

DORA'S ANTIPODEAN INHERITORS: PSYCHIATRIC THERAPY IN *POPPY*, *JULIA PARADISE* AND *STILL MURDER*

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THE reader who is interpreting a literary text with foreknowledge of Freudian psychology, however rudimentary, is adopting a role very similar to that of the psychiatrist engaged in clinical psychoanalysis. Both are readers of a narrative, of dreams, symbols, significant omissions, disjunctions, character, relationships, social placements, in fact all the complex, interconnecting aspects of human adjustment to what we call reality. The madwoman, or the neurotic, or the hysteric, in both fiction and life, is in some way maladjusted to this reality and her body will be speaking a language of the unconscious, of repressed desires, which skilled psychoanalysis may reveal to her conscious mind. The important intervening figure in literature is that of the author, and his or her relationship to the psychoanalytic material.

Feminist critiques of Freud and feminism's involvement in psychoanalytic theory have ensured that gender, and gender construction, has become a crucial element in textual analysis. It is no accident that there is a strand of modern writing by women marked by madness, with writers like Sylvia Plath and Janet Frame reporting back to us, in the form of their poetry and fiction, from behind the barrier which separates the sane from the insane. They tell us how dangerous it is, for women, to live under patriarchy, for both conformity and rebellion can see women made 'mad'. As authors they heroically reverse the subject/object order of psychiatry, that power-structured dyad of psychiatrist and patient, traditionally always male/female or masculine/feminine, to make of themselves the subject of the discourse rather than the objectified patient. They tell a different story from that romantically privileged figure of the artist as both genius and madman – and that it is a mad *man* is no accident here. The mad woman has been rarely privileged or allowed voice.

The writing of 'mad' women is of considerable interest to feminists, but the representation of madwomen is equally revealing. When that representation also includes therapy it can serve a number of purposes, not all of them feminist. It can, for example, be used for covert pornographic purposes, as it is in Rod Jones's novel *Julia Paradise*. In the hands of a feminist writer the woman undergoing therapy can be used to dramatise the powerlessness of women both inside the therapeutic relationship and in her own life, as it is in Drusilla Modjeska's biographical fiction, *Poppo*. Or, interestingly, the madwoman in therapy can be seen as using it to exercise power, as we find in Finola Moorhead's *Still Murder*, a novel which also intersects with the feminist detective genre.

Any interpretation of the madwoman in therapy must begin with some knowledge of actual case-histories. The object here is not to compare a real situation with a fictional one, but rather to see that *both* are fictional constructions. The best known and most discussed is Freud's first case-history, that of *Dora*. Analysts, theoreticians and literary critics have created a fascinating dossier of commentary which has not discredited Freud but has certainly undermined his assumptions of authority. This has meant that *Dora* has become an extremely useful tool in the hands of feminist critics such as Hélène Cixous

and Jane Gallop. Dora's status as victim or heroine is argued in a dialogue between Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement: 'A heroine for Cixous, Clement considers Dora only a victim' (Gallop 135). Dora's unhappy later life is relevant to this debate, but her resistance to Freud as patriarchal representative has led most feminist commentators to characterise her as heroine.

As readers of literary texts, if we are to make a diagnosis concerning the fictional madwoman in therapy, then the reliability of the narrator is of crucial importance, something Steven Marcus focuses on in his discussion of Freud in the *Dora* narrative. This reliability can only be established through the author's awareness of her or his own speaking position, of the authorial complicity in the role of analyst.

The question of how to make the madwoman well is a profound one when, for a start, *all* women deviate from the covertly masculine humanist construction of selfhood, whether that draws its authority from the Oedipal model or the Lacanian entry into the phallic order of the Symbolic. Thus the madwoman in therapy symbolically represents the position of all women on the margins of patriarchally defined normality. She is unmistakably Other in the discourse of psychiatry, and her cure is deeply ambiguous. The liberation of repressed desire in psychotherapy will not liberate the feminine while that is trapped in phallogocentric definitions of the creation of sexual and personal identity. Feminism sees psychoanalysis as only the beginning, the 'cure' will require more than therapy. Fictional representations of attempts to cure the madwoman should be read for their symptom-analysis, for the process not the product.

