

Three Women's Texts and Circumfession

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I

Postcolonialism manages the crisis of postcoloniality. The distinction between autobiography and testimony pays uneasy tribute to this, but itself gets swept up in the discipline of crisis management.

Testimony is the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression, to a less oppressed other. Editorial control varies in degree but is never absent. The situation is not unlike the old anthropological one. Indeed, a more self-consciously subalternist anthropology comes generically closer to the production of testimony, with, again, a variable degree of transcoding for an academic readership.

The production of testimony is also not unlike the classic psychoanalytic situation. The analysand is persuaded [*überzeugt*] to give witness to his or her own truth, to which the analyst has access by virtue of tracking the graph of the metapsychological machinery. The psychological witnessing, the testimony of the analysand, countersigns the analyst's skill in reading the machine.

For lack of time, we cannot here take up the situation of the clinical analytic constraint - to observe and use the distinction between transference neuroses and re-memoration - in the production of testimonies as trade books or academic literature.¹ Yet it is not an unimportant issue. The differences upon this tiny taxonomy - testimony, anthropology, psychoanalysis - each production involving at the core at least two players - lies in the intention of the players. (Autobiography too, of course, could involve two players: I and me, assumed subject assuming object. The intention of the "subject" is to objectify itself without loss of subjectship. Of this more later.)

¹ It can of course be adduced that the "mistake" of transference neuroses was the first source of psychoanalytic science (Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," *Standard Edition of the Psychological Works*, trans. James Strachey et. al. [New York: Norton, 1961], vol. 18: 18-19, 50-51).

The field is open to two sorts of critique: traditional ideology critique of a marxist kind (Slavoj Žižek plays Lacanian with this one) and secondly, to the question of responsibility.²

Ideology critique will bring us back to the formula with which I opened my remarks: Postcolonialism manages the crisis of postcoloniality. Here, the intended subject wavers between folly and knavery. Either you are caught in ideology and don't know what you are doing, a fool even with all the Althusserian apologies. Or, you know that this stuff sells, that globalization needs well-placed migrants to keep busy with "culture." You are then a knave, a running dog of the new orientalism.

But the field is also open to the question of responsibility. The practice of postcolonialism in the production of testimony (or, indeed, the disciplinarization of autobiographies marked by that label) assumes the editorial or critical subject "de-centered," in rather an empirical way, from the burden of crisis management,

without re-testing the bond between, on the one hand, responsibility, and, on the other, freedom of subjective consciousness or purity of intentionality. [The practice of postcolonialism] denies the [prior] axiomatics [of colonialism] *en bloc* and [in fact] keeps it going as a survivor [a postcolonial, if you will]. . . . [S]o coping, so operating, one accounts and becomes accountable for nothing.³

There can be, in other words, no de-centered agent. In response to the question of responsibility, deconstruction invokes accountable reason, *principium reddendae rationis*, and, in a certain way, recommends its own transgression. When this assumption of responsibility is concretely suggested - by me, for example - it is, most often and unfortunately, construed as an accusing and debilitating self-critique, and is not well received. Symptomatically (if I may use this marked word), it is read as a loss of touch with the motherland *as she is preserved in the diaspora*. For lack of time, I cannot here develop the question toward which such symptoms point: what is it to generalize a postcolonialism?

Let us rather look at subaltern space in the crisis of postcoloniality. (That space, as always, is defined as separate from lines of mobility, even

underclass mobility.)⁴ Persons in that space of difference usually had to be interpellated or hailed as testifiers for some truth of the dominant, although not necessarily to mobilize for resistance, which would be to bring subalternity to its own crisis. It is well to keep that possible distinction in mind - testimony and resistance. The resistant subaltern may sometimes agree to be hailed to testimonial in the belief that resistance will thereby find effective consolidation.

Consider Halima Begum, a rural Bangladeshi for whom funding had been found for travel to the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. She spoke of her devastation by and her resistance against the coercive contraception organized by global pharmaceutical dumping in clear, Bengali prose, opening in the classic testimonial style: "I, Halima Begum . . ." Of course, it is impractical to expect the United Nations to provide simultaneous translation for the language of the subaltern. An activist stumbled through incomprehensibly in a truncated mistranslation from Bengali into English. Next morning's bulletin gave it one line, transforming it into a byte of sensationalist human interest; a faint victim's voice providing proof, yet again, that the South needed precisely the kind of aid that this woman was resisting. It is in the context of hundreds of such examples that it may be said: the subaltern often cannot accede to testimony. I hope we have not forgotten the difference between autobiography and testimony with which I started.

