How Does Reading and Writing Become a Celebratory Act for Women?

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All research for this thesis has been carried out and composed by myself. This thesis has not been accepted in fulfilment of the requirements of any other degree or professional qualification.

Negotiating a creative project of this size and intensity has been an incredible experience. I would like to offer special thanks to Dr. David Jasper. This thesis really is a result of conversations that we had. Thank you for your patience, humour, encouragement, and your wonderful insight. I also would like to offer a special thanks to Dr. Allison Jasper. Thank you for your time and honesty. Your encouragement enabled me to keep reading - even when this meant proceeding on fearful ground. A special thank you to my family who has been so supportive of me. I am truly grateful for your love and confidence. Thank you to Andy Carroll -for everything. Above all - a sincere thank you to Dr. Mark Ledbetter.

Abstract

This inquiry's thesis is a meditation on the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* In Chapter I, I begin by stating the hermenutical method I will engage to explore this question. In a sense this hermenutical method is a manifestation of the question itself and it poses articulations towards addressing the crisis inherent within the question (Section 1.1: The Hermenutical Method). By engaging plural metaphors and not 'minding the difference' between creative, metaphorical language and concept-critical language I am enabled to break down phallocentric reading principles and necessarily deconstruct traditional ways of reading (Section 1.2: Breaking Down Phallocentric Principles). Furthermore, my hermenutical method generates inter-text(s) that claim an autonomy which rigorously confronts the issues at hand. These two events, the breaking down of phallocentric reading traditions and inter-text(s) that claim an autonomy within the inquiry itself make a theological language of 're-membering' available to me (Section 1.3: The Autonomy of the Inter-Text(s)).

By placing the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* in juxtaposition with Robert Detweiler's exploration of 'religious reading' and the community that participates in such an event, I examined the two guiding conditions that seal his model: the atmosphere of festival and the event of reading as a celebratory act for individuals and for groups (Section 2.1: *How Does Reading and Writing Become a Celebratory Act for Women?* and 'Religious Reading as Explored by Robert Detweiler', Section 2.2: Detweiler's 'Atmosphere of Festival': The Bakhtin Connection, and Section 2.3: The Relevance of the Untraced Body).

The Result of exploring Detweiler's model of 'religious reading' laid the foundation for my suspicion that 'celebration' means something very different for women historically and presently. This research enabled me to make the claim that women cannot celebrate according to its current understanding and therefore 'celebration' needed to be radically reviewed (Section 3.1: What 'Celebration' Means: the Journey Towards Re-membering 'Celebration'). To begin to approach the subject of re-membering what 'celebration' means, I discussed the phenomenon of ordination (Section 3.2: Ordination, Section 3.3: Traditional Understandings of 'Ordination', Section 3.4: Concerning the Ordination of Women). I concluded that ordination, meaning in some manifestation

'to call out', is not an ecclesiastical convention, but an event that belongs to the realm of language in which ordination is an expression of the frustration of language's attempts 'to call out' or to move towards the sign (Section 3.5: The Frustrated Nature of Ordination, Section 3.6: Ordination as an Event that Belongs to the Realm of Language). Because ordination is an event belonging to the realm of language, women's naturally ordained status ensures that they maintain a unique relationship to language as conditioned by their bodies. This naturally ordained status is the foundation of a woman centred hermenutical tradition. A crucial feature of this tradition is disbelief of women's proclamations. Disbelief obliterates women's textual and bodily status, but *women read, write and interpret anyway* thus creating a subversive textual sub-culture. It is within this space that we can trace the re-membering of what 'celebration' means (Section 3.7: Woman's Bodily Status).

The goal in Chapter 2: 'Reading the Johannine Narrative' is to trace the woman centred hermenutical tradition. I bring my own hermenutical method to the fourth gospel where I 'read' various textual moments. The objective of this goal is not to end up with 'celebration' in its re-membered form, but rather to trace this woman centred hermenutical tradition, to identify its features and to confront this woman centred hermenutical tradition in action so that my subversive 'findings' of this exploration not only substantiate the claims I have been making thus far regarding women, reading and writing they also enable my inquiry to be pitched into a space of actually encountering 'celebration' in some of its re-membered manifestations (Section 1.1: Encountering the Woman Centred Hermenutical Tradition). The Johannine narrative is an apt place to stage such an exploration because of its strong western canon associations. The text of John is infected with issues regarding reading and writing in a gendered sense (Section 1.2: Why Here: Disruption and Gender).

I begin my 'reading' of the fourth gospel with John 20:1-18. I target textual moments associated with two textual strands conjoining and read into their tension (Section 2.1: Reviewing, Re-reading and Re-membering John 20:1-18). I identify five crucial moments within this narrative which begin to reveal the woman centred hermenutical tradition's personality. These 'personality traits' include excess as a positive aspect of woman's 'calling(s) out', a commitment to narrative to exceed imposed boundaries and to journey to 'the end of the story that cannot be told', and a continual and responsible confronting of history (Section 2.2: Five Crucial Moments, Section 2.3: Excess, Section 2.4: The Presence of the Unnamed: the Further Presencing of Excess, Section 2.5:

The Appropriate and the Inappropriate as the Scene Shifts, Section 2.6: Difference in Vision, Section 2.7: The Meanings of Recognition, Section 2.8: John 20:1-18: Conclusion).

My inquiry then seeks to explore Jesus as a body in relation to other feminine bodies. Beginning with the body of the Virgin Mary in which I conclude that Jesus' worldly birth and the fourth gospel's urge towards baptism is a textual statement about women's bodies and their textual status; in this context woman represents death. However, the other possibility as maintained by the woman centred hermenutical tradition is that the Virgin Mary's statement, 'They have no wine' is an invocation of the actual, maternal body. Thus, a powerful re-memory is invoked that is the encouraging blood-line which enables women to read, write and interpret anyway (Section 3.1: Christ is Born: the Absence of the Mother, Section 3.2: The Second Birth, Section 3.3: Body Sighting One: Cana, Section 3.4: The Final Body Sighting, and Section 3.5: Conclusion).

Moving onto feminine bodies subjected to 'the gaze', I examine the history of the gaze and its multi-dimensional features: the gaze as an invocation of otherness for privileged knowledge, the gaze as a tool that distracts focus on women's actual bodies behaving in union, and finally the gaze as a commodity conductor which passes the bodies of women between borders of male ownership. In John 4:1-35, Jesus sits at the site of the well, the house of the gaze, not to invoke union, but to obliterate the body (thus woman's textual posture) of woman (Section 4.1: The Gaze: Introduction, Section 4.2: The Gaze's Very Long History, Section 4.3: Jesus and The Gaze, and Section 4.4: Conclusion).

The well narrative then goes on to establish the foundation from which to meditate on Jesus as writer. In John 8:1-11, we encounter the story of two texts: the body-text of the adulterous woman and Jesus' text of dust. The body-text of woman is obliterated in the spirit of the ether-body that urges baptism (Section 5.1: The Story of Two Texts: John 8:1-11, Section 5.2: The Adulterous Woman: Body-Text, Section 5.3: Jesus' Text of Dust, and Section 5.4: Conclusion).

My 'reading' of the Johannine narrative ends with the figure that is central to those readings: Mary Magdalen. By reading various paintings, I arrive at Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen*. Mary Magdalen here signs woman's intimate union/connection with the abyss or that which exists past imposed narrative boundaries. The strange posture of *St. Mary Magdalen* confronts the reader with woman's subversive celebratory posture (Section 6.1: Mary Magdalen Re-visited, Section 6.2:

Reading Roundwards: Towards Correggio's *St. Mary Magdalen*, and Section 6.3: Ledas Hidden Swan: an Unexpected Celebratory Posture).

The journey provided by walking through the Johannine narrative makes it possible in Chapter 3: 'Women's Contemporary Fiction', to enter into the realm of the crisis of 'celebration' in some of its re-membered manifestations. In this context the celebratory posture as signed by *St. Mary Magdalen* finds an example in the figure of Rosa Lublin. I begin by tracing this posture in its 'live action' by focusing on the body-text that Rosa is: a pregnant corpse (Section 1.2: Focusing on Bodies). This unusual bodily status is an excellent example of woman's ability to go beyond imposed boundaries. The condition of the pregnant corpse is not confined to the environment of life or death expressly, but rather it maintains a powerful connection to both spheres of experience (Section 1.3: Types of Pregnancies: The Pregnant Corpse). The condition of the pregnant corpse signs woman's actual nature: to go beyond imposed boundaries. Woman's naturally ordained status cannot be treated simplistically. To fully demonstrate the need for a realisation of the complex nature regarding women and 'celebration' I place the condition of the pregnant corpse in-between the competing embodiment theories (of Luce Irigaray and Camille Paglia) to expose woman's unique status as reader, writer, and interpreter (Section 1.4: The Unique Status of the Pregnant Corpse: a Demand for the Realisation of the Complex Nature of Issues Regarding Women and Celebration).

Having made available the complexity and unique posture of woman I proceed to 'read' *The Shawl* by Cynthia Ozick. This text concentrates on the experience of motherhood within a concentration camp, exploring a woman's ability to maintain very unique connections; connections maintained by writing. The shawl becomes a super-natural entity which maintains its own rules by which it shapes the lives of those who inter act with it. Ultimately, it is the shawl that signs woman (Rosa) as one who calls out. The shawl is a lesson on how to re-member what 'celebration' means (Section 2.1: Introduction: The Shawl, Section 2.2: The Shawl Emerges, Section 2.3: The Shawl: the Sustainer, the Invocation, the 'Choiceless Choice', Section 2.4: Tasting the Supernatural Depths of the Shawl: the Abysmal Connection, Section 2.5: The Two Lost Things: the Shawl and the Underpants, Section 2.6: The Underwear Pilgrimage, Section 2.7: The Lost Things Re-member One Another, and Section 2.8: The Upwards Motion of Woman's Celebratory Posture).

This inquiry concludes by maintaining that reading and writing become a celebratory act

when 'celebration' expands to traverse the length that woman's body travels regularly. Such a definition maintains that 'to proclaim' i.e. 'to celebrate' is to tell multiple stories at once, never just one story (Section 3.1: Conclusion: The End (The Beginning).

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My main tactic is a simple one. I am eager to reply to the Gospels in kind, to write in a related idiom. Rather than take a jackhammer to the concrete, parabolic language of the Gospels, replacing graphic images with abstract categories, I prefer to respond to a pictographic text pictographically, to a narrative text narratively, producing a critical text that is a postmodern analogue of the premodern text that it purports to read.

Stephen Moore

Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins To Write

p *xviii*

Chapter 1: *How Does Reading and Writing Become a Celebratory Act for Women?*

1.1 The Hermeneutical Method

This inquiry's thesis is a meditation on the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* The terms in this question are loaded and subsequently will be defined in more detail. However, my first effort to deconstruct these terms, to make the crisis of this question more available to the reader, is to explain my own hermeneutical strategy precisely because it is by this strategy that I will engage this question in various ways and it is also by this strategy that I will continually confront the crisis of the question itself.

The hermeneutic I will engage finds its earliest roots in an attraction towards Mieke Bal's understanding of 'gaps, breaks, inconsistencies, and problems' which underlie ideologically or theologically driven readings of texts. Bal suggests that it is these 'gaps' which are finally more interesting than systematically smooth structures[1]. My own readings began to seek out these raised edges or sources of textual discomfort ('gaps, breaks, inconsistencies, and problems') in order to reprieve particular moments within narrative not in order to solve these moments' concerns, but to seriously play with these moments in some of their manifestations.

The result of these readings became a creative hermeneutical method in which the language of plural metaphors makes available a language of 're-membering'. These two languages simultaneously work on various levels to deconstruct textual moments and traditional ways of reading these moments and as a result this inquiry maintains multiple discourses on several levels. There is a recognisable difference between academic concept-critical and creative-metaphorical writing and in this inquiry I admittedly will not 'mind the difference', but deeply confuse the difference so that critical concepts and creative, plural metaphors will not maintain distinctions. By

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[1]Bal, Micke. *Death and Dissymetry: the Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. (Note that 'gap' is a term used by others. Notably, Iser, Steinberg, and Exum)

confusing/interfusing several modes of discourse within this inquiry two important events occur. Firstly, engaging metaphors breaks down phallocentric principles that govern the western reading tradition in which rigid divisions between critical concepts and creative metaphorical discourses are maintained. Secondly, this creative approach claims autonomy within the inquiry itself. These two events make available a language of 're-membering'.

1.2 Breaking Down Phallocentric Principles

The language of 're-membering' is a theological language. Writing on the importance of memory, Karl Plank writes,

Once we knew that place in the forest and there we were at home...Now we know it no more, except as an absence, a loss...Yet, loss marks the beginning of memory, and memory, a narrative turn toward that place where we know, if only tacitly, who we are. Memory turns homeward. In making the past present, recollection runs counter to the unchecked progress of our lives...The ties that time obscures, however, memory would recover[2].

Memory maintains an inherent impulse towards, as Plank describes it, 'home'. It puts us directly in touch with our life narrations *despite time*. In this sense, memory is a force of theological responsibility. The individual's experience and actions are maintained in the atmosphere of that individual's presence. Furthermore, history is not exempt from memory's claims.

As one remembers, one returns; returning to various 'landscapes' is a manifestation of the living presence of memory[3]. Regarding this phenomenon, Plank comments,

Like the act of purification, the act of return does not do away with danger, but places that which is threatening in an approachable frame. The alien is given human context. Here

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[2]Plank, Karl A. *Mother of the Wire Fence: Inside and Outside the Holocaust.* Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994. p 125.

[3]Plank, Karl A. *Mother of the Wire Fence: Inside and Outside the Holocaust.* p 134.

that human context takes the form or re-marking the land, of exposing within its contours the vital boundaries that separate good from evil, the true from the banal, the kingdom of life from the domain of death[4].

The act of returning contextualises events of horror with a type of humanity making these events approachable and accessible. Therefore, returning is a theological exercise: good is separated from evil. In other words, the act of return marks out the psychic (and actual) bruises that the events of inhumanity engender. This 'marking out' maintains an ethic of responsibility that shapes and re-informs theological discourse.

The word 're-member' acknowledges that something has been dismembered as it seeks to confront it as it is. Thus, the subject's history is not written out nor is its present complexity sacrificed. By engaging multiple metaphors, the phallocentric principles that divide and maintain distinctions between critical concepts and metaphors are broken down. This is an example of 'creative writing', i.e. the use of metaphoric language, heralding a language of re-membering, a theological language. Metaphoric/creative language disputes the phallocentric tradition of textual closure in which re-membered subjects have a fixed status. Creative/metaphoric language approaches the re-membered subject and recognises that on its site is a rich history of what it was before dismemberment, including memories of its *sparagmos*, and what it is presently. Metaphoric/creative language recognises that all of these details are in unique conversation and allows this conversation to generate numerous articulations. It is the language of creative metaphor that can weather the violence of this energetic and highly necessary conversation. Metaphors 'carry across'; they can transverse the established boundaries (honoured by phallocentric principles) and bring us into confrontation with the abysmal memories that re-membered subjects maintain. Therefore, creative, metaphoric language maintains a highly critical ambition as it insists upon responsibly encountering the re-membered subject.

There is an other important way in which creative, metaphoric language heralds a language of re-membrance as it disputes the phallocentric principles that have so long governed the tradition of

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[4]Plank, Karl A. *Mother of the Wire Fence: Inside and Outside the Holocaust.* p 134

reading in the west. Historically, this phallocentric tradition has prescribed ways of reading, writing, and interpreting that do not include woman. The interpretive matrix in which reading happens-cultural reading practices, who reads-when, where and how they read-contains a binary character classically represented by the difference between male and female. Feminists and post-modern scholars have pointed out that this feature, the difference between male and female, is not a dilemma that can be academically solved, but a strong characteristic of the logic within which rational thinking has taken place within the whole patriarchal context of the western tradition. A logic of identity has been extracted, and this logic is understood as governing most of western thought, through whole male oriented principles, a fundamental conceptual division is exposed[5]. Metaphors traverse distances and re-touch themselves: they maintain an ability to be more than established boundaries permit. Phallic markers, the dividing sign that represents the phallocentric tradition, only always points to itself and the commentary it has inscribed[6]. Metaphors deconstruct these phallic markers by directly exposing a multiplicity of possible articulations, permanently de-stabilising the foundation of the phallocentric tradition. Engaging creative, metaphoric language in this context is an example of necessarily deconstructing a tradition of domination and making available a second half of logic that has been historically suppressed: female logic. Metaphors provide the language to make such a confrontation possible because metaphors can exceed imposed, supposed boundaries; therefore, even the phallic marker set in stone cannot escape its authority being questioned. The excluded voices/bodies (of women) from the site of phallocentric tradition are re-membered at the site of exclusion. This is creative, metaphoric language engaged in a responsible and critical exercise.

1.3 The Autonomy of the Inter-Text(s)

The second event that occurs as a result of confusing/ interfusing several modes of metaphorical discourse within this inquiry is that my hermenutical method claims an autonomy within the inquiry itself and furthermore, this event makes available a language of re-membering.

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[5]Jasper, Alison. *The Shining Garment of the Text: Feminist Criticism and Interpretive Strategies for Readers of John 1:1-18*. Ph.D. University of Glasgow: Department of Theology and Religious Studies, 1996.

[6]Paglia, Camille. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. London: Penguin, 1991.

My hermenutical method of engaging plural metaphors and entertaining multiple discourses on various levels within this inquiry comments on the issues surrounding *how do reading and writing become celebratory acts for women?* as it becomes a text(s) unto itself. The presence of the inter-text(s) disputes a fixed quality to the textual moments it describes and continually generates/initiates multiple conversations and articulations regarding women, reading and writing. The presence of the inter-text(s) also disputes the closure of other modes of discourse present within the inquiry by continually re-opening the other discourses' details thus continually engaging a constant, rigorous and constructive series of confrontations. The inter-text(s) as its own text(s) also directly exposes itself to the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* In this context, the inter-text(s) is the crisis of the issue at hand: as this inquiry travels further into the interior of the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?*, the inter-text(s) becomes a subversive articulation regarding reading and writing as celebratory acts for women. Therefore, the inter-text(s) *themselves* are the answer to the crisis; the inter-text(s) *themselves* become the space of re-membering what 'celebration' means in terms of women as readers and writers.

I have already stated that this inquiry's thesis is a meditation on the question: *how do reading and writing become celebratory acts for women?* The inter-text(s) generated by the hermenutical method I will engage are, in a sense, manifestations of the question itself and simultaneously answers to the crisis of the question; however, what I mean by the terms within my question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* as yet are unclear. In the spirit of the hermenutical method I will engage which seeks to maintain various modes of discourse on several levels, I will define the terms of my question by placing the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* in various contexts. This series of deconstructions entertains my question in various conversations so that the complexity of my question is invited into the discourse and my specific understandings of the terms in the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* receive a healthy space from which to emerge.