Drusilla Modjeska's 1990 *Poppy* transgresses boundaries of nationality as well as genre. English-born but Australian-identified Modjeska writes a biography of her mother which becomes in part the story of Modjeska's own life, but is fictionalised to a degree not always known or realised by the reader. The section of the book which tells of Poppy's breakdown and period of therapy in a mental institution has many gaps and silences, but includes scenes between Poppy and her psychiatrist, Jacob, which evidently must be fiction, since we have been told earlier of Jacob's refusal to release his notes to Lalage, as Drusilla calls herself in the book. We are forced to consider the reliability of the narrator under such circumstances, but are constantly reassured by the self-questioning of the narrative voice, the many conscious attempts to avoid objectifying the subject, Poppy, by an authorial 'I' appropriating the subject position.

The potential for the usual domination/subordination relationship between psychiatrist and patient is also skilfully avoided. Jacob's voice is de-centred, threading its way through the text, always asking uncomfortable but penetrating questions, sometimes merging with other voices and times. As well, there is the voice of David, Marius's psychiatrist, illuminating Poppy's priest-lover and his relationship with her. We constantly forget where memory must be replaced by imagination as the many voices, those which have objective authority and those which have instead only imaginative authority, are all given equal status in the project of understanding Poppy.

Poppy's breakdown, her helpless slide into depression and silence, is at the centre of the book, with understanding why it happened a pressing necessity for Lalage. There were three stages to Poppy's psychiatric therapy. The first was the eighteen months she spent in a sanatorium, in 1959 its name only recently changed from asylum. 'The treatment in 1959 for depressive disorders was brutal' (79): it consisted of straitjackets, insulin and electric shock treatment. It did not 'cure' Poppy, and when she left she did not return home, but instead went to Pilsdon, an idealistic, mutually supportive community of people from society's margins, where Poppy began again to be whole and strong. The third formal stage of psychiatric therapy occurred with Jacob, and went on

for some years. Yet this is not seen as separate from other, equally therapeutic aspects of Poppy's life; her love affair with Marcus, her journeys to Crete, India and Australia, her women friends, her work with young offenders, the love of her daughters.

Lalage's account of the 'madwoman', her mother, is everywhere informed by feminism, by its theories and by its creative practitioners, Janet Frame, Doris Lessing, Sylvia Plath, May Sarton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jean Rhys and Christa Wolf. She searches through feminist texts for an explanation which she will recognise as true. In fact they all become part of the text, voices dropping clues, giving advice and warnings. As early as the second chapter Lalage suggests the bad mother, China, who rejected Poppy at birth, must have played her part, but later becomes aware that to blame the mother, in a chain of mothers, is simply regressive. The more subtle rejection of the father is recalled, and the comment: 'Is this incident simply, if such things are ever simple, symbolic of the psychic violence he did to her in that long struggle to grow up, to become a woman separate from daughter, wife, mother?' (31) Beneath these roles, the 'masquerades of femininity' (53), Lalage senses a more mysterious, but in Poppy's case temporarily self-defeating, femininity: 'I am interested in the enigma, and therefore the power, of the silent feminine which I come up against time and again in this task, and which remains as painful now as it did that bleak night of Poppy's death' (24). Thus in a text which speaks in many voices, the potency of feminine silence is also acknowledged, hints of an Imaginary perhaps still carried as an unspoken and unspeakable knowledge.

Poppy is quintessentially feminist in its refusal to speak in the masculine, to assume the authority of the unexamined narrative voice: 'Is the drama of Poppy's life to be found in the way she told it? Or in the way I tell it? Who speaks in whose name? Dimly I begin to understand why my struggle with her is also a struggle with myself, and my own attempt to speak' (94). The book is not about finding answers so much as discovering the right questions to ask. As far as Poppy's breakdown is concerned, institutional psychiatry does not know the questions it should be asking.

