The Intimacy of Influence. Narrative and Theoretical fictions in the works of George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson

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Rapturing the Text:  
The “Magic” Writing-Pads of 
*Middlemarch*, *Orlando*, and *Sexing the Cherry*

“Everything I see in him corresponds to his pamphlet on Biblical Cosmology.” (Dorothea speaking of Casaubon, *Middlemarch*, 43).

Often the paper was scorched a deep brown in the middle of the most important sentence (*Orlando*, 92).

For the Greeks, the hidden life demanded invisible ink (*Sexing the Cherry*, 10).

If I distrust my memory - neurotics, as we know, do so to a remarkable extent, but normal people have every reason for doing so as well - I am able to supplement and guarantee its working by making a note in writing (“A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad,” *SE*: XIX: 227).

Introduction: The Lover Who Mistook Her Beloved for a Book

*Middkmarch*, *Orlando* and *Sexing the Cherry* all stage protagonists who share a common partiality. Each of them mistakes their beloved for a book. Dorothea Brooke makes Mr. Casaubon iconic for a pamphlet on Biblical cosmology. For her, theology and epistemology are great aphrodisiacs. Orlando, infatuated with poetry, figures his *amour* for a Russian princess as “words coming out on the pants of his breath with the passion of a poet whose poetry is half pressed out of him” (*Orlando*, 37). The opening section of *Sexing the Cherry* refers to Jordan’s life “written invisibly,” one which is “squashed between the facts” (10). These can escape him, he notes, like the Twelve Dancing Princesses whose stories form the central sequence of his narrative (47-60). One of the princesses, Fortunata, is the object of Jordan’s desire. Indexically speaking, she is the stuff of invisible ink. To add to the list of textual stationary figured as human subject is Freud’s short and celebrated
essay "A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad" (1924). Throughout, Freud takes memory and the human psyche for a writing device.

The contraption he describes consists of two main layers - the bottom layer is a wax slab, the top layer above a "transparent sheet" (SE XIX: 228). This in turn is divided into an uppermost layer of celluloid to write upon, and below it a "translucent" paper above the waxed slab (229). A stylus can be used to inscribe the top surface. Removing what I will now term the top layer, consisting of celluloid and wax paper, removes the writing. The wax slab is clean. The process can start over again. As Freud explains in making his device metaphorical for the human psyche, the celluloid protects the waxed paper from damage (432). What is wiped out, though, is preserved as a permanent trace on the wax slab below. It becomes the palimpsest of the accrual of all traces.

For Freud, this bottom layer is a metaphor for the unconscious, the upper one signifies the conjoined network of the conscious and the preconscious. In an apposite moving picture, Freud figures the endless cycles of the active psyche. He draws our attention to the periodic movement of the perceptual system contacting then separating from the traces inscribed below. He invites us to "imagine" as "one hand writing upon the surface of the Mystic Writing-Pad while another periodically raises its covering sheet from the wax slab" (434). I will use Freud's metaphors as a heuristic starting point for reading the three novels as theoretical interlocuters. I will investigate how the theoretical fictions embedded within Middlemarch, Orlando and Sexing the Cherry form such layers with each other. The fictions which unpack themselves, however, are far from primal or "originary." To bring out meanings from one theoretical fiction can require interpreting others which together produce an ensemble. If the other, supporting theoretical fictions are of relevance, they will provide yet more embedded narratives to supplement the main theoretical fiction or, in de Man's sense, disfigure it.

The procedure of this chapter will be first, to bring Freud's metaphor of the Mystic Writing-Pad into dialogue with the significant theoretical fictions of the three novels. Second, I will trace to what extent Middlemarch might provide the "wax slab" for the "celluloid" of Orlando and to what degree the latter can do likewise for Sexing the Cherry. In some respects, the manner in which specific tropes inscribe
themselves between the theoretical fictions of the novels does conform to Freud’s machine metaphor. In other important ways the traces which weave their way between *Middlemarch, Orlando* and *Sexing the Cherry* require Freud’s contraption as metaphor to be re-designed. In this respect, I contend that Freud’s device, his theoretical fiction, encounters the novels in such a way that they each, in their distinctive ways, re-design it.

In his essay, Freud was quite clear about the advantages and limitations of his metaphor. The Pad as a trope may capture the importance of protecting the conscious/preconscious system. Between the thin paper upon which the stylus inscribes and the wax slab beneath, lies the celluloid which protects the sheet. Otherwise it would be damaged. Likewise is the implication that the conscious has the protective facility of the celluloid; below this, in turn, the unconscious takes the impressions that would otherwise overload the surfaces (*SE* XIX: 229-232). The latter is not just a repository for all the affects which the top layers cannot record. It becomes a crucial site for memory. To cite Derrida, it can be conceived of as a “stage” (1978: 227). In the human psyche, memories which are unconscious do make their way into the preconscious, in dreams, and into the conscious mind through either remembrance or hallucination. Freud admits that the machine would be a Mystic Pad “indeed” if it could do this, which it cannot (230).

As Christine Brooke-Rose has remarked, Freud’s choice of metaphor might have been different if he had encountered the modern computer. This simple but important remark gives pause for thought (1987: 19-37). Brooke-Rose surmises that Freud might have conceived of a more up-to-date version of the Mystic Pad. This suggestion invites improvisation. Perhaps the storing disc could be regarded as a repository of traces. Thus it is the unconscious which, when recalled onto the screen where the typed text is emerging would be “edited.” The revision would combine the new “impressions” punched out from the keyboard. Unfortunately, the computer metaphor lacks two aspects. Firstly, when “unconscious” information is thus summoned, the human operator knows where to re-locate some of the “old” traces. (Many traces will disappear entirely). This human programmer is entirely consciously knowing; the human psyche is not. In hallucinations, the information is triggered into movement, but the operator
would not be able to control from whence it comes nor how it would emerge. The action of defence mechanisms causes memory to work in a parallel manner. Secondly, the metaphor of the Mystic Pad has the advantage of including the notion of "traces." The Pad’s inscriptions mark out an accrual of lines, routes and intersections which form a palimpsest. The term "trace" has its genealogy in the crucial terms "pathways" and "facilitations" (Bahnung) both introduced in Freud’s “A Project towards a Scientific Psychology” (1895). To recall and clarify my hypothesis, I conjecture that the embedding of layers produced between the theoretical fictions of *Middlemarch*, *Orlando* and *Sexing the Cherry* form the more magical prototype of the Pad. I suggest that Freud implied a wish for a contraption more sophisticated than the one to which he refers.

The literary works will help me to envision a yet more ingenious invention, possessing the equivalent of the covering sheet, the celluloid and the wax slab. The difference will be that by a cunning feat of technology, which can be determined only by the novels in question, the interaction between the surfaces will be different from that of Freud’s machine. In his apparatus, the impressions move from top to bottom. When one hand lifts the covering sheet, wiping clean the surface, then replaces the sheet, the writing surface is empty. It is ready for new impressions to be received from the next movement of the stylus. In the revised model, however, these impressions need not come from the human hand and stylus alone. In the models embedded within the novels, the new impressions can come from the wax slab. From here are spirited up pieces of scrambled information. These need not be the last set of scribbles. They could be an ensemble of other tracings. They could have accrued upon the wax at and from any time period. The freshly imprinted tracings can be edited, sorted through, rubbed out and re-scrambled as the writer adds her new impressions. To suggest an analogy, it would be rather like taking parts of a dream’s scrambled information and converting that into a differently organised piece of narrative fiction. The traces from below will become differently organised. The writer falls asleep, has another dream on the basis of this dream narrative and awakens to write another narrative version. The information from the “wax slab” (the unconscious) coming through the equivalent of the celluloid (the preconscious) would be a composite of new traces and old; the latter would have the
opportunity to be again reformulated along with the freshly emerging traces.

In contrast with this account, Freud's model operates in one direction only, the fresh imprints from the surface gathering below. This one way traffic cannot account for the processes of working-through and traversal. The alternative which a reading of the novels will envision is not a Mystic but a "Magic" Pad. It differs from its predecessor by forging traces not just in one, but in two directions. In the way I just schematically outlined, the traces from the bottom layer can break their way to the upper surface. How this occurs will vary depending on the text and the nature of its embedding of another intimate.²

As I will explore below, Middlemarch's layers combine the mythical and the historical within the novelistic. Eliot's magnus opum interweaves amongst its many complex stories of provincial life, narratives about the journey of calling. The external narrator implies that Dorothea would be a second Saint Theresa, wanting to find ways of doing good in the world ("Prelude"). Casaubon would be a great scholar and discover a "key" to all mythologies. Lydgate would follow in the path of heroes such as the anatomist Bichat (1771-1802) (Chapter 15, 177). Lydgate would find the secrets of "certain primary webs or tissues" (177). If he were to have lived in the twentieth century, perhaps he would have sought to discover DNA. These stories of calling are narrated and focalized through textual layers which theorise the developing narratives. Dorothea is compared not only to Saint Theresa but to Antigone. The myths and dramas devoted to the Greek heroine become important fictions for making theoretical connections between Theresa, Antigone and Dorothea. These links produce paths which intersect. The result is a dynamic and theoretical map of Dorothea's story.

The titular protagonist of Woolf's Orlando (1928), a character based upon the novelist's friend Vita Sackville-West, is also a study in calling, but one in which the ambition to write poetry becomes gradually and meticulously wedded to the quest for a rapturous life. The odyssey between art and life is mediated through copious textual layers in which genres, metaphors; and textures are carefully but daringly conflated into an exuberance of literary tropes.³ The protagonist's pilgrimage spans five centuries, beginning in the reign of
Elizabeth and ending in 1928. In a book which should be (though never has been) credited as creating the *oeuvre* of “gender-bending” science-fiction, Orlando begins as a man and changes sex in the seventeenth century (1977: 106); he/she lives five hundred years and by the novel’s close, is only in her mid-thirties. Thus as a Magic Pad, the text has centuries of layers, one historical period reflecting upon the eccentricities, follies and wisdoms of another. The novel’s title page announces the book to be a biography. An external narrator of unknown identity poses on every page. As Rosenthal states about Woolf’s aims, and I will suggest his remarks apply to the text’s goals, the novel “heartily enjoys playing on every page with the nature of historical and biographical truth and the earnest efforts of those who seek to unravel the past” (1979: 129). Memories can be wiped clean from the top of the Pad, then disappear. In the case of *Orlando*, though, even though memory is questioned as a reliable medium of the truth, it is credited with the capacity to re-vivify those truths which might otherwise remain repressed.

*Sexing the Cherry* (1988; 1989) is profoundly concerned with the pursuit of journeys and the vicissitudes of memory. The novel offers a narrative of exuberant characters and colliding historical periods. History, fiction and myth are cross-fertilised just as the novel’s historical and fictional characters, John Tradescant, endeavours to use the technique of grafting to “sex” a cherry (1989: 79). Jordan, one of the novel’s two narrating characters goes on adventures with Tradescant. It is on one such quest that Jordan meets and becomes entranced by the dancer Fortunata, a magical character who can spiral her way between different historical periods. She is figured as a metaphor for rapture itself, as “ten points of light spiralling in a line along the floor” (93). When she assumes this guise of quantum energy, she can traverse the space-time continuum. Her story possesses layers of its own, told to Jordan through the narratives of myth (131-133). Together with the separate narratives of twelve dancing princesses and the tales of the novel’s other character-narrator, Dog Woman, Jordan’s adopted mother, *Sexing the Cherry* offers a series of embedded narratives which are reminiscent of the multi-layered fairy-tale, *The Arabian Nights*.