So, let me say once more that within this inquiry I will entertain multiple discourses at various levels within the text. I acknowledge any dangers that accompany choosing this

hermenutical method, but choosing this creative method is inevitable and necessary if we are to 're-member' what 'celebration' means for women responsibly and indeed that is the most important goal of this inquiry.

2.1 *How Does Reading and Writing Become a Celebratory Act for Women?* and 'Religious Reading' as explored by Robert Detweiler

How does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women? contains multi-dimensional terms and I will begin to dapple these dimensions by entertaining the juxtaposition of the question itself and the hermenutical method I have described in tension with 'religious reading' as explored by Robert Detweiler[7]. Detweiler's notion of 'religious reading' and the community that would participate in such an event bring to the forefront a necessary vocabulary that provides a crucial context for my own question. 'Religious reading' is a communal approach to texts and is a project Detweiler envisions as very different from dominant understandings of the relationship between theology and literature. Detweiler assigns the following characteristics to what he calls the "dominant interpretive communities" reading methods: closed, restrictive, defensive and prescriptive[8]. The 'religious reading' he champions is a counter-articulation to this tradition and can be defined by four crucial characteristics. Firstly, the supposed connection between the two disciplines is disavowed, allowing the creative tension between the two to emerge so that assumed theological certainties are disrupted. Secondly, post-structuralist theory is embraced because it continually and politically challenges institutional hierarchies. Post-structuralism, in this context, like Midrash and the mystical tradition, disputes textual closure, defies systematic understandings and acknowledges the desire and pain within the work of interpretation. Thirdly, an awareness acknowledges that theology is unable to complete literature by definitive interpretation, thus literature is opened up to 'difference'. This awareness is a commitment to resist 'theodical reconciliation'. The marginal, the dead, and the silenced are mourned in their re-membered place.

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[7]Detweiler,Robert. *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings in Contemporary Fiction.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989. Chapter 2: 'What is Reading Religiously?' pp 31-63.

[8]Detweiler,*Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings in Contemporary Fiction*, p 35.

The final feature and the one I suggest is the most important is that this reading happens in a community. This community of religious readers share the task of proliferating meaning thus undermining the traditional 'closed' way of encountering texts[9]. In Detweiler's own language,

A religious reading, therefore, might be one that finds a group of persons engaged in gestures of friendship with each other across the erotic space of the text that draws them out of their privacy and its stress on meaning and power...It would be religious in its very openness to others; its willingness to accommodate and adapt; its readiness to entertain the new, the invention, while honouring the old, the convention; it's a celebration of the text's possibilities rather than a delimiting of them[10].

This type of reading that Detweiler heralds would seem to hold a mirror to my own hermenutical method. The long list of features they share include: responsible/political challenges to hierarchical structures, the disputing of textual closure, a commitment to acknowledging a subject's history while remaining open to its present condition, and a passionate, permeating energy that continually seeks textual possibilities. Therefore I approach this table of readers eagerly, sharing many of Detweiler's values. But it is at this table where Detweiler establishes the conditions that will render individual readers as a community of readers, that his model becomes problematic. Religious readings are distinguished from other readings according to Detweiler because religious reading 'joins the play of story and ritual in an atmosphere of festival[11]'. Within this festival atmosphere the community joins in, 'reciting and responding to their life narrations, their culture's master narratives...Thus a religious reading is one that celebrates the text for the individual *and* for groups[12]'. Detweiler's

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[9]These four defining points that constitute what 'religious reading' means summarises Detweiler's notion of 'religious reading' found in *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction* in Chapter 2: 'What is Reading Religiously?'. They were compiled by Heather Walton in her unpublished manuscript in Chapter 1: 'The Garden of the Girls Next Door: Looking Over the Fence'. Walton is a lecturer at Westminster College, Oxford.

[10]Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings in Contemporary Fiction*, pp 34-35.

[11]Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings in Contemporary Fiction*, p 38.

[12]Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings in Contemporary Fiction*, p 39.

notion of religious reading is understood as a celebratory act housed in an atmosphere of festival. These two features permeate Detweiler's model and establish the conditions that will guide his community of readers. In reflection on my own question which is concerned with reading, writing in association with celebration, it would be useful to consider where Detweiler's 'atmosphere of festival' finds its roots and what 'celebration' means.

2.2 Detweiler's 'Atmosphere of Festival': The Bakhtin Connection

Mikhail Bakhtin's work, *Rabelais and His World*[13], is a rich source of information concerning notions of festival. In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin reads the medieval author Rabelais, systematically exploring the atmosphere of carnival/festival. I here suggest and subsequently will show in more detail that Detweiler's model of a celebratory religious reading community finds its roots in Bakhtinian ideas[14].

In discussing the phenomenon of Rabelais' historical isolation from modern readers, Bakhtin comments on how Rabelasian images are opposed to all that is finished, polished or assumed[15]. Bakhtin suggests that the carnival/festival mode offered a wholly other - non-official, extra ecclesiastical, extra political - aspect of the world of human relations. The carnival/festival mode was the building of a second world in which all medieval people participated at given times of the year[16]. Carnival was not an event to be seen, but rather it was a mode in which people lived. While the carnival occurs, there is no life outside it and it is subject only to its laws, that is, to the laws of freedom[17].

As Bakhtin discusses particular elements of the carnival/festival mode, Detweiler's own model finds

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[13]Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. M.I.T. Press, 1968.

[14]Detweiler cites Bakhtin's influence on his notions of 'religious reading' on p 36 and on p 40 in Chapter 2: 'What is Reading Religiously?' in *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction*.

[15]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 3.

[16]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp 5-6

[17]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 7.

striking resonances. I will briefly show how the previously listed four crucial factors that constitute and define the event of religious reading as explored by Robert Detweiler find their historical basis in Bakhtinian features and explain why this is ultimately very relevant.

A strong aspect of carnival/festival that Bakhtin continually insists upon is that the carnival/festival experience is opposed to the completed and thus demanded an ever changing, playful, undefined availability of forms[18]. Bakhtin named this the logic of the 'inside out'[19]. This insistence is sound in the first and second factors that shape and define Detweiler's model of a celebratory religious reading community. Detweiler disavows the simple connection between the disciplines of theology and literature in order to allow the inherent creative tension that exists between the two realms to emerge and disrupt assumed certainties. This is accomplished by the Bakhtinian spirit that insists upon undefined forms and playfulness, thus traditional understandings are able to be released. The second feature that shapes and defines Detweiler's religious reading model is the embracing of post-structuralist theory because it disputes the completion of texts, defies systematic understandings and acknowledges both the desire and pain in a work of interpretation. This finds its roots once again in the Bakhtinian insistence on playfulness and his resistance to completion. Bakhtin's logic of the 'inside-out' finds its modern day counterpart in Detweiler's understanding of post-structuralism.

Detweiler's third feature that shapes and defines his model of a celebratory religious reading community finds its resonance in the carnival/festival feast that Bakhtin defines[20]. According to Bakhtin, the feast table was a table around which the people gathered were guaranteed, by the nature of carnival/festival, to be a community where all were granted a certain measure of freedom and all were considered equal[21]. Abundance was always the theme of the community that gathered for a feast. This medieval Rabelaisian feasting table finds its counterpart in the third feature of Detweiler's model where readers resist theodical reconciliation, thus re-membering the dead, the

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[18]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 3.

[19]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp 10-11.

[20]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 9.

[21]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 9.

silenced, and the marginal. *All* are invited to the reading table Detweiler envisions and are, by the nature of festival that houses their celebrations, guaranteed measures of freedom and equality in very same spirit of the Bakhtinian feastal table.

The fourth crucial and defining element that shapes Detweiler's model is that those who gather around this Bakhtinian inspired table are in community. Their communal task is to proliferate meaning, thus undermining 'closed' traditional reading practices. This proliferation finds its Bakhtinian twin in the theme of abundance that always accompanied the event of the feast[22]. In counter-distinction to carnival/festival feasts, Bakhtin discusses official feasts of the middle ages (ecclesiastical, feudal, or state sponsored) which did not lead the people out of their existing world order and created no 'second life'. Such feasts sanctioned the existing order and reinforced their patterns, thus maintaining the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions[23]. The official feast finds its modern day counterpart in readings that issue from the closed, restrictive, and prescriptive tradition Detweiler also identifies and seeks to write against in the fourth element that shapes and defined his model of a celebratory religious reading community.

2.3 The Relevance of the Untraced Body

Detweiler's model of a celebratory religious reading community is indebted to Bakhtinian notions carnival/festival. Indeed, up until this point it has been possible to trace Detweiler's model of a celebratory religious reading community in Bakhtinian ideas with ease; however, the previously available and obvious trace dissolves at this point; at the point of the body. That Detweiler finds his roots in Bakhtinian notions becomes more interesting (and ultimately rendering the Detweiler model problematic) as we examine perhaps the most important feature of Bakhtin's work regarding carnival/festival: carnival/festival's connection to the 'material body'[24]. The Bakhtinian concept of the 'material' body finds its locus within the three categories Bakhtin identifies as the main

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[22]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 9.

[23]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 9.

[24]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp 26-27.

manifestations of carnival/festival: the literary sphere, ritual spectacle, and various genres of billingsgate, oaths, curse, etc.[25]. The 'material' body is inseparable from Bakhtinian notions of carnival/festival: where ever a manifestation of carnival/festival appears, so does the 'material' body[26]. Indeed, Bakhtinian notions of carnival/festival find their fullest expression in the excess that the 'material' body displays. Whereas Bakhtin systematically explores the 'material body' in the manifestations of carnival/festival, Detweiler surfaces at the table he has constructed based on Bakhtinian notions without reference to the 'material body'[27]. 'Take what you like and leave the rest' loses its authority however, as this detail becomes a gross oversight. It is my task, and as this inquiry continues it will be emphasised, that women as readers and writers are problematic *because* of their bodies. Thus the table Detweiler invites reader to, with its gross lack of specificity to the issues of bodies, exposes the underdeveloped nature of his project in a very basic way. Detweiler reroutes Bakhtinian notions in order to construct his own 'reading table' without re-membering the body so that the body then becomes the 'dead, the silenced, and the marginal' that he seeks to re-member ironically enough. To trace this event and to be in a position to embrace its relevance I offer the following conversation regarding the 'material body'.

In the literary sphere, the entire medieval parody is based on the grotesque concept of the body or the 'material body'[28]. The medieval 'material' bodily principle is contained not in the biological nature of the individual, nor in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, as a people who are continually growing and renewed. And it is for this reason that the 'material body' becomes grandiose, exaggerated, fecund and immeasurable. The 'material body' is not an individual body, but the gargantuan body that represents the collective force of the community[29]. This body spanned from earth to heaven, its tangled, excreting length traversing the distance between the two points.

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[25]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 5.

[26]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 27.

[27]The 'material body' never surfaces in Detweiler's notion of 'religious reading' or the community that participates in the event of 'religious reading'.

[28]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 27.

[29]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 19.

Medieval people understood this posture in a very specific way. The body was divided into two distinct spheres, its grandiose length and size qualifying it accordingly. The two spheres were downward/upward or earth/heaven. The downward, earth sphere represented the devourer, the one who 'swallows up' and was understood symbolically as the grave/womb. The downward, earth part of the body was also the 'birther' and was both physically and symbolically understood by maternal breasts. The specific body parts that correspond to the downward, earth realm were the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks. The upward, heaven realm represented simply enough, heaven. The specific body parts that corresponded to this realm were the face and head[30].

This huge body that is associated with medieval carnival/festival and haunts the pages of Rabelais' work was encountered by the masses in a very specific way and is one of the key features Bakhtin's work focuses on regarding the 'material body': how the masses communicated with this huge body. Medieval carnival/festival laughter accomplished two things: it degraded and it materialised. Degradation in this context means 'to cause to come down to earth', thus to make the unseen, seen[31]. To degrade also meant to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, thus the abundance of defecation, copulation, and birthing allusions within Rabelais' work[32]. Thus the gargantuan body was the insulted and gross body, but in the richest sense. The medieval carnival/festival laughter that heralded this type of degradation and materialisation in fact created a vital communicative and relational structure. Degradation created a type of call and response pattern that kept the body in touch with its very life force, the ever changing community of people. Degrading the body was a way of keeping the body close, of course being close to those organs that always seemed to be excreting some gross substance or another. However, this is the grotesque realism of the medieval period, and grotesque realism knows no other level than the grossly fruitful earth and womb[33]. The second main feature Bakhtin identified regarding the 'material body' was its habit of being more than one thing: its excessive nature. The 'material' body was the body perceived

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[30]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 20.

[31]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 19.

[32]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 20.

[33]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 19.

as giving birth, bringing forth, while simultaneously dying[34]. Such an image depends upon all textures: the papery wrinkled skin with its soggy edges of birth matter, the withering hag with decaying bones already puncturing the flesh revealing her super-vital and eager genitalia. The birthing/dying body is where two links in the chain of genetic development enter into each other[35]. The gargantuous body's death flesh packed next to its live flesh weathers this contradictory juxtaposition because these qualities render it *unfinished* and *open*: two vital qualities needed to reflect the ever-changing community it represented.

In this brief review of Bakhtin's main concerns regarding the 'material' body I have explained the chief features of this body and stated that it is inseparable from notions of carnival/festival. The unique communicative pattern that bounded the 'material' body with the community and its excessive characteristics of being simultaneously the birthing and dying body, reveal its complexity and it is this complexity that threads its structure into notions of carnival/festival so that the two are in dense inter-dependence. Indeed, the 'material' body and the notion of carnival/festival are inseparable in their insistence on ensuring their very unformed yet continuing nature as each event, the event of carnival/festival and the event of the 'material' body, defines and expresses the other. This renders Detweiler's celebratory religious reading community model problematic because the 'atmosphere of festival' he insists upon for his community to work comes from Bakhtinian ideas of carnival/festival that find their fullest expression in the excess that the gargantuous 'material' body displays. And it is this body that Detweiler does not trace into his own model. As Detweiler 'borrows' Bakhtinian notions of carnival/festival to establish the conditions conducive to the reading he envisions he severs these notions from a body. As stated before, it is then this body which becomes the re-membered subject Detweiler wishes to seek out in his readings. The irony is that this body is severed by Detweiler's own violent, closed, and restrictive 'reading' method.

The absent feature, that of the body, becomes much more relevant as we consider the next feature that distinguished his reading practice: not only are the readings he envisions housed in an 'atmosphere of festival', but within this festival atmosphere the community joins in, 'reciting and

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[34]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 26.

[35]Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p 26.

responding to their life narrations, their culture's master narratives...Thus a religious reading is one that *celebrates* the text for the individual and for groups[36]' (my italics). Religious reading is a celebratory act, par excellence: *to read at this table is to celebrate.* But what if celebrating is a body-dependant phenomenon for women and women can't 'celebrate' in the way Detweiler envisions? This question finds a foundation from which to launch its suggestion in Heather Walton's critique on Detweiler's model. She notes,

The epiphany of darkness[37] is also the epiphany of 'woman' and it is remarkable that this has not been more creatively acknowledged within religious reading[38].

The body that is severed from notions of festival here finds its shrieking conclusion in exploring the second feature Detweiler uses to distinguish his 'readings': the event of celebration.

3.1 What 'Celebration' Means: the Journey Towards Re-membering 'Celebration'

Detweiler's lack of concern for Bakhtin's excessive, gargantuan, 'material body' points to a deeper lack: the absence of women's bodies completely from the reading community he envisions. This claim is based on my suggestion that women cannot 'celebrate' in the way in which Detweiler claims. I am aware that this is a loaded, as yet unsubstantiated claim, and ask the reader for patience as I continue to walk *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* through various deconstructive conversations. 'Celebration' becomes a problematised feature for the reasons I have briefly mentioned as we consider its etymological roots. 'Celebration' finds its roots in the Latin verb, *celebrare. Celebrare* initially meant to frequent and/or to go to a place in numbers. Therefore, it was used to denote gatherings, especially feasts. Eventually, this verb began to be used

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[36]Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings in Contemporary Fiction*, p 39.

[37]The epiphany of darkness involves a committed re-membering of the excluded, the dead and the silenced and is incredibly important to Detweiler's notion of 'religious reading'.

[38]Walton. Unpublished manuscript, Introduction.

on secular occasions and its meaning began to denote 'to praise' and 'to honour'. As *celebrare* found its identity in secular arenas it also found its resting definition: 'to make known' and/or 'to proclaim'[39].

Celebration means to make one's proclamation. In the event of Detweiler's model of a celebratory religious reading community this makes total sense; indeed, proclamation is a result of reading. It is at this point in Detweiler's model, the context in which I have placed my own question and hermenutical strategy, that I leave his reading table to explore my own suspicions regarding what *else* 'celebration' means. This inquiry's various exercises of reading and writing will explore and establish that 'celebration' historically and presently means something very different from 'proclamation' as it exists in the Detweiler model (and all models that engage 'celebration' in the same spirit as Detweiler). My claim that 'celebration' means something very different for women historically and presently finds its locus in my own readings of various texts in which I have identified a tradition in which women's proclamations (the definition of 'celebration') are not believed. Accordingly, if 'celebrate' means to 'proclaim', when one's proclamations are not believed, notions of 'celebration' must be radically reviewed. Disbelief of proclamation is only one feature of what I will call a 'woman centred hermenutical tradition'. This 'woman centred hermenutical tradition' represents a logic based on women and their relationships with their bodies and how this conditions their textual relationships. I believe that it is within this hermenutical tradition that the re-membering of what 'celebration' means can be traced. In subsequent chapters of this inquiry I will seek to trace this 'woman centred hermenutical tradition' by engaging my own hermenutical strategy.

3.2 Ordination

Celebration is the most important concept in the question: *How does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* In exploring Detweiler's model of 'religious reading' and the community that participates in the event of such a reading, I concluded that his model grossly lacked the sophistication required by the task of religious reading community because of an ineffectual

[39]Bradshaw, P.T.'Celebration' pp 130-141 in Jasper, RC., ed. *The Eucharist Today: Studies in Series Three*. London: SPCK, 1974.

notion of what 'celebration' means. I introduced, the as yet unsubstantiated claim, that 'celebration', historically and presently, means something very different for women and that this was a definable feature of what I called a 'woman centred hermenutical tradition'. In this section I will briefly explore the phenomenon of ordination and it is within the realm of an 'ordination conversation' that 'celebration' as understood in Detweiler's model, the same definition which I claimed was insufficient, settles into its crisis. This section wishes to trace this crisis. In the following pages I will explore traditional understandings of 'ordination', trace what I will call its 'frustrated nature', qualify this as an event of language, and discuss how this specifically relates to women's bodies and women's textual relationships, thus addressing the re-membering of what 'celebration' means.