The subaltern's inability to testify is predicated upon an attempt to do so - to which no appropriate response is proffered. It is in fact a failure of responsibility in the addressee. In the print medium, editorial control can simulate spontaneity - I have myself been guilty of this. The best-known testimonials of our time are *Shoa* and *I, Rigoberta Menchú*.⁵ *Shoa* is not a document of postcolonialism. And Rigoberta, an organic intellectual taken for the true subaltern, represents herself as representative even as she points out that she is not representative. This deliberate and powerful play of the individual and representativity is the impossible signature of the ghostly witness in all autobiography.

⁴ As usual, I quote Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1982), vol. 1: 1-8; 8.

⁵ *Shoa* (a film), directed by Claude Lanzmann, Aleph/Historia, 1985, France. Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, trans. Ann Wright (London: Verso, 1984).

² Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989).

³ Jacques Derrida, "Mochlos; or, the Conflict of the Faculties," *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993) 1-34; 11.

II

It is with this invocation of testimony, the other text of selving, that I step over the threshold into autobiography as such, no more than a name of a genre that attempts the impossible, for "so long as the other has not won back that advance" - of life? in death? - "I shall not be able to avow anything. . . ."⁶ But not before I tell you a story of two women who did not know each other, Assia Djebar and Gayatri Spivak, meeting at a conference in 1991, thanks to the good offices of a third woman, Mireille Callé-Gruber. Djebar revealed to me only a few weeks ago that she had decided that I was not altogether tedious, because I seemed to have caught on that her novel, *Fantasia*, was (about) a withheld autobiography. Allow me to read that authorized passage:

I think one of the major motifs of *Fantasia* is a meditation upon the possibility that to achieve autobiography in the double bind of the practice of the conqueror's writing is to learn to be taken seriously by the gendered subaltern [change the implied reader, as it were] who has not mastered that practice [thus responsibility, not interpellation]. And therefore, hidden in the many-sectioned third part of the book, there is the single episode where the narrator speaks in the ethical singularity of the *tu-toi* to Zohra, an eighty-year old rural *muj hida* [female freedom fighter] who has been devastated both by her participation in the nationalist struggle and by the neglect of women's claims in decolonized Algeria. The achievement of the autobiographer-in-fiction is to be fully fledged as a storyteller for this intimate interlocutor: telling her not one's own story, but the animation of the story of two nineteenth-century Algerian prostitutes, Fatma and Meriem, included in Eugène Fromentin's *Un Été au Sahara*. And then to succeed, for Zohra's curiosity flares up, "And Fatma? and Meriem?" Lila Zohra interrupted, catching herself following the story as if it were a legend recounted by a bard. "Where did you hear this story?" she went on, impatiently. "The 'I,' (now at last articulated because related and responsible to 'you,' - the subaltern) replies simply, "I read it!" I retorted. "An eye-witness told it to a friend who wrote it down." . . . This is the divided field of identity, that a feminist-in-decolonization . . . can uncover . . . between Books 9 and 10

⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession," Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993) 3-315; 56; hereafter cited in text as C, with page number following.

of the *Confessions*. It even forces Augustine to turn back on himself to become the subject and object of a dispassionate autopsy. In the rift of this divided field, the tale shared in the mother tongue is forever present (in every act of reading the novel) and forever absent, for it is not in French but in the mother tongue.⁷

The authority of Djebar's book relies on this achievement of the withholding of autobiography.

This "autobiography," then, is no more than "trying my self out, as ephemeral teller, to you," a subaltern, a gendered subaltern. Such a reversal and displacement, in postcoloniality, of the autobiographer's privilege, is to be strictly distinguished from the generic or structural impossibility of autobiography being narrativized through the agency of colonialism. The former best describes, indeed makes visible, the situation of autobiography in postcoloniality. The latter is postcolonialist autobiography. Meyer Abrams had argued a displacement from Christian psychobiography to the Imagination, from Augustine to Derrida if you like, in the *Mirror and the Lamp* forty years ago.⁸ The Romantics rewrote Milton as Derrida rewrites Augustine. And the postcolonialist autobiographer (who is not Derrida, I'll argue) carries that relay forward by displacing its lineaments into the epistemic violation of colonialism.

