

opinión más a la lectura de un determinado texto, es una herramienta más que podemos utilizar si nos convencen sus argumentos. Así estos textos pueden provocar interesantes debates, polémicas, y discrepancias, que demasiadas veces brillan por su ausencia en las aulas.

Resumiendo, es una colección interesante por su variado contenido, por su aparición en edición bilingüe, y por qué engañarnos, por su precio, ya que hoy en día, y más para los estudiantes, puede resultar un lujo el comprarse un libro. La colección del "Taller de Estudios Norteamericanos" es de algún modo utópica al no seguir recomendaciones económicas, ideológicas o de ningún otro tipo a la hora de seleccionar los textos que van a ser publicados. El único criterio seguido es de su importancia en la cultura norteamericana, y por ello son interesantes para cualquiera que quiera acercarse a esta cultura.

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Alice Thompson
Justine

Edinburgh: Virago Press, 1997. 137 p.

In 1996 Alice Thompson became the first female Scottish writer to win the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction with her first novel, *Justine*. In 1991, when she was a student at Oxford University, *Killing Times*, a novella, was published by Penguin. After completing her PhD on Henry James, she moved to the Shetland Isles where she wrote *Justine*. Nowadays, she is a novelist in residence for St. Andrew's University.

Justine investigates the world in which fiction works, a fiction which needs the help of the reader to interpret its full meaning—and which also needs the reader to open the uncut pages of the novel with the paper knife supplied with it; a fiction printed with gaps and spaces (blank pages, ellipses, flashbacks and -forwards) in an attempt to create a written account of the narrator's unconscious mind.

In this new way of writing "what to express" and "how to express it" are blended in the same framework. Alice Thompson approaches closer and

closer the way in which the human mind works, trying to find a new way of expression for the psychological novel. This new way is as hermetic as the human mind can be to us, and as elliptical as the human mind is. The novel is therefore an attempt to create a unified meaning which can no longer be achieved within its fiction, because only the reader can supply the ultimate meaning: "That's for you to find out" (*J* 136). And though her narrative style is very descriptive and profusely decorated with over-adorned gothic adjectives, the whole story goes round a certain unknown truth one is never able to discover, round the unknown which is hidden in the darkness of one's mind. Therefore, to a certain extent, the reader is caught in "the black art of manipulation and the casting of spell" (*J* 1), in the manipulation of the author's prose, in the dichotomy of the prose which allows readers to know everything and the prose which makes them ignore the main facts:

The style in which my flat [novel] is decorated gives everything away about me. A gift to you which includes the fact that there is something about me that will never be given away. (*J* 1)

Justine is a dream, a two-faced woman, a painting, but above all an object of desire, especially a projection of male desire. *Justine* is the story of a man in a continuous search for Beauty, both spiritual and physical, pleasant and hurtful, not ethereal but sexual, a beauty which transgresses every aesthetic theory because of its masochism.

It is in his continuous search for Beauty, in his role of collector, that he creates his own hallucinations. This collector must be collected or possessed by someone else; he is a man who wants to possess the last object of his desires: *Justine* or *Juliette*? Or both?

For *Justine* pretends to have a twin sister, *Juliette*, and step by step, as the story begins, the opium-dazed narrator becomes more and more insecure, not only about the identity of the woman he is chasing (*Justine* or *Juliette*), but about his own feelings and desires. Besides his life in London, he lives his "Midsummer Night's Dream," as the prologue to the novel reads:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.1.4-6)

Everything is a dream, a fantasy created by a madman or a lover whose self has dissolved and merged into new characters, in the Gothic house he is living, a decadent scene in which characters and events are exaggerated beyond

reality to become symbols, monsters, ideas and passions. As J. E. Fleenor remarks, "Monsters are particularly prominent in the work of women writers, because for women the roles of rebel, outcast, seeker of truth, are monstrous in themselves" (Fleenor 1983: 83). The monster here is the misshapen narrator who explores the obsessive emotions, forbidden by society, arising from pain, masochism and murder, once the traditional roles of victim and abuser have been turned completely upside-down. According to Fleenor,

[n]ew writers are changing the female Gothic symbols of victimhood and persecution into new sources of strength. Undergoing journeys that lead to a personal integration, their heroines rejoice in the exploration of their full human potential, and transform social stigma into power. (1983: 83)

This is what happens in *Justine*. The narrator believes that everything is under his control, that the story belongs entirely to him. He is the owner, a collector of characters: he would want to take them home, touch them, lock them up, take them out, look at them, stroke them whenever he wishes, as if they were objects of art. But he must come to grips with reality to find that he is another character who must fulfil his author's will, Justine's will. He painfully discovers that he cannot behave as a human feeling because his story has been written by the woman whom he dreamed to possess: "My plot had been rewritten by her and I didn't like it one bit" (*J* 39). His plot has been written by Justine and Juliette, by the projections of his masculine fantasies, the fantasies of a man who wants to live in a masochistic relation to his mother.¹ For that purpose, the figure of the son (the narrator) must be stripped of all virility (of his deformed foot) to be "reborn as a new sexless figure" (Silverman 1992: 73) out of the castle, out of the uterus-room in which he was enclosed. Otherwise, the figured mother could not be invested with the phallus.