3.3 Traditional Understandings of 'Ordination'

The ecclesiastical definition of ordination in its broadest sense is the consecration of the Christian clergy in and to the church. Its meaning differs among Protestant and Catholic denominations; however, the Protestant tradition recognises three marks or qualifications for ordination. These 'marks' include: an inward call, an outward call and affirmation by the congregation, sometimes this affirmation includes gifts (in many cases, education)[40]. As these three 'marks' indicate, ordination is, on all accounts, about *calling* and ordering. The ritual of consecration that confirms one's ordination includes: exhortation, prayers and a laying on of hands[41]. These consecrating acts are all manifestations of 'calling out'; they confound and confirm ordination's definition which is infected with 'calling' and/or 'to call out'. The work for which the clergy are ordained is a detailed list; broadly speaking however, these details include infecting the tradition with a stabilising force, preaching, administration of the sacraments, the assembling of the church, leadership, teaching and administering discipline[42]. The tasks included in this list all, in some sense, refer back to the basic manifestation of ordination: they are types of calling(s) out. 'Celebration' means to proclaim and

[40]Musser, Donald W., and Price, Joseph C., eds. *A Handbook of Christian Theology*. Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992.

[41]Musser and Price, eds. *A Handbook of Christian Theology*.

[42]Musser and Price, eds. *A Handbook of Christian Theology*.

'proclaim' means to call out; therefore, the clergy's work is centred in proclamation and their ability to celebrate. Ordination's qualifying marks, the actions that consecrate it as an event, and the tasks of the then ordained individual, all pitch variations of 'to call out' deeply into its structure.

3.4 Concerning the Ordination of Women

Debates concerning the ordination of women have infected church politics and changed the complexion of the church inalterably. At the very first world conference on faith and order (1927), in the minutes it is recorded that six women issued the following statement:'...that the right place of women in the church is one of grave moment and should be in the hearts and minds of all'[43]. This statement finds a moment of triumph when the general convention of the Episcopal church of the USA authorised, by a small majority, to ordain women in September of 1976[44]. The ordination of women is a current heated political debate[45] and at its heart is the issue of women *celebrating*. Women celebrating is a profoundly undecided matter and its 'unfixed' nature reads against the table Detweiler invites readers to in order to *celebrate* texts for themselves and for the group. The rhetoric of ordination debates regarding women and celebrating exposes the lack of sensitivity displayed by Detweiler's model of a celebratory religious reading community.

This debate maintains, primarily, two points of view: those for the ordination of women and those against the ordination of women. Each community entertains numerous claims; however, particular claims are asserted so frequently that they can be understood as stable complaints. The most popular claims that champion the ordination of women include: scripture cancelling hierarchical relationships between the sexes, women's ordination as an issue of religious liberty and freedom to respond to God's call, women's ordination as a basic human right, feminine images for

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[43]Field-Bibb, Jacqueline. *Women Towards the Priesthood: Ministerial Politics and Feminist Praxis*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

[44]Mascall, E.L. 'Some Basic Considerations' pp 9-26. Moore, Peter, ed. *Man, Woman and the Priesthood*. London: SPCK, 1978.

[45]To contextualise the current heated political crisis surrounding the ordination of women, I would like to note that women and ordination has been the sole topic of several meetings of the General Synod of the Church of England. In addition to this it is the subject of numerous anthologies, articles and essays. For further reading please consult this inquiry's bibliography.

divinity in scripture, the role of women as deacons and ministers in the early church and as judges in ancient Israel, the presence of qualified and gifted women claiming God's call, and finally, the need for women's participation in the ordained ministry in order to model the full variety and diversity of the whole of God's people[46]. Those opposed to the ordination of women most frequently cite the following claims to support their views: the Bible as a sacred text and scripture that disputes women in roles of leadership, the iconistic priest or the literal gender of Christ as relevant and necessarily same as the ordained celebrant's gender, the male priesthood as headship and thus the proper exercise of authority, the unity of the church, the tradition of the church, and finally, 'decision making' concerning women as celebrants when issues of unity/fragmentation exist between churches and the universal church[47].

3.5 The Frustrated Nature of Ordination

The two communities in dispute feel frustration regarding the issues of the ordination of women. Each community undoubtedly seeks to resolve the crisis; however, I would here suggest that resolving the frustration concerning the ordination of women is a mute goal not because the two communities in question are incapable of resolution, but because it is the very nature of 'ordination' to be frustrated. This inherent frustration expresses itself in 'ordination' by simultaneously seeking *limitation* and *freedom*. Indeed, it is the energy of frustration that is the necessary organic matrix that supports 'ordination'. To substantiate this claim, I offer the following discussion.

What led me to identify the inherent frustration of ordination which constitutes its binary nature (it seeks limitation and freedom) was a meditation on the anti-ordinationalist communities' rhetoric. My research identified a specific body rhetoric that this community employs to express the phenomenon of the crisis as they understand it. This rhetoric is a pattern and also the 'thing' itself. In other words, gender is understood as a biological, spiritual genre and this genre never

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[46]Musser and Price, eds. *A Handbook of Christian Theology*.

[47]General Synod of the Church of England. *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood: A Second Report by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*. London: publishes by the General Synod of the Church of England, 1988.

violates its own form. Woman's body is why she cannot be ordained in both a positive and a negative sense as understood by this community[48]. Woman's body is what also becomes the bones of a vocabulary that ultimately fill out the feminine frame that is the church[49]. Thus, woman is her body in a grossly available sense and her body is expanded to be the feminine body of the church: she is her own body and *that other body.* Taking these beliefs championed by the anti-ordinationalist community, I became aware of some subversive speaking details. It is from this understanding of the feminine body in relation to ordination, that ordination's binary characters emerge: the feminine body of the church is a *very* big body; it is the gargantuan body. This is a subversive detail speaking in the sense that it is *by the feminine 'material' body* that I will begin to trace articulations towards re-membering what 'celebration' means, thus this inquiry re-members the gargantuan body severed from Detweiler's notion of a celebratory religious reading community.

The feminine gargantuan body, that is the body of the church, always threatens to be the grotesque body: the body that grows by its own fecund ability. The fecund growing is mesmerising and terrorising the expansive, growing, regenerating body must weather the violence that large scale growth inherently requires in order to enjoy a kind of freedom. Positively, in this sense 'to grow (out)' finds its own meaning in 'to call out'. This is sensed most effectively in the continued projection of the importance of 'calling out' found in ordinations' qualifying marks, the actions that consecrate the event of ordination, and the tasks of the ordained individual. These multiple possible variations on 'calling out' mirror the gargantuan body's fecund expansive, growing and regenerating nature. The bruises, cuts, broken bones and discarded skins that litter the gargantuan body's urge toward freedom weathers a whole other set of contradictions, however. The gargantuan body is

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[48]Herzel, Susannah. 'The Body is the Book' pp 101-122. Moore, *Woman and the* General Synod of the Church of England, 1988.

[48]Herzel, Susannah. 'The Body is the Book' pp 101-122. Moore, *Woma*ter, ed. *Man,Priesthood.* London: SPCK, 1978. An example of this belief can be traced in Herzel's following remark: 'It is woman's burden and her offering to be more fundamentally connected with time and its detailed processes than man. Waiting for something or someone and being aware of the hours as they pass has been a vocational discipline for women. She is an hourglass in her shape...Women's bodies have taught them discipline naturally as have their accustomed spheres of work: the garden and the kitchen...and each month in her life there is a heaviness, dragging her down to a slower pace and into a 'low key'...a woman can only wait'. p 106.

[49]Pope John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter, Mulieris, 1988 VII: The Church - The Bride of Christ" in Leonard, Bishop Graham, ed. *Man, Woman and the Priesthood.* Herefordshire: Gracewing Fowler Wright Books, 1989.

stunted because the gargantuan body cannot go on and on. Christ is born and the response is the institution: the large lady's feet stop at the altar and her head cannot fit out the front doors. Splitting heads and blood bruised heels sign this body's encounters with limitation. To be stunted in this context equates to saying 'some' not 'all' which is also a function of ordination's calling out: to ordain is to limit and order.

The binary character of 'ordination', its urge towards freedom and limitation simultaneously, reveals that frustration is inherent in its very fabric. 'Ordination' finds a metaphor in the Gaisha's foot. Bound, the bones rend and deform, but it is growth that ensures the deformation will seek new painful curvatures. To be sure a foot is there, held in a slipper. To be sure no foot at all is there, a tangle of bones and blood clots held in a silk tent. Ordination is infested with the frustration of the urges that constitute it. Furthermore, the frustration that informs 'ordination' is a symptom of belonging to a much deeper and complex expressed ritual of frustration: language. In other words, I am making the claim that *ordination is a manifestation of the very frustration of language itself.* To make available what I mean by this suggestion, I offer the following commentary.

3.6 Ordination as an Event that Belongs to the Realm of Language

Language is always an attempt at failure; such is the pained journey towards the sign. Edmond Jabès writes, 'Writing is not man's projection, but it traces his devotion to the void. It becomes a record of his negativity[50]'. Writing of Jabès writing, Derrida comments, 'Absence attempts to produce itself in the book and is lost in being pronounced; it knows itself as disappearing and lost, and to this extent it remains inaccessible and impenetrable. To gain access to it is to lose it; to see it is to hide it; to acknowledge it is to lie[51]'. The frustration that ordination maintains, the simultaneous urging toward freedom and limitation found a metaphor in the Gaisha's foot: a foot is there, a foot is not there. The tension generated from the simultaneous urgings toward freedom and limitation destabilises ordination as a 'fixed' phenomenon: in 'ordination' growth and death share a

[50]Jabès, Edmond. *The Book of Questions: Yael, Elya, Aely.* Connecticut: Weslayan University Press, 1983.

[51]Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Chapter 3: 'Edmund Jabès and the Question of the Book'. London: Routledge, 1978.

genetic space so that it remains profoundly 'unfixed' in the Derridian spirit that says: 'to gain access to it (language) is to lose it'. This claim finds its most available justification in the meaning of 'ordination'; 'ordination' always means some manifestation of 'to call out', recalls language's most basic attempts to trace the void; to move towards the sign and as such *ordination is manifestation of the very frustration of language itself.* For the reasons I have discussed, ordination is an event that belongs to the realm of language and not an ecclesiastical invention.

3.7 Woman's Bodily Status

What, then, does it mean to ordain a woman? The answer to this concern might find its origins in another question: can you 'call out' the already 'called out'? This inquiry would maintain a women's pro-ordination stance from the point of view that I think it is a necessary event in deconstructing institutional hierarchies; however, I here suggest that women cannot be ordained *really* because they are ordained *already.* In no way does this statement seek to devalue women clergy's experience or service; this inquiry honours the ecclesiastical ordination of such women and recognises that such women change and shape the political complexion of the church. However, in saying that 'ordination' which means in some form 'to call out' and furthermore naming ordination as an event that belongs to the realm of language in so far that it is itself a manifestation of language's frustrated journey towards the sign, I am suggesting that women specifically maintain a unique textual relationship because of their already ordained or 'called out' status. To initiate the meaning behind this claim I offer the following discussion.

Writing on women's bodies and the event of menstruation, Camille Paglia comments, 'every month it is woman's fate to face the abyss of time and being, the abyss which is herself'[52]. Paglia's comment beautifully illustrates woman's constant confrontation with natural procreative law. Women's bodies are called out by procreative law, and these appointments are non-negotiable. Women's bodies are houses of amazing self-sufficiency; these are the bodies deeply initiated into the violence of change (puberty, pregnancy, menopause); here are the interior spaces that swarm with

[52] Paglia. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson.* p 11.

spiralling rhythms and crackling signals: woman's body is a shore pounded by every rhythmic return. *Women's bodies are naturally ordained: they are called out by their self-sufficiency and their non-negotiable appointment with procreative law and they call out with every interior uterine lining released.*

If ordination is a manifestation of language's frustration to 'call out' or move towards the sign, then woman's naturally ordained status means she is inherently familiar with the frustration of language. Woman maintains a unique relationship with language as conditioned by her bodily situation. Therefore, when a woman reads, writes or interprets, when a woman 'calls out' in any way, she is confounding upon her already 'called out' (naturally ordained) status. This renders woman's basic reading, writing, and interpreting logic as excessive and might explain why so many males deem women's writing as 'unreadable' or 'impenetrable'.

Women's naturally ordained status conditions her relationship to language. This feature is the foundation for what I have called a 'woman centred hermenutical tradition' in which feminine logic maintains its own rules of reading, writing, and interpreting. The first feature I will confront within this tradition is the disbelief of women's proclamations (the definition of celebration). Disbelief of women's proclamation is so ingrained within the western tradition that it can be understood as a permanent feature of a woman centred hermenutical tradition. Disbelief of women's proclamations can be sensed in a multitude of historical experiences including: women not being allowed to vote, own land, receive a higher education, administer the sacraments, and the list goes on. These historical memories have a counterpart in our biblical tradition in which the feminine witnesses are continually disbelieved, most notably in Luke 24:8-12 when the women witnesses to the resurrection are disbelieved[53]. Disbelieving women's proclamations is a serious offense to half of the logic that applies to textuality (the feminine half). To disbelieve woman's proclamations or her 'callings out' is to invalidate woman's relationship to reading, writing and interpreting *and* her body because it is by her body that she maintains a non-negotiable relationship to textual events. For these reasons, disbelief of women's proclamations results in an obliteration of women's presence.

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[53]Luke 24:8-12 (RSV) reads, 'And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; but these words seemed to them an idle talk, and they did not believe them.

The woman centred hermenutical tradition's response to this repeated disbelief was to develop a textual sub-culture in which women read, write and interpret *anyway*: from beneath the obliterating forces, life finds a way. It is this space I wish to examine, seeking out a woman centred hermenutical tradition in its more subversive manifestations. 'Celebrating' meaning 'to proclaim' demands radical review in light of women's experience which maintains a history of disbelief of proclamation. It is within the subversive sub-culture, the response to being continually disbelieved, that 'celebrate' is re-membered.

4.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to re-state this chapter's claims. This thesis is a meditation on the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* I began by stating the hermenutical method I will engage to explore this question. In a sense this hermenutical method is a manifestation of the question itself and it poses articulations towards addressing the crisis inherent within the question. By engaging plural metaphors and not 'minding the difference' between creative-metaphorical language and concept-critical language I am enabled to break down phallocentric reading principles and necessarily deconstruct traditional ways of reading. Furthermore, my hermenutical method generates inter-text(s) that claim an autonomy which rigorously confronts the issues at hand. These two events, the breaking down of phallocentric reading traditions and inter-text(s) that claim an autonomy within the inquiry itself make a language of re-membering, a highly theological language, available to me.

By placing the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* in juxtaposition with Robert Detweiler's exploration of 'religious reading' and the community that participates in such an event, I examined the two guiding conditions that seal his model: the atmosphere of festival and the event of reading as a celebratory act for individuals and for groups. The result of exploring Detweiler's model laid the foundation for my suspicion that 'celebration' means something very different for women historically and presently. This research enabled me to make the claim that women cannot celebrate according to its current understanding and therefore 'celebration' needed to be radically reviewed.

To begin to approach the subject of re-membering what 'celebration' means I discussed the phenomenon of ordination. I concluded that ordination meaning in some manifestation 'to call out' is not an ecclesiastical convention, but an event that belongs to the realm of language in which ordination is an expression of the frustration of language's attempts 'to call out' or to move towards the sign. Women's bodies are naturally ordained. Because ordination is an event belonging to the realm of language, women's naturally ordained status ensures that they maintain a unique relationship to language as conditioned by their bodies. This naturally ordained status is the foundation of a woman centred hermenutical tradition. A crucial feature of this tradition is disbelief of women's proclamations. Disbelief obliterates women's textual and bodily status, but *women read, write and interpret anyway* thus creating a subversive textual sub-culture. It is within this space that we can trace the re-membering of what 'celebration' means.

In Chapter 2: 'Reading the Johannine Narrative' I begin the journey of tracing 'celebration' in some of its re-membered articulation(s).

Chapter 2: Reading the Johannine Narrative

1.1 Encountering the Woman Centred Hermenutical Tradition

I have stated that the most important concept in the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* is that of celebration. In the spirit of that importance, the goal of this inquiry is to trace the woman centred hermenutical tradition's re-membering of what 'celebration' means. In order to do this I bring my own hermenutical method to the Johannine narrative where I will 'read' various textual moments, engaging plural metaphors, confusing the distinction between concept-critical language and creative-metaphorical language, and entertain throughout various modes of discourse on several levels. By this method, moments of slippage will be revealed within the text allowing us access to the woman centred hermenutical tradition in some of its more subversive manifestations. The objective of this chapter's exercise is not to end up with 'celebration' in its re-membered form, but rather to trace this woman centred hermenutical tradition, to identify its features, and to confront this woman centred hermenutical tradition in action. The task of re-membering what 'celebration' means and encountering re-membered manifestations of celebration requires such a textual meditation. The subversive 'findings' of this exploration not only substantiate the claims I have made thus far regarding women, reading and writing they also contextually fuel the strength needed to pitch this inquiry into the space of actually encountering 'celebration' in some of its re-membered manifestations (Chapter 3).

1.2 Why Here: Disruption and Gender

Why expose this woman centred hermenutical tradition in the Johannine text? The New Testament is a powerful textual body within the western tradition. Its presence is awesome and the history that has collected on its edges is incredible. The phallocentric tradition has invested a great

deal of its energy into this fantastical text that reeks of the western canon. In a seriously playful sense, how could I resist engaging my creative (and profoundly 'unacademic' according to traditional phallocentric standards) hermenutical method within this text's pages? However, I also entertain two other guiding reasons for choosing to trace a woman centred hermenutical tradition within the fourth gospel: it provokes disruption and it is a text infected with issues regarding reading and writing in a *gendered* sense.

Can scripture be 'fiction' and can fiction be 'scripture'? Such a question indicates the reasons why I have chosen the fourth gospel as a place to explore the features of a woman centred hermenutical tradition. Scripture and interpretation might maintain the most famous relationship in the west's history of textuality. To interpret is always to disrupt narrative: *reading is never an innocent act*[54]. Every interpretation, be it reading, painting, sculpture, or stain glassed windows, of a biblical event is a (necessary) disruption of the narrative. In the case of a work of art, the art piece creates a space from which a particular articulation comes forth. This articulation, a completed painting or just the gesture of a hand in a painting, rends the biblical text so that a space for its presence can be marked out. In this sense the biblical text is fragmented by an inter-text: the articulation posited by the work of art. In addition to this type of textual disrupture, and to continue with the example of a work of art, a painting establishes the space where conceptual image meets language (accordingly, the text is disrupted by the artist's 'reading' of it). As one image is produced by an artist, for every viewing of that image 'ten thousand' more images are provoked by the viewer. The initial disruption of the text is projected without end.

