation of black female agency. Walker writes of a young girl who tells her mother, “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me” (xi). At once idealizing Canada as a space of freedom and depicting it as elsewhere, the quote centers the United States as a space of “black” experiences of oppression. In this way, it places under erasure a recognition of anti-black racism as also a reality within Canada.

At the same time, Pabst stresses the indebtedness of her own thinking as an American-Canadian dual citizen to black feminist writing coming out of the United States. At stake, then, is not a simplistic critique but a call for a more nuanced understanding of the interpenetration of gender, race and nation.

119 In other words, the concept of the subject presupposes an other or object. We have already seen how this other is feminized and racialized, in processes that support colonialist narratives of nation-building. Where Canada is already constructed as ‘other’ in relation to the U.S., and to Britain, this inhibits the visibility of the specific differences of gender and race. An analysis of whiteness and the literary imagination, such as Toni Morrison explores in an American context in Playing in the Dark, seems to be comparatively more elusive in Canada.

120 E.g., gender is constructed in the stories in a Canadian context, and this construction involves a displacement of whiteness on to an other culturally coded white space; thus, embodying Canada’s own disavowal of its colonial history.
outright reliance on a metaphor of race to modulate themes of gender inequality in her works, a similar, though more complex, articulation of this dynamic is not absent from Munro. In this respect, more work is needed to discern the nature of the progressiveness of her work in relation to gender, as it relates to the construction of “foreignness” in her writing.\textsuperscript{121}

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My discussion of white women’s historical complicity in a structure of racial patriarchy in which they are both privileged (as white) and dispossessed (as women) is in part an effort to think about the connection between the current state of things in relation to gender equality, and the ongoing state of racial inequality in North America, particularly as regards the recalcitrance of power to attempts to mobilize against or resist it. This recalcitrance is demonstrated in the way in which radical movements entrench the structures of power that they resist, by constructing a hegemonic oppressed subject and privileged sites of experience from which to narrate oppression. Yet, the post-modernist response to this embeddedness of narratives of “resistance” in power – the claim that identity and experience are fundamentally divided and cannot constitute the basis for knowledge of the social – arguably does not provide a viable alternative means for advancing the conversation around social justice (Moya 11).

As Sean Teuton, Jacqueline Goldsby, Himani Bannerji and others have suggested (Teuton 9; Bannerji, \textit{Thinking} 82), activist work for social change has to take place alongside an interrogation of the knowledge practices that foster this change, or else do not. As is widely recognized, a form of knowledge production that produces a split between the observing knower and what he or she observes entrenches a structure of inequality. Yet it may not be enough simply to assert, as does postmodernism, that all knowledge is thereby impossible

\textsuperscript{121} Overall, my sense is that, to the degree that Munro’s work achieves that surprising quality that is in excess of any pre-conceived strategy of reading that might be brought to it, her stories, while they engage with representations of other cultures in connection with their investigations of gender and class, generally revise these representations within the story as constructed, and so do not involve the kind of projection of inequality that is seen in Riviere and Campion, and that functions as an articulation of a dominant structure of hegemonic (white patriarchal) power.
In chapter 5, I referred to Foucault’s discussion of theories of the social as descriptions of power which construct power (“How Much” 254). As such, accounts of the social may serve more or less progressive purposes. It is not enough, therefore, to say that narratives of political opposition are “socially constructed” and leave it at that – as if to be socially constructed were equivalent to “false.” If all accounts of the social are constructed, yet it does not follow that they are all equally true or untrue (Moya 11). What seems rather to be indicated is a fundamental relationship of story to knowledge-gathering as an ongoing, collaborative process – a process that involves evaluating between various “constructed” and socially context-dependent perspectives.

