Narrative, Social Myth, and Reality in Contemporary Scottish and Irish Women's Writing

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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PREFACE

This book is concerned with narrative constructions of women's identities in texts by contemporary Scottish and Irish women writers.[1] The theoretical framework of my analysis has been inspired by the writers' concerns with the relationship between narrative and reality. A. L. Kennedy has compared voice with a river that collects affluents (others' voices).[2] On another occasion, reading for the *Aye Write!* Festival in Glasgow, she spoke about her experiences as a student of drama who had to cite another's voice. Kennedy showed her conviction that using another's voice (the specific example was acting roles from Shakespeare's plays) "unleashes a force that transforms the actor as well as the members of the audience."[3] This view, expressed by Kennedy on numerous occasions of readings and speeches that I attended between 2004-2007, has suggested the main line of investigation of this study: an examination of how narratives in which we inevitably cite others' voices influence our presentations of ourselves to ourselves and to others in discursive interaction.

I endeavoured to undertake this investigation by following two threads. The main thread is an analysis of how the influence of narratives in shaping identities is reflected upon in the very narratives of the writers whose works form the interest of this study. In this framework, the focus is on the characters' identities. These characters, within the fictional realms where they abide, are shown as having to deal with issues of authority wielded through other narratives to which the texts refer. On the other hand, I have found that the texts that depict these characters' situations may themselves influence the texts' readers. Thus, a secondary venue of investigation opened up, enticing me to reflect on the extent to which our

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[1] Generally, I adopt Mieke Bal's terminology: "A *narrative text* is a text in which an agent relates ('tells') a story in a particular medium, such as language … . A *story* is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner. A *fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors." Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 5, original italics.

[2] Personal conversation with A. L. Kennedy, University of Glasgow, May 2004.

[3] Approximate quotation. A. L. Kennedy, *Aye Write!* Festival reading, Mitchell Library Theatre, Glasgow, 19 February 2007.

identities as real individuals are shaped through the texts we read. My analysis will therefore also provide reflections on how texts shape identities of individuals inhabiting metatextual worlds.

The theoretical argument of this book can be summarised as follows, with a degree of generalisation. Identities are fantasised in the recesses of the mind. In order to express these fantasies, and thus flesh out our social identity, we cite, to an extent, from others' narratives. These acts of citation shape our perceptions of ourselves and of others as we negotiate, helped by these narratives, subjective identities and acceptable socialisation scenarios. These negotiations can only take place in social interaction where we become acquainted with voices that we can cite. In this view, reading is also a form of social interaction, a dialogue with the voice of the text that joins ours as we read.

Thus, others' voices have power over us and influence our identities and socialisation. We, in turn, have power over others when we express our fantasies of their identities and invite them to inhabit the subject positions we set forth when we address them. Not only the authority of voice is relevant here, that is, not only is it important to be aware that who speaks "louder" silences others; but also the power of fantasies set forth through the "louder" speech steers others as they seep into their own fantasies, permeating through voices joined in dialogue or in reading—a silent "invasion". Our fantasies, remote as they may seem in relation to the real world, nevertheless affect reality in significant ways. A vision of how this happens is suggested in Kennedy's novella "Original Bliss", which explores the idea of a cybernetics of the imagination understood as the way one is steered from the inside: "our interior lives have seismic effects on our exterior world."[4] In order to theorise the role of the imagination envisioned in "Original Bliss", so that this vision can be developed into instruments of theoretical analysis, I have used concepts of fantasy and fantasising. The analysis of these concepts offered incentives for examining how they fit with theorisations of the relationship between narrative and (inner as well as outer) reality. This examination led me to the argument that if how and what we fantasise is influenced by narratives, stories steer readers and audiences.

But if stories steer readers and audiences, the latter may also revise and reconfigure stories, staking claims on authorship and on the power it engenders. I found that this effort of reconfiguration is characteristic of Liz Lochhead's reconstructions of Grimms' fairy tales, the fabula of

[4] A. L. Kennedy, "Original Bliss", *Original Bliss* (London: Vintage, 1998), 151-311, 154.

Persephone's myth, and Dracula's story.[5] The analysis of Lochhead's texts provided cues for further developing the main argument of this study, and for defining its focuses. It determined this book's concern with the disciplinary effects of corpuses of narratives derived from myths, that perpetuate them or engender new myths. Addressing this concern, it has become necessary to assess the social value of corpuses of narratives that engender disciplining discourses.

Illustrative examples of such corpuses of narratives can be found in the folk and fairy-tale traditions. I endeavoured to asses the social value of the disciplining effects of narratives in relation to the varied forms of manifestation of disciplinary power engendered with folk and fairy tales, so as to provide a blueprint for analyses of other kinds of corpuses of narratives. The importance of fairy tales in shaping social attitudes is discussed in Angela Bourke's study of Bridget Cleary's murder.[6] This study, as well as some of Bourke's short stories, emphasise that physical bodies and landscapes are imbricated with a community's body-social or official body politic. From the analysis of Bourke's writing, I retained a concern with how corpuses drawn upon in narratives, such as those of the folk and fairy-tale tradition, discipline audiences while at the same time legitimating social order and dictating patterns of socialisation.