At the end of this chapter I will focus on Corregio's painting, *St. Mary Magdalen.* By focusing on this disruption of the narrative, I am paying attention to details that only Corregio's interpretation could have framed in *that way.* These are details drawn out of the text and given space in which they might 'speak' and allow function as an inter-text to the biblical narrative. Therefore, to return to the question: can scripture be 'fiction' and can fiction be 'scripture', I make the following claim: every act of interpretation is a disruption of the text. Furthermore this is a necessary and unavoidable event that saturates human experience (disruptions of texts being projected endlessly).

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[54] Paul Ricoeur especially develops this concept.

These disruptions, though not authoritative, are undoubtedly inter-texts and as such are also powerful bodies. Therefore, scripture can be read as fiction and fiction can be read as scripture because the presence of inter-texts permanently destabalises, by its inherent associations with disrupture, any one text's claim to a dominant posture.

Because the biblical text maintains so many relationships with inter-texts, by choosing to haunt the fourth gospel with my concerns and claims I am staying true to the spirit of my own hermenutical method which seeks to maintain various modes of discourse on several levels: in other words, the inter-texts provided by the paintings I will 'read' (and further disrupt) ensure that there will be no shortage of plural metaphors on my part. This enables my tasks (of breaking down phallocentric reading traditions and of directly confronting the crisis of women as readers and writers as celebrants as my own inter-text(s) claim an autonomy within the larger inquiry) to remain an important focus as I seek to re-member what 'celebration' means and as I encounter some re-membered manifestations of celebration. Most importantly, and as this discussion unfolds it will become more recognisable, it is ultimately the disruptions provided by the inter-texts of paintings that land me in the actual space of the crisis re-membering what 'celebration' means.

The second reason that the fourth gospel proved to be an apt place in which I might posit the claims I have made thus far regarding women, reading and writing explore the features of these claims, is because it is my opinion that the Johannine text is a text that is infected with issues of reading and writing in a *gendered sense*. This finds its fullest expression when, in the event of Jesus' birth, he is not born of a woman but is the *word who becomes flesh* and is *'the only son from the father*[55]'. This body, a word spelled, comes to us infected with textual issues. That he comes to us specifically 'from the father' introduces an irreducible quality of gender into the narrative. Not only is he a body infected with textual issues, his body's introduction is a simultaneous statement regarding gender. To be born 'of the father' is to be born, not of a fleshy, feminine birth canal, but of ether sky-cult particles that provoke materialisation[56]. The claim that the absence of the maternal

[55]John 1:14 (RSV)

[56]Paglia, Camille. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. Sky-cult is a term Paglia coined in describing western cultures 'swerve' from femaleness. She writes, 'Both Apollonian and Judeo-Christian traditions are transcendental. That is, they seek to surmount or transcend nature...The Old Testament asserts that a father god made nature and that differentiation into objects and gender was after the fact of his maleness. Judeo-Christianity, like the Greek worship of

body is a comment on women as readers and writers will subsequently substantiate as this inquiry unfolds.

In addition to the birth of Jesus, examining other specific moments in the fourth gospel where women's bodies *are* present, the Johannine narrative reveals more articulations regarding reading, writing and gender. The various narratives I have chosen to read reflect this gendered sense within the fourth gospel. Those narrative moments include: John 20:1-18, the tomb scene where Mary Magdalen encounters the risen Christ, and inquiry into the birth of Christ or the absence of the maternal body (John 1:12-14, John 2:1-4, John 19:25-30), Jesus at Jacob's well (John 4:1-35 in addition to Old Testament well/betrothal narratives Genesis 24:11-15, Genesis 29, Exodus 2:15-21), Jesus writing before the woman taken in adultery (John 8: 1-11), and inquiry into Jesus and violence (John 21:25), and finally a discussion regarding the tradition of Mary Magdalen as reader (John 20:17-18, John 20:24-25, and a reference to Luke 24:8-12).

2.1 Reviewing, Reading and Re-membering John 20:1-18

What follows is a critical reading of John 20:1-18. We surface in the Johannine text at this site, because as far as John is a text about reading and writing in a gendered sense, this is the bloody moon that all other Johannine narratives are traced back to by blood threads. No matter the chronological placement of the particular narratives I will read, their type-set is stamped with the coded memory of John 20:1-18. *Noli me tangere*[57] is a site of continual return; it represents a refusal that contains all memories of disbelieved proclamations. John 20:17 marks the first step taken on the journey to trace a woman centred hermenutical tradition.

Traditional readings of John 20:1-18 suggest the popular view that this narrative is a configuration of various texts brought together. This reading posture has resulted in various theological articulations, but often at the expense of the rich complexity of the text. While my own

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Olympian gods, is sky-cult' p 8. 'From the beginning of time, woman seemed an uncanny being. Man honoured but feared her. She was the black maw that had spat him forth and would devour him anew'. p 9. Sky-cult was the most sophisticated step in a defence against this nature.

[57]John 20:17

reading will favour the position that *John 20:1-18 is indeed a configuration of textual strands*, I will attempt to read this narrative in an untraditional way. Instead of reading out the troublesome areas traditionally credited as a by-product of more than one text conjoining, I will target those exact textual moments in order to read the implications of this narrative. Between the lines of two texts in their snugly knit moments and their moments of ballooning uncertainty regarding clarity, some of the woman centred hermenutical tradition's subversive articulations can be heard.

The events contained in verses 1-10 begins with, 'Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalen came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb' (v.1). Before the sun has risen she makes the discovery that the stone has been moved and the tomb is empty. Mary then runs to Simon Peter and the other disciple - 'the one whom Jesus loved' - and tells them of her discovery. She is reported to have said: 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him'. The two men run to the tomb, and the 'other disciple' outruns Peter, reaches the tomb first, stoops down to look in, and sees the cloths in which the body has been wrapped, but does not go in. Peter, however, enters, sees the wrappings and the sudarium, and is then followed by 'the other disciple', who in the words of John, 'saw and believed'. The disciples return to their homes, but Mary stays. Verse 11 begins with Mary weeping outside of the tomb of Jesus. She stoops down to look in the tomb and sees two angels in white sitting at either end of the place where Jesus' body has lain. They ask her why she weeps to which she responds: 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him' (v. 13). She does not see the grave clothes credited to the vision of Peter and the 'disciple whom Jesus loved'. The narrator moves from Mary's response in verse 13 to the abrupt, 'Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus' (v. 14). Jesus questions her, 'Woman why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?' The text tells us that Mary thinks that this man is the gardener to whom she responds, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away' (v. 15). Jesus says her name upon which Mary turns around and says in Hebrew, 'Rabboni!', meaning 'teacher'. Jesus then says, 'Do not hold me, for I have not ascended to the Father, but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God' (v. 18). Verse 18 concludes with Mary going to the disciples and saying, 'I have seen the Lord' and telling them his message.

2.2 Five Crucial Moments

My thesis is a meditation on the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?* 'Celebration' is the most important concept of this question and attempting to locate 'celebration' in its re-membered context, I am searching through what I have called a woman centred hermenutical tradition in some of its more subversive surfacings. In tracing this tradition by engaging my own hermenutical method, my claim that this woman centred hermenutical tradition exists becomes substantiated. In reading moments of the Johannine narrative, my goal is to explore the features of this woman centred hermenutical tradition. In John 20:1-18 I have identified five crucial moments that begin to reveal this tradition's personality.

2.3 Excess

The first crucial moment I wish to discuss is sensed as the text opens, bearing ambiguous beginnings with verse 1. In verse 2, we encounter Mary Magdalen's first verbal encounter with the two disciples: 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and *we* do not know where they have laid him' (my italics). This statement is in awkward juxtaposition to verse 1 which reads, 'Mary Magdalen came to the tomb early...'. Whereas the narrator sets up the post-crucifixion narrative in the singular, after verse 2 we no longer know if Mary went to the tomb alone. The 'we' in verse 2 is heightened in mystery because it is the only reference to plurality in connection with the chief character of Mary Magdalen. Such a textual in-discrepancy would seem to point to the raised edges of two texts conjoining. Two texts are being woven together by an editor in which one strand is a more sympathetic reading of Mary Magdalen (and for this reason it is understood as the older of the narrative strands) and one strand seeks to invalidate such a reading by subjecting her character to textual confusion. The editing process then is a systematic act of violence towards the character of Mary Magdalen and such an editing actually invokes a very real physicality within the text so that the text itself is involved with committing physical acts of violation. This is an unusual violence, however. It only half delivers in its blood spill. Mary's identity is blurred by competing

information and this intended confusion destabilises Mary Magdalen as our first credible witness to the resurrected Christ. This is an example of real textual violence to the character of Mary Magdalen; however it is an awkward violence because it does not expose what it seeks to expose: woman as excessive and therefore unreliable. Thus, a type of 'confounding' or proliferation occurs. That these two verses are indeed in juxtaposition is the first point to consider.

According to this editing process, what is to be made of this ambiguity regarding the singularity or plurality of Mary Magdalen? As I have said, verse 2 casts Mary Magdalen in a role of possible plurality thus rendering her as an excessive character - she is more than she possibly appears to be. The suggestions by the placement of verse one next to the discrepant verse 2 invalidates Mary as a confident leader who will guide us to our first sighting of the risen Lord. One imagines a proliferation of Mary Magdalen images all walking in different directions, all differing from their twin image as the light strikes different points on the body. Which to follow regarding the sheer number to choose from, which to follow in their sheer difference - the smiling one, the one without a mouth at all? Or maybe her imposed ambiguous plurality takes the form of Mary Magdalen and guests. This could be a horrific scenario to imagine, and that 'they' are not named and are never mentioned again invests in her guest's possible ghostly features - ashen inaccessible or meated with white packed eyes, roving. The text or the event that occurs between two texts as they conjoin, is unoriginal in naming her as 'excessive'. *She was excessive before the editor got there.* In one pedantic sense she is excessive because she *is* more than she appears to be: Mary Magdalen is a composite character of several feminine personalities within the biblical text (see Luke 7, Matthew 26, Mark 14, and John 8, 11, 11:2, 12)[58]. In another sense she was excessive before the editor got to her because she is a woman. She is already 'called out' by her body; by her self-sufficiency she is already excessive and ordained and her excessive bodily situation is confounded every time she 'calls out' in any way. Perhaps the editor's goal was to render her as excessive and therefore unfit as our leader: she will lead us to the first sighting of the risen Lord, but remember she can't be trusted too much (which one to trust?), but as I have established - she was already excessive.

So, what then can we make of the raised edge of two texts conjoining with competing

[58]Haskins, Susan. *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*. London: Athalone Press, 1993.

information? Perhaps the editor then only confounds the situation as it exists. If this is so, he 'calls out' the already 'called out'. His 'calling out' is most likely a negative comment on women as leaders/readers thus the editor bypasses an inherent logic of difference between women and men as readers and writers. What is crucial in this moment is that, from the start, *Mary Magdalen's presence is associated with excessiveness*. This association does not take into account woman's inherent relationship with her body that renders her excessive in what might be a positive sense. Therefore, what I consider the first crucial moment that shapes this narrative and draws out features of a woman centred hermenutical tradition which is represented by the figure of Mary Magdalen, is the acknowledgement that the woman centred hermenutic I am tracing is fundamentally confused by underdeveloped or suppressed understandings of woman's relationship to excess.

2.4 The Presence of the Unnamed: The Further Presencing of Excess

The second crucial moment which reveals the personality of a woman centred hermenutical tradition is found in the rich tension between the characters who occupy verses 1-10. This tension is maintained throughout the whole narrative as it develops its multi-dimensional features. The presence of the unnamed disciple is a counter-embodiment to both the characters of Peter and Mary Magdalen. Though this disciple is in relationship to both Peter and Mary Magdalen, his purpose is to further presence the 'excess' that emerged in verses 1 and 2. In this way, excess is further misunderstood or confused as it relates to women: the farther one goes into this text, the further one gets away from what excess means regarding woman and her natural bodily ordained status and how this status conditions her textual relationships. In this way the presence of the unnamed disciple shadows the figure of Mary Magdalen, seeking by its dark ability to conceal, to make her way of reading/writing, or the woman centred hermenutic I am tracing, unavailable.

The unnamed disciple is unnamed only in the sense that we do not know an informal, birthright name. The text actively names him twice, first in verse 2 when this individual is described as 'the one whom Jesus loved' and later in verse 8 when he alone is noted as the one who, 'saw and believed'. The presence of the unnamed disciple is heavy with personality. His unnamed status reeks of an unusual invisibility: he/she would seem not to be there because he/she is never formally

introduced by name, he/she does not speak and yet from the unseen breath of this curious person all kinds of details seem to emerge. And these emerging details are also not named formally by the text, but slinking around them, I am aware of a bowel-heavy laughter, distinct smells, organic structures crackling and jiggling - to be sure a presence is here and it is a crucial presence.

Such a rite of naming by description posits this character in direct tension beginning with the character of Peter. This disciple outruns Peter and is the first of the two to see the discarded cloths. It would seem that the 'other disciple' exceeds Peter in every action Peter participates in verses 1-10 with the curious exception of one activity - Peter's entrance into the tomb. Such a system of ranking the two disciples by this list of ordered activities however, does not undo the emphasis that it is the 'other disciple' who is awarded as the believing disciple. This tension could be in connection with the beach scene in John 21:1-15 where Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him; that Jesus would even have to ask Peter reflects back to this narrative that so freely acknowledges the unnamed disciple at the expense of Peter's textual presence. The unnamed presence here is embellished in a way that Peter is not. In this sense, the presence of the unnamed disciple engenders his/her counterpart, Peter, with a bruise: *there is someone always ahead of you, there is someone who sees and believes more than you, there is someone who is named only 'beloved'.* This other disciple *exceeds* Peter. 'Exceed' finds its root in 'excess'. Though what this disciple brings to the text regarding his/her relationship to Peter does not specifically represent 'excess' to the character of Mary Magdalen, Mary Magdalen is not only indicted by association, in her relationship to the unnamed disciple, excess finds deeper manifestations.

Mary Magdalen and the unnamed disciple maintain a relationship and this relationship is infected with the unnamed disciple's constant re-memory of Mary Magdalen's excess: this excess is between them, occupying all the space between their bodies. To begin this discussion we must resurface in verse 16. In verse 16, Jesus says 'Mary' upon which Mary Magdalen turns around and says in Hebrew, 'Rabboni!', meaning 'teacher'. Prior to verse 16 Mary does not know the identity of Jesus, it is only upon him saying her name that recognition in the context of resurrection occurs. It is hearing one's name from the lips of the beloved that induces this new context. The suggestion here is one of the intimate and it is wholly intended. This intimate association with this textual moment takes a unique turn, however. Discussing the event of naming refers us back to the Genesis narrative

and what naming means within this tradition: to name is to have power over. When Jesus says Mary's name he exercises a sense of erotic control that includes recognition.. This is confounded by the spatial dimensions in which the naming occurs: Mary is posited between two sets of strangers who both ask her a series of questions at the site of a grave with its lurking shadows of death who are spatially in front of her and behind her. The insinuation of this physical surrounding is one of rape[59]. The grave/tomb is also the reflection of the pink available womb. In other words, naming happens in a compromising space that reeks of fear and sexual violation. The presence of the unnamed disciple resonates in this passage. Firstly, the unnamed status of the disciple recalls the unnamed 'we' in verse 2. Secondly, the unnamed disciple who is presented to us as 'special' is reminiscent of Jesus who is also unnamed and in the sense that Mary does not recognise him and does not address him as named until verse 16.

In the spirit of the shadow that keeps excess close to Mary Magdalen, I recall the ambiguous 'we' in verse 2. The *unnamed* presence represents excessiveness in that he/she recalls the *unnamed* 'we' - the proliferation that accompanies Mary Magdalen. The placement of the 'we' in verse 2 in conjunction with verse 1 which claims her singularity, is woman's excess presented as misunderstood and as a counter move to invalidate woman's natural relationship to excess and thus textual issues. The suggestion in the unnamed status of the disciple is that he/she is a member of the 'ghostly' party that accompanies Mary Magdalen as she travails through this narrative. In this sense the unnamed disciple represents excess as a real presence, giving the excess in verses 1 and 2 a more pronounced presence.

The unnamed disciple also recalls the unnamed/unrecognised Jesus and thus the unnamed disciples re-memory directly surfaces at the moment before and after naming occurs. Before naming there is the dangerously charged space where Mary is questioned by two sets of strangers at the site of a grave. When naming occurs, memory is brought forth. However, this naming is the excise of erotic control. The lips of the beloved bring forth (by pronouncing her name) recognition, but this recognition does not remove her from the brutal plane of a sexually dangerous place. Indeed, once

[59]Mieke Bal explores the spatial implications of Mary Magdalen at the tomb in detail in her text *Reading 'Rembrandt': Beyond the Word-Image Opposition; the Northrop Frye Lectures in Literary Theory.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

recognition occurs the sexual volatile aura does not dissolve, on the contrary, it becomes a definitive statement. Mary stands at the site of the tomb, which also mirrors the womb. The tomb is the sign of death, it is an end-sign. Textually, the tomb as the end -sign represents the end of narrative: this is where the story supposedly ends. Mary Magdalen's bodily presence at this site of the text, the presumable end of the text, is *very* significant in revealing an important feature of the woman centred hermenutic which she here represents. Presumably the story ends at *the end*; however, her presence at the end as signed by the tomb is a sign that the story continues (It is Mary that is the only constant character throughout this narrative). Her presence at 'the end' as signed by the tomb is the first footprint that begins the journey to the 'end of the story that cannot be told[60]. The tomb, which here means the 'end', which really marks the beginning of woman's narrative journey, also reflects the womb. The womb, in this context, is a sign of woman's inescapable bodily relationship to textuality: it is by her body, which is excessive and ordained, that she reads/writes and participates in a woman centred hermenutical tradition. However, the unnamed disciple by surfacing before and after verse 16 where naming occurs, is a reminder that womb in this context is sexually dangerous or unable in some way. Woman as excessive (and when women engage in any activity of 'calling out' - reading or writing she is confounding on her already 'called out') here begins to mean, as dictated by the text, that once sexuality is introduced to the biblical text, it implies an element of destruction[61]. This is the penultimate example of misunderstanding woman's relationship to textuality by her excess. It is the old prescription that when it comes to women being in excess (which is actually a valuable characteristic of her person and defines her unique relationship to texts), particularly women reading and writing, become desecrators or whores or rather become destroyed or raped). Women act out negatively or are acted upon negatively.