III

"Circumfessions" does not fit either model. The Algeria that some of the photographs in the book evoke has not gone through the violence of the national liberation movement. "Circumfessions," the borderline text to Geoffrey Bennington's introduction or exergue to Derrida's thought, plays in the field of a sexual difference plotted thus by Derrida's Nietzsche:

. . . the structure of the exergue on the borderline of the borderline in the exergue will be reprinted wherever a question of life, or "my-life" [auto-bios], arises. . . . It is life that has to return eternally (selectively, as the living feminine and not the dead

⁷ Spivak, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk," *Identities*, ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 147-80; 148. For a discussion of the singular *tu-toi* in Hélène Cixous, see Gayatri Spivak, "French Feminism Revisited: Ethics and Politics," *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 141-71; 154-55.

⁸ Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1953).

that resides within her and must be buried). . . . Inasmuch as I *am and follow after* my father, I am the dead man and I am death. Inasmuch as I *am and follow after* my mother, I am life that perseveres, I am the living and the living feminine.⁹

Over the years, Derrida has tried to displace this binary opposition - Mother / blood / life, Father / brain / death - by attempting to use the resources of typography for philosophizing. More than a decade ago, "an exergue on the borderline" animated the running bottom panel of the page of a text entitled "Living On," and was itself entitled "Border Lines." It is a codic appeal to the bloody brainless continuity of the mother, embedded in the many references to the survival-in-death of women, mouthing the question: What is it for a woman to die?¹⁰ In "Circumfessions," I can read the question as having come closer to Nietzsche's: What is it for a mother to die? Nietzsche's mother outlived him; he never found out. "If," as Nietzsche wrote, "as my mother I live still and grow old," the text of Derrida is indirectly about "my" (Derrida's) growing old. Fifty-nine periods or sentences for "my," in 1989, fifty-nine years, not an autobiography at all but an impossible counter-thanatology, for the mother is not writing. To cheat the deliberate graphist, Derrida apparently allowed each period to run on until his antique Macintosh overloaded. "Does it change anything that Freud did not know about the computer?" Derrida writes in "Archive Fever." "And where should the moment of suppression or of repression be situated in these new models of recording and impression, or printing?"¹¹ It would be beyond my ability now to tap Melanie Klein to show her kinship to artificial intelligence theories. For now, let us note that in "Circumfessions," the relationship between the top and the bottom of the page is more to the point than in "Living On: Border Lines," where both texts were by Derrida, playing two different games.

Here, the top part is where Jacques Derrida is dead, for in it, Geoffrey Bennington attempts to summarize the system that can be signed by Derrida's patronymic. One stated part of the project of "Circumfessions" is to give G.'s systematization the lie, as life must give death the lie, as the mother, nameless blood, survives the named autobiographical subject al-

ready dead in the patronymic or, as Nietzsche writes, "as my father, I am already dead."¹²

The very first words of "Circumfessions," "*le vocable cru*," gives G., the intellectual biographer, the lie. "As soon as seized by writing, the concept is cooked," says the epigraph, and the text utters for "the raw vocable," not the written concept, just what the systematization of the grammatologue would not endorse in Derrida's name. And, if describing the vocable, we want the sound, *cru*, it is of course lost in translation. *Cru* also means "believed in," so that in the name of some believed-in voicing, this "Derrida" fights his systemic naming, reminding himself in the third phrase that the throw in poker belongs only to his mother: "The mother is living on, and living on is the name of the mother. This live-on [*survie*] is my life that she overflows, and the name of my death, of my dead life, there is the name of my father, my patronym as well."¹³

But then, how can a mother die, as mother? "Circumfessions" is written, if that's the word, while Derrida's mother is dying, as *Glas* had been composed after his father's death. If in *Glas*, the bereaved son, in half-mourning [*demi-deuil*], finds his patronym encrypted, in "Circumfessions" he brings up his secret Jewish name, perhaps standing in for that nameless streaming life where mothers are no more than birthing moments? But even that won't do, for the mark of a Jew - circumcision - the masculine covenant that turns genealogy into history is on the side of the patronymic (C 186). Circumcision is mentioned often, but always as a sort of research project, engaged in for many years but now to be given up. It is mentioned most often in italics, quoting past notebooks dated '77 to '84 (C 237). The only interest that the rite has for Derrida in the "now" of the roman print of "Circumfessions" is the possibility that the mother sucked off the blood on the child's little penis. "From now on, no point going around in circles" (C 56).