Sharing similar concerns with Bourke's writing, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's narratives are more directly preoccupied with the imbrication between verbal and material textures that stifles women's voices. Indeed, throughout the texts analysed in this book, the main concerns tend to be women's voices as well as the ways in which women's bodies are disciplined through the fantasies upon which representations of the body are based. However, the exploration of these disciplinary effects of fantasy and voice could not be undertaken without addressing issues of masculine identity. The stifling effects of narrative traditions can be seen as marking both masculine and feminine identities.

Marina Carr's discursive strategies foreground heteroglossia as a means to undermine the power of subjection exercised through stories. Never frozen within subject positions, the protagonists of Carr's plays explore the potential of heteroglossia in their attempts to find ways of exercising agency within the constraints of traditions that limit one's

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[5] Liz Lochhead, *The Grimm Sisters*, *Dreaming Frankenstein & Collected Poems* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), 69-104; Liz Lochhead, "Lucy's Diary", *Bagpipe Muzak* (London: Penguin, 1991), 60-62; Liz Lochhead, *Dracula*, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* and *Dracula* (London: Penguin, 1989), 69-147.

[6] Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story* (London: Pimlico, 1999).

possibilities of fantasising identity. The analysis of Carr's work suggested the idea to examine also the texts of the other writers with a view to their interest in forms of heteroglossic intervention that undermine monoglossic discursive regimes.

Thus, the analysis of the relationship between narrative and reality called for by these writers' works had to be interdisciplinary, involving elements of narratology theory, linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, and social theory. However, it was not my purpose to offer an exhaustive critical analysis of the texts from within each of these disciplines. I have used primarily the tools of literary criticism to find out how the texts envision narrative as developing from, and affecting, reality. But at the same time, I attempted to define an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that is useful in studying the relationship between narrative and reality in broader contexts. This theoretical framework will be presented in the first part of the book, but I emphasise that many of its elements have been derived from analyses of the texts. Thus, each analysis of an author's work, having yielded some, not all, of the elements of the overall critical framework, will highlight various facets of this framework. At the same time, the theoretical framework has been continuously reshaped to respond to the visions that emerged from close readings of the texts. I have then used it to reinterpret the texts in order to define their common ground. For instance, the vision of how a discourse's heteroglossia can be used to deconstruct oppressive subjection, suggested by Carr's plays, has not only served the chapters concerned with this playwright's work, which are the last chapters of the book, but I have also used this vision to reflect on the other writers' work, in order to see how their texts use the decentralising power of heteroglossia.

From these movements between a specific textual analysis and an overarching perspective, there emerged the third major term in the overall architecture of this study. I have spoken of the relationship between narrative and reality. From now on I will refer to a triad instead of a dyad when speaking about the main focus of this study, which is the relationship between narrative, reality, and myth.

All the writers whose works are examined here share a concern with myths of femininity and with familiar mythic themes that influence perceptions of femininity. There exists a strong tradition developed by women writers of rethinking and rewriting stories derived from myths. I will discuss the importance of this tradition in the introductory chapter of Part I. At this point, I am satisfied to simply signal the existence of a need for rewritings of stories derived from myths through Marina Warner's comments:

> Myths offer a lens which can be used to see human identity in its social and cultural context—they can lock us up in stock reactions, bigotry and fear, but they're not immutable, and by unpicking them, the stories can lead to others. Myths convey values and expectations which are always evolving, in the process of being formed, but—and this is fortunate—never set so hard they cannot be changed again, and newly told stories can be more helpful than repeating old ones.[7]

In my analyses a central concern is the influence of myth in constructing our identities in social reality, but I am equally concerned with the ways in which acts of citation of stories can lead to productive mutations that help us imagine new identities and social worlds.

Most of the texts examined in this book engage, to various extents, with stories derived from myths in order to re-signify the myths. Although grounded in the specificities of Scotland or Ireland, the treatment of mythic themes in these texts has wider relevance. Some of the texts focus on the specific manifestation in Scottish and Irish culture of elements of myths that are encountered in most Western traditions. Other texts deal with elements of myths that are specific to Scottish and Irish cultures, in a manner that shows their cross-cultural value. My focus on Scottish and Irish writers is partly determined by the fact that their work continues to offer fertile ground for critical exploration. My study is intended as an addition to the work already undertaken on these authors, expanding this work. On the other hand, the texts studied in this book answer questions of interest for worldwide audiences in original ways, and my focus on Scotland and Ireland should not be understood as an endorsement of understandings of these cultures as cultures that deserve to be "redeemed" through further study. The non-parochial character of contemporary Scottish and Irish writing has been substantially documented in critical arguments that show how Scottish and Irish writers respond to questions of international interest.[8]

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[7] Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of Our Time (The 1994 Reith Lectures)* (London: Vintage, 1994), 14.