The unnamed disciple is a shadow figure that carries the original damage of 'excess' as misunderstood and presented as a negative aspect when related to women to a new peak. It also reveals that inherent within the Johannine prescription of excesses, as it applies to woman, excess is

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[60]The journey to the 'end of the story that cannot be told' is a concept I will subsequently explore in more detail.

[61]Cheryl Exum cites Old Testament examples of this in *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 163*. England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993. Ch.6: 'Raped by the Pen'. pp 170-201.

rendered sexually unstable. This is clearly damaging to the nature of the woman centred hermenutical tradition in which women's bodies condition a tradition of reading and writing that represents a profound logic that belongs to the sphere of textuality. The womb as a sexual organ destabilised, shuts down women's ability to read by her natural bodily and textual status.

2.5 The Appropriate and the Inappropriate as the scene shifts

Between verse 10 ('The the disciples went back to their homes') and verse 11 ('But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb...') a change in tension occurs. In verses 11-18 a difference in tone is felt in various ways, most notably in the cast of characters. The third crucial moment that illustrates the personality of the woman centred hermenutical tradition I am tracing, is found in this axis: as the scene shifts, Mary remains the constant. Her 'constancy' is set off by the odd behaviour of Peter and the 'other disciple' in verses 8 and 9, when in verse 8 the 'other disciple' is said to see and believe. Verse 9 offers a counter-response to verse 8 however, when it says that the disciples, 'as yet' did not know the scripture that explained Jesus must rise from the dead. What the 'other disciple' believed in verse 8 is called into question, if not invalidated by verse 9. Indeed, this possible site of two texts conjoining generates subversive speaking details. This suggests a lack of clarity regarding the state of the disciples' belief systems which finds an almost comical edge when we go on to review the next action of the disciples: to go home. Mary Magdalen weeps due to grief and confusion regarding the death of her friend and the possible grave robbing his remains have been subject to. The disciples' actions of just 'going home' read against Mary Magdalen's textual posture and exposes the inappropriate nature of their behaviour. It is the figure of Mary who behaves in a way that we expect and understand. But I would here suggest that her 'constancy' is multi-dimensional. Appealing to our own ideas of appropriate responses in the face of this confusion and possible violation, her actions meet our expectations. However, it is appropriate because her refusal to abandon the narrative at its 'end' as signed by the tomb, is a characteristic of the woman centred hermenutical tradition which she represents. This feature suggests a gruelling endurance: to stay until the end, when the end is 'undefinable' as signed by the absence of the body, the body that *should* be there. This woman centred hermenutic bears an unrelenting commitment to narrative. It

challenges supposed 'endings', disrupting textual closure. It is a stance that *exceeds* structures of defined boundaries. This posture of commitment, despite whatever violences might accompany it, is woman's natural response: her body which is marked out by its self-sufficiency and excessiveness ordains woman; therefore, whenever woman calls out in any way she is behaving in excess, confounding her already 'called out' nature. Woman's relationship with excess makes it not only possible, but natural, to exceed imposed boundaries; woman can not only stand at the site of the presumable end of narrative, she can go past that boundary. This textual posture is a natural response. Mary behaves the way we hope all good friends would behave, but she reads this way because of the hermenutical tradition which she represents where her relationship to excess, made possible by her ordained status, provokes her to read past normal boundaries. It is in this way that 'telling the story that cannot be told' and/or 'journeying to the end of the story that cannot be told' is within woman's capacity. 'Telling the story that cannot be told/ journeying to the end of the story that cannot be told' is the way I will express the narrative that exists past imposed boundaries. It is this narrative realm where 'celebration' can be re-membered and it is in this realm that we can encounter re-membered manifestations of celebration. This is a story that can and must be told as stressed by a language of re-membering in a post-Holocaust era. To coin these narratives as 'the story(s) that cannot be told' is to employ language to express the survival that colours the teller who has weathered the journey: it expresses that one has been somewhere incredible (in positive and/or negative senses). It also acknowledges that language will never adequately express the experience of the journey, but it seeks out language to attempt to speak it *anyway*; it is, despite the frustration, dedicated to testimony. These narratives are invaluable to theology in which a language of re-membering is crucial to a post-Holocaust society.

2.6 Difference in Vision

With verse 11 the tension and scene shifts. Most obviously this is seen in the change in characters; however, this is not the only feature that pitches the scene into a new and different context. In verse 12 when Mary looks in the tomb, she does not see discarded cloths, but angels. The fourth crucial moment that draws out a feature of the woman centred hermenutical tradition is

represented by the difference in visions between the two disciples and Mary Magdalen. Exploring the gap between the edges of two very different texts reaching towards the same event, that of the resurrection, we are immediately aware of the different agendas each of these textual strands represent and the episodes of different visions truly reveals that two very different stories are happening here. However, this is not just a sign of two different narrative strands co-mingling it is also the pen-ultimate expression of difference between two very different hermenutical traditions. Mary sees angels and this vision represents the claim of the woman centred hermenutical tradition I am tracing. The two disciples see discarded cloths and this vision represents the dominant, western hermenutical tradition. Mary's vision, the claim that represents the woman centred hermenutical tradition, is answered by the text. Whereas the disciples go home and their textual encounter ends, Mary's response to begin her narrative journey 'towards the end of the story which cannot be told' is met with unusual cruelty.

The text answers this feature of the woman centred hermeneutic initially with an attempt to isolate and further invalidate it. Beginning with the encounter between Mary Magdalen and the angels, the text specifically notes that the angels are 'in white' (v. 12). The 'whiteness' of the angels is a significant detail. As a detail, it acts to cast them into their angelic roles - white implying purity and therefore a heavenly posture. However, this 'whiteness' is a subversive feature that exposes their eerie dispositions. Indeed, these angels are nothing like their synoptic counterparts of the post-crucifixion narrative. They do not offer hope and/or comfort, nor do they bear a message regarding Jesus. They interrogate Mary Magdalen instead. They are strangers to her, and furthermore, they make no attempt to be known by their characteristics. Her presence at the presumable end of the story (the disciples go home...), the tomb, makes her commitment to 'journey to the end of the story that cannot be told'. The start of this journey is met with angels; however, they bring a heavy emotional violence as a response to woman's impending journey. This narrative journey is not easy; one must weather the violence of 'life outside the boundaries'.

Because the tomb is a sign of the end of the text and also the marker for the beginning of the journey for the woman centred hermenutical tradition, what is seen in it is valuable information regarding the two hermenutical traditions present within this narrative. The disciples see discarded cloths: the corpse wrapping. These cloths are a sign of the absent body. Jesus, as 'the word made

flesh' in the Johannine narrative, is now the absent text. There is literally nothing to read, or rather, they do not have the imagination to read the cloths, the sign of the absent text. Mary, however, sees bodies, albeit angelic bodies. Whereas the body as text is absent for the other disciples, thus they have nothing to read, she has more than enough reading material before her. For Mary Magdalen there is no ending to the story in sight. The difference in vision in these textual moments further confounds the woman centred hermenutical feature of a commitment to textuality that disputes textual closure. Woman as reader and writer does not see absent bodies, because of her unique relationship to textuality, her excess enables her to see past cloths and into supernatural bodies. Her vocabulary extends past the body as held in the tension of flesh and she can see other types of bodies. In what I hope is now more clear as I am 'walking through' this narrative, I say again, women inherently maintain a different relationship with language because of their bodies.

2.7 The Meaning of Recognition

The events that constitute the fifth crucial feature revolves around issues of recognition: when Mary Magdalen encounters Jesus before she recognises him and after recognition occurs. When Mary Magdalen looks into the tomb, or the sign of 'the end of the story' she sees angelic bodies. I have suggested that this ability, this enduring stamina, is a result of her ordained, excessive nature and her relationship to textuality *because she is a woman.* Mary Magdalen's presence at the tomb bears witness to her commitment to narrative which is also a natural response to it. So, what happens next? We know what happens next. It is the moment when the resurrected Jesus makes his incredible mark on the text. Mary's encounter with Jesus, before and after she recognises him, comments on two features concerning the woman centred hermenutical tradition. As Mary comes to recognise Jesus, the heavy emotional violence that the angels greet the beginning of Mary's journey 'towards the end of the story which can't be told', is completed as it finds its fullest expression when she is named by Jesus and a raw sexuality is released. After Mary has recognised Jesus, he charges her: *'Noli me tangere*[62]*'. Noli me tangere*: 'do not touch me', becomes a type of

[52] John 20: 17

negative invocation regarding women's proclamations. To substantiate these features, I offer the following commentary.

The Johannine narrative indeed comments on woman's relationship to her body; however, as we have felt in other shadows within this text: when Mary is questioned by the angelic strangers, women's bodies have been devalued in instances of destabilising feminine sexuality. This negative de-stabilising force makes another appearance. After Mary Magdalen answers these strangers' questions, she turns and faces the unrecognised Jesus, another stranger who will also question her. We must again consider the metaphysical spacial dimensions of such a scene: because they do not serve usual angelic functions the angels seem to serve only as a backdrop to Mary's first sighting of Jesus, as yet unrecognised. Jesus asks strikingly similar questions. The resonance that exists between the two sets of questions and the fact she is spatially in-between strangers, posits Mary in a highly charged space. This space is - at its least - intimidating and confusing. The unrecognised Jesus nevers offers any gesture acknowledging the angels. This textual lack serves as a detail to further reveal the isolation finds herself quickly becoming seeped in. In verse 16 Jesus says her name, 'Mary', to which she replies, 'Rabboni!'. It is not until Jesus names her that recognition occurs. As discussed earlier in this inquiry, this is no small notation to the text. This type of recognition is startling; not only is memory renewed, but memory is brought forth into a whole new context - the context of resurrection. From the lips of the beloved this newly called context settles into the narrative and this is an erotic moment. Consider the important detail that this recognition is introduced by an act of speech, consider the mouth from which he calls forth. The mouth kisses, lips retouching themselves and the other; mouths bite, rending the other and preserving the self; mouths refuse, pursed and thin - bloodless they can screech silence; mouths offer, a strange gift at their best and a salvic drowning at their worse; mouths remember, they mark out the speaking self; mouths have lips and throughout the realm of texts, notably the text of Revelation, lips refer to woman's genitalia[63]. When Jesus pronounces Mary's name out of the realm of the unrecognisable he sharply brings knowing into a vague and threatening space. If this space was dangerous before, Mary being sandwiched at the site of a tomb/womb by male strangers, the danger may have been a

[63]Pippin, Tina 'Eros and the End: Reading for Gender in the Apocalypse of John'. Semia: Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts. 59. 1992. pp 193-210.

by-product of the many present unknown features of the scene. When recognition occurs as Jesus exercises a sense of erotic control, the threatening 'unknown' elements do not dissolve. The light (in other words what is now known) merely reveals the dangerous features better. The bodies are seen *more* - the text demands to be read. Somewhat carnivorously it invokes raw sexuality. At the point where woman will go past the normal boundaries of the text as signed by her commitment to the tomb (whereas the disciples go home...), the text responds by exposing her textual posture to a raw sexual edge. For women, reading and writing is physically engaging; indeed, it is women's physical bodily status that conditions her relationships to texts. I would suggest that the raw sexuality unleashed by the biblical text in this instance is an acknowledgement of this phenomenon. The question becomes: is this a positive or negative acknowledgement? I maintain the opinion that it is a negative acknowledgement because of the implied sexual intimidation posed by no less than three important characters. Woman reads *anyway*: the physicality is encountered as woman steps past scenes of intimidation on her journey that begins after imposed narrative boundaries and towards ' the end of the story that cannot be told'. This woman centred hermenutical tradition's textual commitment can go farther than a purely ether/intellectual, non-bodily reading position championed by phallocentric traditional reading practices because of her body. Woman's body monthly dismembers and re-members. Her nature is that of continual re-constitution physically felt in her fertile years and remembered genetically and spiritually long after. The scars of dismemberment and re-membering become a map-like grid that are also the makings of an alphabet. This alphabet is a sign of the woman centred hermenutical tradition's commitment to testimony; this alphabet is an anthology of scars which testify to the violence of the journey (here represented by the angel's and Jesus' replies); this alphabet forms the letters that will make testimony pronounceable without the naive belief that language can ever adequately tell the tale of the person who has gone past boundaries; this alphabet records the journey in all of its curvatures, slopes, and hollows: *this alphabet is a history*. Other hermenutical traditions which maintain relationships to language that are divorced from the body forfeit a very important kind of historical memory. Therefore, an important feature of the woman centred hermeneutic is that because of its acknowledgement of the actual body, it engages history. This illustrates that the woman centred hermenutical tradition maintains a relevant and critical point of view.

Woman's textual posture is conditioned by her bodily - or naturally ordained - status. Earlier in this inquiry I have discussed a powerful feature of the woman centred hermenutical tradition: disbelief of proclamation (though woman reads, writes and interprets *anyway*). Verse 17 reads, '..Do not touch me...'. The text never reveals if Mary Magdalen makes a physical gesture towards Jesus to prompt such a statement; however, the narrative ultimately bars Mary Magdalen from touching with her body. In other words, 'touching' here represents disruption and it is disruption which makes reading, writing and interpretation possible. Mary Magdalen is refused the encounter that would enable interpretation. This refusal's implications cannot be over looked: Jesus is not only saying 'do not interpret' he is making a comment about woman's textual relationships. Woman maintains a non-negotiable relationship with texts as conditioned by her body. Therefore, '...Do not touch me...' is a statement about that body which makes reading, writing and interpreting possible for woman. '...Do not touch me...I have not yet ascended to my father' is an admission of disdain for woman's way of reading, writing and interpreting: it is an obliteration of woman because woman cannot read outside of her body. No mistake about it, he is on his way to the sky-cult realm which birthed him where language is ether-like, intellectual and severed from the body completely. In so far that *Noli me tangere* is the refusal of her ability to read, write or interpret, in other words, to proclaim, it becomes the sign that her proclamations will not be believed and also the memory of her disbelieved proclamations. *Noli me tangere* is an invocation that projects the feature of disbelief of women's proclamations within the Johannine narrative as it also refers to historical memories in which women's proclamations have not been believed (as sensed in a multitude of experiences with examples including women being disallowed to vote to biblical narrative such as Luke 24:8-12). John 20:1-18 concludes: 'Mary Magdalen went and said to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her' (verse 18). I here introduce doubting Thomas who is invited by Jesus to finger his wound (John 20:24-27). Mary Magdalen proclaims, as she is charged to do, and proclamation is always a result of reading, but 'Do not touch me' is the release of a type of strange guarantee: you will not be believed. Doubting Thomas would not have believed Mary, therefore her testimony becomes the ground for him to express his disbelief. By disbelieving her proclamation he is invited to touch/interpret. A curious event: woman is refused to touch/interpret; however, a male body is invited to probe the wounds of Christ. Male bodies can

touch/interpret other male bodies and, in the case of doubting Thomas and Jesus, it was the disbelief of a woman's proclamation that became the ground for inviting this touching/interpreting.

2.8 John 20:1-18: Conclusion

I began this essay with the notation that I would read this narrative in terms of the energy generated from the unruly collision of two different narrative strands. To return to the notion of two textual strands, one sympathetic to the figure of Mary Magdalen and one that writes against that strand, a very real physicality of the text is made available to the reader. This physicality mirrors the physicality demanded within the text as seen by the sexual dimension that is invoked. In the text of John 20:1-18, features within the woman centred hermeneutical tradition are exposed. Mary Magdalen is this tradition's representative and the crucial events I have concentrated on within this narrative begin to reveal this woman centred hermeneutics' identity. In conclusion, I offer this summary of the characteristics that have emerged as a result of my reading.

Mary Magdalen's possible plurality is the first event I explored. The text actively re-defines excess as negative thus concealing how excess truly exists in relationship between woman and her body (2.3).

As this re-defined notion of excess picks up speed with the unfolding of the narrative, excess points to woman's sexual instability which further conceals her true textual posture (2.4).

This woman centred hermeneutical tradition which values excess as a positive, and in fact it is by this excess that women read, write and interpret (or call out in any way), is suppressed by the Johannine narrative; however, the raised edges inherent within the text allow us to reprieve excess as it exists in its positive manifestations regarding women and textuality. Furthermore, this women centred hermeneutical tradition begins to reveal a commitment and a natural response to narrative. Because of women's natural excessive status (bodily and therefore textually) she does not abandon narrative at the presumed 'end' of the story. In this sense her reading tradition disputes the closure of texts and seeks to 'tell the story that cannot be told' (2.5).

The difference in visions between Mary Magdalen and the two disciples is a further testimony to this woman centred hermenutical tradition of remaining committed to narrative, past the point of imposed boundaries. This is represented by Mary's vision of bodies, in light of the absent body observed by her counterparts, and is a sign of reading past boundaries in the spirit of 'telling the story which cannot be told'. This commitment and the journey it provokes is one in which certain violences must be weathered (2.6).

Finally, this woman centred hermenutical tradition responsibly and continually confronts history as a result of the body's presence. This woman centred hermenutical tradition is dependent on excess as it is scandalised by gross misappropriations of what I mean in relation to woman. This hermenutical tradition houses the natural response to journey towards the 'end of the story which cannot be told' and is a type of reading/writing which is not believed. *Noli me tangere* is the sign that woman's proclamations will be disbelieved as it is the memory of her disbelieved proclamations. *Noli me tangere* projects its invocation in the fourth gospel and it refers to a multitude of historical experiences in which women's proclamations have not been believed (2.7).

Having discussed Mary Magdalen in the context of John 20-1-18, I hope that the features of the woman centred hermenutical tradition have emerged. Mary Magdalen, the figure who has thus far represented the woman centred hermenutical tradition, is a very important guide as we trace this tradition; however, I will stray from meditating chiefly on her character as a guide and explore other bodies within the Johannine narrative. Even by this abandonment, we slink ever closer to what the hermeneutic involves, however. All trails are the clotted lines that lead us back to the bloody moon inherent within John 20:1-18 where Jesus makes the charge to the woman: *do not touch me.* Jesus' charge to Mary Magdalen is a statement regarding women as readers, writers and interpreters in which he invalidates woman's non-negotiable textual posture. *This invalidation is devastating to woman.* Therefore, the following meditations on various bodies should be seen as a 'tracking' of footsteps. In examining the body of Jesus, specifically this body as reader and writer[64], and how this body relates to other feminine bodies, valuable subversive surfacings of the woman centred hermenutical tradition can be exposed. We can then rejoin Mary Magdalen and the hermeneutic she

[64]Jesus as reader/writer is a developed concept in Stephen D. Moore's text *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write.* London: Yale University Press, 1992.

represents. It is at the site of this rejoining that the woman centred hermeneutic becomes more fully developed. However, I now begin a series of 'readings' in which I will focus on Jesus in the fourth gospel. Entertaining various conversations inspired by Johannine moments, and furthermore having details of these conversations work on several levels, I again acknowledge the dangers of replacing/confusing/inter-fusing concept-critical language with creative, metaphorical language. For the reasons I listed in my original apology regarding this method, I will continue to 'not mind the difference'.