Yet I would not argue that Winterson’s novel is any more densely packed with “writing sheets” than its precursors. In *Orlando*, separation between layers is less obvious; the novel’s deployment of
tropes interlaces the threads of memory into a design akin to a piece of sewing, one joyfully pulled apart and trailed around. More soberly, the layers of *Middlemarch* do not make a pretence of untroubled cohesion. The strategy is more sophisticated. As D. A. Miller remarks (1981: 85), *Middlemarch* maintains only an ambiguous illusion that its separate parts are seamlessly interconnected, rather “like one of those optical drawings that won’t resolve once and for all into five cubes or six.”

How do these sections, layers and textures within and between novels connect? The second part of my hypothesis is that the movement of traces from the lower to the upper surface of the Magic Pad takes place through “rapturing.” Rapture is a cutting-edge term. It cuts two ways. Only in the last two centuries has it acquired more exalted connotations. The Greek and Latin roots of the word rapture reveal it to have connotations of rape, theft or the drive to violently consume. Over the centuries, these associations have been largely jettisoned. Instead, some of the more primitive meanings have gone through something of a sublimation. To be enraptured is to be transported into a realm of delight. It finds its synonyms in “ecstasy,” which means the standing out of the soul from the body. Ecstasy means, as well, a state of being transported by joy. Thus in both the pejorative and elevated meanings of the word, movement from one terrain to another is implied. The adjective rapturous has come to connote beauty, that which is entrancing and incites the experience of the sublime. These connotations suggest the power of transference in Chase’s second sense, the subject enraptured by an idealised imago which she or he cathects. The connotations of “transport” suggest transference as the movement of the drive and the re-location of a trope. This is the first sense of transference, specifying the positive side of working-through in which the drive is given meaning. If this process is effective, then not only does affect deepen symbolic configurations, it can promote the further abreaction of dangerous impulses. However, this process is precarious. Too much rapture can cause rupture. Too little can provoke the ossification and decay of the traces, that is, those pathways which act as tributaries to nourish the psyche.

*Middlemarch*, as its title implies, concerns the subject’s journey between already existing paths. These are metonymically linked to the traces of literary texts which rupture through each other. For Dorothea, Casaubon is more than book: he is Pascal and Milton. He is
the erudite, paternal imago who leads her down a path into the tomb of Greek texts. From this incarceration she will be rescued by Will Ladislaw. He is not just a potentially Dionysic actor in the narrative, but himself a series of figures rupturing between layers of the Magic Pad. It is by engaging with these through “productive looking” to quote Silverman (1996), that Dorothea will re-configure her desire. Silverman’s notion of the “productively remembering look” defines a paradoxical movement in which objects are focalized and invested with libidinous energy on the basis of a displacement from a memory of another similar yet different object. The “look” thus has a curiously backward yet forward movement (1996: 180-185). This remembering look does not become productive until it achieves what Silverman terms “one final displacement,” namely that of the ego (1983). In other words, the subject who is productively looking needs to do so without the need to be the same as the perceived object. In the “Prelude” to Middlemarch, the external narrator tells the story of the child Theresa setting out on her pilgrimage and eventually fulfilling her calling to be a Saint (1994: 26). The narrator notes how many potential Theresas would follow in this honourable path, but how changing social conditions prevent the success of the next generations. I would add that these would-be Saints aspire to be “like” their role-model. In order for their ardour to find a sensible focus they need to displace it onto another object of calling or identity. But to do this, their arduous looking would have to become more “productive,” that is, more displaced from memory’s role-model, though not entirely disconnected from it. The theoretical fictions which form the stage for acts of productive lookings and re-workings are two apparently irreconcilable stories, the myths of the tragedy of Antigone and the myths of the ecstasy of Saint Theresa.

Orlando has in common with its predecessor a determination to reckon with irreconcilables. In broad terms, layers of the Magic pad form through the text as biography and that stratum which is Orlando’s long poem “The Oak Tree.” The major production and realisation of this literary piece occurs off-stage. In the sixteenth century, the poet Sir Nicholas Greene scoffs at Orlando’s poem, but Orlando in the twentieth century wins a prize for “The Oak Tree”(240). The tangential “presence” of the poem gives clues to the construction of Orlando as a “Magic” pad. In a piece of conventional
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biography, excerpts from "The Oak Tree" or extensive paraphrases would be included. Yet in the ground-breaking Orlando, whenever the poem is referred to, there are no excerpts, bar one. It is a portion of verse which may or may not be attributed to Orlando's poem. No unambiguous indicators are given to confirm the source either way. The verses are a result of Orlando's spontaneous writing (182). They appear in the novel as Orlando finds herself in the nineteenth century. There is Elizabeth I, but there is Queen Victoria. Orlando's mock-lament declares:

I am myself but a vile link

The "link" and "chain" capture the implied and recurring criss-crossings between Orlando's discourse and that of the biographer. The "link" is a symbol for the production of a poem, "The Oak Tree," which in turn becomes indexically linked into the biography as a whole. To put it simply, if the above lines are indeed from the poem, they also function as an extract from the developing biography. Thus, pathways are broken between the "Oak Tree" and the biography, the two "texts" forming layers of the Magic pad, the connecting paths between the two, signified by the word "link." Scenes of writing emerge which ensure that the subject and object positions of protagonist and biographer, self and Other can become mutually substituted (247). "The Oak Tree" acts as a sparring partner from below the layers, implicitly theorising that the identities of self and Other, and their corollary pair "male" and "female," are terms reflecting upon each other, just as traces of one text can theorise the agenda of another.

As Mark Rosenthal remarks, the long maturation process of Orlando's poem "marks the growth of her poetic vision" (1973: 133). This development marks too the emergence of a working relationship between her masculine and feminine sides. As the novel progresses, the opposition between male and female imagos is traversed into the rapturings of the Magic pad, Orlando. The intimacy of influence between poem and biography becomes the index and symbol of a dynamic interaction between gender identifications as they move towards ever more sophisticated states of resolution. The result is that
the fibre of the Magic pad becomes more raptured, more light in texture.

Perhaps this process of refinement has led Jeanette Winterson to applaud Woolf’s novel as a “flying carpet” which sweeps us into its adventure “through the inner and outer world of imagination and experience” (1995: 73). *Sexing the Cherry* has - excuse the needful pun - taken many a leaf from *Orlando*’s book. If the texture of *Orlando* becomes so energised that it is about to fly, *Sexing the Cherry* will launch its response into quantum space. Metaphors of light, vibration and the language of quantum mechanics inform Winterson’s novel throughout. Its princesses do fly. The magical ability to defy gravity is stated to be a virtue. Yet two of the novel’s important and related theoretical fictions risk a collision.

If each novel can be brought to reckon with what I have termed a Magic Pad, it will not do to reduce any of the works to this device. As a theoretical fiction, the writing implement requires a supplement from the novels as well as affording them precisely that. Having explored the tropings of rapture within and between the novels, I will assess whether the supplement is a suitable term for describing the influences between the works, and to what extent Derrida’s term can itself be supplemented.

**Road Movies: When Theresa Meets Antigone**

I use the word “movie” to signal that film theory, in the guise of Silverman’s concept of the “productive look” has a vital function in my tracking of Dorothea’s quest to find an outlet for her passions. I employ the adjective “road” to highlight that, like her predecessors Theresa and Antigone, Dorothea will be pursuing emotional journeys of great length, making her own bid to break new pathways through the vicissitudes of her personal life.8 The Magic Pad can also double up as a map which the mythical and novelistic characters may follow or re-draw after having made cartographical discoveries of their own. In this section I will be examining the theoretical fictions which propel Dorothea’s quest to find safe passage for her ardour. As I have discovered so far, many multi-grooved narratives, or the incomplete kernels which demand to be worked through, not only challenge what Silverman terms “the dominant fiction” but consist of more than one narrative. This is no less the case for Dorothea. It is the dynamic
tension between two theoretical fictions and the breaching of fresh pathways between them that produces the ensemble, or “theorising fiction.” For a reading of Dorothea’s path, the roads trodden by Antigone and Theresa are more than precedents. As characters, they reflect on Dorothea’s potentials and limitations. They will not be figures Dorothea can identify with without mediation. Rather, they offer Dorothea imagos whose elements can be travelled through and re-drawn. Dorothea’s navigation of these imagos carves out pathways aiding the patterns of traversal in Eliot’s novel and the intimacies it can bestow on its inheritors.

Middlemarch’s first reference to Antigone occurs in the novel’s last paragraph, together with a second reference to Theresa:

A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother’s burial: the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone (1994: Book I, Chapter 1, 896).

The reference to the mythical, Greek heroine refers to a series of texts, including not only the myths but Sophocles’ Antigone. Thus as the reader completes the novel, they are offered another fiction with which to reflect upon that which they are completing. Pause for thought is given. The “Finale” stimulates the reader to think back through Dorothea’s fabula, to consider her character and measure it against the mythical destiny and actions of the Greek heroine. Thus the various forms of Antigone’s fabula comprise theoretical fictions, that is, tools to analyse the narrative to which, at the eleventh hour of reading, the external narrator adds a footnote. Furthermore, this is combined with Theresa’s fabula with which the external narrator opened the novel. Placed in the readers’ minds before they plunge into Dorothea’s story, the Saint’s fabula prods the audience into treating it as a tool with which to analyse what is to follow. The implied narrative of Antigone and the external narrator’s version of the Theresa story both offer fictions which theorise their primary object, Middlemarch. Thus the miniature narrative of Theresa and those implied by the mention of Antigone and her brother, can all be termed theoretical fictions.
In that Antigone’s fabula historically precedes that of Theresa, the former is a “layer” below the latter. Both stories are embedded below the “writing sheet” of Dorothea’s emerging story. In other words, there are versions of the Magic Writing-Pad in which several layers come into play, engaging the processes of rapture between these several layers. *Middlemarch* invites the invention of a writing device in which the wax slab of one theoretical fiction can act as the writing surface for another.

The novel’s opening page stages Theresa’s first attempt at a pathway of escape from childhood. The scene so portrayed bears the tracings of narrative texts and the pathways of literariness. The external narrator refers the audience to “the little girl walking forth one morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother” as they “seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors” (Prelude: 25). The narrator’s focalization of their trudging forth sets the stage for one of the novel’s emerging theoretical fictions.

Out they toddled from rugged Avila, wide-eyed and helpless looking as two fawns, but with human hearts, already beating to a national idea; until domestic reality met them in the shape of uncles, and turned them back from their great resolve. That child-pilgrimage was a fit beginning. Theresa’s passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life: what were many-volumed romances of chivalry and the social conquests of a brilliant girl to her? Her flame quickly burned up that light fuel; ...the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self. She found her *epos* in the reform of a religious order (emphases added, Prelude: 25).

... days, and months, and years which she must spend in sorting what might be called shattered mummies, and fragments of a tradition which was itself a mosaic wrought from crushed ruins - sorting them as food for a theory which was already withered in the birth like an elfin child (519).