This sense of the normativity of knowledge is linked to, or has implications for thinking about and transforming, stereotypes of black masculinity, and black and white femininity, such as underlie past and ongoing structures of violent discrimination, together with the rational frameworks that might be used to analyze them. The convergence of the creative act with analytical or truth-telling discourse suggests an overturning of the divide between reason and imaginative processes that is parcelled out to the social roles of whiteness and blackness, masculinity and femininity respectively. In chapter five, I argued that Walker’s “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” functions as truth-telling discourse to the degree that it points up what is missing in constructions of the gaze or of power in fixed terms, and suggests a way of imagining these as open to potential change, through its own narrative

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122 Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks critiques this assertion within psychoanalysis. She describes Jacqueline Rose’s defense of Lacan from his feminist detractors, in which Rose asserts that Lacanian psychoanalysis provides a resource to feminism in its concepts of identity and knowledge as fundamentally divided. According to Rose, such a view of identity guards against the danger of essentialist concepts of what a woman is that have historically propped up claims to male superiority. Seshadri points out that Rose’s defense “paradoxically instates the problematic of identity as contradiction or failure as a theoretical finding, in which, as a discipline, [psychoanalysis] is not implicated. Psychoanalysis, then, acquires the status of (an ironic) epistemology” (“Primitive as Analyst” 189). This irony comes to a head, according to Seshadri, when the focus turns to the positionality of Third World Women. Freud’s notion of a fragmented mental state, which supposedly characterizes all subjectivity, nonetheless acquires a specific association with so-called “primitive” cultures in Totem and Taboo (193). This primitivism is not merely diachronic, referring to the past, but synchronic, referring to contemporary non-Western cultures, in Freud’s text. Thus, a hierarchy of Western over non-Western forms of subjectivity subtends, and troubles, Rose and Juliet Mitchell’s defense of the idea of a fundamental fragmentariness of identity as an egalitarian proposition.

123 Judith Butler glosses Foucault’s remarks as suggesting that “My speaking is also a doing, an action which takes place within the field of power” (Giving an Account 125).

124 See the Appendix for a discussion of this line of thinking as it is developed in post-positivism realism, a critique of postmodernism that attempts to find a more nuanced basis for thinking about social conflict than is provided by either of the polarities of postmodernism and identity politics.
modelling of a deferred conclusion. In chapters one and two, I argued that Munro’s stories in *Open Secrets* assemble myths of feminine survival that take on a truth value as plausible alternative descriptions of culture to those stories which psychoanalysis describes as ultimate. In both cases, the stories interrupt the projection into the future of narratives of the way things supposedly are that co-opt the possibility of change.

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A couple of potential shortcomings of this thesis have to do with the structure of the thesis itself and the development of my ideas as I was in the process of writing it. I came to the thesis interested in the potential of psychoanalysis to describe the interaction between social norms and the construction or availability of modes of experience or consciousness, but also frustrated with the discourse’s liability to entrench those norms. This led to a perception that psychoanalysis did not fully account for my experiences as a reader, that there was a gap that, as it were, asked to be read. I experienced this shortcoming at least initially in a gendered locus and my readings of Alice Munro were through this lens. My reading of Joan Riviere’s “Womanliness as a Masquerade” was initially, in fact, an attempt to reconcile the excess that Munro’s stories in *Open Secrets*, and particularly, “The Jack Randa Hotel,” presented to my interpretations of them. This excess, however, became the basis of my reading of Munro’s challenge to or expansion of ideas within classical psychoanalysis. On the one hand, my somewhat retrospective claim in the introduction about literature’s capacity to speak back to literary and psychoanalytic theory grew out of my engagement with Munro, rather than being a claim or discovery that I then illustrated through Munro. Thus, my analysis is susceptible to the critique that I am making broad claims about literature (or potentially film) that I then support mostly through a single author study – raising questions as to why this author should be privileged above others or else, what the broader ramifications of my argument are for a larger survey of cultural texts. While acknowledging the non-optimal design of the project, which would have been difficult to anticipate at the beginning of my thesis, I argue that this objection belongs to an understanding of objectivity that my analysis attempts to challenge.
In other words, the suggestion that Munro’s stories “illustrate” a particular strategy of reading raises the question as to why she should be accorded privilege over other authors as having access to knowledge of female experience. Such an interpretive approach belongs to an understanding of knowledge as disinterested objectivity of which, I argue, Munro’s stories suggest a critique. It is rather the failure of any such a distanced perspective to stabilize a reading of Munro’s stories that leads to their theoretical importance to questions of knowledge and (its historical co-determination with) gendered subjectivity. In one sense, my study aims to provide not a “new” theory of narrative to oppose to that which psychoanalysis offers (in the analogy of narrative with the developmental quest); but a different relationship between theory and narrative to that which is suggested in some literary applications of psychoanalytic theory (for example, Brooks 1984) that are still widely in usage.125 Two studies similar to my own, by Shoshana Felman and Derek Attridge, resolve this problematic of the specific and the general in speaking of the “truth-telling” capacity of literature in different ways. Felman, in her study of reading and femininity in What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference provides, somewhat similarly to myself, an analysis of several literary and one psychoanalytic text(s), but does not provide an overriding methodology as to why she has selected these particular texts above and beyond others.126 Attridge, in The Singularity of Literature, writes that he initially intended to develop his discussion of literature’s exceeding of the “limits of rational accounting” through an analysis of J.M. Coetzee’s work as illustrating to a high degree this quality of excess (3). However, he elects to separate these concerns into two separate works, and uses mostly poetry to illustrate his claims in the 2004 text.127 If I were to make the thesis into a book, more consideration of or acknowledgement of this potential drawback would have to be undertaken.