3.1 Christ is Born: The Absence of the Mother

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth' we have beheld this glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.
John 1:14

The word was made flesh. The word did not arrive by the body of a woman. In sharp counter-distinction, the text radiates an ether like quality. This birth narrative is sky-cult, not earth-cult. It is the sky father who is included in the birth narrative, the birth/word becoming flesh *is the only son from the father*. Lineage is marked by the cold obelisks, the phallic markers, in the sky. The body of the mother is the *touched* body. The mother's body which nourishes and sustains as we touch it. It is the warm flesh-carpeted realm of the semiotic - it is the sign of a deep rhythmic connection that once we move into the signed/realm of language we trace by every word. It is the site always reverberated by the loss of the word[65]. This new body is a strange baby. A word made flesh, ribs curving around the loss of the arch of the first letter. Skin encasing the mark. Dry, seething dryness. The dryness of the whiteness of pages upon which words are written; birth matter unavailable to complicate the whiteness with its huge semi-colon splashes and placental stripes for quotation marks. Jesus is the word under erasure. He is the word made flesh, but that word is continually unavailable. This is especially felt in Jesus' charge to Mary Magdalen: 'Do not

[65]Moi, Toril, ed. *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986. Chapter 1: 'Linguistics, Semiotics, Textuality'.

touch me' - do not mark my text, I cannot be interpreted. Jesus refuses inscription, he does not wish to be touched by Mary Magdalen; as he refuses the way in which woman reads, an event conditioned by her body that is nonnegotiable, he makes himself unavailable. It is in this spirit that he does not want to touch or be touched by the maternal body; however, danger of what 'touch' means becomes more multi-dimensional in its meaning as we explore Jesus' body in relation to the body of the mother. Not only does Jesus resist being 'sullied' by touching, touching assumes a serious death connotation as seen by his relationship to his mother. This inquiry will trace these characteristics.

Jesus' move into the signed is overtly different from other babies. No rhythms are mourned by the sign of the mother's body as child becomes speaking man. There is no linguistic grief for this baby. Language exists in his belly like supplanted live cats. You have to realise what kind of person you are dealing with here.

3.2 The Second Birth

A word is in order about the event of baptism, or the second birth. In the lines preceeding the very birth narrative of the Johannine Jesus, baptism as a concept presents itself. That baptism as an event is symbolically signed by water is a reflection to the sky-cult from which Jesus heralds. John 1:12-13 reads,

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor the will of the flesh nor the will of man, but of God.

This second bloodless birth is the birth of the spirit. All who took him in, who believed the name which his body spelled, who agreed to materialise from spiritual ether as opposed to squatting flesh, were his children. Reading John 1:12-13, clearly this is the birth that is preferred. Baptism as a 'second birth' finds its success as it plays on actual birth and the differences between the two. Baptism as a second, spiritual birth is a spiritual graduation. All movements towards this 'graduating line refer back to the original marker: actual birth. Because the mother of Jesus is wholly

absent from his own birth sequence, this is intensified: *the original marker's sign is the maternal body.* The event of the body as a marker, a mile marker of sorts, conjures up interesting images of this body: expanded, swollen flesh, bloated flesh like a fishy-balloon marking the starting line. This is the maternal body as the *death ringer*. To be actually born from the maternal body is the proof that one has entered into sin, pain, and other griefs: types of symbolic death which only the second birth can re-qualify or re-write. Baptism as a second birth re-qualifies all of the negative events/characteristics associated with actual birth by removing the individual as far away as possible from the thing that started all the grief, that thing being the maternal body. The distance of the bloodless birth promises to remove the maternal body association. Baptism re-writes one's story to validate/re-qualify one's experience by forfeiting the history that inescapably comes with the actual body as represented by the maternal body. Women's maternal bodies, touching bodies, are stinking in death and Jesus is the cure. It is that brutal of a situation. Accepting Jesus by the second birth of baptism is set up by its very play on the de-valued feminine body.

Being born again is to be redeemed from the little deaths, symbolically represented as pain, sin and numerous other griefs. But all of these little deaths were only made available by the canal that brought us to this land of choices, the original sign of death, the mile marker that reveals how near one is to 'spiritual graduation', the maternal, touching body. But something happens when one has their 'second birth'. If a person's text is re-written by the act of baptism, the new birth rendering them 'like a new child' invokes a forfeit. The baptised person re-writes their history, thus forfeiting the semiotic journey towards the signed which the maternal body represents. In other words, the baptised person changes their relationship with language and because Jesus is the word made flesh, how could it be otherwise? The maternal body is the realm of the semiotic, thus the body becomes a sign of a deep rhythmic connection, that once we move into the signed/realm of language we trace by every word. Baptism therefore espouses a new relationship with language that does not trace the loss of this semiotic - or our deep connection to the rhythmic. Baptism's birth is ether, pure intellectual, ordered not rhythmic. Rhythm is not valued because it hollows its tones in the curvatures of the body, ripples our skin, engages in a type of weird cosmic music; despite the fact that this ultimately leads to language its bodily association invalidates it according to the second birth of baptism. Therefore, to be born into language by way of ether, pure intellect and order is to

be involved with language: reading, writing, interpreting and celebrating in a new-bodily divorced mode. The problem is of course, that woman's body establishes her relationship to language in a way that is non-negotiable. Her body which is excessive in its self-sufficiency ordains her or 'calls her out'. Any 'calling out' she engages in, reading and writing particularly confounds her excessiveness which is body dependent. To change this relationship with language would be impossible. In this sense then we might read the absence of the Virgin Mary in the birth narrative positively - her refusal to present her body is a refusal to accept the conditions of a new relationship with language. However, we don't know if she 'refused' to submit her body or if it was merely passed up. Instead of making suppositions about how to 'read Mary' in this context, I propose to look at where her body *is* in the narrative. Where her body is, so are subversive articulations issuing from the woman centred hermenutical tradition.

3.3 Body Sighting One: Cana

In an attempt to begin to establish the conditions of what kind of a writer and reader Jesus is, his birth is the ideal starting place. To fully develop this weird birth, which is always a sign of the absence of the mother's *body*, I will look at where the mother is present within the Johannine text and read those moments in tension with Jesus' worldly birth. Our first introduction to her is by her absence - the birth sequence where her absence shrieks through the sky-cult particles. This is the Virgin Mary swelling with her own sense of abyss. Our next encounter with Mary is at a wedding. The bowels of this narrative rumble in deep laughter - such laughter is always the response to weddings and unions when the Johannine Jesus is present.

John 2:1-4, the first sighting of the actual body of Mary, reads,

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus was also invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.'

This passage has been regarded as the site upon which Jesus' career as 'miracle worker' begins. Jesus' response to Mary's request is notably problematic as seen by the many theories that seek to reconcile the tension inherent within this scene. I briefly mention them in the spirit of fully appreciating this unusual textual moment. Some thoughtful readers have suggested that his mother, aware of his gifts and talents, calls on him to make things 'right' - her actions crudely underdeveloped considering his *true* mission. Or perhaps her request is a sign of her 'neediness' which manifests in that endearing quality so often attributed to mothers: nagging. Some readers have gone to great lengths to point out that the term, 'woman', which may sound cold and impersonal to western ears, is in fact, a title of some respect[66]. In many ways, 'O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come' takes us to the third and final sighting of the body of Mary at the site of the cross. The question in this sense is almost prophetic: the 'O woman,...my time has not yet come' is almost like - what are you doing here? You don't come into the scene until chapter 19! Of course, the 'O woman,...' is more complex than this somewhat humorous suggestion indicates. In its prophetic mode, this statement becomes a death invocation, invoking the death of Jesus, that often mentioned 'hour'. But at the site of his own death, he seems to indicate that her presence fits, whereas at the wedding, the site of union, it does not. And yet repeatedly in the fourth gospel at the site of union (notably the Cana wedding and the events that occur at Jacob's well in John 4:1-32) when union does not in fact occur, but should, women *are* present. Jesus isn't opposed, totally, to being touched as made evident when he invites Thomas to finger his wound (John 20:24-29). However, Jesus does not engage in 'touching' with women, indeed, he detests it, continually urging baptism. Therefore, touching within the Johannine narrative means something specific regarding women. This inquiry concentrating on the Virgin Mary's bodily presence within the Johannine text will begin to examine this phenomenon by revealing that it exists and that it is a profound feature within the fourth gospel.

Mary's statement to Jesus, 'They have no wine', deserves special attention. The wine that she mentions finds its symbolic counterpart in blood, eucharistic blood. In this sense the

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[66]Warner, Marina. *Alone of All Her Sex: the Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976.

inescapable cross scene finds its resonance in this narrative. 'They have no wine' is a dual comment however, though in both of its manifestations, death is clearly the issue. In this statement's traditional sense, it can be understood in unison with the gospel's message regarding the maternal body as the death ringer. In this context she is the body that only always leads to death (life before it is re-qualified 're-written by the event of baptism) and her body is also the heralder, the sign, of his death which is to come. This is the traditional hermeneutic expressing its own belief system while systematically (thus ensuring its purpose) suppressing woman as reader/writer, for indeed she reads *by her body.* In a very different sense, however, her statement 'They have no wine' can be seen as a comment on the loss of the actual body (the actual body as represented by the touching, maternal body). Woman's body which is forsaken for an ether styled relationship with language is brought into the textual moment. This is how I choose to understand her statement. It is a departure from its other meaning in which her body is part of the dark bramble that sets the stage for the pen-ultimate death - *his death.* In this context the body of the mother is representationally death-bound only, that is if it can be deciphered from beneath the weight of the death of the Son - the male death. By this tradition, the Cana siting of the mother is the text employing the body of the mother as a compass. Her presence is then a 'looking back' at the original site of death and therefore a looking forward towards baptism. Every statement she makes (she never asks Jesus to change the water into wine, she simply comments on it) receives death as the answer.

3.4 The Final Body Sighting: The Foot of the Cross

The last sighting of the body of the mother has been at the very place we have been standing, in many ways: the cross of the death of Jesus. John 19:25-30 reads,

So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalen. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved, standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to

fulfill the scripture), 'I thirst.' A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished'; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

The Virgin Mary's appearance at the foot of the cross is another sign of the end of the text. Like Mary Magdalen, her presence here represents her commitment which is also a natural response to narrative to journey to 'the end of the story that cannot be told'. Her presence as understood by the other hermeneutic at work here is to see her body as the *death ringer*, par excellence. Thus, her presence at the site of death finally seeks its appropriate textual home.

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved, standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!'

The last mortal act of business Jesus commits is to conduct this exchange. Note the sequence, the sequence that happens between the heavy and heady 'gaze': Jesus *sees* the two subjects of the upcoming commodity-switch: the disciple whom he loved and his mother. The sequence goes: Woman, behold your son. Disciple, behold your mother. She is to see her son and the disciple, the new 'beholder' is to see his new mother. As she looks/beholds she is passed *by the gaze* to her new subject/owner. This text cannot have her exist autonomously. She must be the 'dark bramble' death representation of another male, unable to be loosened of the burden from under the shadows of other male deaths. In this context, women's reading and writing never exists as autonomous acts, instead they are controlled events that sail between the economic borders of male ownership. The tradition this hermeneutic represents is continually committed to supressing women reading and writing.

However, she reads *anyway*. After the 'exchange' - 'I thirst' he says. This statement references itself back to the Cana wedding when he made an excess of wine and it also recalls his command in John 4:7 when he says, 'Give me a drink' at Jacob's well, the site of getting a bride. Both events recall the theme of union where in fact union does not happen between Jesus and his

mother[67] or Jesus and the Samaritan woman, even though, according to the setting(s) it *should* happen. However, 'I thirst' also recalls the Virgin Mary's statement in John 2:3, 'They have no wine' as a powerful invocation of the re-memory of the actual body that baptism obliterates. It is the presence of this invocation which is our assurance that despite the fact that she is suppressed by the text as a commodity passed between males in an attempt to control her, she reads *anyway*. The presence of her invocation is the powerful muscle that turns the page so that she reads on.

3.5 Conclusion

By examining where the maternal body *is* in the fourth gospel, several things have been established. Jesus' worldly birth and the fourth gospel's urge towards baptism is a textual statement about women's bodies and their textual status. In this context woman represents death. However, the other possibility as maintained by a woman centred hermeneutic expresses itself in Mary's statement, 'They have no wine', which is an invocation of the actual, maternal body. Thus a powerful re-memory is invoked that is the encouraging blood-line which enables women to read *anyway*, in spite of suppression (being passed by the gaze to another male). It is the women, specifically discussed thus far by the figures of Mary Magdalen and the Virgin Mary, that are disallowed to engage in touching (they are denied encounter - the violation that makes interpretation, reading and writing possible).

That women in the fourth gospel frequent union themes so noticeably, when touching, the union of encounter, does not happen, union as a concept becomes a shining white background that highlights the event of 'no-union', inviting us to feel the confines of that impotent space. Discussing the maternal body in its absence and in its presence in the fourth gospel, I have put this as an event on the map, now my task is to continue meditating on why it is the *body of woman* that Jesus denies encounter. This seeking leads me to concentrate on Jesus *as a writer and a reader*. Such an examination will illuminate the issues at hand.

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[67] Jesus engaging in union with his mother is not meant to provoke unnecessary thoughts about incest. It is to recall the perception of the virgin Mary as the 'bride of Christ' in which she represents the body of the church.

4.1 The Gaze: Introduction

To find Jesus reading and writing within the text of John, I re-surface at John 4:1-35 where Jesus sits down at Jacob's well. As we have seen, the fourth gospel introduces the theme of union only to read against it by refusing union, or the encounter that makes it possible for women to read, write and interpret (though they do so *anyway*). Since it is union in its most impotent manifestation that presents us with this disallowal, going directly to the sight of betrothal is an apt place to begin our journey. Leaving Jesus at the foot of the cross, I noted that his last act of business was to conduct the commodity exchange of his mother. He conducts this exchange by the gaze (he *sees* his mother). Nailed to the cross, it would seem that his strongest muscles are not affected. It is here, at Jacob's well, where 'the gaze' finds its fullest expression. The way in which Jesus uses the gaze in John 4 is the precursor to an important moment when Jesus writes (John 8:1-11 when Jesus writes before the woman taken in adultery). The gaze is an important part of Jesus' textual experience, as we shall see. Therefore, this inquiry will now trace that gaze in order to see what kind of a textual tool it eventually proves to be in John 8:1-11.

4.2 The Gaze's Very Long History

John 4:1-35 reads,

So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

The text locates Jesus for us in a unique way. It names the city and then gives the geographical setting a very sharp edge: the city is near a field, in this field resides Jacob's well. Arriving at Jacob's well, we meet a site passed between men; a thing given from father to son. Male ownership precedes the site of the well. This ownership is only one comment on the charged history that radiates from the site of the well.

Historically, wells are where men get wives. The Old Testament has three men visit the site of the well in a betrothal context. I will briefly examine these narratives. Genesis 24 is the first betrothal-well narrative. In Genesis 24:1-6, Abraham charges his servant:

Put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac...Abraham said to him, 'See to it that you do not take my son back there.'

The servant departs to seek the wife. She comes from a land where the son/bridegroom is exiled by the father. Verses11-15 read,

And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. And he said, 'O Lord God of my master Abraham, Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Let the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Pray let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels' -- let her be the one whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac...Before he had done speaking, behold, Rebekah...came out with her water jar upon her shoulder.

The tradition of getting a wife at the well began with this servant on his strange errand. Abraham does not tell him specifically to go to the well, but it is from the well that he chooses to scout the potential wife because he knows that women gather there. 'Pray, let me drink'. Verse 16 continues, 'the maiden was very fair *to look upon*, a virgin, whom no man had known' (my italics). This 'looking upon' is the gaze introduced. Verse 21 tells us more about this gaze. 'The man *gazed at* her *in silence* to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not' (my italics). Gazing and silence are not isolated elements here, they work together to achieve a result: knowledge. This is a very specific invocation that seeks knowledge from 'otherness'. The gaze and silence, as a force,

marks out a space we are excluded from. One casts the gaze to partake in a privileged communal space with an 'other' intelligence. It is a mistake to understand the gaze as only a sensory act. As its multi-dimensional character as a textual tool emerges, we here note that it is a tool for exclusive, psychological communion.

The gaze's character continues to develop as we move to Jacob's well in Genesis 29. Verses 1-3 read,

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and lo, three flocks of sheep lying beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered.

The text is not stingy. Jacob sees a well in a field 'and lo' three flocks of sheep lying beside it. The text tells us by way of an excessive extra - for out of that well the flocks were watered. The opening is a statement about relationships. The narrative proceeds with the detailed steps that made the watering available to the flocks. Jacob enters dialogue with the shepherds asking them, 'Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?' They said, 'We know him' (Genesis 29:5). Nahor directly links us with the well of Genesis 24 where the well was located in the city of Nahor. Rachel is Nahor's daughter. This point of connection flashes in this narrative moment and then tucks itself away and is a sign of the gaze's multi-dimensional character. When Jacob sees Rachel and the sheep she tended (Genesis 29: 10b-11),

Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud.

The narrative proceeds in a rich complexity; however, I will not stray from the well that blessed the following madness to come. The well is covered with a large stone. The text does not tell us why Jacob removed the stone - politeness, excitedness regarding news of his kinsman, in an egotistical show of muscle to impress the woman. We do not know 'how the well works' so to speak. The text covers how it functions three times (verses 2-3, 8, and 10). What is important about this

meeting at the well is that the reader is required to know 'how the well works'. In verses 10 and 11, Jacob waters the flock and then he kisses Rachel. The resonance between watering the flock and kissing Rachel charge the site with the perhaps already grossly present symbolism of the well as a sexual symbol - the throat, the one that stretches to the womb, the one that stretches to the stomach. Jacob's removal of the large stone might be understood as the rending of the hymen which speaks eagerly to the sexual/fertility symbolism that makes union possible. Jacob's rending also speaks to the necessary violation that makes interpretation and reading and writing possible. When Jacob kisses Rachel, for whatever the reason - joy, relief at finding kinsman, attraction, rudeness - an interesting dynamic emerges. Jacob's kiss to Rachel is a pun on the event of watering the flocks; as he kisses Rachel, he waters himself. Three times we have approached the well with its procedures that conclude with the removal of the stone. Three times our attention feels the largeness of that stone that must be moved/rent. When it comes to kissing Rachel, an event that mimics the watering of the flocks, the excessive, instructive commentary dissolves in glaring counter-distinction: *our attention is expressly directed towards the well, the site of getting a bride, and away from the actual union occurring.* We are directed not to concentrate on the body of woman in union, but on the well which houses the gaze. The well is where one secures a bride and the fact that three times we are made aware of the 'rending' of the well outlines the encounter between Jacob and Rachel with a lacerated charge. The gaze that 'gets a bride' now can be seen as a textual tool that works to direct the reader away from woman behaving in union.