An elfin child, a product of fiction, implies an impossibility. It is one which is already “withered.” The past has indeed been shattered, but it has not been surrendered nor cleaned away. The mosaic is but a pattern that put together the shards; it is a tragically defiant act to
rescue the pieces left after an aftershock. The “shattered mummies” signify the dead so desecrated that Dorothea would be stretched to her limits to summon these effigies into life. If this is Antigone’s tomb, it is the sepulchre of anti-climax. No one knows exactly what Sophocle’s Antigone actually finds in her grave. In line with the Greek dramatic tradition, the audience learn after the fact that she has hanged herself. But once she enters the tomb, no one knows exactly what happens to her. It is unknown whether she discovers the rapture of uniting with her brother and parents in the underworld or whether she has found the serpent of immortality to be made of worms.

Thus the allusion to Antigone’s incestuous and slow death casts light on Dorothea’s narrative, drawing attention to the dangers of following noble ideals even unto Hades. Such a pursuit, like the heroic and unquestioning quest after great traditions can lead straight to the tomb. Unlike her predecessor, Dorothea escapes both. This is one transference which is broken at the very point Dorothea would make a last, desperate attempt to conjure it. Dorothea has held onto the hope of being a good wife, even after her husband’s death. Antigone has no such hope. Yet beyond the threshold of life, the grave promises more than a re-uniting with Polynieces. The family grave would offer a corridor to Hades in terms of Greek mythology. The other dead members of the family would reside there. Antigone would encounter not only her father Oedipus, but her mother Jocasta.

In his reading of Sophocles’ Antigone, Lacan makes a reference to the ghostly figure of Antigone’s mother and Oedipus’ wife Jocasta. Lacan claims that her desire lies at the root of the passions of the other family members (1992: 283); thus the mother’s desire defines an origin, or a cause of incest and the breaking of sacred prohibitions. Once the mother’s desire has been installed, the incestuous marriage and the birth of offspring destined to suffer are events already set into motion. If the theoretical fiction comprised by the drama of Antigone figures a deeply hidden but profoundly active (m)Other, then it reflects upon Dorothea’s encounter with the fragments of “mummy.” This word meaning a well preserved dead body is also a pun on the familiar and childish use of “mummy” to mean “mother” (OED Vol. X: 97). In Dorothea’s case, the ardours of death are antithetical to the raptures of the text. She has trodden that fine line between breaking new pathways and burning up roads in their wake. The search for the ultimate “tool,”
for a phallus to unlock all mythological secrets has desiccated them all. Intellectually, the risk for Dorothea has been to be entombed in an incestuous embrace with a knowledge which can petrify and crumble.

Yet unlike Antigone, Dorothea will exit the tomb with her brother and not, as many critics have insisted, to a desire diametrically opposed to the one which had first led her to Casaubon. Returning home after the anti-climax of her honeymoon, Dorothea experiences the funereal atmosphere of Lowick. Inside her new home, even the interior decor seems to have “shrunk” (Chapter 28, 306). On the wall a tapestry reveals a vital detail: the “stag in the tapestry looked more like a ghost in his ghostly blue-green world” (Chapter 28, 306). This animal image is a trace of another creature which appeared on stage in the novel’s opening mise en abyme, namely, Theresa and her brother, who are “wide-eyed and helpless-looking as two fawns.” The pattern of traces from the Theresa layer of the text have made their way into the tapestry at Lowick. They do so at that point in the novel’s fabula when Casaubon exiles Will from Dorothea’s life. The fawn/stag appears again in Dorothea’s focalization. When this composite creature does so, she experiences yet another recognition: the unavoidable force of her desire for Will.

The longing was to see Will Ladislaw. She did not know any good that could come of their meeting: she was helpless; her hands had been tied from making up to him for any unfairness in his lot. But her soul thirsted to see him. How could it be otherwise? If a princess in the days of enchantment had seen a four-footed creature from among those which live in herds come to her once and again with a human gaze which rested upon her with choice and beseeching, what would she think of in her journeying, what would she look for when the herds passed her? Surely for the gaze which had found her, and which she would know again. Life would be no better than candle-light tinsel and daylight rubbish if our spirits were not touched by what has been, to issues of longing and constancy (583, emphases added).

The fawn from the Theresa narrative and the half-dead, ghostly stag from the tapestry/tomb have breached their way into Dorothea’s vision of her desire for Will as a “four-footed creature.” Following Silverman’s concept, if Dorothea were exercising a productive look she would have to take old unconscious impulses and displace them away
from the first identifications, in this case, the fawn/stag. The condition for the productive look would be the endorsement of an alterity producing deictic markers pointing away from such bucolic pleasures. The discourse of the narrator comes in at the end of the passage as a voice-over, suggesting that it is the “what has been” which gives life its value. My claim is that without recourse to past facilitations, life would be cheapened. Therefore the passage might be inferred as not being one in which the productive look is at work.

I contend, however, that it is the narrative intervention of the external narrator, not Dorothea’s focalization, which falls short of exercising the productive look. For Dorothea, focalizing Will as a four-footed creature signifies a dramatic shift in her perception of her own desiring possibilities. To put this alternatively, the four-footed creature which was imprisoned in the tapestry at Lowick is now free to roam the woods of Dorothea’s spring awakening. Furthermore, both the stag and the four-footed creature are the grown-up versions of the fawn. Like Dorothea, Will has had to shape up and mature. For Dorothea, the timing of her efflorescing desires is appropriate. Had this happened earlier, her emotional inexperience would have caused her to be overwhelmed by rapture.

Support for my interpretation comes from the scene of Dorothea’s honeymoon in Italy. The walls of the Via Sistina initiates her into the ecstasies of classical painting (Chapter 20, 224). These provoke in Dorothea’s “Protestant” sensibilities a flood of anxiety (225). She focalizes the mural as

the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence; the dimmer but yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on the walls and ceilings … all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion. Forms both pale and glowing took possession of her young sense, and fixed themselves in her memory even when she was not thinking of them, preparing strange associations which remained through her after-years (225-226, emphases added).

Here, any alterity between herself and the Titanic, upsettingly sensual images, is foreclosed by the inverse idiopathology of the scene.
Dorothea’s sensibilities hijack the images in such a way that they overwhelm her; the pale figures taking possession of her are a disturbing sign of the symbiosis which she brings to her encounter. The painted figures terrorise her with a rapture threatening to break down her ability to organise their syntax of images. The structure deteriorates into what is “confused” and in a “glut.” Dorothea becomes a channel for a libido of such charge that it instigates a loop for its own resistance. The movement of working-through is thus blocked. Indeed, Dorothea’s final note of horrified focalization is signalled by the phrase “disease of the retina” (226). The images are so rapturous that they are in danger of spreading infection through the layers of the Magic Pad.

This near-chaos of associations which Dorothea suffers must wait until after her husband’s death to be abreacted and bound to Dorothea’s perceptions. Whereas in Italy, Dorothea felt overwhelmed by an iconography which represented a fissure between the “religious” and the “superstitious,” in the passage focalizing Will as a four-footed creature, she feels herself to be a “princess in the days of enchantment.” The superstitious and the sacred, all that is the opposite of materialism and cheap tinsel, has been bound together. As such, “remembrance” is the re-binding of previously split-off binary oppositions. Furthermore, the shockingly sexy Titans with all their Dionysic terrors have been accommodated through traversal. The four-footed creature, with its human gaze, suggests as well as a stag, a satyr, a creature iconic of uninhibited eroticism. Through a process of having traversed in, through and out of her husband’s tomb, the Protestant girl has allowed the traces from those narrative layers which focalized both the Titans and Will, the mythical creature to breach their way back into her daily life. It is from this point that she can begin to regard Will as a potential lover.

Dorothea’s journey of desire began when she fell in love with Casaubon, mistaking him for a pamphlet. Her way towards Will began by focalizing a scene inter-textually linked to the Italian wall painting. Confronting the tomb of her beloved text and finding her “brother” in the scene of her desires, constitutes the mainstay of her traversal. But each one of these movements has involved a text, be it the visual syntax of the tapestry at Lowick or the rustic scene of pleasure and desire. In other words, Dorothea Brooke never transcends her textual constructions; rather, she re-constructs them to somehow bridge the
impulses of her ardour with what she can achieve in “reality,” that is, her historical medium. In marrying Will she will bond herself to a young radical, a writer, a man whose prose will endeavour to keep itself abreast of the times. This is the task in which his predecessor failed and in which he will attempt to succeed.

The theoretical fictions alluding to the mythical Antigone give pause for reflection on *Middlemarch*. The reader is encouraged to bring together two groups of narratives which respond to and discourse with each other. On the one hand there are the fictions narrating the life of Antigone - the myth and the play. On the other hand there is the novel itself, concerned as it is with the life and times of Middlemarch’s characters. The theoretical fictions and their novel, when they both work together, both produce a composite - the “theorising fiction.” The participle “theorising” I use as an adjective. I do so because it captures the dynamic task of the Magic Pad’s layers which, as they cumulate and operate together, produce not static theories. Rather, they generate moving forces of signification and self-reflection. Put alternatively, it is the collaborative powers of the theoretical fictions and the novel within which they are embedded, that allow a joint effort to take place. The result is a cumulative working-through. In the ensemble process, one theoretical fiction can re-generate already familiar interpretations in another; or equally well, the two can help each other to produce brand-new analyses. Moving repeatedly between theoretical fiction and novel, the reader catalyses and takes part in producing the traversal which brings to light those meanings which otherwise would have remained eclipsed.¹⁰

Moreover, *Middlemarch* asks us to consider what would have happened if Polyneices had lived and Creon had died and what, in the long run, might be the effects of such an outcome on the socio-symbolic order. For there is the possibility that whilst Polyneices might be different from Creon, he might also carry on much of his predecessor’s ambitions. Traversal does not allow the subject to escape the loop of either theoretical fictions or theorising fictions. Rather, this circuit functions as “road movie” in which the normative is challenged and the cumulated narrative map, or the various layers of the Magic Pad, effects rites of combination on the stories at hand. The tales of Theresa and Antigone give Dorothea’s story another depth which would otherwise not be brought to the reader’s attention. The result is
that even more opportunities arise to make new roads in the evolving text with every forthcoming traversal.\footnote{11}

**Costume Drama, Or Orlando Gets Laid**

*Middl\(\textit{e\text{\textemdash}}\)march* and *Orlando* are, at first reading, strikingly different pieces of work. Yet, in both, the female characters face inescapable realities of gender and economic position. Woolf applauds Eliot’s work for not “tampering” with the facts. *Orlando* tampers with them to give us a hero who has an inexplicable sex-change half-way through three centuries and is still only thirty six years old after such an epoch. One might wonder at the links between a work in which the characters struggle heroically but tragically against their lots, and one in which the protagonist has it all. But what *Orlando* has in common with Dorothea is the rapturous pursuit of texts as talismans to the transformation of their lives.