125 Maureen Niwa-Heinen points out that Brooks’ Reading for the Plot emerges around the same time as the rise of feminist narratology, with its interest in often voice-driven female-authored narratives which exceed the focus of Brooks’ more masculine plot-centered analysis (15). Despite this fact, Brooks’ text remains the only theory of narrative desire widely in use.
126 My sense is that such a schematic analysis or comparison would go against the element of surprise that is common to the kinds of readings that she conducts, but that cannot be codified or reduced to a settled theory of narrative or of reading which they rather disrupt and disturb.
127 Attridge likewise justifies his decision not to include visual art in his study as pragmatic, seeing as “It is only by an artificial and often arbitrary distinction that the qualities of the literary can be discussed” (3).
Another potential drawback of the thesis is the way in which it slides between literary and film narrative, especially as regards my claim in chapter five that Walker’s short story speaks implicitly to a film like Campion’s *In the Cut*. Such a slippage runs the risk of appearing to diminish the distinctive formal features of each medium, or the non-synchronicity between literature and film’s economic and production constraints, mass market appeal or status as the product of many voices. In choosing to use film and literary narrative as illustrative of linked formal and thematic considerations in Munro, Campion and Walker’s texts, I have suggested that their housing under the same thesis is justified by the bearing that the phenomenon or concept of feminine masquerade has, at least in the West, on thinking about narrative and visual structures. In “Desire and Narrative,” Teresa de Lauretis draws attention to the way in which Freud’s ideas on gendered subjectivity speak on the one hand to ideas of visuality and the gaze, and on the other hand, to questions of narrative (143). My analysis of feminine masquerade in chapter three, particularly as it relates to constructions of “race,” speaks to these differing but linked registers in a way that, I hope, looks both to my discussion of film on the one hand, and to my analysis of literary narratives on the other. Although I have suggested a connection between the differing but related ways in which Campion’s *In the Cut* and Walker’s “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells” each speak to racialized feminism and the interventionist possibilities of fictional forms, I have tried to contextualize my readings of the texts in terms specific to their distinctive media. If I were to make the thesis into a book, more work would nonetheless be in order theorizing the connection that I am drawing between literary and film narrative.
Appendix
Knowledge in Post-Positivist Realism and Psychoanalysis

This appendix gives a brief overview of concepts of objectivity in Lacanian and relational psychoanalysis. I consider both how these diverge and also how they may come together in some ways at a higher order level. I also consider how the relational approach to knowledge as emerging from a breakdown of communication, or enactment, shares affinities with ideas of knowledge in post-positivist realism – a critique of postmodernism that has developed over the last fifteen years, aiming to provide a more nuanced understanding of identity and experience to better support progressive social thought. This appendix fills a gap in my thesis, in that I have purposefully allowed the literary and film texts to do a lot of the theoretical “talking,” out of a conviction (described in the introduction) that these avoid the tendency of truth-based discourses to formulate themselves in terms which repeat hegemonic structures. This appendix summarizes the stakes of that gamble as it relates to the insufficiency of current popular conceptions of knowledge, including as expressed in postmodernism’s humanist legacy.