All the pictures of the engines of circumcision belong, in a certain sense, with the pictures of Algiers and France, in a kind of auratic necrology, not postcolonialism. The only historical grudge was to have been denied Frenchness during the war - a subcolonial theme, as Farhad Mazhar, the Bangladeshi activist poet, would say. It is France that is unmarked in this text. A certain symbolic and distanced identitarian hybridism is at work in the text through the figure of Augustine. In his seminar in 1989, "*Aimer-manger l'autre*," to which Derrida refers in period number 32, Augustine figured rather largely and was referred to as "the Italo-Maghreban." In pe-

⁹ Derrida, "Otobiographies: the Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name," *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie V. McDonald (New York: Schocken, 1985) 1-38; 14, 15.

¹⁰ Harold Bloom et. al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1986) 75-176.

¹¹ Derrida, "Archive-Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25 (Summer 1995): 9-63; 22.

¹² Derrida, "Otobiographies" 62.

¹³ Derrida, "Otobiographies" 16; translation modified.

riod 3, Derrida refers to him as "my compatriot," and explains that the connection between them is that both their mothers will die far from home. If one compares each passage quoted from Augustine to what Derrida actually does in the period in which it is quoted, the connections are often contradictory. Yet there is no doubt that, like Ulysses, that other polytropic Mediterranean who put the Mochlos in the monster's eye, Augustine is the French philosopher's other name, and looking for him, as did Paul Celan for Lenz, Derrida can hope to be "encountered by himself."¹⁴ But these are male relays, and the text on Celan is in a certain sense an exegesis of the reaching power of circumcision. In seeking to grasp the mother as "living dead," that covenant cannot be counted on, "no point going around in circles."

Once one has caught on to this notion of the son seeking the answer to the question - "who am I?" other than the autobiographical temporizing subject, - from the mother as he enters her surviving time (otherwise known as dying), things fall in place, begin to make a weird kind of sense, giving the lie to the effort itself perhaps. Or perhaps not. What Derrida calls, making a simple untranslatable French pun: *pas*.

IV

Twenty years ago, in reading *Glas*, where the father's funeral, already in the past and mentioned once in passing, stands guard over the entire text, I had turned to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's notion of cryptonymy.¹⁵

In "Circumfessions," the mother is living and dying all over the pages, and held in life in the enunciative existential temporality (and spatial invocation) of the text: "Tuesday, May 1, 1990, 7 o'clock in the morning in Laguna Beach, she's still alive for you, over there in Nice, 20, rue Parmentier, 4th floor, it is 4 in the afternoon there, your brother and sister have not yet arrived, you will see her, perhaps you will still hear her when you get back." She is imbricated with the other way in which her son is trying to beat the deathly patronymic, by refusing to countersign Bennington's omniscient account of the system named "Jacques Derrida." The passage just quoted ends as follows: "it's enough to return to the 'present' to throw G's theologic program off course. . ." (C 311).

¹⁴ Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992) 373-413; 387, 386; for the Ulysses reference, see "Mochlos" 34, n. 18.

¹⁵ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986).

To read such a text, I am obliged to turn to Melanie Klein.