By proxy, Dorothea sought a “key” to all knowledge, one bound up with her quest to find plausible outlets for her ardour. *Orlando* faces a similar yet also different trail of discovery. Just as Dorothea becomes infatuated with Casaubon’s academic knowledge, Orlando espies a poet in his house, imagining this amazing creature to be capable of revealing “everything in the whole world” (1977: 17). Like Dorothea’s pursuit of love and knowledge, Orlando’s double pursuit of *amour* and the poet’s laurel will lead ultimately to his/her relinquishing of worldly ambition. Rhetorical figures deployed by the external narrator of Eliot’s work compensate for what the heroine, in her medium, could not achieve. In contrast, the biographer of *Orlando* progressively hands over the task of writing to the protagonist. This is achieved as Orlando’s interior monologues progressively become the material of the autobiographer. I propose that unlike Dorothea’s narrative, that of *Orlando* will liberate more rapture than does its predecessor work. Woolf’s novel brings a greater number of traces from the wax slab of the Magic Pad through to the upper surfaces.\footnote{12} To employ Kristeva’s term, Woolf’s narrative will “lift” to some degree “the weight of the symbolic” borne by the predecessor work. In this sense, the intimate relation between one work and another is not of competition but support. *Orlando* supplements *Middl\(\textit{e\text{\textemdash}}\)march* by rapturing what lies beyond the predecessor’s limits. To turn Woolf’s comment on its head, the inheritor text turns upside down those “facts” which
the predecessor was not able to invert, principally because its historical context would not allow the subversion to occur. It is only in the inheritor text that the old drives are given new pathways.

The title to this section derives its logic from Orlando's intertextual lineage. This line of inheritance offers an insight into the novel's dramatisation and traversal of one of its theoretical fictions, Shakespeare's Othello. This metanarrative unit is conjured and mobilised in a camouflaged manner, even though the Renaissance play is rarely mentioned by name. Nonetheless, Othello is in active service throughout Orlando. By wittily and subversively traversing the precursor work, Woolf's novel weaves itself upon sartorial figures and innuendoes of sexual intercourse. It comprises a bawdy display of tropes. It is about the pleasures, dangers and vicissitudes of "getting laid."

In her diary, Woolf mentions that when she was not writing, she read Shakespeare. In particular she mentions Othello (1978: 12). Woolf remarks that she is "impressed" by what the play affords: the "volley and tumble of its words" (1978: 127). In the play, Desdemona is seduced by Othello, he claims, not by their mutual looks and glances, but by his story-telling and her "greedy ear." His prospective wife, he argues, was the agent in her own seduction. Othello insistently characterises himself as the object and not the subject of the transaction. Desdemona he imputes to be an idiopath eager to "devour up" his "discourse" (Act I, scene iii). Ironically, it is Othello who turns out to be the idiopath, gobbling up so much of what his servant Iago will tell him, refusing to analyse much of it beyond the gender codes of the time.

The issue is less that Iago is a villain so much as that his master becomes enraptured, however crazily, with the heady and rhetorical mix of sex and invective which Iago pours into the Moor's ear. Iago tortures Othello with puns. Iago deludes his master into thinking Desdemona unfaithful by luring him into an agonising foreplay with the word "lie" (Act IV, scene i). The verb connotes not only the act of deception, but fornication. The object which will take part in the drama of alleged bedding is a handkerchief, a rare piece of weaving, a piece of sartorial figuring which will precipitate Othello into a linguistic breakdown, one in which he will no longer be able to piece apart the handkerchief from the word lie and his wife's fantasised infidelity. In
Othello, finely woven objects made metonymic with linguistic duplicities - false conflation between word and act, the concatenation between sex, lies and fabrics - cause mayhem. Othello launches into his fabric frenzy with a series of rhetorical questions!

Lie with her? Lie on her? - We say, lie on her, when they belie her - Lie with her! Zounds, that’s fulsome. - and be hanged for this labour - first to be hanged, and then to confess! I tremble at it (Act IV, Scene (i), ll. 35-40).

It is precisely this aspect which Orlando absorbs into yet comically inverts through its theorising fiction.

Sartorial fragments cunningly laid out, cleverly referring to Othello the Moor, hang literally and figuratively in the novel’s opening line. This is immediately hitched to the novel’s ironic and discursive insistence that there is never anything certain about either sex or gender.

He - for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it - was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters (11).

If there is “no doubt” about Orlando’s “sex” then it is because the masculine attire would have to signal one index of the male anatomy, the codpiece, or the ornate piece of sartorial appendage for protecting yet exposing the indexically camouflaged penis. Yet paradoxically, the Elizabethan costume, the “fashion of the time” is also signified to be effeminate. In other words, Orlando’s very costume problematises the wearer’s sexual identity. Moreover, it is precisely Orlando’s sex which will be put in doubt when it so arbitrarily changes from male to female.

The scene of sexuality rendered ambiguous through sartorial gendering is the frame for Orlando slicing at the Moor’s head. Subsequent to this, Orlando the spurned lover will identify with Shakespeare’s protagonist as he murders Desdemona:

The frenzy of the Moor seemed to him [Orlando] his own frenzy, and when the Moor suffocated the woman in her bed it was Sasha he killed with his own hands (44).
In other words, what the young man has trashed in such a racist manner is the Moor’s head with which Orlando himself will identify.

Traces from Shakespeare’s play do not bluster their way up to the “layer” of Orlando without being mediated by a theoretical fiction which reverses object/subject positions in the process of breaching. What has then been set up as a piece of rampant racism is further subverted when Orlando lives amongst an ethnic minority of Turkish gypsies, temporarily flaunting as she (no longer he) does any of her responsibilities as a white, British colonialist and ambassador to His Majesty’s government. But more than this, the sentence prefigures what will be the high stake of Orlando’s destiny: to be both the subject and object, the man and the woman, his/her life and its representation in fictional biography. This latter opposition also plays itself out in the struggle between Orlando’s desire for erotic objects and his object as poetic text, between the “how” of rapturing the trope and the “how” of troping copulation.

Moving between such points of alterity is what constitutes Orlando’s journey of traversal. Thus the novel’s title carries part of the code of the theorising fiction. The prefix “or” signifies a movement and struggle between choices, this place (“land/o”) or another, England or Turkey, this gender or that. The theoretical fiction of Orlando might be defined as a textual fabric which is re-worked by progressively forging “pathways” between points of the binary opposition. The fictional biographer takes joy in discovering Orlando in delightful states of contradiction which the prose begins to mix and interconnect. This is especially so after Orlando’s metamorphosis from male to female, during which time Orlando comes to terms with wearing frocks and several paradoxes:

For it was this mixture in her of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other, that often gave her conduct an unexpected turn. The curious of her own sex would argue, for example, if Orlando was a woman, how did she never take more than ten minutes to dress (145).

Habits from the past when Orlando was a “he” weave their way into “her” current life. The narrative’s piece by piece re-discovery of old facilitations from one historical period to another, parades across its catwalk; Orlando in doublets and necklaces and britches, Turkish trousers, flowing skirts, corsets, damask quilts, and Sackville-West style
jodpurs, will playfully mix metaphors between text and texture, between troping and sewing.

This stirring up and conflation of contiguously related elements such as text and texture, finds its precedent in Othello. The protagonist’s treatment of his wife and his handkerchief disturb the stable relationships of alterity in Othello’s cosmos. This disturbance is traversed by being turned comically on its head in Orlando, though the serious mechanisms at work in Shakespeare’s play are relevant. As Edward A. Snow points out in his psychoanalytic reading of the tragedy, Othello’s bequeathing of his mother’s handkerchief to Desdemona, aimed at testing her loyalty, reveals much about the disturbances in the family tree as they affect Othello. In Act III, scene iv, Othello hands over his handkerchief with the following narrative attached.

That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give;
She was a charmer, and could almost read
The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it,
'Twould make her amiable, and subdue my father
Entirely to her love; but if she lost it,
Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
Should hold her loathed, and his spirits should hunt
After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me,
And bid me, when my fate would have me wiv'd,
To give it to her (lines 55-65).

As Snow underlines, this piece of family history disturbs the usual traditions of patrilineal descent. It is odd that the mother should hand something down to the son. Snow argues that the “fantasy of direct patriarchal descent must elide the Oedipal betrayal that necessarily mediates the son’s accession to the fathers’ place” (1980: 404). The line of descent is mother to son. In Snow’s terms, the lines of transition between father and son would stimulate a sense of Oedipal betrayal. I would add another nuance to this interpretation. Othello is an intermediary in the transition of an object between mother and daughter-in-law. Othello in a link in a matrilineal line of descent, which subverts the patrilineal order of inheritance. It is this subversion and confusion of a traditional system of exchange which fuels Othello’s fury. When
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he completely breaks down when the handkerchief goes missing in Act IV, scene (i), presuming its disappearance to be the result of his wife-mother's betrayal, his constant repetition of the word handkerchief signifies a meaningless break in the processes of inheritance.

Following Snow's cue, I should also point out that Othello describes his mother as a "charmer." This is not just one who reads minds. It is also a person who uses her sexual allure. Moreover, like mother like son (as the saying goes), he too would aspire to read minds, principally that of Desdemona. The main issue here is not the psychologising point that Othello is suffering from an Oedipus complex. The more vital matter is that Othello identifies with both father and mother, and that he becomes the site of contested alterity which reaches a distressing crescendo when the burdens of alterity make him crazed over the handkerchief. This delicate fabric becomes both metaphor and metonymy for a memory of conflicting identifications between masculinity and femininity.

To take these insights back to the analysis of Orlando, I contend that such a mixture not only of metaphors but of metonyms and synecdoches is one of the novel's strategies for making the layer between the bottom and top of the Magic Pad more capable of conducting drives, more able as it were, to recall Woolf's phrase from A Room of One's Own, to "illuminate" the "web." As I explored in my first chapter, this web metamorphoses through metaphor and by virtue of contiguity, crosses over into other networks of metaphors. The example I have already used there is Woolf's implied mutation of this same web into the materials of a room. Its occupant, the woman writer, employs imagination to turn a claustrophobic space into a scene of parallel and touching worlds. The middle-class living-room moves through an opening towards a Persian scene, then vision contracts into a prison before being re-envisioned as an ocean (A Room of One's Own, 83). Such a site becomes the ground of congregation for various tropes which materialise into scenes. In the movement from one scene to another, one ensemble of tropes to another, no one in particular pauses to be caught as a fetish. Despite some tropes temporally predominating, not one is allowed permanence. To put this another way, metonymy takes the responsibility of re-directing the impulses behind synecdoche or metaphor which would tend towards fetishism. At the same time, metonymy allow these tropes to function.
One instance of this I will take from Orlando; the example provides more material for scrutinising how the layers of the Magic Pad, or to put it somewhat differently, how the tropes which get laid in one layer, can be found in a passage where “Memory” is compared to a “seamstress:”

...nature, who has so much to answer for besides the perhaps unwieldy length of this sentence, has further complicated her task and added to our confusion by providing not only a perfect rag-bag of odds and ends within us - a piece of policeman’s trousers lying cheek by jowl with Queen Alexandra’s wedding veil - but has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly stitched together by a single thread. Memory is the seamstress, and a capricious one at that. Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. We know not what comes next, or what follows after.

Thus, the most ordinary movement in the world, such as sitting down at a table and pulling the inkstand towards one, may agitate a thousand odd, disconnected fragments, now bright, now dim, hanging and bobbing and dipping and flaunting, like the underlinen of a family of fourteen on a line in a gale of wind (61, emphases added).

The dynamic text thereby produced can encounter Silverman’s recommendation to make the gift of love active. The necessarily lengthy quotation about to enter my stage comes after Orlando has been spurned in love. As a result, he vows to win victory on the field of the English language (63). En passant the biographer cites Orlando’s gathering of sources, the several heroes and heroic works which heap themselves like discarded clothing through the beginning of Orlando’s chapter 2.