In psychoanalytic literary criticism, the main point of reference for the discussion of knowledge is the work of Lacan. His “Intervention on the Transference” breathes new life into Freud’s exploratory efforts in “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” to map the opacity of the subject. According to Lacan, Freud’s failure to consider the factor of his own subjective involvement in Dora’s case typifies (and points to) an overall structure of knowledge as based on a prior failure. On this basis, the position of the analyst comes from knowledge of the inevitably compromised nature of all that the analyst thinks he or she knows:

[A]nalytic neutrality takes its meaning from the position of the true dialectician who, knowing that all that is real is rational (and vice versa), knows that all that exists, including the evil against which he struggles, corresponds as it always will to the level of his own particularity and that there is no progress for the subject other than through the integration that he
arrives at from his own position in the universal: technically through a projection of his past into a discourse in the process of becoming. (103)

The idea of knowledge as fallible is at the center of the postmodernist understanding of identity and experience as compromised and ideological. This discussion, most well known in the work of Judith Butler (for example, in her edited work with Joan Scott, Feminists Theorize the Political [xv], as well as in Gender Trouble), provided a way to critique the hegemonic structure of oppositional discourses of political oppression, which set up a unitary subject of oppression. More recently, critics have questioned whether postmodernism does not in fact inherit the basic structure and problems of identity politics, while providing a language to critique these in the specific case. Satya Mohanty and Paula Moya, in the volume Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism, point out that the concept of knowledge as inevitably fallible is based upon a prior assumption that, if objectivity were possible, it would mean unmediated access to truth or reality. Postmodernism thus first constructs objectivity as meaning unmediated access, and then observes it to be impossible in the specific case. In doing so, it retains (ironically) an overarching structure of closure and alienation between subject and object of knowledge at a higher order level.

According to Mohanty and Moya, such a concept of objectivity is not ultimately helpful, as it does not provide ways to think about inequality as subject to potential, progressive change. If knowledge is ineluctably fallible, then the only thing that can be said about identity is that it is constructed or self-different (Moya 5, 68). Yet the constructed nature of identity does not preclude the ways in which identities are also real, in the sense that, in an unequal society, “goods and resources are still distributed according to identity categories” (Moya 8). Identities therefore arguably have a contingent reality that is based not on intrinsic essence but upon the meanings that cultures place upon social locations (such as female, trans, or “person of colour”).128 These meanings are associated with experiences of discrimination that individuals may have as members of groups, which call up or make relevant theories about

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128 Mohanty describes this reality in terms of identities as “referring outward, to causally significant features of the social world” (55). By “refer,” Mohanty argues that there can be both partial and successful reference. Thus, although there may be no one-to-one correspondence between an individual’s identity and their objective social location, this does not mean that there is therefore no correspondence.
those experiences – even as those theories are also, themselves, “socially constructed.” An idea of objectivity as mediated, as is provided by the post-positivist critique of postmodernism, may be better positioned to address the paradoxical way in which identity claims can be mediated and ideological, and yet, in their mediated form, still yield access to knowledge of the social (Moya 81).

The post-positivist realist conception of objectivity has a number of parallels with relational thinking in psychoanalysis, in particular as regards the (emergent) discussion of intersubjectivity. Although I do not explicitly reference post-positivist realist concepts in the body of the thesis, which dialogues with the concepts and language of psychoanalysis, it is present in my work in the way in which each of my chapters turns on a moment in which the interpretation that is being constructed of a particular text or issue is instead revealed as implicated in, or as producing, the issue – shifting the object in need of being analyzed or addressed from the “textual material” to the tools being used to analyze it. Knowledge in these readings cannot be described in terms of a risk-free theoretical statement or venture, as inevitably fallible or otherwise. Rather than being foreclosed by error, it seems to emerge from it.