[8] Douglas Gifford, "At Last—the Real Scottish Literary Renaissance?", *Books in Scotland* 34 (1990): 1-4, 2; Alison Lumsden, "Scottish Women's Short Stories: 'Repositories of Life Swiftly Apprehended'", *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, eds. Aileen Christianson and Alison Lumsden (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 156-69, 168. Gerry Smyth, *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in the New Irish Fiction* (London: Pluto, 1997), 47; Edna Longley, "From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands", *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994), 173-95, 194-5. Alison Lumsden and Aileen Christianson, "Introduction", *Contemporary*

In Chapter 4 I will examine in more detail definitions of the concept of myth, explaining how this concept will be used in my analysis. For now it will suffice to highlight Bruce Lincoln's argument that *mythos* is "an assertive discourse of power and authority that represents itself as something to be believed and obeyed."[9] In this understanding, the discourse of myth is not necessarily tied up with a specific genre, historical period, theme, etc. Rather, Lincoln's argument suggests that manifestations of authority through discourse justify the suspicion that a myth may be employed in the service of authority. In this sense, some of the myths explored in the writings analysed in this study are: the vampire myth, the Persephone myth, and myth as folk and fairy tale (Lochhead); myths of Irishness derived from the masculine cultural canon (Carr); myths reiterated in various folk-tales that legitimate male-dominated gender regimes (Ní Dhuibhne); and Enlightenment myths that emphasise the organic contiguity of feminine bodies with a powerful body of nature seen as needing to be tamed and governed by a masculine elite, lest the alliance between women and nature should threaten the legitimate masculine body politic (Bourke).[10] I will argue that narratives derived from these myths can influence how feminine bodies are socialised. Kennedy's writing will be examined not so much for its use of elements of myths (for instance of the Grail myth in the novel *Everything You Need*) as for its emphasis on the mythologizing effects of the stories through which we fantasise ourselves and those with whom we interact.[11]

As noted, my methodology has been influenced by the very texts which I analyse in this study. However, a methodology suited to the task of critical analysis could not have been entirely reliant on the visions on the role of fantasy and fantasising, on the social value of myth, on the effects of reiterating stories, or on heteroglossia that I derived from these texts. I sought to develop these visions using critical theory. My

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Scottish Women Writers, 1-7, 2; Margery McCulloch, "Scottish Women's Poetry 1972-1999: Transforming Traditions", *Contemporary Scottish Women Writers*, 11-26, 25.

[9] Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 17.

[10] The concept of "gender regime" used here is derived from Sylvia Walby, *Gender Transformations* (London: Routledge, 1997), 6. Walby identifies six interrelated structures (household production, paid employment, the state, violence, sexuality and cultural representation in various media) that sustain a gender regime in the domestic and public spheres.

[11] A. L. Kennedy, *Everything You Need* (London: Vintage, 2000). The novel was first published by Cape in 1999.

methodology is heavily indebted to theories developed by Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler. I have already mentioned Kennedy's point that voice is like a river that collects affluents. This vision has suggested a Derridean approach to narrative as an act of citation. This approach allowed me to conceive subjectivity as unstable and amenable to change through reiteration, and to think of subjects as always incomplete; there would always exist a supplement that hinders claims of subjects' immutable identity, while at the same time preconditioning any possible identity.

Thinking of myth as a discourse of authority, I sought to establish possibilities of theorising myth that take into account the subject's alterity. I have found that Judith Butler's theories, which work with Derridean concepts, are crucial in developing such theorisation. From Butler's work, I retain as a cornerstone of my theoretical framework the concepts of repudiation and abjection. Legitimate subjects are constituted through casting away in domains of abjection that which is fantasised as illegitimate. The repetition of such constitutive acts that presuppose repudiation creates, in time, norms. I will argue that a myth is the expression of such norms at a given point in time. In turn, myths permeate discursive interaction, prescribing and scripting the ways in which subjects are constituted. It would not be feasible at this point to explain how the use of these two theorists have influenced the development of my methodology through reference to theories of narrative, discourse, materiality, social interaction, and psychoanalysis. These will be revealed at length in the first part of the book, which is heavily theoretical, while the second part focuses on close readings of texts. And, it is important to remember at the outset that what follows is not an attempt to fit the material analysed into pre-existing theoretical frameworks, but rather an attempt to find a critical angle that responds to the perspective developed in the texts on what literature does, or can do to readers and audiences as individuals or groups engaged in social interaction.