The garments fall on top of each other like pieces making themselves for patchwork to be sewn into the text’s evolving design. The biographer will mention one of Orlando’s ancestor’s “Sir Gawain, the Turk” (63). Here is a concatenation of an Anglo-Saxon hero made “other,” the contiguity of the knight’s name, and a place he never originally came from. According to the Medieval poem of unknown origin, Gawain and the Green Knight, Gawain undergoes an ordeal in which he will offer his neck for possible decapitation, but in fact survives with just a wound, reminding him that he is, to all intents and purposes, just an ordinary sort of chap. The reference to decapitation
resonates with the novel’s opening in which Orlando is found “slicing at the head of a Moor” (11). Thus through the citation, that is the consciously textual repetition of Gawain and the Green Knight, the novel once again refers to Othello. The reader is once again caught in the text’s determination to draw him or her into alternating subject/object positions, whose substitutions will not be still. This aspect of the theoretical fiction also finds itself intertextually announced in references to manuscripts such as “The Death of Ajax” to name but one. Though as readers we are given no snippets, this tale concerns Ajax’s suicide due to not winning the top prize for his heroic deeds. The hero must face the failure of his own heroism, just as Orlando will confront the fact that s/he feels pale next to the canonised writers. Furthermore, the one who has triumphed by slaying then slays himself. Yet again, the subject makes of himself his own object.

These works which are implied to be all “written over” in Orlando’s hand are to be found in an array of drawers (59). I shall argue that this latter word can also be read as a pun on underpants, a double entendre which has important consequences for tracing the raptures of Orlando’s Magic Pad. The biographer, reflecting ironically on her/his own prose, stages Orlando tackling an onslaught of memories.

The citation about Memory as a seamstress concerns rapture. The passage focuses on rapture as a movement of traces breaching their way towards the upper surfaces of the Pad and therefore being made available to be read. One part of the policeman’s trousers would cover his groin. Earlier I mentioned a staple of men’s Elizabethan dress, the codpiece, hinted at in the text by a combination of metonymy and paralepsis. The first specifies something contiguous and the latter does so by deictically indicating its absence. Put simply, one signifier implies an absent counterpart whose absence is noteworthy. That these pants could be lying “cheek by jowl” with Queen Alexandra’s “wedding veil” makes a metonymic and erotic connection between trousers and veil. The metonymy leaves the mind to boggle, and by virtue of paralepsis, further contiguities are stimulated. One might imagine, for instance, walking into the room after the honeymoon, the emblemata of this night of passion strewn upon the floor: clothes retrospectively indicating that they have been thrown off in the tumble of getting laid. The sartorial items have been scattered across the floor.
The veil lies with and over pants and goodness knows what else. Tropologically speaking, the “vehicle” of the clothing therefore metonymically implicates the “tenor” of the naked bodies who would have been wearing their cast off garments. After their wedding night, it is reasonable to assume that Queen and cop would be cheek by jowl on top of each other. But what is Queen Alexandra doing in bed with a policeman?

To answer this difficult question, which has serious consequences for reading Woolf’s novel, it is useful to contrast two interpretations. Perhaps the one can, to adopt Mieke Bal’s terms, expose the expository strategies of the other (1996: 8-9). In the novel’s first chapter, Queen Elizabeth I has been staged as Orlando’s patroness. In Freudian terms she could be interpreted as an index for the mother. The policeman, signified in that synecdochic and popularly gnomic expression, the “long arm of the law,” might then be an index of the phallus. In other words, it is here that the theoretical fiction cannot be so easily identified as conforming to those I posed above. The matter is not as simple as lining up the elements along the axis of who is being the subject for which object. The combination of Queen and “bobby” does suggest comparison with Freud’s “primal scene.” She and he could be taken as standing in for mother and father, caught in flagrante delicto. That the reader does not witness the actual act, that it is threaded out, so to speak, through the condensations of clothing and the displacements of their arrangement, might be evidence for repression. It is unclear, however, to whom the psyche doing the repression in fact belongs.

The biographer is most prominent in this part of the novel, having narrated how Orlando has survived the pain and the sickness of being jilted by the Russian Princess, Sasha, for whom he had fallen completely (41). In the melancholic period after her departure, Orlando begins slowly to return to his writing. “Thus it was that Orlando, dipping his pen in the ink, saw the mocking face of the lost Princess” (61). The Princess is on a par with royalty, or Queens. Yet this note of focalization comes at the end of a section in which so much of this is given over to a “we.” Like the biographer, “we” are also scrambling through and sorting out pieces. Whilst Orlando is of concern in the passage, its prose is opened out to the rest of us. “We” were invited into the primal scene. “Memory” is a “she” and a “seamstress.” “We”
therefore identify with a female audience and encourage the men in it to identify with their counterparts. Furthermore, this personification of memory as a capricious seamstress, going back and forth with her needle, encourages the audience to think differently about both the male gender bias of history and its linear construction. The seamstress is given no point of origin for her thread. Her needle moving through the “present” fabric is what re-aligns the past to which the threads have been connected.

This question of origins brings me to suggest an alternative to interpreting the novel’s theoretical fiction. The structure of the psyche posited by Freud in the Mystic Writing-Pad and developed by Derrida in his reading of Freud’s text, problematises the very notion of “primal.” As Derrida argues, there are no original traces (1978: 203; 227). These have already been repeatedly transformed through inscription. What caused the trace is, as Derrida insists, already dead and for that matter, “non-origin” can be a cause (1978:203 ). Following Derrida, I would suggest that the Queen and the policeman have emerged from sources which can only be constructed post hoc. They can hardly be termed the “original” actors in the primal scene because one can only be left wondering who were their other co-actors from the deeper layers of Memory.

My aim is not simply to support Derrida’s argument, but to supplement it. To employ his line of analysis would be infer that the policeman and the Queen are deferred signifiers of others which are in turn so deferred and so on, ad infinitum. Between this extreme position and that of Freud’s insistence on a phylogeny underlying a primal scene, supported as it is by Lacan’s notion of a “radical,” that is “root” phantasy, is another path to be broken in the task of setting out a model for the theoretical fiction and its traversal. A citation below from “Freud and the Scene of Writing” makes a case for deferral as a potentially endless connection of signifiers from which no single one can be identified as having any predominance, or to offer a starting point from which further development forward could be guaranteed. Derrida states this as follows:

There is no present text in general, and there is not even a past present text, a text which is past as having been present...The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in
which meaning and force are united - a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are always already transcriptions (1978: 211).

Now to return to the policeman, I suggest that he is a deferred signifier for a variety of men in authority, including judges and code-makers going back not only to the past but to the future. The mention of the police, who only came onto the scene of British history in the eighteenth century, is odd, or literally preposterous given the fact that the extract which I am tackling comes towards the end of the sixteenth century. Hence the “past” from the lower layer of the Pad has been conjured back to the future.

Treating the policeman as the signifier of an older facilitation might lead me to interpret him as a trace of Creon the law enforcer. Rather, I will argue that the policeman not be buffeted along too many threads of endless deferrals, of that “weave of pure traces” but allowed a limited terrain of signification. The policeman is not a King, therefore is not the “Father” whose law cannot be broken and who carries the synecdoche, that is, the part or “father’s name” standing in for the symbolic order. Rather, the policeman is just part of the social order and helps to apply its rules. To put it bluntly, he is not the “top dog.” Policemen can hail from the working or lower middle classes. He is in bed with a Queen. Thus the aristocratic hierarchy has been subverted, as has the dominant fiction that Queens only end up in bed with Kings. She has “laid” one not from her class. Allowing the policeman to be a signifier capable of endless deferrals would necessarily involve bringing the father into the scene. This strategy would conflict with my reading which is based on the concept of the “productive look.” That the scene includes a reference to the “underlinen” of the family of fourteen, again brings the high-brow world of Orlando and his literary pre-occupations down to earth.

When Orlando becomes a woman she will bed Shelmerdine, a sailor. His is another uniformed profession and as such, he is closely associated with the policeman. But though not its “head,” the police have a metonymic connection to the Law. Orlando will carry the signifier of the “head” because she will become the head of her Estate, and in this sense, she will be a Queen. Once again, as the theorising fiction moves up through the layers of the Pad, it moves into other
modes, maintaining its pattern and without deferral to any other. In other words, what is maintained is the structure of constantly moving subjectivity between the masculine and the feminine, the upper and lower classes, the Queen and the public servants, the European and the colonial, the subject of life and its object - the textual representation of that life. The subversion of the opposition between lower and upper class is already at work in Shakespeare’s play. Mark Rose has eruditely situated *Othello* within its political and historical context.\(^1\) Rose points out that Iago’s speech is “shot through” with the language of commerce (1985: 300). Othello himself may uphold the feudal and pastoral orders, but he too can be a bourgeois man in the making. Rose gives the example of Othello’s pre-emptive pillow talk with Desdemona which compares sex with “profits” (300). Within the relationship of this troubled couple, the old feudal order is about to tumble in more ways than one. Importantly, though, in *Orlando* too, the feudal lord will find himself in a Victorian era where members of his class are no longer lords but employers. As the old political orders wear down, Orlando’s affective engagement with life intensifies.

This does not mean to say that as Orlando’s journey progresses, life merely becomes more enjoyable. Traversal is not the promise of the end of resistance but the possibility of re-figuring it to allow the most manageable conduction of affect. By the end of the novel, the gap between the focalizing Orlando and the narrating biographer has almost disappeared except for the markers “she said” or “she thought” (214-239). The twentieth century becomes a layer which can accommodate the movements of all those traces which would be more familiar to her from earlier epochs. Her first journey in an escalator produces the following moment of rapture:

The very fabric of life now, she thought as she rose, is magic. In the eighteenth century, we knew how everything was done; but here I rise through the air; I listen to voices in America; I see men flying - but how it’s done, I can’t even begin to wonder. So my belief in magic returns (229).

In traditional literary critical terms, such a passage would be cited as an example of “epiphany.” Rapture is not just another word for epiphany, but a specific instance of its theoretical fiction, tightened, reduced,
refined. Dorothea Brooke was left at the end of *Middlemarch* with still much to traverse, particularly given the uncertain future of her new marriage. Orlando, in contrast, claims to have almost achieved an illumination of the entire fabric. So much so that it is capable of flight. What has been sublimated into energy are a series of dross emotions which act as resistances to the conduction of libido and its sublimation. The tension in the theoretical fiction, the conflict between two positions and the unequal fight and dogged compromises so much at the heart of alterity, find themselves eventually worked through thus:

> Was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice? So that all this chatter and praise and blame and meeting people who admired one and meeting people who did not admire one was as ill-suited as could be to the thing itself - a voice answering a voice. What could be more secret, more slow, and like the intercourse of lovers, than the stammering answer she had made all these years to the old crooning song of the woods (247-248).

Resistance as a symptom of narcissism, the desire to be upheld in the public gaze, has been removed. There is no over-valuation of another. There is no desire to have the power of rhetoric and the puissance of poetical forms to make Orlando triumphant on the field of literary practice. This had been “his” dream. Such transferences have been released, unravelled, brought to a point of equilibrium. The costume drama which relied so much on the tropes of texture, of figurations which could be interpreted as fetishistic, have been laid down. They have been replaced by another metaphor, that of the voice answering the voice. The metaphor for the drive has been left unclothed and disembodied.