Derrida gives us a clue in period 27. One of the running strands of the text is the search for the brother, Norbert Pinhas, dead in childhood, - the almost double: ". . . I imagine her [my mother] protesting in silence, impatient faced with the incorrigible narcissism of a son who seems to be interested only in his own identification, but no, that of his double, alas, the dead brother . . .," says the period. And then Derrida inserts an italicized notebook entry, self-citation from the text's past, dated, however, with a question mark. Here he tells us, with something like a reference to his son telling *his* mother that he had dreamed a double, that he - Derrida - had, presumably, made a note to himself to

revise the whole thematics of the twin, for example, in The Post Card [from Socrates to Freud and Beyond], put it into relation with Envy and Gratitude [by Melanie Klein], i.e. that the desire to understand oneself is linked to the need to be understood by the internalized good object, as aspiration that expresses itself in a universal fantasy, that of having a twin whose image represents all the parts of the I [moi] separated by splitting, and not understood, that the subject desires to understand by re-constituting himself in them, and sometimes the twin represents an internal object . . . to which one could accord complete confidence, in other words an idealized internal object. (C 138-39)

Of course, this cited self-reference is under the sign of active forgetfulness, since it is not the text's present. But it has at least as much authority as the many self-citations that deal with a past obsession with circumcision. And therefore, it does not seem altogether inappropriate to remind ourselves that the internalized good and bad object in Melanie Klein is not only the twin but also, and primarily, the mother.

Klein is peculiarly ambivalent about the "value" of the shift in the child from part objects to whole persons. Indeed, it may be suggested that Klein deals with conscience in an extra-moral sense. The movement from the oral-sucking to the oral-sadistic stage in the infant, when part objects begin to symbolize whole persons, is described by Klein as a "depressive position," and as akin to "primary mourning," because the child begins to practice reality testing (as in Freud's classic definition of mourning), with reference to its internal world.¹⁶

I can read the protagonist of "Circumfessions" as a staging of the desire to inhabit this Kleinian ambivalence between living in the world of part ob-

¹⁶ Melanie Klein, "The Technique of Child Analysis," *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, trans. Alix Strachey (New York: Free Press, 1975) 3-120.

jects endowed with incredible benevolence and malevolence on the one hand, and moving through depression and mourning into the world of whole persons who possess the patronym on the other. Klein listens to and watches children at play with infinite care and decides that for them, the same object shuttles between good and bad at the violent pace of innering the outer and vice versa. The protagonist of "Circumfessions" - sometimes "you" and sometimes "I" - shuttles violently as he tries to act out a stalled version of the Kleinian metapsychological apparatus in the interest of a counter-thanatology.

And indeed, the always intended but forever postponed revision of *The Post Card*, putting Mrs. Klein beyond Dr. Freud for the nonce, becomes one of the motifs of the text. Nowhere is this more evident than in the final movement. After a particularly vertiginous shuttling that comes to an end in period 55, Derrida - let us call him that for convenience - begins to understand that avowal (often translated "confession" by Bennington) is an assumption of guilt which arrests the "asubjective and endless culpability of chaos" (C 296). "The subject is in truth constituted by the category of this assumed [*assumée*] accusation" (C 297). I can read this description of the constitution of the subject by an assumption, in the strong sense, of guilt out of "primary anxiety," as a Kleinian conclusion. This assumption (translated as "taking on") of guilt, continues through the next period where Derrida gives a lovely ironic summary of his work, the second in the text, abruptly ending in his mother's open bedsores. (How lovingly Mrs. Klein would interpret this if little Jacquie were her patient!) In the next period, which is the last one in the book, we read: "*beyond what happens in The P[ost] C[ard], it is now the work to dispatch it that must win out . . . the 'perversity' of The P[ost] C[ard] not to be finished with a destinerrancy which was never my doing . . .*" (C 314). Let me get off the Socrates-Plato-Freud merry-go-round. I want the mother now!

This self-citation is interrupted with another description of his own work and the cry that "it is too late now." At this point, the ego is irreducibly split, the "I" has become "you." The idea that the interlocutor's work ensures that his double cannot witness has links with all of Derrida's later work. (Perhaps Bennington is the double up top as well, who knows?) It is within neither my grasp nor your patience to comment on it. A son's counter-thanatology succeeds by not succeeding, I suppose, and vice versa. What is interesting is the final description of himself "as the floating toy between two phantoms of witnesses" (C 315). If you have been reading Melanie Klein, the child's identification with the toy is uncanny. In the spirit of Klein, who "gave interpretations" to the small patients, for whom metaphor had not set itself in binary opposition to reality yet, I would say: the

two witnesses are the father and the mother, not the real but the phantasy parents. It is fruitless to try to "prove" the Kleinian aura of this final scene.