Another use of terminology must be clarified before we can proceed. I acknowledge that the texts studied can be approached from many angles. However, my focus will be on constructions of femininity in these texts, and on the ways in which they reflect processes of femininity construction. According to Doreen Massey, "deeply internalized dualisms … structure personal identities" through "structuring the operation of social relations and social dynamics, and … derive their masculine feminine coding from the deep socio-philosophical underpinnings of western society."[12] In my

[12] Doreen Massey, "Masculinity, Dualisms and High Technology", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995): 487-99, 492.

analysis I will emphasise that masculine/feminine coding is derived from narratives that are underpinned by socio-philosophical factors that maintain dualist understandings of masculinity and femininity. Indeed, the narrators analysed here cannot avoid engaging with these dualisms, working as they are in the continuation of a masculine tradition whose social myths legitimate these dualisms. However, when I use the term "femininity" I do not have a static definition in mind, but rather a fluid understanding of negotiable characteristics attributable to women at a given point in time, and within a given tradition. I will often engage with the dualisms that structure femininity/masculinity in Western society, using "femininity" to refer to traditional Western understandings of it as one of the binary terms of a duality. But I do not endorse that duality, even though I acknowledge it as reference in relation to which one should negotiate critically meanings of femininity.

PART I

THEORIES OF NARRATIVE, SOCIAL MYTH, AND THE BODY

INTRODUCTION TO PART I: CONTEXTS

In this chapter I will define my analysis framework in relation to wider theoretical contexts and trends. This will help me to clarify how the theoretical framework at first sketched in the following chapter, then developed at length in consequent chapters, is situated in critical traditions the goals and vision of which I share. I will first define my position in relation to a thread in Irish Studies that takes in the modernist writers. After that, I will define my position in relation to contemporary feminist work.

Perhaps a characteristic concern of modernist writers is their interest in the otherness which permeates our experience of the past through memory, our experience of socialisation through the conscious mind, and our experience of language as proof that we exist in the here and now. The analyses developed in this study focus on contemporary writers, but they answer in part concerns raised by modernist writers, or rather, they answer questions that contemporary writers have inherited from the tradition of modernist thought: does memory bind us to a constraining social world by reminding us the traditions of a "truer self"? Or does it free us by stealing into our experience clues that help us to discover a different, if "less human" in being an-other, identity? Is our conscious mind paralysed by social norms and conventions, or can it be awoken to reality through epiphanies that cast reality anew in the otherness of a lightening flash? Is the "I" in the language we use our own or does this "I" also belong to another? If the latter is true, is this other owned in the "I", even while it is estranged from the self proclaimed through the "I"?

As one may readily infer, my formulation of these questions has been inspired by texts of the Irish writers W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett. These texts provide excellent examples of modernist engagement with the otherness which permeates our experience of memory, of social reality, and of language. Although these writers explore, to varying degrees and with different emphases, all three kinds of experiences, a highly provisional classification could ascribe the province of social reality to Joyce, that of language to Beckett, and that of memory to Yeats. It would be a task beyond the scope of a single book to show extensively how these writers' ideas and their rich literary expression

affect the themes, narrative techniques, and preoccupations of contemporary writers concerned with the bearings of memory, language, and social identity in today's world. But, taking into account the main focus of this study, it is important to comment at least on an example of how one of these dimensions of experience has been treated by a major figure of the past and passing world of literary modernism. Yeats's exploration of the realm of memory is relevant for my analysis framework because it concerns the ways in which we deal with a past harboured in myth in order to define our social identity in the present. I am especially interested in Yeats's take on how the imagination stirs the realms of myth, and on how myth stirs the realm of memory, so that the social self is governed by the three powers of imagination, myth, and memory.

Yeats's infatuation with Celtic myths is well known, as is the fact that he joined the efforts of other Irish groups and individuals attempting to forge a Gaelic consciousness in which might abide a truly Irish social identity. We may use the two famous metaphors of "stone" and "living stream", through which Yeats explored the complexities of perceptions of embedded fixity and change ("How can we know the dancer from the dance?")[1], to comment on John Unterecker's assessment of the role of the mythological figure of Cuchulain, a favourite of Yeats's, in the culture of the Irish Revival. Unterecker's assessment captures the dynamics of the social reality born at the confluence of myth, imagination, and memory:

> Yeats's audience saw in Cuchulain a figure half way between myth and allegory, an embodiment of dreams familiar to themselves as well as to Yeats. The more Yeats wrote, the more useful the figure became. Gradually, the wish-fulfilment projection took on new roles, sometimes a figure celebrated, sometimes satirized, finally humanized; for in the character's long career … Cuchulain had become as much a part of Yeats's world (and his audience's) as Maud Gonne or Lady Gregory.[2]

Unterecker's comments suggest that a figure drawn from myth may gain life not only metaphorically, in the texts that reiterate its being and its actions, but also quite literally, as it enters the fantasies of real individuals and from there governs the imagination through which social identities are fashioned. In my analyses, I will investigate to what extent elements of

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[1] W. B. Yeats, "Among School Children", *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats, Volume I: The Poems*, ed. Richard Finneran (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 219-21, 221.