**Moving Genies at an Exhibition: To Cross and To Cross Out**

In Winterson’s novel, one important metaphor for the drive is another oft disembodied force - a genie, a word meaning a spirit caught in a bottle, but also a genius. From its Greek roots, a “genius” is not a human phenomenon such as an Einstein figure, but a guardian spirit who oversees the destiny of the human to be protected (*OED* Vol. VI). These meanings resonate in Winterson’s novel. Jordan imagines
his adopted mother and protector, Dog Woman, to have come into the world when she was found by a passing woman, imprisoned in a bottle (79). Jordan “imagines” the woman cutting the seal on the bottle and his mother expanding like a genie (79). This story is his method of explaining his mother to himself, as a woman who “may have been found herself” before he likewise was found by her (79). The hint that his fiction is “theoretical” is given by Jordan’s remark that his mother is “like a mathematical equation, always there and impossible to disprove” (79). Jordan’s theoretical fiction contains the genie not just as a character, but a trope which can be further explored by comparing his fiction with another: Fortunata’s narrative of her rape (132). Her story is a mise en abyme, or “mirror-text” in Bal’s sense of both terms (1997: 57-58). Fortunata’s story is embedded within Jordan’s, which is the primary fabula. Her tale comes towards the end of the novel over the course of Jordan’s several adventures with Tradescant and his postmodern incarnation as a twentieth century boy (118-120). I use the term postmodern here in Brian MacHale’s sense (1991: 62-65). When fiction brings different temporalities and worlds into collision, that is, the characters of the seventeenth century manifesting in different guises in the twentieth century, these ontologically different spaces overlap. Fortunata’s story comes from another ontological domain, that of myth, for she is both herself and Artemis, the huntress. This story, read with the theoretical fiction about Dog Woman, produces a double mirror-text, in that the two narratives reflect on the primary fabula, which is Jordan’s story. Both Fortunata/Artemis’ story and that about Jordan’s mother are linked by the fact that they each narrate a distinct type of “trauma,” a term shortly to be set out.

I will be arguing that a traversal takes place between the Dog Woman story and Fortunata’s account of surviving rape. Inasmuch as both narratives act as mirror-texts, Fortunata’s tale also shares in the theoretical tasks that the story of the Dog Woman carries out. The traversal which takes place, however, is quite different from the gathering but gradual movement of rapture which produces a sense of lightness achieved in Orlando. The two mirror texts/theoretical fictions to be discussed undergo re-shapings which are the result of affect being released not to proliferate but to reduce the number of textual pathways. To return to the metaphoric model of my Magic (not Mystic) Pad, the encounter between the two narratives can be explored
Winterson’s novel is an array of disparate and dispersed pieces of text which have been thrown into odd combinations through fractures and ruptures, thus disorganised for the purposes of re-combination. However, in the suspension of the interface between surfaces and the manner in which they are brought together, what takes place is both a defusing of affect and a reduction of the number of available pathways. The net result of this is a contradictory movement of tropological organisation. On one level, the impulse on behalf of narrative subjects to make a more profound inscription of the libido through the symbolic is resisted. On another level, the chance to re-facilitate areas of the symbolic order through a wrestling with cultural clichés, dominant fictions and traditional identifications is offset. The traversal which takes place shuts off part of the signifying circuit. It is as though the reader were invited into the gaps and silences thus produced to take a greater responsibility for making her own meanings. The reader is thus invited into the very difficulties with which the text has engaged. The reader is encouraged to wrestle with the very symptoms which, if submitted to working-through, help the text’s evolving meanings to reach new frontiers.

Traumatic experience is a tough frontier in the quest of working-through. Consulting Laplanche and Pontalis for a definition of trauma is a useful place to start. According to them, psychical trauma comprises

an event in the subject’s life defined by its intensity, by the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately to it ... In economic terms, the trauma is characterised by an influx of excitations that is excessive by the standard of the subject’s tolerance and capacity to master such excitations and work them out psychically (1988: 465).

The fuller text of their definition brings out two important points. In psychoanalytic terms, there is no clear distinction between traumas which are the aftermath of primal scenes not adequately dealt with, and traumas caused by horrific life-events. One of these types of trauma may indeed trigger the other. The trauma which is not about life-threatening events is theorised as the psyche’s inability to represent the
matter and construction of the wound caused by the negative experience of various infantile scenes, such as the “scene of seduction.” As I have already argued, the concept of a theoretical fiction allows that its narrative can be formed from more than one of these scenes or indeed others. Furthermore, a trauma caused by a catastrophe rather than an infantile event might produce “scenes” which through a series of displacements, connect up to those scenes symptomatic of infantile conflicts. For this reason, it is crucial to make a distinction between a trauma which has its roots in the “scene of castration” as opposed to catastrophes such as exploding bombs, rape or the Holocaust, to name but a few.

Ernst van Alphen’s exploration of “holocaust effects” helps in delineating a more refined definition of trauma (1997: Chapter 2, 41-64). Van Alphen argues that the problems encountered by Holocaust survivors emerge from life-events which “could not be experienced because language did not provide the terms with which to experience them” (44). The traumatic is defined by “unrepresentability.” This abyss-like state cannot occur after the fact. Rather, this predicament is part of the experience itself. Following a study by Lawrence Langer (1991), van Alphen lays out what he terms, “four representational problems” which emerge in the realm of traumatic experience (45). Two of these will concern me here. They will help me to explore the boundaries between the two different categories of traumatic experience with which I began this section: the type which comes from an infantile “scene” and that which corresponds to the experience of having survived the threat of death. In referring to the latter, one of Van Alphen’s examples of a “representational problem” is an “ambivalent actational position” in which the sufferer is neither entirely the subject nor the object of the remembered experience (45). Another problem he isolates is a lack of plot or “narrative frame” which allows the events a sense of coherence (45). Both these representational problems can be found in the story of Dog Woman and Fortunata’s account of her rape.

Jordan’s tale of his adopted mother is also a narrative about the strange life of a genie in a bottle. Jordan explains his mother’s emergence into the world as a speaking subject. He notes in the telling that this bottle birth is what he imagines rather than knows to be the case. He conceives Dog Woman to have been trapped in a bottle (80).
A passing woman hears screams from inside it. Cutting open the bottle a genie emerges “growing bigger and bigger” (80). As a reward, the Dog Woman grants the woman three wishes and throws the bottle, or what served as her pre-Oedipal container, into the sea. The punch-line is that Dog Woman cannot recall any of this. She has been birthed into the symbolic order. If she had not, she would have been rendered incapable of asking a single question pertaining to wishes. The symbolic capacity has been acquired, but Dog Woman forgets everything. In other words, one of Van Alphen’s representational problems has emerged in Dog Woman’s experience - she can remember no story. Her adopted son has imagined or told it for her. He identifies with her because like her, he was discovered abandoned. One wonders who exactly has forgotten what. It is Dog Woman who refers to an event, hardly narrated, of picking up Jordan from the slimy banks of the Thames (1996: 11). One wonders whether Jordan in fact uses the story of Dog Woman to tell his own tale. But if this is the case, if the story of Dog Woman is the frame by which he tells himself to himself, then the narrative of how Dog Woman was in fact born remains a mystery. Narratively speaking, something is indeed missing. Furthermore, Jordan may be the subject of the Dog Woman tale rather than she being its object. Thus the uncertainty of being object or subject which van Alphen categorises as a representational problem occurs in Jordan’s theoretical fiction. Perhaps this fiction theorises its own inadequacies in terms of achieving a coherent narrative in which the positions of subject and object are unambiguously defined. In short, traversal as an attempt to “get at” the narrative material and turn into signification becomes short-circuited most intriguingly by representational problems.

The genie which has bubbled up so problematically in the wake of representation, figures its way elsewhere into the novel’s tropes. Jordan comments that “Paintings are light caught and held like a genie in a jar. The energy is trapped for ever, concentrated, unable to disperse” (91). Thus the figure of personification becomes the material within the pigments and its organisation, namely, the “dancing light of life” (92). Matter itself, claims both the epigraph to the novel and Jordan’s diegetic repetitions, is “empty space and light” (91). What is more, the signification of light, or genie energy, as both metaphor and metonym for matter and subjectivity, makes this signifier of subjectiv-
ity an allegorical sign for the pre-Oedipal stage. It does so because it is metaphorical for all that is trapped in a bottle prior to the subject’s emergence into the symbolic. Though the Dog Woman story may be allegorical of an infantile scene, it could also allegorise a scene more decidedly life-threatening. If Dog Woman remained trapped in her bottle, maybe she would have suffocated. Perhaps Dog Woman nearly suffocated at her own moment of birth. It is possible that the details of how she survived and what components of her birthing were so hellish she simply cannot remember. Either way, the residues from her experience crystallised into narrative prevent either her or the reader from entirely grasping and clarifying the heart of the trauma. The genie is a cunning signifier of a representational problem structured through Jordan’s theoretical fiction.

The term “allegory” combines configurations of metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche. To clarify the term allegory before making an adroit exploration of Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece* and the paintings devoted to this Renaissance heroine, Mieke Bal suggests that

allegory is an extended metaphor; it is a reading based on continuous similarity, involving both difference and contiguity, between its vehicle - say, here, the myth of Lucretia - and its tenor - according to its oldest pre-texts, political tyranny (1996: 227).

Through both verbal and visual encounters, Bal exposes the problematics of the connections between these tropes, shaking them up until their uses and abuses are shaken out. Unavoidably, I will be reducing a complex and multi-layered analysis to concentrate on the points which are important for my own reading of Orion raping Fortunata/Artemis. First, by drawing such attention to the rhetoriticity of the narratives of Lucrece’s somatic and subjective violation, Bal reminds the reader that rape cannot be represented. Rape which takes place in the “real” and in the non-Lacanian sense, “cannot be visualised because the experience is physically as well as psychologically, inner. Rape itself takes place inside...it cannot exist as experience and as memory, as image translated into signs, never adequately objectifiable” (Bal’s emphases, 1996: 231). As Bal explains, the experience of rape causes subjectivity to be “temporarily narcotised, definitively changed and often destroyed” (230). I should add to this that research into the effects of rape
catalogue amongst the victim’s many symptoms, the impossibility of imaging herself in the mirror. Women who have been raped almost unanimously complain of the profound sense of smashed, violated and “murdered” identity. The sense is of having gone through a death. Thus I contend that rape is amongst the traumatic experiences which are defined under the rubric of life-threatening experiences.

Rape figured as a displacement of death occurs in Fortunata’s narrative. Hardly a fortunate tale, the event is opined through mythological hyperbole. This is then deflated through a series of laconic asides and understatements. These then gradate towards a hyper-reified, rhetorically emptied attempt at “signifying,” if one can call it that, the rape. Fortunata is equated with a mythological figure of the “goddess” Artemis. Empowered to be disempowered, she enters the stage as a female to reckon with. She is the daughter of Zeus. She is a huntress (131). She is thus someone who kills. Having “envied” the male sex their adventures, she aims to “take on the freedoms of the other side” (131). After this follows a passage quoting an alchemist’s maxim, “Tertium non data” (sic), or “the third is not given” (131). This statement heads a reflection on the part of the narrator, presumably Jordan. When matter is transformed into gold the third term in the process remains a mystery. Then follows a prosopopeiaic representation of Artemis’ dividing selves. These are images she “saw.” The images include “a child, a woman, a hunter, a queen. Grabbing the child she lost sight of the woman, and when she drew her bow the queen fled” (1990: 131). Subjectivity is here not so much split in two as splintering; thus van Alphen’s representational problem of the subject erring between self as subject and as object is here at work. So oddly, even before the rape itself, symptoms of trauma both as an actational crisis or, in contrast, pre-Oedipal splitting, plague Fortunata. The huntress risks becoming the hunted. “What would it matter if she crossed the world and hunted down every living creature so long as her separate selves eluded her?” (131). The enunciation of the possibility of subject and object positions splitting is reminiscent of the same operations of substitution in Orlando. In Fortunata’s tale, the final remark “In the end when no one was left she would have to confront herself” is oddly laconic. Splitting is a traumatic event. What is recalled here is evacuated of affect, most unlike the refining and dancing signifiers of Orlando. The laconic moment then turns into the entrance of the rapist
- he "smells" (132). He wants to possess her, goes the free indirect discourse, he is "famous" and she is "curiosity," a woman to be possessed as an index. The narration of the rape is evacuated of metaphor.