The third well-betrothal scene is in Exodus 2:15-21 which is how Moses came by his wife Zipporah. 'But Moses fled from Pharaoh, and stayed in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well' (Exodus 2:15). Reuel, the priest of Midian, has seven daughters who went to draw water from this well. Within this narrative the flash of the other two wells makes a quick and bright appearance signing the multi-dimensional character of the gaze as a textual tool. As it appears as its own collective references, it becomes an increasingly charged space. The arrangement Jacob made for Rachel was seven years of labour in exchange for her as wage. Of course, Jacob works seven years times two as it happen. The number seven here is the bruise and the shimmer of memory as the seven daughters approach. The shepherds, 'came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them and watered their flock' (Exodus 2:17). Reuel inquires of the seven daughters,

'How is it that you have come so soon today? They say, 'An Egyptian delivered us out of the hands of the shepherds, and even drew water for us and watered the flock.' He said to his daughters, 'And where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread. And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah.

It would seem that the daughters regularly faced harassment from the shepherds, so much so that they considered themselves 'delivered' from the hands of the shepherds. Moses is the hero of this sparse narrative, but a strange one. It is the not the women that deem him worthy of bread and thanks for his deeds. It is the father who is not present. This odd strategy continues when we read that Moses was content to dwell *with the man*. Again the daughters are absent. The well-betrothal scene is about male relationships and things passed between the borders of men. The first thing being 'passed' an agreement that finds its solidity as bread. The second thing 'passed' - the bride-daughter. In the Exodus well narrative the seven daughters are never gazed upon, but passed by the gaze that infects the site where they met Moses. The gaze as a textual tool is not only about 'seeing', but it actively conducts the passing of women's bodies between the borders of male bodies.

Based on these three well-betrothal narratives, what can be said for the site where we find Jesus 'resting' (John 4:1-35)? The well is the charged site of the gaze; all visitors to the well are unable to avoid the gaze which infects it. This gaze is a multi-dimensional textual tool. It is an exclusive invocation of otherness to gain knowledge, it is a guide that directs the reader away from the actual bodies of women, and it passes feminine bodies between the borders of male ownership. This gaze is a complex entity that will be ultimately employed by Jesus as a textual tool as we shall see in John 8:1-11.

4.3 Jesus and the Gaze

Moving back into the Johannine narrative, we resurface at the site of the wearied Jesus who sits down beside the well - the place of the gaze we have been tracing. John 4:7-8 reads,

There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink,' For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food

The language of Jesus' water seeking is not like the language of his well counter parts who either did not request a drink or did so preceded by a 'pray let down your jar'. This narrative must be read in tension to John 4:1-3,

Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptising more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptise, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again to Galilee.

The text says that when the Lord knew Jesus was baptising more disciples than John - and then curiously interrupts itself. In parentheses the text corrects itself by informing the reader that actually Jesus himself did not baptise. This ambiguous textual amendment works against concerns for textual clarity, its task is to re-inform and the new information it provides is like a sharp line, a slash in the text. The event of baptising is an event that leads to Jesus leaving Judea for Galilee. We do not know, as we read it by the slash, that Jesus himself did not take part in the event that raised enough concern that leaving would conclude the verse. He himself did not touch, he himself was not touched: the blood red moon of *Noli me tangere*[68] is traced by smarting red threads. The baptising of the spirit was ritually demonstrated by water being poured onto the convert. In verse 7 a tension erupts, bringing the stressed amendment that Jesus himself did not baptise into the moment. He who gives water (but really only his disciples) now says, 'Give me water'. His statement, 'Give me a drink', is the invocation of absence. This absence is signed by the gaze and its multi dimensional characteristics. The gaze recalls our absence from exclusive conversations with 'otherness', it recalls the absence of seeing the actual body of woman behaving in union, and it recalls the absence of woman controlling her own body, instead she is a thing passed between the borders of male ownership. Jesus' statement, 'Give me a drink', is the invocation of absence and the site of the well

[68] John 20:17

shivers at the request and responds with an excited familiarity, glad to be awake again because the well and the gaze that infects it houses absence as an ecclesiastical nourisher to its seething, far reaching eye. Give water to the one who does not touch and is not touched through water. It is a request from the blinding, unmarked page (Jesus refuses to be touched/marked. The conditions for interpretation, reading and writing remain unavailable to women). Jesus in his blinding, unmarked page mode simultaneously consumes as he refuses. Verse 8 follows, 'Give me water' with, 'For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food'. It is as if though the text intends for verse 8 to somehow explain Jesus' demand; however, the disciples' absence here confounds an already present absence: the absence invoked by the gaze.

The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water'.
John 4:9-10

The woman's question is wholly legitimate. It is an intelligent question to the 'foul bridegroom' and his demand she surely recognises. In this sense it is a challenge, and a politically sensitive one in which she raised the issue of gender and nationality in a way that respects her offence and is open to an intelligent response. The text reads, 'Jesus answered her', but clearly and to the delight of happy Christians everywhere, Jesus' response is pitched into a whole other context, his answer is the non-answer of the trickster. This is a moment that must be examined - when the text moves into the sphere of what I will call *fantastic dialogue* where the conversation that occurs between two people beautifully illustrates a 'message' by way of two different dialectical strands. They share a vocabulary but are talking about very different things and the mixture produces a theological chapter in miniature. An unreadability is forced upon the woman. Jesus' response has biting edges - *if you knew, you would have, he would have* - Jesus' response as an answer is an obliteration of her text (the text of her question, the text of her voice). Jesus' response is a projection of possibilities, but no choice can be made because the projection exists in the past tense.

We cannot enter the fantastic dialogue, it is the gaze extending, invoking absence, our absence. In this sense we are the object of gaze. As we read the fantastic dialogue's theology in miniature produced with two different rhetorical intentions using a shared vocabulary, we actually become, by our very act of reading, part of the harsh 'no-union' backdrop which seeks to invalidate a woman centred hermenutical tradition in which women read by their bodies in moments of encounter.

The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?'
John 4:11-12

The woman's response, 'You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep', followed by 'are you greater than our father Jacob...' is a comment that addresses an offence. When she previously asked why he demanded a drink he gives her a possibility projected into a past tense that does not answer her question but obliterates the text of her own voice. Her response in verse 11 acknowledges Jesus' refusal to drink from the well where they are located. She is aware that the water he requests is not well-water and her 'who do you think you are' tone is not an unintelligent rebuff or a playful indulgence in sexual rhetoric. She says the well is deep and 'you' have nothing to draw with. She has removed herself as the 'water bearer' shifting this responsibility to its rightful owner. Her response is a statement of identity and boundaries. He who demanded a drink now offers the drink. The woman is introduced in order to be excluded in this sense. It is only after he makes the request *of her* to give *to him* and obliterates the text of her voice (as the narrative moves into fantastic dialogue), making it unreadable to her by this response, that he is positioned to offer *and this is a type of consumption* achieved at the gaze infected well. That there is no union here is in line with the disallowal of touch that Jesus demands of women, and that this is a move to obliterate woman's textual connections is of no consequence to him.

Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of

the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life'.

John 4:13-14

Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will ***never thirst***

The cycle of thirst - wetness followed by dryness - the continual condition - the poetry and tragedy of the body - is not the only choice. Jesus offers an *other* condition. The condition of 'never thirst'. This is an extension of his baptismal urgings, his continual comment against the actual body as signed by the maternal body. The popular Christian suggestion is that this narrative intends alleviation from a very basic (metaphorically understood) condition of suffering; such a notion is undeveloped. The condition Jesus offers besides the available one means that 'never thirst' *is* silence. It is the reduced state. After the ashes of the burning away of the actual body there is only silence. This is the holocaust of the body as invoked by Jesus as a white, untouched page ('Do not touch me': I will not make the conditions available that interpretation, reading and writing require). The blank page requires this expensive silence to remain unmarked, undevastated by the line, to remain never *undone*. Fear of fragmentation finds its metaphor in Jesus' tunic at the site of the cross[69] which was 'without seam, woven from top to bottom, so they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it...'. 'Never thirst' is the choice that reduces one into silence because it is a removal from the body and it is the body which threatens to touch and is repeatedly disallowed to do so. 'This water' that Jesus offers 'will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life' because one's silence ensures the continual reconstitution of the white page. In other words, Jesus goes on consuming.

The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw'

John 4:15

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[69] John 19:23

The woman requests this water. That which he has been describing to her, the water which he clearly prefers, is at last requested by the woman. Instead of expounding further on this water Jesus abruptly changes the scene's tension:

- 'give me this water that, I may not thirst....
- 'Go, call your husband, and come here'

In this sense the woman is introduced in order to be excluded. Once the woman accepts the invitation for the water Jesus offers, Jesus never mentions water again in this narrative. Her acceptance becomes her absence, this is the Samaritan woman being delivered into silence and out of her actual body. From this point on the narrative moves from a 'water focus' to a worship focus'. Before further commenting on this shift in focus, I would like to again consider the 'other' possibility, that of 'no thirst' or the extension of Jesus' baptismal urges. Jesus offers an alternative to the 'bodily dilemma'. It is a dilemma to Jesus in the sense that it is the body of woman which he does not want to be marked by nor does he want to promote this body's hermenutical tradition. The metaphor of alleviation of thirst operates on the paradigm of: thirst/fulfillment/thirst or dryness/wetness/dryness - the cycle I have called the tragic and poetic condition of the body. Jesus offers an other choice - the choice of blankness, of silence, the space of no-body. The very pattern Jesus is repulsed by, the very pattern he offers removal from, is a pattern that he 'borrows'. This 'borrowing' is not unfamiliar - it is the same borrowing technique employed at the well where the bride-getting gaze is borrowed for purposes of no-union and ensures his own ability to continue consuming. By verse 16 a clear pattern has emerged: refusal, offer (only to be refused), refusal. This pattern operates by repeated disallowal. This sequence is set into motion by Jesus' demand, 'Give me water':

Refusal - In verse 10 Jesus refuses the water he has requested, clearly marking a preference for some other water and in this way a refusal occurs. In another sense this is the site of refusal because he obliterates the text of the woman's voice/question by making it unreadable. He offers a possibility,

but in fact it is not an offering at all because it is a space of 'no choice' because it is set in a past context and cannot be elected.

Offer - In verse 11 the woman inquires about the nature of this water and the nature of the man who speaks this water. It is an intelligent response to her obliteration. Jesus responds not by addressing her question but by further obliterating her text. It is in this moment that he offers her an other choice besides the known condition, the choice of 'no thirst', the choice of silence which is ultimately a refusal.

Refusal - When the woman requests this water, the woman is excluded, this finds its metaphor in the absence of the 'water' throughout the rest of the narrative which signs her absence as well.

Refusal, offer (the offer is always however to be excluded by silence), refusal. Thirst/fulfilment, dryness/wetness. In making available his 'living water' which is ultimately an absence of the bodily, thus obliterating woman's textual posture, Jesus laces his choice on the edges of the known pattern. He makes his possibility available by borrowing the pattern of that which he seeks to reduce to silence, thus the holocaust of the body. This type of narrative presentation is another example of the way Jesus relies on the objectification of known patterns to continue his consuming and reconstitution. As readers we read the unreadable, the unavailable word that Jesus is. We read these hungry teeth, we read this consuming, and as we read we also ensure that Jesus will be reconstituted as the white, unmarked page that he is because every time we read the totality of the narrative, Jesus lives again because we read the word and he is the word made flesh. And yet we do not read the unreadable by reading because pages aren't available *for* reading in the fourth gospel. John 21:25 reminds us that the world cannot contain all of the books of Jesus - all of the pages which are his flesh. Pages are never meant to be read. The world ending by way of books is not an internal combustion from too many words, words are never available. It is to die by way of paper cuts - the ten million edges of whiteness. It is this horrific scenario, the scenario of the paper-cut death, where we see the fullest expression of what the ether-body relationship demands. When baptism occurs, the forfeiting of the actual body as signed by the maternal body, one's relationship to language

changes profoundly, so much that books, as espoused by this hermeneutic, are not meant to be read so much as they are capable of a foul death.

The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, 'I have no husband;' for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.'
John 4:17-19

Is Jesus testing to see if the woman will lie? I believe this is a moment of slippage revealing Jesus' consumption. Jesus who has obliterated her text, who has offered her the choice of silence, who has introduced her to exclude her, in other words, Jesus who has rendered her unable to interpret, read or to write, has confirmed his reconstitution by way of consuming. In verse 17 he is reading her text (the text of her story). Her silence makes her text completely accessible to him. His visionary blurb is a sign of his 'fullness'.

The text moves from 'water' to 'worship' in verses 20-25. Jesus tells the woman,

'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father...But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'

Jesus' statement requires, not surprisingly, that worship occur in the context of the spirit, the absence of the body. This passage is a further reiteration of what Jesus offers. It is another context for the silence he urges.

Verses 25-28 read,

The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.' Just then his disciples came. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, 'What

do you wish?' or, 'Why are you talking with her?'

The woman's knowledge ('I know that...') concludes with, 'he will show us all things'. This statement rests on a very significant moment. To her knowledge, Jesus reveals his identity, simultaneously, the disciples return and inherent in their return is silence. The moment of identity revelation does not read: women: 'he will show us all things'...Jesus: 'that's right and that is why I am showing you who I really am at this moment'. The identity revelation that this passage contains does not uncurl like a warm tongue, it is rather a type of collapse. His identity has hitherto remained available. The showing of 'all things' coupled with 'I am he' bears the weight of pages blank with heaviness. What we are shown cannot be seen (in the spirit of books that weigh down the world, but are not for reading). This revelation of identity is a simultaneous moment of the disciples' return. The disciples do not ask; they choose silence over disruption. True to their ether-body form, their choice confounds the invocation of absence that has been heralded by Jesus throughout the narrative.

Verse 31-32 will be the passage that will conclude my reading (of that which cannot be read) of this well-narrative.

Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat of which you do not know.'

Jesus' words: 'I have food to eat of which you do not know' invites us into the fullest expression of violence of the surreal, airless space he has been establishing. Jesus' 'I have food to eat of which you do not know' is the final invocation of absence. The disciples do not know of this food, their state of ignorance is signed by their absence in the sharing of the knowledge regarding this smarting, airless space that has signed the edges of where a woman's body used to be. We, however, *know what he has eaten.*

4.4 Conclusion

In examining the history of the gaze I noted its characteristics: it is a multi-dimensional tool that finds its origins at the site of the well/union: a place steeped in notions of embodiment. It is an exclusive invocation of otherness to gain privileged knowledge; it is a guide that directs the reader away from the actual bodies of women and it passes feminine bodies between the borders of male ownership. As Jesus engages this complex tool, the gaze that finds its origin in the very concept of embodiment (union) is now employed to champion the obliteration of woman's body (and thus her textual relationships), Jesus continually borrows known patterns that rely on the cycles of the actual body to liquidate woman's body into a seething dry memory. This is Jesus consuming, all of his consumptions lead to the reconstitution of his own ether body.

In the next section of this inquiry we move from Jesus using the gaze as burning tool of obliteration of woman as reader, interpreter and writer to Jesus as writer. It is the ether-baptised body that gleans its whiteness from the devastating obliteration of woman's actual body. How then does this ether-baptised body write? To explore this question we move to John 8:1-11 where we find the actual body of woman in-between the gaze and the speaking voice.

5.1 The Story of Two Texts: John 8:1-11

The story of Jesus writing on the ground in a text of dust is a disputed passage and is therefore often excluded from the gospel of John. That women are so often introduced only to be excluded within the Johnannine narrative, this often excluded passage smiles with irony as it enters this dialogue. This inquiry will read John 8:1-11 as found in the Revised Standard Version. The text of John 8:1-11 reads,

They went each to his house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?' This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.'

5.2 The Adulterous Woman: Body-Text

Behold, Jesus writes. This disputed passage is the only narrative in which Jesus writes anywhere in the New Testament. He who refuses women to write, writes in a text of dust. Jesus writes *before* the actual body of the adulterous woman; therefore, I look first to this body.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him...
John 8:3a

The dynamics of where this body is placed are very important. She is placed 'in the midst'; she is placed in-between the staring crowd and the speaking Jesus. Her arrival and placement occurs between gaze and voice: *she is located in a position that bears the dynamics of being the place of the text.* Woman, who reads by her body, is now the body which is the text. How Jesus handles this is of the ut-most concern. What kind of text is she?

Immediately, she is a text crowded with danger. Those that accuse her seek her death in an obvious way - stoning; however, Jesus who we have seen obliterate the bodies of women via the gaze is also present. The crowd of people that have been gazing at Jesus as he speaks now enlarge their vision to take in the body of this woman; this expanded gaze is a menacing, dull edged reminder of the gaze that Jesus so often engages. It would seem that the textual situation of the body-text of the adulterous woman houses only violent possibilities: letters bursting like scarlet sacs popped,

unstitching themselves by stony edges or the text's script being burned away by the seething dry shards that radiate from the ether body of Jesus.

This body-text, crowded with the stony obvious and more stealthy dangers alike, is the body of a woman who has been caught in adultery. This text is freshly picked from the space of body upon body. Her pages are not dry with the seething whiteness associated with the unreadable book containing Jesus' deeds[70], but soggy with the moments before. She has traversed the space of total encounter: body touching body re-touching body straight to being the text that can be read, and, as we shall see, written before. She is both 'soggy' and 'charred' at once. Alive with the wetness from the intersection of bodies and charred from the breathless removal (she was caught *in the act* of adultery) into the burning dryness where dust becomes text.

Indeed, there are two texts here: the body-text of the adulterous woman and the mysterious text of dust that is Jesus'. The questionable text of dust saturates this scene with a particular brand of instability; however, this instability is only confounded by the realisation that when a woman's sexuality is introduced into the Johannine narrative it always introduces elements of instability (note John 20:1-180.