[2] John Unterecker, "Introduction", *Yeats: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Unterecker (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963), 1-6, 2-3.

myths may shape the lives of real individuals in the social world. But acknowledging this shaping force of myth does not mean that we are merely prey to the myths and the narratives derived from them, imprisoned in the subject positions to which they may bind us. For, as Yeats advocated, we should remain mindful of the living stream of the imagination lest we should become enchanted to frozen, stone-like stances. In his poem "Easter, 1916" Yeats wrote

> Hearts with one purpose alone
> Through summer and winter seem
> Enchanted to a stone
> To trouble the living stream.[3]

Using the central metaphors of these lines, the main argument of my study can be phrased thus: social myths yield identities that can be compared to the identity of statues fashioned out of stone; but the living stream of the imagination is a powerful force that can reshape the statue-like identities we may acquire through inhabiting the subject positions derived from myths.

Yeats's metaphors of "stone" and "living stream" refer to interconnected states of stasis and change. Stasis ("the stone") binds the alterity of the living stream of change; the living stream of change shapes and polishes the contour of figures seemingly possessing the durability of engraved figures "writ in stone". Yeats's understanding of the social value of the reciprocal conditioning of stasis and change, "stone" and "living stream", is highlighted by Edna Longley thus:

> This is no simple antithesis between obsession and flux. The stone actively 'troubles' the stream in the sense of political turbulence and conceptual challenge. Years before reinventing Cathleen ni Houlihan as Medusa, Yeats had associated stone with opinion, abstraction and his own temptations thereto. … In the context of Irish Nationalism Yeats came to identify himself, the natural world and poetry with the female principle, and Maud Gonne (Cathleen), mechanism and opinion with the male.[4]

In my analyses, myths will be regarded as being the effect of a certain kind of obsession, the kind that compels us to reiterate legitimate stories, and which troubles the flux of the imagination, "enchanting it to a stone". But this enchantment will also be seen as a conceptual challenge: the writers

[3] W. B. Yeats, "Easter, 1916", *Collected Works*, 182-3, 182.
[4] Edna Longley, "Introduction: Revising 'Irish Literature'", *The Living Stream*, 1-68, 63.

whose texts will be examined deal with this challenge and register the political and strategic value of the turbulence created by the myths turning reality into stone. This value is connected to the possibility of using stories to change opinion, and to breath new life into the identity constructs that, having been reiterated and consecrated as myths, become abstractions in the etymological sense of the word: identities that have been dragged away from the reality of experience with a certain kind of violence and which convict and imprison us, as if we were turned to stone by a witch's or wizard's magic wand.

I will also engage with the kind of identifications Longley discerns as Yeats's, even though my analyses will not be guided by Yeatsean paradigms except in a very broad sense. The texts I will examine do problematise identifications of the natural world with the feminine and cast a critical eye on the mechanisms of male-dominated social worlds. However, although such problematics did not escape Yeats's own thoughts, in this respect my analyses will be heavily indebted to contemporary feminist theorists.

Exploring the possibilities of feminist postmodernist criticism from political sciences perspectives in late 1980s, Jane Flax proposed that

> Feminist theorists are faced with a fourfold task. We need to (1) articulate feminist viewpoints of/within the social worlds in which we live; (2) think about how we are affected by these worlds; (3) consider the ways in which how we think about them may be implicated in existing power/knowledge relationships; and (4) imagine ways in which these worlds ought to and can be transformed.[5]

The formulation of goals of feminist criticism as requiring an assessment of the reciprocal influence of social and personal realities, which emphasises that social and individual worlds are thoroughly imbricated, is representative of the priorities that informed the work of feminist critics across disciplines, not only in the seventies and the eighties, but also in the decades leading up to the present. Examples abound. From work in the history of science by Donna Haraway, Evelyn Fox Keller, or Katherine Hayles to research in queer theory by Judith Butler, or in film studies by Barbara Creed, feminist theorists have examined how the social worlds in which we live affect our identities, how current power/knowledge

[5] Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory", *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 39-62, 55.

relationships that shape identities are engendered in these worlds, and possibilities of transforming these worlds.[6]

The critical assessment of the dynamic interaction between social worlds, narrative, and constructions of identities has not been the exclusive preserve of critics and theorists. Along with, and inspiring, feminist analyses of naturalised cultural identities, many women writers and artists have used various mediums of fiction to explore critically the ways in which male-generated texts shape feminine and masculine identities, as well as the ways in which constraining identities can be subverted. Texts of fiction reconsidering the social value of identities hitherto perceived as legitimate are of many kinds: films, theatre productions, literary texts, art installations etc.

As regards literary texts, an excellent example is Angela Carter's work. One of the most widely studied authors, Carter has perhaps been canonised, to use Lorna Sage's words, as "a figure identified with 'fantasy', Gothic, otherness". However, Sage notes, Carter "had always taken the line that fantasy was not the shadow-side of a binary opposition, but had a real life history. Being was marinated in magic, and (conversely), imaginary monsters had no separate sphere."[7] This perception of an interpenetration of realms of fantasy and "real life history" informs the writer's interest in how mythologies affect identities and social roles. Carter's literary work revises a wide-ranging stock of established cultural constructs, transmitted in narratives of various genres from fairy tales to romance and Gothic. This revisionist work is underlain by a recurrent critical take on the mythologizing effects of narratives.