From the very beginning, the narrator is associated with his mother in sexual and masochistic terms. His mother is fully conscious of her beauty and her sexuality:

My mother worshipped at her mirror's shrine; she adored beauty and her own was no exception. She would gaze at herself for hours

¹ As Kaja Silverman points out, "Masochism is entirely an affair between son and mother, or to be more precise, between the male masochist and a cold, maternal and severe woman whom he designates as the oral mother" (1992: 73). There is no need for her to be the biological mother, she may be another woman performing that role.

and I would catch her gazing. Idolaters came from all over the country to pay her tribute. They came in the form of men. (*J* 5)

But she refuses to touch his deformity and his body. She fully enjoys her sexuality, whereas he is punished for his deformity and is sexually separated from his mother. His mother is so active and phallic that she will turn into a destructive woman when she becomes unable to attract men. She will destroy anything she is unable to achieve, and a symbolic way to do that is to cut off every prominent body part, as she does by mutilating all the statues, one by one, with surgical precision: legs, teeth, hands and ears—everything that protrudes is cut off:

The activity of these [castrating] women consists in castration. Heads, noses, feet, anything that protrudes is cut off by them. (Theiveleit 1996: 65)

In spite of being such a strong woman, she is never named, but is called only "mother"; a mother shown to be protective, but also an iron mother who can administer torture slowly and gruesomely. The narrator is only attracted to Justine and Juliette because of their resemblance to his mother, although the incest taboo makes such feeling towards his mother painful and impossible. Hence, the only way to have sexual relationships is with women who do not resemble the mother, and degrading the love object. If Justine and Juliette had not been degraded they would still resemble the mother, and would not be acceptable as sexual partners.

The narrator often remembers being a child, and being bathed by his mother, though she refuses to touch his deformed foot, the result of a fore-shortened leg. And she even turns her head. But as time goes by, and his mother is getting old, another woman has to fulfil her mother's role as a sadistic mother. This new unpredictable woman is a red-haired woman, who is even more aggressive and castrating, because she is a whore. She is able to do what his mother did not dare: to cut his foot off, removing his deformity, leaving him physically immaculated. She is the woman who transforms all his masochistic obsessions (punishment, castration, whippings, sadism and masochism) into literal truth. And, although what he desires is to be tortured, to be raped, a kind of struggle takes place in his unconscious, because on the one hand, he wants to be sexually possessed, but on the other hand, he is repelled by this woman, because of her repugnant temptations, for being too much of a woman for him.

All his relations are defined by the sexual element he is able to establish with the different feminine characters. This relation is not based on love, un-

less it is at the same time redefined or used ironically, but on pain and sufferings. And though Justine is not a sensual woman, what really makes her so powerful and so attractive is her obsession with power, politics and possessions. She is a character who celebrates women's sexuality as well as the pleasure of the female body. She does not hesitate in trapping the narrator in a circle of impossibilities in which his reality and personality disappear when he is not able to understand what is going on.

Who are you? I asked, suddenly realizing that this was the point to everything, everything has gone through, the point to the story of Justine (J 136).

This is the very end of the novel, when the narrator is fully-conscious of his impossibilities as a character, as a narrator and as the owner of the story. He has been deceived by a two-faced woman, a woman who pretended to be Justine and Juliette, by the beautiful object that he had been eager to possess, and about which we do not know anything else. At the very end of the novel she still remains a mystery, because we discover that she is neither Justine nor Juliette, but a mixture of both, a character living somewhere between Justine and Juliette, between the needy virgin and the powerful whore. She is the only character who is able to cross the frontier between reality and fiction whenever she pleases, being the only true writer of her own story and destiny, whereas the narrator is only used as a ghost-writer, as the slave that has to write for her. Thus the novel finishes in the place where it starts: in the library where the narrator is writing for us the story of Justine. And the only conclusion that the narrator as well as the reader can reach is that reality, all that has been written, is the product of imagination, because there is no single true view of any of the events depicted.

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ABSTRACTS



FRENCH FEMINISTS AND ANGLO-IRISH MODERNISTS: CIXOUS, KRISTEVA, BECKETT AND JOYCE

Jennifer Birkett

This essay discusses the importance ascribed to the work of Samuel Beckett and James Joyce by two major French feminists: the philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva and the creative writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous. An introductory section gives a short account of the controversy in English feminist academia over the importance attributed to the founding fathers of modernism, which does not appear to have arisen in the French feminist tradition. In Joyce and Beckett, Cixous and Kristeva have acknowledged imaginative models that developed their understanding of the socio-political structures that operate through the family and through language, through deep processes of repression, to construct individual subjects, male or female. These writers helped shape their perception of the extent to which the Law of the Father is the organising structure of society and its language. And most of all, they have stimulated reflection on the possibility of a language in which to think and talk differently about such things, with the intention of changing them: a language that might subvert patriarchal discourse.