Yet Poppy did not only survive the sanatorium, she eventually recovered, although not simply at the time she walked out of its doors. Puzzling over the process, Lalage concludes: 'The best I can do is to say Poppy recovered because she found her voice' (93).

Poppy offers us dreams to read, resistant silences, family drama, symbols and metaphors like that of Ariadne, the myth which points both to the book's complex, maze-like structure, and to the strategy we as readers need to keep in mind. Madness is an episode in life, an episode which helps define the daughter's position in history as well as illuminating one particular family drama. What Lalage uncovers in her quest for meanings is the feminist truth about women living in patriarchal society. The woman who conforms to the normative and idealised feminine roles in this society is precisely the one most at risk of madness.

The text's persistent present tense signals its emphasis on process, its postmodern refusal to provide closure, to shape the shapelessness of a life into a narrative structure that will objectify the woman at its centre. Indeed the subject of the book becomes not Poppy, but Woman, the shifting times and multitude of voices sifting away the accidental, the casual, to find beneath the predicaments known to Ariadne and all the generations of women between her and Lalage. Madnesseems to be one of the constants, as is betrayal, and not only Ariadne provides a key, but also Cassandra, or at least Christa Wolf's re-vocalising of her experience, in a book which has much in common with *Poppy*. These mythical figures, like Freud's Dora, contest the roles of heroine and victim. Their 'madness' is patriarchy's attempt to destabilise if not discredit their heroism. The feminist writer continually interrogates her own text, but she also uses psychoanalytic

and feminist knowledge as a reader of her own experience, much as we do as readers of her text. Despite the presences of Freud and Lacan, *Poppy's* field of reference is not the usual humanistic, patriarchal *fathered* text of pre-feminist writing, but the self-consciously feminist traditions, both primary and textual, that we have at our disposal as contemporary readers.

A contrasting, fathered text, with Freud as the specific Father, Rod Jones's *Julia Paradise*, not only concerns itself with the madwoman in therapy, but also provides an arresting, contrasting example of gendered writing. It is a subtle, fictional version of a psychoanalytic case-history which questions the Freudian model of therapy and 'cure' by bringing some, but in my opinion not enough, post-Freudian knowledge to bear upon it. What is troubling, though hardly surprising, is the degree of masculine bias which remains, presumably despite the male writer's knowledge of feminist, as well as other, commentary on Freud. A feminist reading of *Julia Paradise* turns out to be not unlike a feminist reading of *Dora*, with a fictional psychoanalyst becoming deeply entangled in a process of transference and countertransference.

The novel contains competing texts and versions of 'reality', Julia's childhood revelations almost constituting a novel within the novel, a disturbing fiction at the heart of the whole fiction, ultimately discredited, but nevertheless a 'key' to a different truth than the classic, Freudian one. What the 'truth' consists of, we are never quite sure. The one character who might be able to tell us that, Julia, is textually de-centred in the book's final section. Perhaps her final revenge, like *Dora's*, is to resume silence, to refuse to continue. The psychiatrist Ayres himself wants to believe in the truth of her fiction, which even her husband Willy Paradise's contradiction need not necessarily invalidate. Ayres is seduced by the uncanny congruence between Julia's story and Freud's theories, an apparently authoritative authentication which he presumes Julia herself must be ignorant of. Ayres/Freud encounters a truly formidable Julia/Dora.