Orion raped Artemis and fell asleep.

She thought about that time for years. It took just a few moments, and her only sensation was the hair on his stomach matted with sand.

Her revenge was swift and simple. She killed him with a scorpion (132).

Indeed, at one level affect is evacuated. Yet it is precisely the figure of paralepsis, of signifiers pointing to what has been left out, which sets up a disturbance. The event has cut deep, for Artemis thinks about it for "years to come." Only one sensation can be recuperated, namely the remembrance of the "hair on his stomach matted with sand." This is metonymic of an area of the body displaced from the groin; yet what is at a remove, is also a weapon of attack. Paralepsis could be defined as the invisible metonymy of metonymies. The index connects back to a black hole of signification. This abyss is the "real" of the traumatic event.

This reading prompts two further remarks. The allegorical mode of narrating rape has not been avoided, but used differently. To take a mythical story is to enact an allegory. Artemis is a personification, that is a metaphor, for a woman breaking down into other conflicting identifications. With his implicitly repulsive smell, Orion personifies the abject. The scorpion, a metaphor for the sexual organs as well as death, is the weapon of self-determination. This tool enables not suicide but murder. Each of the metaphors (Artemis and the scorpion) interact with the other through contingencies, that is, the drama of rape and its revenge. The allegory has a deadly quality in that it keeps the power of affects under its yoke. While I read this as the allegorist's respect for the ineluctable hope of being able to represent rape, I find the cool evacuation of affect disturbing.

My feeling of disturbance is not the result of naively reading the rape story as a symmetrical reversal of subject and object positions between the rapist and his object. In other words, it is not that I read
the avenging act as an inverse savagery of what precipitated it. Once the subject of the rape has been violated, she employs a weapon which is a metonymic replacement for Orion’s sexual organs. She turns the instrument of rape back onto the perpetrator, but without raping him. The “turning of the tables” is asymmetrical. Artemis does not rape Orion to leave him the incalculable heritage of trauma. Instead, she wounds to murder. After having murdered Orion, and carefully burying him under a pile of stones, her sensation is not anger but the hunger resulting from physical exertion (133). Through interior focalization, the narrator grapples with the double effects of the trauma. Artemis is lonely not for “friends” but for “a time that hadn’t been violated” (134). As a consequence of this gap in memory, the black hole of the trauma will be frozen. As she walks away from Orion’s “mound” she looks into the sky. There is nothing there to “remind her of the night before, except the stars” (134). Orion is the name for a star cluster. It will be a metonymic reminder of the rape. It could trigger a memory. It will be all around her on all cloudless evenings. The “reminder” releases no further metonymies nor metaphors which could begin the many workings-through of the trauma. No further abreaction of Artemis/Fortunata’s story of “excessive” excitations takes place.

The visual image of stars in the sky is a condensation and displacement that will so remain, forever atrophied. The black hole which is stoppered up with this freezing of the light is metonymically linked to the novel’s final line that the “most solid of things” are “Empty space and points of light” (144). Dog Woman, the genie, metonymically connected to images of light through this figure’s participation in painting and quantum fields, is an index not just of this incandescence as materiality, but the character who cannot remember the trauma of her insertion into the symbolic order. The net result, then, is that the foundational trauma of the subject’s coming to be is associated by contiguity to that quite different agony of rape. Genie light is made metonymic of Orion, that is, the rapist’s light. Metonymy has been an agent of conflation. Just as Dog Woman’s story of becoming is engraved only in Jordan’s imaginary construction and not her own remembrance, Fortunata’s trauma will be enshrined in a mummified collusion between metaphor and metonymy. Orion will be the sem-
The Intimacy of Influence

blance of rape, while stars cluster in continguities of light and forgetting.

Jordan’s theoretical fiction and Fortunata’s mirror-text have become conflated, each mirroring the other yet appearing in each other’s blind-spots. Two needfully separate accounts of trauma have been blurred. That one has been made a mirror of the other is what I find particularly disturbing. In a culture where rape is figured by any other trope than what comes to representing it, cultural artefacts can perform the ethical task of distinction and contradistinction. The introduction to this chapter pointed out that “rapture” has a history of pejorative meanings. These include rape and theft. The “rapturing” that takes place through the conflation of the two narratives produces a negative transference. One allegory is abducted for the purposes of the other. The layers of the Magic Pad are pulled apart and closed. The hands do not lift up the covering sheet, but rip it off, just as affects on the point of pathbreaking, ready to inscribe some portion of their anguish. Fortunata states that the rape took her across a “threshold” of her identity (132). One identity was violated, another had to be forged, but still, representational problems remain.

It may seem that by applying two of van Alphen’s representational problems to both narratives, each having a bearing on the two types of trauma, that I am myself conflating the two types. This is not my intention. Van Alphen’s list of problems apply to the stories of Holocaust survivors. That the two examples I explored can be helpful in reading Dog Woman’s story may imply that Dog Woman’s story, as recounted by Jordan, is another version of Fortunata’s tale. Both his adopted mother and the dazzling dancer are the influential women in Jordan’s life. Fortunata dances on points of light and Dog Woman has been a genie, another form of light. Furthermore, genies are supposed to be lucky, as Fortunata’s name connotes good fortune. Both women could be the same woman, and both have undergone a trauma which has involved survival and the threat of death. In this case, the two narratives become each other’s theoretical fictions, yet equally well, they mirror in each other a crucial and missing piece of representation. As layers of the Magic Pad, the two narratives combined enact a traversal, but it is one in which the traumatic heart of Fortunata’s experience remains beyond the reaches of any working-through. And the fact that her story contains what lies beyond catharsis and signifi-
cation provides a theoretical fiction of its own. If intimacies of influence are to be fostered between novels, some “thing” in excess of abreaction and signification, some affective dimension must remain available for the activity of traversal.

**Conclusion: Between the Three of Us**

The quest for the book as object of desire was for Dorothea Brooke a limited success. As a woman she has borne the weight of the symbolic. She has fallen between the sacrifice of Antigone and the triumph of Theresa. *Orlando* has defied the weight and trodden the tightrope of renegotiating the contract between the narrative self and its Other. *Sexing the Cherry* takes on the ambition of flight already rehearsed by the modernist intimate. Perhaps the drive behind the signifier which Winterson’s novel could possibly release is so great that rapture would cause rupture. Bloom defines the ratio *kenosis* as the move to break away from the overwhelming ancestor. This interpretation could be applied to Winterson’s novel. Should it continue the ecstatic movements of *Orlando* and incidentally, the word “ecstasy” is used one page towards the end of the novel no less than four times (219), Winterson’s novel might experience a self-implosion. By enacting an act of “crossing out” or what Paul de Man might term “disfiguration,” *Sexing the Cherry* preserves the layers which comprise the Magic Pad. Here, the act of supplementing I would interpret as a negation of the desire to “have it all.”

This brings me back to what I promised to engage with earlier: Derrida’s notion of “supplement.” Towards the end of “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” Derrida emphasises that Freud’s machine is a metaphor. As such it cannot be an adequate representation for the psyche (1978: 228). The machine is the “supplement” to the “finitude” of psychical organisation. The contraption is “dead” though the psyche is not. Earlier in the essay, Derrida has argued that writing requires the death of the origin of the trace (203). What is supplementary is the *différance*, or the trace which is detour and deferral (203). In interpretation deferral takes out of the drive its brute force, inscribing it not as death, but offering it another life. In Derrida’s reading the machine and the psyche need each other. The interworkings between psyche and machine inscribe an allegory about how Eros (libido) and Thanatos require each other for their mutual survival.
In *Middlemarch*, ambitious men like Lydgate and Casaubon meet premature deaths. I would supplement the narrator’s claim that a modern Theresa lacks the historical medium in which her ancestor the Saint performed her good works (896). I would suggest that the modern Theresa could turn the limits of her conditions to her advantage providing she were to succeed where Antigone failed, that is, in finding an exit from Oedipus’ sepulchre. Changing historical conditions do not obliterate the possibility of living a theoretical fiction. They add more challenging supplements. The aspect of “crossing out” which I explored in Winterson’s novel is also at work in-between the dialectic of the narratives of Theresa and Antigone. In this respect, *Sexing the Cherry* summons the traces of its more distant ancestor.

*Orlando* supplements *Middlemarch* by tracking deep into its tomb. Woolf’s novel does not hide the dangers of such a journey. It is in the closing epiphanic sequence that Orlando’s reflections expose the risks:

> Hail, happiness, then, and after happiness, hail not those dreams which bloat the sharp image as spotted mirrors do the face in a country-inn parlour; dreams which splinter the whole and tear us asunder and wound us and split us apart in the night when we would sleep; but sleep, sleep, so deep that all shapes are ground to dust of infinite softness, water of dimness inscrutable, and there, folded, shrouded, like a mummy, like a moth, prone to let us lie on the sand at the bottom of sleep (emphasis added, 225).

Kristeva has argued (1996: 107-112) that it is particularly difficult and therefore impressive when a woman writer produces a strong work, because her position in the symbolic order and her ambiguous connection to the pre-Oedipal mother are unavoidable hurdles. Yet a confrontation with this archaic force is a requisite for creative production. In the passage above, the dream, the sleep from which the drives move can “tear us asunder” and deform the sharpness of images achieved. The dream conjures the trace of the “mummy” which has been re-inscribed from *Middlemarch*. In this work, the tragic actor, Casaubon, seeks the illusion of that trace which can never be erased. Dorothea does not end up there, but temporarily lives the melancholia of the dream which by virtue of denying narcissism invokes the more
drastic possibilities below it. In Orlando's monologue, the mummy is met head on, and from it a delicate strand hangs metonymically. Like Ariadne's thread, it offers Orlando the path back to symbolisation. This strand is the "moth," a favourite of Woolfian discourse, a mythological symbol of the soul. This moth is not near a burning light, so it need not be extinguished, but can fly the scene. In the ensuing passage after the one quoted above, Orlando's psyche flies above the danger. The moth implied to be a "he" manages to "burst the seals of sleep" and Orlando, identifying with both herself and the psyche can state "We rise." What has been "handy" is a "rhyme" to "help us pass safe over the awkward transition from death to life" (225). Here, what Kristeva would term "semiotic" facilitations, or the most archaic of traces, provide symbolic security, moving between layers without causing damage. Yet the flight was precarious.

The miraculous and the anti-gravitational are extensively used forces in *Sexing the Cherry*, but to the point that they are taken for granted. Traversal is a painstaking process which encounters failures, many structures which turn the narrative subject back on herself. Dues are paid heavily for the limited rewards of the resistance lightened, palliated, compromised. From the beginning of Winterson's novel, there is a confidence that resistance can be fully challenged. The invisible ink will flare up once the right powder is found. Glibly, Jordan claims he can produce the map of hidden journeys. He implies that all will clear. The audience need only "follow" by "tracing those travels with your finger" (1989: 10). Jordan suggests that the task is easy. Curiously, he glosses over the problematic aspects of cartography. New borders in any domain may be difficult to find or produce.