Carter's interest in revisiting and reconstructing established and normative male-generated traditions is echoed in Flax's recommendation that "we need to recover and write the histories of women and our activities into the accounts and stories that cultures tell about themselves."[8]

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[6] See for instance Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association, 1991); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[7] Lorna Sage, "Introduction", *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994), 1-23, 1.

[8] Flax, 55.

Carter's concern with how male-dominated traditions generate disempowering women's identities and social roles can be compared with Flax's assertion that "we need to recover and explore the aspects of social relations that have been suppressed, unarticulated, or denied within dominant (male) viewpoints."[9] That Carter and Flax share a similar vision is not due to a direct relation between them. Instead, it can be seen as signalling a general need among feminists (but not only) for reconsiderations of naturalised perspectives, attitudes, and social rituals that, in their unchallenged reiteration of what counts as legitimate identities, consecrate myths whose power extends not only over realms of fantasies, but also over social realms in which we enact those fantasies.

Jack Zipes offers an extensive list of rewritings of fairy tales by feminist authors, of which perhaps the most suggestive title is *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*, by Emma Donoghue.[10] Referring to these texts, Zipes underlines that

> Almost all the rewritings of traditional fairy tales have a greater awareness of the complexities of sexuality and gender roles and have sought to explore traditional fairy tales with a social consciousness and awareness in keeping with our changing times.[11]

Zipes' comments again highlight the social value of these rewritings. It is with a view to the interactive dimension of such rewritings that I approach the texts analysed in this book: how do presentations of ourselves and of others fare in the social worlds in which we live? To echo Flax, how do these stories help us to imagine ways in which these social worlds can be transformed by transforming the ossified identities traditionally regarded as legitimate? In order to examine such possibilities of transformation I will develop the concept of fantasy and fantasising as means to create one's identity. In order to connect this process of identity construction with narrative, I will focus on the extent to which these fantasies are narratable. The concept of narratable fantasies will help us to examine the processes whereby identities are constituted through stories that circulate in social spaces.

Perhaps most commonly circulated are stories derived from or exploiting the traditional fairy-tale ethos. However, my interests are not

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Jack Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 103-4. Emma Donoghue, *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (New York: Harper, 1997).

[11] Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick*, 103.

limited to rewritings of fairy tales. Indeed, the re-evaluations of traditionally legitimate identities in literary fiction do not work only with stories from the fairy-tale stock, but have also tackled motifs and themes from ancient and contemporary myths. Jay Clayton, for instance, notes that

> [Alice] Walker dedicates a novel to the Spirit (*The Color Purple* [1982]); [Toni] Morrison opens several texts with an allusion to ritual (*Sula* [1974] and *Song of Solomon* [1977]); other writers make healers, voodoo figures, or conjure women the presiding spirits of their novels (Bambara's *Salt Eater*, Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo* [1982], Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* [1983], and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* [1988]).[12]

Another example is Christine Crow's *Miss X or the Wolf Woman*, which Susan Sellers regards as a text that

> encompasses many of the classical, biblical, literary and even psychoanalytic myths that have constituted Western culture, unravelling and representing these to demonstrate the ways they obliterate or falsely distort women's experiences.[13]

The texts I will discuss always offer opportunities for tackling a network of myths, rather than a single theme, tale, or motif derived from myths. In analysing how these networks of myths construct identities through distorting representations of women's experiences we will come across different kinds of texts, the roots of which are entangled with myths in ways that resist easy categorisation or systematisation. Classical myths such as that of Persephone have been transmitted through different channels and may be detected in different layers of cultural memory than myths constituted in more recent times, for instance the Dracula myth. A flexible concept of "myth" is required if we are to define an interpretative framework that can accommodate a complex network of cultural themes. That is why I will be working with a wider concept of myth which allows us to conceive that any narrative can be elevated to the status of myth at any given point in time, under specific circumstances.

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[12] Jay Clayton, "The Narrative Turn in Minority Fiction", *Narrative and Culture*, eds. Janice Carlisle and Daniel Schwarz (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 58-76, 66, first names in brackets added.

[13] Susan Sellers, *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 52; Christine Crow, *Miss X or the Wolf Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1990).

In widening the concept of myth, the question arises of how is myth different from ideology and why should we speak of myth and not of ideologies or ideological functions of myth. I have found that the concept of "ideology" can be too rigid to cope with the diversity presented by the socio-cultural networks in which our identities are constituted. "Ideology" seems less fruitful a concept for dealing with the ground zero whence myths take off. I have therefore defined a distinction between ideology and myth by examining the roots of stories that may become myths. Stories may become myths through challenging other myths in the social circles where stories are at first used to think about existing power/knowledge relationships. The already existing power/knowledge relationships are legitimated through other stories that have come to script social identities and roles. A story used to think about one's place in the social world by devising alternative stories of legitimate social worlds may itself come to convey myths, through its reiteration in a monoglossic discursive regime that may dominate a social space. These myths born out of social interaction may be called social myths to emphasise the social value of their centralising tendency and their heteroglossia.