It is, however, not without interest to note the redirection of "too late now." In an earlier passage, the interlocutor says of and to "God" - and I take the risk of paraphrasing: although I know you know all, and that I cannot avow until death has brought me back to "absolute unicity," "I give myself what you give me, i.e. the i.e. to take the time to take God as a witness" (C 58). In the French it comes rather clearer that the "I" is availing himself of the heterotautology that makes life possible, the gift of time.

"Absolute unicity" is the tautology of "death is death" which equals "life is life," where the "is" means nothing and everything, the asubjective chaos that might as well be called *absolute Notwendigkeit* as in Hegel or *Gattungsleben* as in Marx. Heterotautology arises when the "is" becomes a "that is to say." Because with "that is to say" the two sides are equal but not identical; in the middle is not an "is" but a "that is to say," or, in other words, when the unanticipatable gift of time makes the human fall into temporality, a temporizing that is life begins. In the (stream of) asubjectivity that I can only define as before my birth and after my death, a life-shaped bubble of time forms. It is as if the tautology "death (is) death" becomes a heterotautology: something like "death, in other words, life." And it is this "in other words" of an individual life - the gift of time - that the autobiographer-as-counter-thanatologist seizes in order to avow or confess - a life? Not the collective genealogy-to-history of circumcision. It comes a bit clearer in the French: "*Je me donne ce qu'il me donne, c'est-à-dire le c'est-à-dire de prendre le temps de prendre Dieu à témoin*" (C 57).

But the gift, if there is any, is withdrawn just as unanticipatably. The heterotautology changes from something like "death, that is to say, life" to something like "life, that is to say, death." Deconstruction can make Derrida resonate with Nietzsche, but it cannot ruse its way out. There is nothing but a *pas*. The asubjectivity of death is always around the corner.

[T]o know if . . . there will have been surprise and therefore event, you have to wait, general truth that remains to be *made* and will no doubt surprise those who have confidence in that so indispensable but so deficient grammatical category of the future perfect, the last ruse of presentations, confessions, conversations and other peripheral contortions. (C 140)

Therefore, and imperceptibly, "not yet" changes to "too late" in "Circumfessions." It is not a failure, but an account of a failure that is not derived by negating a success - not an impossibility but a condition of

(im)possibility shading off into an experience of the impossible. And the evocation of Algeria is not specifically postcolonial.

V

For lack of time, I content myself with saying that the gift of time is neither something nor nothing. One cannot not assume it to be the cut or mark of the wholly other. There are transcendental figurations of this cutting and marking. Circumcision and the messianic are collective ones; whereas birth has been a transcendental figuration of the gift of time in the individual theater all over the world. Nature is somewhere in between. The transcendental figuration of birth as the synthesis with the wholly other, becoming-human out of radical alterity, can be collectivized in the miraculating idea of nation, as the metaphor of birth in that word (and in corresponding words in many languages) signifies.

Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic vocabulary traces the individual's tendency toward the figuration of birth as the mark or call of the other: in other words, the figure of the mother, and secondarily, the father, as the origin and end of conscience as reparation. We receive the idea of doing good from them, and whatever we do, we do for them. In this section, I have tried to point out what a couple of male children's figuring out of the father and the mother will do to the autobiographical impulse.

Will women do something different with the Kleinian intuitions? Can the connection between birth and nation get any play here?

In the essay "Envy and Gratitude," to which Derrida refers in period 27, Klein defines Envy as "the angry feeling that another person [or group] possesses and enjoys something desirable - the envious impulse being to take it away or to spoil it."¹⁷ As her speculations in "Love, Guilt, and Reparation" suggest, such a destructive impulse, collectivized and displaced, might arise in the collective situation of embittered colonized men, powerless to take it out on the men who colonize them.¹⁸ The least bit of philosophical common sense would tell us that "Envy" would make them take it out on the women of their own cultural inscription, who are in their power. A little more would tell us that the figure most disfigured might be the mother.

¹⁷ Melanie Klein, "Envy and Gratitude," *Envy and Gratitude & Other Writings* (New York: Free Press, 1975) 176-235; 181.

¹⁸ Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation," *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works: 1921-1945* (New York: Free Press, 1975) 306-43; 333-35.

VI

Here is Assia Djebar, in "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound."¹⁹ First, the description of colonial "envy" and the slow freezing of gender relations.