Like psychoanalysts, we read the text for clues. We should be alerted to the fact that Ayres is as much the patient as is Julia, for if hers is the pathology of hysteria, his is the pathology of perversion. His sexual taste for female children is sinisterly indicated not only in his nickname, 'Honeydew', but in his apparent identification with J.M. Barrie's stage version of unnaturally prolonged childhood, *Peter Pan and Wendy*, while 'Wendies' is the name Ayres gives to his child victims. Julia herself, although 30 years old when Ayres meets her, has the size and figure of a child, 'apparently breastless'. He is as physically excited by her as he is sexually stimulated by her descriptions of her father's constant sexual harassment:

She accepted it as quite natural for him to take her at any moment of the day or night. In the kitchen while she was at her chores, outside in the garden, even at table during a half-finished meal, Joachim would simply move behind her, raise her skirts and take her with several brutal efficient strokes. This was always his method of enjoying her, as if to have to look at that pale bewildered face while he was performing his act would have been too much for even his hardened heart to bear. From this early age of thirteen she had come to accept the insertion of his erect penis as a natural and unremarkable bodily function. (40)

In passages such as these, there is a complicated textual dynamic going on. Aware, at least as second-time readers, that Julia is probably deliberately seducing Ayres, possibly or even probably by creating a fiction of incest which parallels Ayres's own sexual practices, we understand this as a deliberately created pornography – but what are we to do about the possibility of the reader also being pornographically aroused? If Rod Jones wants to

uncover the inevitable pornography of sexual disclosure in psychoanalysis (which Freud's Introduction to *Dora* had so vigorously tried to disclaim), then he fails clearly to signal his intention. Where Freud at least dramatised himself and spoke in his own voice as he analysed Dora's revelations, *Julia Paradise* is related by a bodiless authorial voice which provides occasional moral judgments (as it does in the passage above when Joachim's reluctance to face Julia is explained), without having any further to account for itself or being prepared to abrogate the privilege of withholding as well as providing information.

We need to keep in mind that this second section of the novel is actually *Julia's* narrative, but it is not told in her words. Here is an unmistakable authorial refusal to let the mad woman speak. Her narrative is also framed by her husband's conflicting versions of events. It is Willy Paradise who first tells Julia's story to Ayres, when he brings her to him for treatment: '... he impressed Ayres as a kindly, intelligent man whose main concern was that his wife should get well again' (6). Once again, a patriarchal account of a woman's story is privileged by its position as mediating voice between psychoanalyst and patient. Here are the men, who, it is presumed, know best, getting together to make a mad woman 'well' – or at least well enough not to trouble them with her hysterical symptoms. Here is Dora's father, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's doctor husband in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Poppy's anxious husband Richard, and innumerable others, well-intentioned police of the patriarchal world.

Yet Rod Jones is not simply complicit, for he does not totally privilege Willy's version of events. In the third section of the book, when Willy gives Ayres a simple, conflicting account of Julia's early life and his meeting with her, there are hints which subvert his narrative and lend tenuous support to Julia's. Further, Willy is working on a scientific study of corals, as was Julia's father Joachim. Then there is the leprosy which gradually disfigures Joachim's body, which is passed on to his mistress Tina, the same disease that Ayres diagnoses in Julia's lover Gerthilde. Has the disease been transmitted, from one text to another, by Julia herself, while she has escaped contagion? We are teased, as is Ayres, by the possibility of Julia's narrative being truth, not fiction.

Ayres's practice of using child prostitutes is conveniently rationalised away, apparently condoned by Freud himself: 'Ayres recognised this in himself indulgently. He knew well Freud's remark "that some perverse trait or other is seldom absent from the sexual life of normal people"' (13). All questions of transference and countertransference (exhaustively debated by commentators on *Dora*) are exploded in Jones's novel by the actual seduction (significantly we do not know who seduced whom) and sexual relationship between Julia and Ayres.

If the second section of the novel is seduction, a gradual drawing-in of Ayres and the reader into the steamy world of incest, the third section consists of a series of awakenings. Willy's contradictory story is believed partly because of its ordinariness, and Ayres realises he has been fooled by Julia's 'silky narrative' (63). But as readers we are entitled to ask why Willy's story should be thought true and hers false. Is it because she is a 'madwoman', and he is a man as well as 'sane' (though his wilful self-sacrifice and infatuation with the Chinese might throw this into doubt)? Or might we be fooled by the traditional nexus of power between psychiatrist and patient, the detective/doctor in charge of sorting true from false, unconscious from conscious, fantasy from reality, symptom from sign, repressed from acted desire?