Having sketched my goals and interests in reference to existing critical contexts, I will now define my theoretical framework in more detail. This will form the first part of this study. The second part will offer textual analyses within the outlined theoretical framework as well as explanations of how they helped me to define this framework.

CHAPTER ONE

FANTASY, NARRATIVE, AND SOCIAL WORLDS

I will begin with a sketch of a theoretical framework for defining the relationship between narratives and socialisation, postponing for now the analysis of their relationship to myth. My main argument at this stage is that our modes of socialisation are steered by fantasies derived from narratives. Thus, I will first clarify my use of the concepts of fantasy and fantasising. I will then explain how fantasies help construct subjectivity. I will mainly use theories developed by Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida, whose work is of central importance in my arguments. The theoretical analysis of fantasy and fantasising will be exemplified with close readings in the chapter examining Kennedy's novel *Everything You Need* and her novella "Original Bliss". Issues of subjectivity construction will be explored throughout the close readings of the second part of this study, with the Derridean perspective more emphatically used in the analysis of Bourke's and Ní Dhuibhne's writings.

Pierre Bourdieu comments that one's bodily feelings and experiences are created through repeatedly enacting complexes of words, bodily postures, and gestures:

> there is no better image of the logic of socialization, which treats the body as a 'memory-jogger', than those complexes of gestures, postures and words—simple interjections or favourite clichés—which only have to be slipped into, like a theatrical costume, to awaken, by the evocative power of bodily mimesis, a universe of ready-made feelings and experiences.[1]

In my textual analyses I will focus on the role of complexes of words which constitute narratives in determining bodily feelings and experiences, and on the role of fantasies in mediating translations of narrative "realities" into the reality of experience.

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[1] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984), 474.

My understanding of the concepts of "fantasy" and "fantasising" draws heavily on Judith Butler's argument in "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse". Butler uses Roy Schaffer's argument that "when identifications [in a psychoanalytic sense] are understood as internalizations, they imply a trope of inner psychic space that is ontologically insupportable."[2] Butler notes Schaffer's suggestions that "internalization is understood better not as a process but as a fantasy" and challenges the psychoanalytic view of the self as an inner core or essence.[3] Rather than identifying oneself as an individual with certain attributes (such as gender), one fantasises that s/he is that individual: "fantasies constitutive of identifications are not part of the set of properties that a subject might be said to have, but they constitute the genealogy of that embodied/psychic identity, the mechanism of its construction. … [T]hese fantasies are themselves disciplinary productions of grounding cultural sanctions and taboos … ."[4] The difference between identifications and fantasising is important, because in the latter case it is conceivable that one's identity changes according to one's imagination of what is desirable for him/her to be, whereas in the former case, one cannot be but a certain individual with certain attributes; if s/he does not become that individual, s/he is branded psychotic. Butler's argument can be used to explain how the configuration of the self may be changed with the changes in one's fantasies that challenge cultural sanctions and taboos.

Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis argue that fantasy is not "the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images."[5] As in Butler's argument, in Laplanche and Pontalis' view the self is imagined as an inner site in which one sees oneself with a certain identity. Both arguments show that the fantasy of the self is constitutive of the subject, expressing the self's identity in sequences of images. Elizabeth Cowie extends the applicability of Laplanche and Pontalis' argument from individual private fantasising to fantasising based on texts.[6] Thus, the

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[2] Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse", *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 324-40, 333, brackets mine. See also Roy Schaffer, *A New Language for Psychoanalysis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

[3] Butler, "Gender Trouble", 333.

[4] Ibid., 334.

[5] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality", *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin et al (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), 5-34, 26.

[6] Elizabeth Cowie, "Fantasia", *m/f* 9 (1984): 70-105.

sequences of images which constitute the self can be regarded as narrative sequences, not just as events of the imagination. Using narratological terminology, it can be said that for Laplanche and Pontalis fantasies are like fabulas (series of events), whereas for Cowie they are like stories (fantasies are narratable). Thus, one may suspect two-way traffic between fantasies and narratives: if "internal" fantasies are narratable, then "external" narratives can influence one's fantasising.

Laplanche and Pontalis argue that "the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a desubjectivized form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question."[7] In this perspective, it is difficult to distinguish between one's image of one's self as a character (or subject) and the realm one figures as an eventful space that his/her self inhabits (the scenario one fantasises for the subject through which s/he consents to be signified). These fantasies are rather like texts signed (in the Derridean sense) with the indelible mark of the self. According to Derrida,

> In the form of the whole name, the inscription of the signature plays strangely with the frame, with the border of the text, sometimes inside, sometimes outside, sometimes included, sometimes overthrown. But it is still included when thrown overboard and always eminent when drunk in by the surface of the text.[8]

The inscription of the self as a subject in a fantasy "plays strangely" with the frame and border of its domain. The self is drunk in by the texture of fantasies. Even when thrown overboard, it can still be summoned and made amenable to rules governing its medium of expression; thus being amenable to cultural sanctions and taboos, to subjection. If, through using narratives, one's fantasising of a given scenario and subjective constitution is repeated, then, in time, one's body learns to be awakened to ways of feeling and experiencing that these narratives make available. One will then enact complexes of gestures, bodily postures, and words that one has grown accustomed to fantasising as one's own.