In relational psychoanalysis, the relationship between error and the construction of knowledge is understood in terms of the idea of enactment. Donnel Stern describes enactment as mutually interlocking patterns of transference and countertransference in which each person loses “the capacity to see or value the other’s perspective” (66). This loss stems from the fact that to formulate the other’s perspective would require access to a self-state that is dissociated (xvi). Resolution of enactment requires one or more parties to breach the dissociation so as to gain access to the self-state and the meaning it contains from which it becomes possible to formulate the other’s mind (e.g., to identify temporarily with the other’s perspective so as to be able to relate it to one’s own). Knowledge is said to be co-created, because it is not knowledge of the other as such, but a new perception of self and other that opens up new possibilities for relatedness (both interpersonally and between self-states). This

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129 Stern writes that this dissociation is often, but not always due to the danger that formulating the meanings that the dissociated self-state gives access to is seen to pose to the stability of the self.
is relevant to the readings I conduct in the thesis in the sense that they turn on a moment or moments of perception of the contingency of their own formulations. These correspond to an expanded awareness of how they contribute to the formulation of meanings in the interpretations they derive. As I have suggested in my readings of Munro, this expanded awareness enables a kind of intersubjective or third perspective transcending the dualities of presence and lack as indices of divergent gender positions in language. Agency is no longer associated with a gendered thematic, but is tied in to, in Denise Riley’s terms, how well I am able to see myself as “held in a structure which is not of my making but with which I tacitly concur” (122). In this respect, I consider that relational psychoanalysis or methods may link up with a Lacanian perspective, for example, as can be seen in Zizek’s re-reading of the later Lacan. In Zizek’s concept of enjoying the symptom, agency is no longer explicitly gendered, as it is in Lacan’s early work (“The Meaning of the Phallus” 84, “Intervention” 99); rather, it emerges from the point at which the subject is roped in to performing the dictates of the structure by which he or she is excluded. Zizek describes this paradox in terms of a discourse of perversion: “The only true awareness of our subjection is the awareness of the obscene obsessive pleasure [surplus enjoyment] we get from it” (“The Masochist Social Link” 119).

A bridge between this discussion of knowledge in psychoanalysis and the perspective of post-positivist realism that I have introduced can be seen in the concept of epistemic privilege. Mohanty describes the relationality of meaning in epistemic privilege, the idea that some individuals have privileged access to knowledge of the social based on their experiences of exclusion by it. The idea of epistemic privilege has been critiqued from post-modernist quarters as implying a privileged angle of vision of the oppressed – corresponding to a hegemonic oppressed subject. Mohanty argues that such need not be the case: to acknowledge epistemic privilege (of self or others) implies that “our own epistemic perspective is partial, shaped by our social location, and that it needs to be understood and revised hermeneutically” (58).

Mohanty references Dominick La Capra’s work as a forerunner of this insight – La Capra’s “History and Psychoanalysis” provides a particularly clear discussion of the problematic in terms of the idea that any historiographic critique of psychoanalysis can, itself, be subjected
to a psychoanalytic critique. Shoshana Felman’s work is similarly pioneering in its elaboration of the idea of unconsciousness as something that takes place and is encountered in the act of reading. In psychoanalytic writing on feminism and anti-racism, Jean Wyatt describes a similar idea of knowledge in terms of the potential space that is created by acknowledging that the other’s experience is not completely knowable by the self, especially where self and other come from different cultural backgrounds. On the one hand, some identification with the other’s experience is the foundation of empathy, and thus of political solidarity. However, Wyatt cautions that identification also has the tendency to assimilate the other’s difference to the self, as if the other were a mirror of, or proxy for, the self. Such assimilation reproduces the social relations of domination, by placing the other under erasure as “the center of her own complex reality – as, in a word, a subject” (4). Identification thus needs to be tempered by an equivalent “acknowledgement of the limitations on knowing another” (180).

The idea of epistemic privilege and the corresponding way in which it implies that one’s own perspective is epistemically partial has come up in the readings I give in the chapters, in each of which a narrative of gender oppression is reframed as a constructed (but not necessarily thereby unreal) expectation. Chapters one and two consider the way in which this reframing expands the possibilities for thinking about gender in non-hierarchical ways, in the work of Alice Munro. Chapters three and four consider how traditional feminism forecloses or obscures differences among women, but also how a feminist narrative of gender oppression might be opened up by being reframed as “story,” or in realist terms – making room for its being told in multiple ways. Chapter five considers the myth of the black rapist and the possibility of change through regaining the means of representation in Alice Walker’s “Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells,” a story that, I argue, works as theoretical discourse by prompting readers to encounter their own perspectives as conditioned by limiting norms.


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