Around [a] feminine drifting away, the dispossessed man's haunting feeling of paranoia crystallizes. . . . In Algeria, it was precisely when the foreign intrusion began in 1830 - . . . that a gradual freezing up of indoor communication accompanied the parallel progressive cathexis of material space, . . . between the generations, and even more, between the sexes.

In this situation, the only figure, demonized and neutralized, that can be endowed with the gaze, is that of the mother, so that the sons can enable themselves for ritual reparation within a general situation of envy. If Nietzsche and Derrida wanted to catch individual life by figuring the mother, Djebar's description of the dystopic figuration of the moment of birth, the patriarchal transfiguration of the mother into repressive moral law rather than feminine accountability toward justice, as agent of responsibility, is indeed an account of the colonial and postcolonial:

This gaze of the bloodied sex on the wedding night refers back to the primary gaze, of the mother at end of birthing. That image then rises up, ambivalent and beyond grief, totally veiled and yet delivered naked, legs bloodied in the jerks of pain . . . the woman without delight or *jouissance*, with the obscure hope that the eye-sex that has given birth is no longer that threatening fact. Only the mother can gaze.²⁰

As I have already indicated, the bond between Djebar and myself is secured by my recognition that the withholding of autobiography can also be a political gesture. But to locate, precisely, an autobiographical moment, I travel to the foreword of her novel *Far from Medina*: ". . . fiction, filling in the gaps in collective memory, revealed itself to be necessary for the spatializing [*mise en espace*] that I have attempted here, to re-establish the timing [*durée*] of those days that I've wished to inhabit . . ."²¹ Djebar has herself explained this desire for a different auto-bio-graphy - to put the past in the

¹⁹ Djebar, "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound," *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, trans. Marjolijn de Jaeger (Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia P, 1992) 133-51. The next quoted passage is from 140.

²⁰ Djebar, "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound" 142; translation modified.

²¹ Djebar, *Far from Medina*, trans. Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet, 1994) xv; translation modified. The next quotation is on the same page.

future by changing timing into spacing - as precisely that, the writer's desire to animate historical actors in order to imagine not only possible pasts, but possible futures, without "the occulting of feminine presence."²²

In undertaking this enterprise of the imagination, she keeps somewhat clear of the Mother, as does Mahasweta Devi, for comparable reasons. She does, of course, make the women of the past live again, but with respect to the male "chroniclers," paternal custodians of collective temporizing, "who write [*écrivent*] a century and a half, two centuries after [the death of Muhammad]." In *Fantasia* she wants to inhabit the gaze of the conquering figure:

Dawn on this thirteenth day of June 1830 [T]he French Armada starts its slow glide past The name of the lookout man is Amable Matterer. . . . [T]hat same day [he] will write, "I was the first to catch sight of the city of Algiers." . . . I, in my turn, write, using his language. . . . I wonder, *just as the general staff of the fleet must have done*²³

In para-capitalist feminism, the mode is not embattled competition, but finding allies in unexpected places, metaphors and metonyms for the autobiographical subject. In *Fantasia*, she wants to give the pen to the severed hands remarked by Fromentin. In "Forbidden Gaze," it is the women painted in a fugue by Delacroix that she unfreezes.

In Melanie Klein's work, there are two parents, the mother presiding. Both the daughter and the son attach to both parents, not so much according to a programmed phallogocentric teleologic narrative ontogeny but rather by that shuttling inside-outside rhythm that I have already described. I can certainly sympathize with a more tendentious feminism focused on Freud and Lacan, energetically excavating the mother. Klein frees us *from* this obsessive task *to* internalize external fathers *as well*, to refashion, to repair. It is as if Assia Djebar, this daughter, hails these fathers to a different testimony, quite like Mary Prince.

The most spectacular case of such a hailing is of course her interpellation of the Prophet father, Mohammed, as father in *Far From Medina*. I have written on this at length elsewhere.²⁴ Here let me say again that I can locate a cryptic autobiographical figure living in that history as Djebar re-does it for the future, Habiba, "the friend," the second *Rawiya*, the only totally imaginary character in the novel, *habibi* Assia Djebar. At the beginning

²² Communication to Spivak's Senior Seminar in April, 1996.

²³ Djebar, *Fantasia* 6-7.