One always participates in discourse in one way or another in social interaction. Thus, one's identity is always derived to an extent from a narrative whose subject is fantasised as being of one's self. One lives socially through fantasising in this sense. However, the performance of these fantasies, that is, the production of a social persona one sets out and steers in the social world, is not simply an enactment of ready-made

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[7] Laplanche and Pontalis, 26.

[8] Jacques Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 120.

narrative constructs. This performance depends not only on an individual's subjection to a pre-existing text in his/her discursive presentation of him/herself to the world; but also on his/her interaction with other individuals whose discourses affect one's fantasy script through heteroglossic interference.[9] In order to examine how discursive interaction alters the participants' fantasy scripts, it is necessary to examine the conditions in which such a script may remain stable or may be destabilised. This examination can be undertaken using Derrida's and Butler's theories, which demonstrate that narrative iterations provide opportunities for re-creating subject positions in new configurations.[10]

Let us postpone this examination for a short while in order to sum up the main argument so far: the events of the imagination in which we figure our selves can be said to be derived, to an extent, from stories. At the same time, our fantasies are narratable. The self is constituted at the intersection between fantasies and stories as an "I". On the one hand, this "I" is amenable to cultural sanctions and taboos that govern its narrative expression, and guide its presentation as social persona. On the other, this "I" is always amenable to change because, as is argued in deconstruction theory, the "I" of narration and of social scenarios is not unitary and stable.

In order to explore the instability and incompleteness of the narrative "I" I will focus on Derrida's essay "Signature Event Context", in which he challenges the premises of J. L. Austin's theory of performatives.[11] Derrida focuses on Austin's qualification of performative utterances said by actors on stage, introduced in a poem or spoken in soliloquy as parasitical, non-serious, and non-ordinary. Derrida regards this qualification as an exclusion of acts of citation that helps Austin to "pass off as ordinary

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[9] By "fantasy script" I understand a scenario of social interaction that one fantasises as suitable for oneself based on scripts derived from narrative "acquaintance" with the world, i.e. based on the schemata of social interaction offered in narratives that make sense of (signify) the world.

[10] The concept of "iterability" is used by Derrida throughout his work but see for instance Jacques Derrida, "'This strange institution called literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida", *Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature*, trans. Nicholas Royle, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 33-75, 62; and Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988). Judith Butler's understanding of iterability and reiteration is developed in the context of her theory of performativity in Butler, *Gender Trouble*, esp. 140, 145, 226; and Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, esp. 1-29, 124-40, and 187-9.

[11] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", *Limited Inc*, 1-21. See also John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, eds. James Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

an ethical and teleological determination of the utterance."[12] The subject expressed through Austin's ordinary utterances remains "'at home,' by and in itself, in the shelter of its essence or *telos*".[13] Derrida insists that the parasitism which Austin repudiates in order to purify speech is rather "its internal and positive condition of possibility".[14] By demonstrating that every utterance is impure, because it is to an extent a citation or iteration, Derrida shows that every narrative is "parasitical", and therefore the subject is not ordinarily unitary and stable, but its configuration is constantly renegotiated through (con)textual (re)positioning. Therefore, the configuration of the subject through which we express our identity in social interaction is never fully complete; this configuration is endlessly worked out in discursive interaction. A unitary subject can only exist through the exclusion of its alterity.[15]

Judith Butler argues that constructions of the subject operate "through *exclusionary* means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation."[16] However, as Butler argues, fantasies of legitimate subjectivities may be subverted through the rearticulation of what has been hitherto repudiated as abject. Butler's argument applies not only to gender, but to all kinds of normative constructions of identity. Thus, subjective identity is shaped through a continuous process in which one fantasises his/her identities, rather than being formed through a pre-determined cast one must become, or else one is seen as psychotic or abject.

Constructions of the subject affect one's personal, physiological, and social space. They can be regarded as products of "semiotic technologies", to use Donna Haraway's words. Semiotic technologies cannot be divorced from material and social technologies. It is always through a collaboration of the three that "what will count as nature and as matters of fact get constituted."[17] Thus, I regard narratives also as tools for crafting minds and bodies.

The argument of this chapter can be summarised thus: fantasies are narratable and inform subjectivity constructions. But every subject is constituted through citing legitimate subjects in narrative presentations of

[12] Derrida, "Signature Event Context", 17.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 9, 18.
[16] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 8, original italics.
[17] Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium: FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse*™ (London: Routledge, 1997), 50.