These questions become more urgent once Julia has confessed her motive of revenge to Ayres, and we have had an account of the horrific rape-killing by the huge Ayres of the tiny girl who had been Julia's favourite pupil. The psychiatrist/patient power relation-

ship is dramatically reversed, the supposedly morally neutral Freudian analysis revealed to be fraudulent in its refusal to make moral judgments. The discovery of the lesbian relationship between Julia and Gerthilde reveals even the sexual relationship with Ayres to be merely part of the revenge, unconnected to real desire. Ayres loses his faith in psychoanalysis and abandons it for an utterly selfless career as roaming doctor in the war and revolution-torn countryside of China.

The similarities between *Dora* and *Julia Paradise* can hardly be accidental. The 'secret' of Dora's analysis is her homosexuality, the relationship she enjoyed with Frau K, and Julia has the same secret, her lesbian relationship with Gerthilde. The female servant is a key figure in both texts, in *Dora*, degraded object of masculine sexuality, Dora's 'revenge' with Freud consisting of giving him a fortnight's notice of her intention to end the analysis, precisely the period of time given to a servant. Julia's shock on coming upon her father copulating with the servant Dolly Hang, and later the promiscuous Tina, both maternal figures to the girl, re-enacts part of the Oedipal desire for the father. Both stories described contagious diseases transmitted sexually, venereal disease in Dora's father, leprosy in Julia's. The girl child's desire to have her father's baby, suggested in Freud's explaining to Dora that she has transferred her desire for her father onto Herr K, is literally brought about in Julia's reported but not verified pregnancy. Both Dora and Julia suffer from the hysterical symptom of loss of voice. As post-modern readers we cannot ignore this deliberate inter-textuality. What is more surprising, however, is our final recognition that the dialectic of post-Freudian criticism, the dialogue feminists and others such as Lacan have conducted with both Freud and Dora, has *not* been incorporated into the *Dora/Julia* text. Rod Jones is as unrepentant and unreformed as the original Freud himself.

Julia Paradise is a text about female madness which is appropriated by its male analyst, just as Freud appropriated Dora's story. The omniscient, impersonal narrator withholds both information and judgment, leaves unanswered the many questions raised. Just as Julia masks her real unconscious, providing a profoundly unreliable narrative, so her author withholds the psychic truth of his text. Most of all, it leaves open the degree to which we can read it as a subversion or a criticism of psychoanalysis, which could be seen simply as a means to an end in a game of sexual revenge.

Finola Moorhead's radical, feminist, post-modern, crime novel, *Still Murder*, is structured like a jigsaw puzzle, with the last piece only made available to us in the last pages not unlike much conventional crime fiction. The text consists of a confession, a collection of press-cuttings, a floppy disk print-out, police notebooks, a madwoman's diary, letters, private notebooks, a monologue of a jailed woman, a psychiatrist's report, an interview, a public address and a final excerpt from the personal papers of the Detective Inspector in charge of the case. Everything is precisely dated, between March and June, 1989. That there has been a murder seems fairly clear, but the body is unidentified, there appears to be no motive and the only suspect has apparently gone mad. We are tricked into the role of detective, for what looks like a police attempt to solve a murder turns out to be an elaborate conspiracy to *prevent* the murder being solved and the murderer brought to justice.

The Vietnam War is crucial to the book and the reason for the murder. Peter Larsen, returned Vietnam veteran gone feral, enunciates in his confession a revenge code that sees the war still being fought, between the 'hero' veterans and the 'weasel' anti-war activists like Steven Phillips, who betrayed his companions to the CIA. Larsen's monologue contains a description of the Australian masculine relationship to a feminine land in terms which echo Kay Schaffer's 1988 Lacanian analysis of this relationship in

her book *Women and the Bush*. The point of the passage is to establish what and why the Vietnam veterans fought in that war:

I haven't met a man from the sticks who didn't love the land as he raped it. The land is like a terrible woman to them. She breaks their hearts when she sees their vulnerability and she dries the clay into deeper ruts month after month with the determination of nature's revenge. Then she laughs, she laughs buckets of silver rain and the reflection of her laughter is carpets of delicate wildflowers as far as the eye can see. This is their very own land, no matter what the acreage. They pretend to own it, they'll die saying they own it, but really they're panting after a perverse mistress who has the strength and fury of hell and the loving embrace of the gorgeous earth. Human women will leave them. The wives can't take the competition of the mistress, nature herself. (9)

The policewoman Margot Gorman, assigned to surveillance/protection of the 'madwoman' Patricia Phillips, is super-fit, liberated, ambitious and appears to identify with the male world of the police force. But Patricia's feminism, and her madness, finally force Margot to face the fact that she polices patriarchy and patriarchy's rules. 'In the Gothic world of her schizophrenia, where a battle of the sexes rages for centuries, where did I stand? A flash of loyalty made me want to defend her. Of course a woman can kill if she has a cause' (86). This statement turns out to be the moral pivot of the entire novel. The novel's feminist strategy is to oppose patriarchy's law with another, feminine ethic: under certain circumstances a woman is justified in killing an evil, violent man. Steven Phillip's betrayals are many, but his real crime turns out to be the violent rape of a lesbian girl. Thus radical feminism becomes not just an assertion of alternative sexual practices, but of the moral right to counter male violence with female revenge.

This radical feminist ideology and the female 'madness' central to it, are expressed in two lesbian poems written by the rape victim and Patricia's lover, Catherine. When the mystery of the murder is resolved what emerges is a group of men who appear to have been drawn into complicity with the feminist ethic, although ironically their motive is mateship, forged in the Vietnam jungles. Male sanity is madness to feminist eyes: female madness is a sane strategy in a violent, patriarchal world. Men have made Patricia both criminal and mad, but it is women who become her healers, including a female psychiatrist who rejects Freudian theories. The Freudian Family Romance is rejected in favour of a grim emphasis on the binary oppositions which structure our value systems. The linking of crime and madness is used to exonerate the female 'criminal' whose crime is justified by her always and everywhere being the victim of male violence. Patricia is both victim, of patriarchy, and heroine, of feminism. She escapes from the mental hospital in a symbolic re-birthing, a fantasy of non-biological maternity.

All three texts concern themselves with lesbianism. In *Poppo*, Lalage has a lesbian affair with Joss which is deliberately unproblematised; it is simply part of her feminist quest to know herself. In *Julia Paradise*, Julia's lesbian relationship is one kind of resolution to her sexual and psychological problems. In *Still Murder*, Finola Moorhead is more radical in her suggestion that lesbianism is one form of 'cure' for the otherwise fatal condition of being female, one that inevitably borders on madness. The metaphor of war pervades her novel, not just the Vietnam conflict, but the eternal war between the sexes.

We could hypothesise a re-reading of *Dora* after reading Moorhead's novel, in which Dora's 'secret', her lesbian relationship with Frau K, which Freud failed to consider as important, might in fact have held the key to her cure. In all three of the books I have

discussed, lesbianism could potentially deliver its heroines from their position as female objects of sexual exchange.

The analysis of criminality as well as insanity in gendered terms, the 'Thelma and Louise' pattern of justifying female revenge against violent, evil men, has become popular in a number of feminist detective novels. *Still Murder* also suggests that male madness is a result of the psychological damage done by war. War strengthens mateship, forging stronger bonds than ever between Australian men, further marginalising Australian women. The bonds are stronger even than the laws of the land these men went off to fight for. The Australian masculine fantasy of rape of the land is shown as perverse in its inevitable self-destructiveness. Women cannot join the enemy, they can only create bonds among themselves which will give them the strength needed to fend off the masculine enemy. The 'cure' for the female condition and for the constant threat of madness is not Freudian psychoanalysis, but a re-alignment of sexual identity.

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