²⁴ Spivak, "Ghostwriting," *Diacritics* 25 (Summer 1995): 78-84.

of the narrative, the death of the father is opened up: "He [Mohammed] is dead. He is not dead." And, in an intermediate "point d'orgue," the death of the father of Ayesha is opened up in a rhetorically parallel way. Within this in-between time, the "Living Word" of the entire last section is "liberated," "female," and collective, a possible future, a figure of (im)possible action, no rusing promise.

As you may have gathered by now, I am guarded and watchful of the autobiographical impulse within postcoloniality. The line between aesthetics and politics is not necessarily programmed by the authority of the author. There seems to me to be a line between varieties of Romanticisms in the imperial literatures, their displacement into varieties of linguistic and historical experiments of high modernism on the one hand and postcolonialist autobiography on the other. The trajectory of the colonial to the postcolonial (and now globalized) subject within the culture of imperialism is still to be studied. Nevertheless, I can give ourselves a keynote. Let us not read the text's desire as its fulfillment in the text. Let us not read the historical provenance of author / protagonist as if unmediated by the dynamics of class, institution, and affiliation. Let us remember the informant of the testimonial as we read autobiography.

You will also have gathered that I am engaged in a study of Melanie Klein. This study is by no means complete. In conclusion, I want to ask you to relate Klein's view of the peculiar violence of the making of the human on the cusp of nature and culture to a text of identity in a police state. I will not myself call this text postcolonialist, but then, I am not sure what that word means. I give you the briefest glimpse of Diamela Eltit's *The Fourth World*, written during the so-called economic miracle following General Pinochet's repressive regime in Chile.²⁵

VI

The text is as unremittingly monotonous as Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*.²⁶ What Derrida's protagonist attempts in a philosophical allegory, which you cannot track if you are not his "schoolmate," as Yeats would say, Eltit achieves in a sustained surrealism that signals another lexicon by its very seamlessness. The language mimes the tone of the child-analyst who knows that metaphor and reality - inner and outer - have not separated them-

²⁵ Diamela Eltit, *The Fourth World*, trans. Dick Gerdes (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1995). Hereafter cited in text as FW, with page reference following.

²⁶ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989).

selves in the child's consciousness. "Whole persons" have not congealed here. We are in a world of negotiable sexual identities, twin brother vanishing into twin sister. I repeat, nothing, except an uneasy sense of everything, tells us that there is an entire body of political meaning here - in order to discover which we must move into the social text. Far from being self-referential, the text signals beyond itself. Yet there will be no referential connection, I can promise. As soon as you decide this is a veiled description of a devastated country, you remind yourself that Mrs. Klein teaches us that this is the normal landscape of the infantile psyche that enters "social normality" precariously, in depression and mourning. Earlier I referred to the structural impossibility of autobiography, which may or may not be informed with postcolonial content. Eltit does not permit negotiation between these two structures of violence.

The narrative, such as it is, begins with the primal scene of violence: "On that April 7, enshrouded in my mother's fever, I not only was conceived, but also must have shared her dream because I suffered the horrible feminine attack of dread" (FW 3). After one hundred and eleven pages of violent shuttling and reality testing inching towards some unnameable conclusion, the last page asks for a reading in Kleinian language, as the birth of a political super-ego. When the beginning of the final section says "Outside . . ." we are convinced that it is a description of a city on a certain map. There can be little doubt that "[t]he money from the sky return[ing] to the sky . . . hungry for urban emptiness but also sowing emptiness upon the fields . . . [upon which] contempt for the sudaca race [the immiserated female race, especially from the South - *sud*] is clearly printed" (FW 112-13) speaks of the empty promise of "economic growth" as the immiseration not only of some place like Chile but of the entire South, of "Development"-as-exploitation. This is not postcolonialism as some latter-day psychomachia of territorial imperialism. It is the recognition of globality. Autobiography is easy here - the collectors of testimonies are waiting with their tape recorders - but irrelevant. "Far away," the book concludes, "in a house abandoned to brotherhood, between April 7 and 8, diamela eltit, assisted by her twin brother, gives birth to a baby girl. The sudaca baby will go up for sale" - code name "democratization." And her name could be Halima Begum, a name you have no doubt forgotten by now.

Michelle Cliff