My discussion of *Sexing the Cherry* explored how the text pushed the boundaries of literary invention by capitalising on the alchemist's formula, the "third is not given." Here I have suggested that *Sexing the Cherry* makes the second person, the reader, somersault through different types of identification to fight for their "third." By so doing, the reader can carve out her own, path-breaking exit from Thebes. I have explored rapture in this novel as a cancellation of the traces which would otherwise be inscribed. That the repeated movements of working-through operate in a regressive or static mode, is not to judge the text negatively. Given that Winterson's novel breaks pathways in other respects, it may be the case that a traversal working in the
opposite direction to the continued and gradual progress towards the binding of more affect may testify to the text’s method of achieving some degree of homeostasis. Otherwise, rapture might work not in the interests of re-invention, but regression. In terms of the intimacies between all three novels, it is worthwhile to read not only in terms of a movement from past to present, but as layers in which what is strongly expressed in one work compensates for what has been only partially explored in its intimates. Where there are the “excesses” of ecstasy, as in the closing section of *Orlando*, both *Middlemarch* and *Sexing the Cherry* help to dissipate and re-distribute the force of rapture.

Closely allied to rapture is incandescence. This force is released, suggests Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* as the result of a mind “unimpeded” (1983: 55). The intimacy between *Sexing the Cherry* and its two precursor novels is not based on the twentieth century novel being more or less incandescent than its friends and ancestors, despite Winterson’s claim that Victorian fiction does not reach the same standards of linguistic excellence as the modernist inheritors (1995: 31). The sartorial exuberance of *Orlando*, the manner in which it whisks away the reader on a flying carpet of sex, fabrics and linguistic experiment may seem to have more in common with the anti-gravity domains of *Sexing the Cherry* than the Victorian precursor. Yet both of these twentieth century novels have gathered within their Magic Pad textures already woven in *Middlemarch*. The textual layers provided by the narratives of the intrepid explorers of graves, Dorothea and Antigone, are transformed through Orlando’s story of a close shave with sepulchral passions, that is death and sex devolving from the novel’s various references to *Othello*. Winterson’s work does not produce a textual fabric necessarily more incandescent than Eliot’s novel, in the sense that the greater the conduction of textual energy the more meanings there are available. *Sexing the Cherry* carries within it a series of traumatic breaks. Fortunata’s rape and what was Dog Woman’s bottled existence before she came into the word are both examples of “tombs” in which non-representation casts its shadows. *Middlemarch* has intimated to *Sexing the Cherry* and *Orlando* that no amount of traversal will redeem either narrative or human subject from the confrontations with limitation and death. For it is both these forces which provoke the quest for rapture.
Notes

The definition of "facilitation" is from "The Project towards a Scientific Psychology" (SE I: 283-387). It is useful to outline how Freud developed the term. His essay might be described as a type of draft for describing the neurological processes of the psyche, including in his explanation, the mechanisms of pain, dream and memory.

Freud argues for the operation of two types of neurones: the phi (Φ) system is permeable, the psi (Ψ) one impermeable. The former allows a free flow of excitation, enabling raw consciousness. The impermeable system produces the resistance which protects the nervous system from overloading. Crucially, though, the latter will attain degrees, then patterns of permeability. This occurs when lines of conduction are set up between them (I: 300). The flow is possible through the establishing of "contact barriers" between the impermeable neurones. The different networks of contact so forged are termed "facilitations" (Bahnung). According to Freud, memory "is represented by the differences in the facilitations between the Ψ neurones" (300). Derrida takes Freud's word Bahnung, drawing attention to its lexical meaning of path (Bahn) and what is implied by the action of the contact barrier, namely, the process of "breaching." The path is broken, cracked, fracta, breached (Derrida, 1978: 200). Memory, deduces Derrida, is not some operation within the psyche; rather, it is its very "essence." This involves not only differences in facilitations, the "effraction of the trace" (201). Both these terms, difference and effraction, constitute the breaking of the path which, he underlines, "presupposes a certain violence and a certain resistance to effraction" (200). The need for the fracture is due to the resistance proffered by the psyche. Without these defences, the psyche could not function, it would be consumed by its own drives.

A comparison to the psychoanalytic technique of transference is useful. In analysis, the patient's journey requires her to project a variety of imagos onto the analyst, or what Cynthia Chase has termed transference in the second sense (1987). Without this, the unravelling of the symptoms would not be possible. The sorting through, the teasing apart of imagos into tropes is transference in the second sense, which corresponds to the working-through which will precipitate transference in the first sense. The Magic Pad is a metaphor which more successfully links these processes with the act of writing and the processes of memory activated within a psyche through which drives and traces work in two directions.
For a reading of the interrelations between Woolf's friendship and love affair between herself and Sackville-West and the development of the protagonist in *Orlando*, see Jean O. Love's article "*Orlando* and Its Genesis: Venturing and Experimenting in Art, Love, and Sex" (Friedman 1980: 189-218).

John Tradescant was a seventeenth century adventurer and horticulturist.

All further references to the dictionary definitions of the word rapture come from the *OED* Vol. XIII (1989).

Mark Rosenthal (1979: 133-134) points out the prize-winning status of "The Oak Tree" as referring to Vita Sackville-West's garnering of the Hawthornden Prize in 1927 for her poem "The Land."

Rosenthal makes a detailed and illuminating analysis of "The Oak Tree" as a piece of writing which bears the signs of Orlando's struggle to envision three centuries of experience and give this meaning (133-134). Rosenthal states that Orlando's struggle with his/her text dramatises the writer's struggle with the *zeitgeist* of the time (134). I would add that her challenge is to produce new meanings from old, to make intelligible for a contemporary literary period what made best sense for an earlier period. This producing of new meanings from old figurations is the literary challenge of traversal.

Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) founded a group of reformed Carmalites. She was born of an aristocratic Castilian family, making a precocious attempt at pilgrimage with her brother. See *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (David Hugh Farmer 1997: 467).

"Antigone between Two Deaths," (Lacan, 1992: 257-270) reads Antigone's desire as being located between two deaths, as mapping a path for the heroine to find her way back to the desire of the mother, namely Jocasta, the other ghostly occupant of the family tomb.

In "The One and Another: George Eliot's Dialogic Incarnations" (1993: 500-507), Marijke Rudnik-Smalbraak investigates the interactions between different narrative levels produced between fictional characters, authors and readers. She uses Bakhtin's work on the "dialogic" from his essay "Discourses in the Novel" (Bakhtin 1981) to address texts by George Eliot and *Middlemarch* in particular. She draws attention to the notion of "dialogic incarnation" important in Bakhtin's work, and the theme of "confession" in Eliot's novels. Rudnik-Smalbraak remarks that "the word, as discourse and utterance, manifests itself as a dialogic event on different yet simultaneously active planes" (505). Though this remark is not simultaneous with the concept of a Mystic or even a Magic Pad, Rudnik-Smalbraak's
insight parallels the notion that novels are composed of levels between which words, tropes and ideas move, becoming thus enriched through the communication between layers.

11 Here I would like to quote Mary Jacobus’ sobering remark about Eliot’s *Mill on the Floss* (1860) read in the light of Irigaray’s philosophical quest to seek out a female language. In “Maxims and *The Mill on the Floss*” (1986: 62-82) Jacobus suggests that “we will look in vain for a specifically feminine linguistic practice in *The Mill on the Floss*” (78). Jacobus’ point is not that there are simply no feminine practices; instead, her point is that these “reinscribe the exclusions, confines, and irregularities of Maggie’s education” (78-79). Here I concur with Jacobus; my study does not make a case for a specifically female praxis of language. I would suggest, though, that the modes of reinscribing “exclusions” to which Jacobus refers, has an affinity with my notion that in textual traversal, it is the unusual, the unexpected and the ideologically rejected which can be made textually and discursively significant.

12 Arguing that one novel liberates more rapture than another in terms of the economy of its specific layers, is not to make a value judgement or to claim that one work is aesthetically more successful than another. The qualifiers “more” or “less” rapture define the product of inter-linking between layers of the text and its respective theoretical fictions. A text which makes breaks between layers to reduce the flow of rapture can be read as doing so to allow the reader or another intimate text to be the force responsible for making interpretative connections.

13 For an account of Woolf’s readings of Shakespeare see Alice Fox’s study of Woolf’s studies of English, Renaissance texts (1990: Chapter 4, 94-158). Fox finds evidence that Woolf was fascinated by Othello’s love for Desdemona. Orlando’s identification with the “frenzy of the Moor” is a key example (*Orlando*: 44).


15 In her essay on *Orlando*, Sandra M. Gilbert (1994: 204-205) makes the excellent point that the novel’s challenge to official, “masculine” history with the “feminine” version is inscribed in Orlando’s name. The “Or” could be replaced with “Ur,” a prefix referring to “origins” and what is “original.”
Gilbert suggests that the biography pursues a paradoxical activity by writing the public history of a private woman when women, for the most part, are left out of the historical record. The notion of “origin” closely aligned with femaleness is expressed in the phonetic similarity between the pronunciation of “Ur” and “Her.” Orlando can be translated as “Her-land-o.” Furthermore, during her travels in Turkey, Orlando not only cross-dresses in terms of gender, but also culturally. After his change into a woman, which coincides with his sojourn in Turkey (1977: 106-118) Orlando dresses up as Turkish gypsy. In fact, the “crossing” here involves gender, race and class. For a reading of the interconnections between cross-dressing as a gender and cultural act, see Inge E. Boer “This Is Not the Orient: Theory and Post-colonial Practice,” *The Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis* (1994: 211-219).


The Gawain Poet, *Gawain and the Green Knight* (1925). Briefly, the story focuses on one of Arthur’s trusted knights, Gawain. He offers to impress everyone with an example of his prowess. He passes all his tests, but is not entirely perfect. Orlando is less than an outstanding writer.

For a clear paraphrase and definition of the “father’s name” see Alan Sheridan’s “Translator’s Notes” in Lacan (1986: 281-282). Lacan’s “Name-of-the-Father” has its origins in Freud’s symbolic father of *Totem and Taboo* (SE: XIII: 150-151). This “name” is not a father in person so much as a signifier of the “Law.” See my chapter 4. For an examination of the relationship of the “Law” and “ISAs” see Althusser 1997: 219-247.


For a more detailed analysis of the difference between modernism and postmodernism, see my chapter 3.

See Laplanche and Pontalis 1988: 404. This troubled and controversial theory was first established by Freud between 1895 and 1897. It was subsequently abandoned.

I would like to add here that the psychoanalytic definitions of trauma have a long tradition, one of the most important precursor texts being Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920; SE XXVIII).

For the view that trauma requires that the subject has faced the threat of death and survived it, see Cathy Caruth (1996). Her study examines the experience of trauma as embedded within historical development. She
contends that Freud's critical insight in *Moses and Monotheism. Three Essays* (1939: SE: XXIII) was that "history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (1996: 24).

24 For a detailing of the traumatic symptoms see Julie A. Allison and Laurence S. Wrightman (1993). This study explains why rape involves a threat of death even if the woman who is attacked is not threatened with a gun, knife or some form of execution or disfigurement should she not submit to the attacker's control.