They said to him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now the law of Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?' This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.
John 8:4-6

The scribes and Pharisees want to know: 'should we kill this bad text?'. The narrative tells us that they employ the body-text in this way to test Jesus. Jesus responds to the test by producing a text. Again, the men employ the body-text of woman to test Jesus. He says to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again, Jesus responds to the test by producing a text. Jesus, who is the tested, employs the same body-text that seeks to

[70]John 25:21

'fail him' to test the testers. They fail the test ('But when they heard it, they went away...'). By all accounts, the body of woman which becomes the body-text as test, is not a text to be read; *indeed, its only purpose is to further the superior text of Jesus.* After visiting the well where Jesus obliterates the body of woman (and thus her non-negotiable textual situation) by the gaze, we cannot naively assume that because this woman's body is not stoned to death, she escapes violence. It is the body of woman which Jesus obliterates penultimately as he continually urges the ether baptised body. Likewise, the position of this body-text is another example of Jesus' consumption. She is not read/encountered, only used as a foundation so that he might out-test the testers.

5.3 Jesus' Text of Dust

Jesus does not only pass the test, he is revealed as the superior tester. This show of superiority is indebted to the text Jesus produces. John 8 verses 6 and 8 read,

...Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. (John 8:6b)

And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. (John 8:8)

Jesus writes with his finger. *Noli me tangere*[71], the words directed towards Mary Magdalen - darkens like a bloody moon pages away as this incident occurs. She who is charged not to touch with her body by which she maintains a non-negotiable relationship with textuality shrieks as Jesus writes by touching (he writes with his finger). We do not know what Jesus writes. His text is unavailable to us. However, it takes actual bodies for Jesus' ether body to be established and continually reconstituted: when Jesus dismisses the woman, he obliterates her body-text by not reading/encountering her text. We have seen this dismissal/obliteration in John 1:14, the birth narrative of Jesus as we have seen it in John 4:1-35, the well narrative where the woman is dismissed from the scene after finally accepting the preferred bodily condition Jesus champions. The

[71] John 20:18

unavailability of women's bodies within the Johannine narrative establishes the foundation for the unavailability of Jesus' own text: as women's bodies are consumed/liquidated into ether qualities, Jesus maintains his ether-body distance/unavailability. The absence of Jesus' text that contains the memory of the absence of the many bodies of women is surely felt in its full and silent violence in John 25:21 where we are introduced to the many books of Jesus' deeds that the world cannot contain; books we are not introduced to in order to read.

5.4 Conclusion

Examining John 8:1-11 is crucial to this inquiry's discussion which seeks to fully understand the role of women's bodies in order to engage the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?*, as poignantly as possible. From my reading of this Johannine narrative, I conclude that women's bodies are introduced in order to be excluded (the adulterous woman is not read/encountered) in all textual situations: not only are women's bodily status' obliterated so that they cannot read, write and interpret, the bodies of women are unavailable for our own reading/encountering. At the other end of these textual situations is always the silence of Jesus with superior unavailability.

6.1 Mary Magdalen Re-visited

This section of Chapter 2: Reading the Johannine Narrative, marks the path of this chapter's circular journey. I say 'circular' not to indicate an unfragmented narrative journey; indeed, 'circular' in this context serves to mark the round curvatures of a woman's stomach. In particular, the rounded stomach of Mary Magdalen as depicted in Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen*[72] (figure 1). I began Chapter 2 with the figure of Mary Magdalen as a guide to whom all red-blood threads of other Johannine moments lead back to as she received the charge: do not touch me[73]. Following those

[72]Gould, Cecil. *The Paintings of Corregio*. London: Faber, 1976.

[73]John 20:18

threads back to their source was necessary. The clotted web gave valuable insight into Jesus as a body (and reader/writer). In brief, by examining his body in relation to other feminine bodies within the Johannine narrative the woman centred hermenutical tradition in which women maintain unique, non-negotiable textual relationships because of their bodies was given an apt space in which to be explored. My goal was to establish that, indeed, when women's proclamations are disbelieved or when women's bodies are obliterated, 'celebration' which means 'to proclaim' must be radically reviewed. Throughout this chapter I have said: women read, write and interpret *anyway*. This section is a close examination of '*anyway*' and marks the gateway from which we can explore other ways women celebrate/proclaim which are entirely excluded from traditional understandings of celebration/proclamation.

This 'gateway' is the straight and steady line that issues from Mary Magdalen's eyes in Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen* (figure 1). Straight and steady though this line is, the journey towards this path is not. We arrive at this point of departure by reading many other curvatures and it is for this reason that I reiterate that the word 'circular' indicating this point within my discussion in no way lends itself to suggesting an unfragmented journey. In order to arrive at *St. Mary Magdalen* (figure 1) I will read the curving lines of other paintings and it is in this way that curving circles break into other curving circles: to trace woman's stomach is to trace the fragmented edges of 'breaks' yielding into more 'breaks'. One must remember that a woman's stomach always points to fragmentation: as a flesh sheath covering of the internal organs its memory snugly details the rent hymen that is invoked every time intercourse occurs; as the balloning birth arc deflates its surface maintains the dimpled hollows, swollen veins, and spidery stretch marks which replace smooth terrain with rich experience. And still there are the countless scars of sharp caesarean angles and the faded pink puncture spots of countless hysterectomies.

6.2 Reading Roundwards: Reading Towards Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen*

And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalen and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; but these words seemed

to them an idle talk, and they did not believe them.
Luke 24:8-12

But she reads *anyway*. What follows is a discussion of Mary Magdalen as a reader with the conclusion resulting in a meditation on Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen* (figure 1). Artistic interpretations are always disruptions of the narrative they seek to illuminate and it is these disrupting curvatures of women's bodies that I will attempt to read. The goal of this inquiry is to seek out articulations of the question: what is Mary Magdalen doing when she is reading?

I chose to surface in this conversation at the site of a wonderful painting (figure 2)[74]. The scene is as follows: Jesus hangs dead on the cross. A whole flurry of activity goes on around the corpse. To his left, the grieving mother comforted by friends, to his right, discussion taking place between the Romans who hold the tunic. Circling Jesus' corpse, little man-angels, noticeably two – the one under his right arm who rends his heavenly garment, his little man-angel male chest a curiously exposed tender muscle and the man-angel under his left arm, holding a bowl catching the fluid offspring of Jesus' corpse, his head turned away in absolute grossness. Both angel's gowns violently give way to the text upon which they rest where their painted garments tear into the surface medium, indicating the fragmentation of time, highlighting their harsh expressions that stamp the retina with their roughness: the small shrimp coloured mannish gestures that scrape into the surface that presents them. Following the way of the cross, the brilliant lapis scrapes downwards to the feet of the corpse. The feet unalone – Mary Magdalen kneels. The lapis peels to its sides at this point and reveals the flurry of activity I have been describing. To the right and to the left and above, the flurry of activity attends to itself; Mary Magdalen is the only individual in the painting that directs herself to the crucified corpse. As she kneels, she touches a foot. The feet rest on what begins to reveal itself as a podium, like the podiums of the classroom, like the podiums of the church. On the podium, a text rests. Jesus' feet begin to reveal themselves as a text. Indeed, these "feet" look suspiciously like an open book. Where the feet meet, one sees the trace of the spine. Open, Mary attends closely to the text. She reads the text, and we know so by her hand that

[74] I regret to say that the identity of the painter or where this painting resides is unknown to me. I discovered this painting accidentally; it was part of an old calendar hanging in a bed-sit that I rented. I have been unable to locate its identity, though the search continues.

touches it. The self-absorption that occurs simultaneously around her is mirrored in the expression she offers in counter-distinction. Her gaze is the reading gaze; she directs her attention pointedly to the text before her. The intensity with which she reads maintains a breathless quality: she will not overlook any details; on and on she reads, omitting nothing. This painting is the happy coincidence the biblical text does not include readily: woman who reads and touches/woman who touches and reads. This painting is our sign: woman reads anyway.

From this anonymous representation, I resurface at the site of another set of feet: those of the corpse in Corregio's *Lamentations from the Del Bono Chapel*[75]. (figures 3 and 4). It is the moment of gross return: he who issued out the womb, now remembers it through death. This is the other side of Corregio's many Madonna with child paintings while at the same time a comment on those scenes as we shall see. The corpse reclines, held by the inside of the Virgin Mary's legs, his head buffing her womb. The Virgin reclines as she is reclined upon so that the picture itself invites reclining; so that our bodies recline with our eye that traverses the length of the corpse. Alone, at the other end of the corpse and the womb who bore it: her back in the reclining position, in line with her counterparts. However, unlike her counterpart's eyes, the Virgin's whose eyes are closed in supreme grief and the corpse who sees not, Mary Magdalen's eyes are wide open; her lids pierced with seeing, caught in the void of her half opened mouth (figure 5). There is no mistaking what she looks at; she looks upon the feet of the corpse. The strange text of feet: the doughy text connected to sharp anklebone hinges and there is only Mary Magdalen and the obvious book. From the curvature of the feet/text we break into other curvatures to get there.

It would seem that one of Corregio's favourite compositional subjects is that of the woman with child in her lap. This motif countlessly confronts the viewer who looks at a catalogue of Corregio's work. Corregio's work warrants the word "pornography" a good review. In his work one is confronted with the "wide openness" of figures' legs, popularly seen from the rear (figures 6-8). His cupids and fleshy love children, when standing, always end where the genitalia of adult figures begin. Their soft noses seek out the darkly painted recesses of the adult genitalia[76] (figure 9-12). In Corregio's "sky" paintings, the fecundancy of legs squirm next to fat buttocks. The musky detail

[75] Gould, *The Paintings of Corregio.* Pp 81-88.
[76] This "position" is also assumed by the adults in Corregio's work where they seek out the genital recesses of the children/cupid's genital areas. See figures 11-12.

coupled with its constant repetition confuses the viewer as they follow the fatty clouds (figures 13-15). Correggio's Christian representation is erotica. Like the cupid children who seek the genital realm, with approval, like the *Madonna and Child with Saints Sebastian, Geminian and Roche*[77] (figure 16) where a saint's genitals – his phallic projection – is presented with the impossible: entry by another and very sharp phallic projection, one reads Correggio with an odd feeling.

Therefore, how do we arrive at Correggio's *St. Mary Magdalen* (figure 1)? Our first stop is the painting *The Madonna of the Basket*[78] (figures 17-18). The buffed womb is recalled, but under quite different (I cannot say better) circumstances. The Christ child sits in his mother's lap – being a baby – under his mother's loving gaze...except not quite. The infant's legs are parted, making him brutally available to the viewer from the access point of his flesh bubbly genitalia. This is the central focus of the painting. His unmanly genitalia rest in-between quivering blubber; his white, soft belly radiates a creamy skin tone. This "creaminess" is not hard or stable, nor is it dripping from the knees of the mother; it is like putty. The quality of this creamy skin is highlighted by the shadows of the infant's legs, making the blubber tremble with its own moist whiteness. The Madonna's head tilts in a gentle slope downwards, her chin drawn in, her ear lighting upwards. This is the moment where the mother gazes lovingly at her sweet child, except the child is not sweet, but threatening to the viewer's sense of the moral and the woman is not gazing: her eyes are closed. The child is in movement; this is indicated by the direction of his legs and hands and fingers on those hands. However, the Madonna is caught in stillness. She holds the smaller moving hands: movement versus stillness. Her smile pushes her eyes deeper into her skull under the shut lids. Par excellence, before us is the Madonna in ecstasy. The child sitting on her lap with his white ruffled shirt hiked up above his quivering blubbery belly is a secret: the colourless man in the background, no idea of the shivers that shake the leaves on the tree under which the woman sits. On our left, we see her basket holding its strange tools. The tool in the forefront of the basket insinuates a sheathing function. Its circular head along with its descent into an opening suggest the anatomy of the interior of woman's genitalia. Its sharp scissor-like endings form a perfect triangle where an object might be placed and sharply rid of excess. This tool signs castration's strange connection to woman's ecstasy. Its presence is

[77] Gould. *The Paintings of Corregio.* Pp 101-102.
[78] Gould. *The Paintings of Corregio.* P 97.

menacing metal component of the scene before us. Its presence is in conversation with the politics of the moment; its vocular black-smithed strains finding its own echoes in the noise of the painting. This painting houses a familiar vocabulary of imagery, however. I have seen this before, but where? The extended neck of gentle slope with its offering of the exposed ear, the white ruffling of the shirt hiked up…The answer to this familiar imagery is Corregio's *Leda*[79] (figure 19).

In *Leda* (figure 19), Corregio offers the viewer a strange act of love. Bestiality is seen in other works as well, notably in *Ganymede*[80] and *Vienna*[81] (figures 20-23), which I would argue fall under this genre of painting motif. In *Leda* (figure 19), the woman's lap is also resting home to the "white ruffled" thing which is "hiked up." However, this time it is the white ruffles of the visible swan and instead of the "white ruffles" being "hiked up" on the fatty belly quivering, it is "hiked up" inside the body of the woman. We see the same graceful neck gently sloping and the same facial gesture with eyes closed; the same wrestling moment between movement and stillness, this time between the stillness of the body of the woman and the movement of the white swan; again, we see woman in ecstasy. To our left of Leda other winged beings with their musical instruments and arrows. To our right of Leda, other women. One lady's maid lifts off her gown. The look on the young woman's face is one of eager arousal. She looks up towards a swan in flight. Her body descending into the water blushes with anticipation. To her left a clothed woman, perhaps another maid servant smiles on the scene before her. To the right of the woman, descending into the water, a naked woman, more bashful than her peers, distances herself between the swan and her nudity, but there is a smile on her face (figure 19: detail). I read these bathers in counter-distinction to Leda whose body occupies the forefront of the painting and whose body is larger: more developed, more womanly, complete with the nipples that her counterparts lack. Leda is not in anticipation nor is she shy; she wears the countenance of an intimate knowing. It is from the lap of Leda that we find Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen* (figure 1).

The same stone upon which Leda sits is found in *St. Mary Magdalen* (figure 1), this time as the prop for the body of Mary Magdalen. The deliciously available and troubling calf of Leda is unavoidable to the eye. From the bending shoulder and fatty hands, one's eyes led to it and to its

[79] Gould. *The Paintings of Corregio.* pp 190-192.
[80] Gould. *The Paintings of Corregio.* pp 130 and 185.
[81] Gould. *The Paintings of Corregio.* pp 130 and 185.

foot contained in a still flexing posture that does not touch the water but instead choose its own tension. This same beautiful leg is present in *St. Mary Magdalen* (figure 1). Its whiteness shines. It peeks from beneath the robe in unbounded glory. It arches in counter-distinction to Mary Magdalen's left arm, reminiscent of Shiva in her dance representation. Mary Magdalen's robe does not banish her nudity; her plump breast resting on the cusping fabric reveals her nudity. With her right elbow secured on the book, her arms work together maintaining a dance-like quality. Artistically perched in-between her two hands – the infamous ointment jar. The robe, the robe which does not banish her nudity, bulbously balloons out from her. It is as if though not only do her hands "dancingly fold" in the way they do to behold the ointment jar, they are also a sign: they trace the bulbous glow of the fabric.

6.3 Leda's Hidden Swan: Unexpected Celebratory Postures

Where have we seen the image of the ballooning fabric before? *The rounded glow of Mary Magdalen's robe houses the bulbous body of Leda's swan: this is woman engaging in 'impossible' union.* Unlike Leda and her counterpart, the Madonna of the Basket, Mary Magdalen looks straight ahead. With the book, a part of her posture, *she looks at us.* The bulbous swell houses the hidden swan in union with woman. Bestial sexual encounters do not yield pregnancies outside of mythology, and yet we cannot escape the direct gaze of Mary Magdalen: to confront her gaze is to admit to knowing about the hidden swan. Bestiality fragments Christian notions of union with its very grossness. In this context, Mary Magdalen's hidden union with the beast signs woman's relationship to the abyss or that which exceeds imposed boundaries. It is of no surprise that this connection to the abyss would find its symbolic home in woman's sexual organs; woman reads, writes and interprets (calls out) by her non-negotiable relationship established by her bodily condition. The symbolic beast nesting beneath the curvatures of Mary Magdalen's stomach is the union, the outside of mythology is considered gross, improbable and impossible, but tradition heaves outwards with its own subversive manifestations of what "celebration" means. No longer is the text of Magdalen half-formed maintaining its connection to ankle hinges; it is clearly a text of its own. It is this developed text which supports her "pregnant" body. Text and hidden beast become

one in this gesture and it is the marriage of beast/abyss to woman's body that enable Mary Magdalen to look directly at us: she is not masked by inappropriate notions of "celebration"/"proclamation." To reinstate the initial question, what is happening when Mary Magdalen reads?, she looks ahead with her strange globe protruding, pausing to confront us with her celebratory posture.

7.1 Conclusion

To conclude Chapter 2: Reading the Johannine Narrative, I would like to restate this chapter's most basic claims. I began this inquiry by stating that the goal of this chapter was to trace the woman centred hermenutical tradition. I brought my own hermenutical method to the Johannine narrative where I "read" various textual moments. The objective of this goal was not to end up with "celebration" in its re-membered form, but rather to trace this woman-centred hermenutical tradition, to identify its features and to confront this woman-centred hermenutical in action so that my subversive "findings" of this exploration not only substantiated the claims I have made thus far regarding women, reading and writing, they would also enable my inquiry to be pitched into a space of actually encountering "celebration" in some of its re-membered manifestations (1.1).

The Johannine narrative was an apt place to stage such an exploration because of its strong western cannon association, the fourth gospel's inclination towards disruption and the narrative as a text infected with issues regarding reading and writing in a gendered sense (1.2).

I began my "reading" of the fourth gospel with John 20:1-18. I targeted textual moments associated with two textual strands conjoining and read into their tension (2.1). I identified five crucial moments within this narrative which began to reveal the woman-centred hermenutical tradition's personality. These "personality traits" include excess as a positive aspect of woman's "calling(s) out," a commitment to narrative to exceed imposed boundaries and to journey to "the end of the story that cannot be told," and a continual and responsible confronting of history (2.2-2.9).

My inquiry then sought to explore Jesus as a body in relation to other feminine bodies. Beginning with the body of the Virgin Mary in which I concluded that Jesus' worldly birth and the fourth gospel's urge towards baptism is a textual statement about women's bodies and their textual

status; in this context woman represents death. However, the other possibility as maintained by the woman-centred hermenutical tradition is that the Virgin Mary's statement, "They have no wine," is an invocation of the actual, maternal body. Thus, a powerful re-memory is invoked that is the encouraging blood-line which enables women to read, write and interpret anyway (3.1-3.5).

Moving into feminine bodies subjected to "the gaze," I examined the history of the gaze and its multi-dimensional features: the gaze as a tool that distracts focus on women's actual bodies behaving in union, and finally the gaze as a commodity conductor which passes the bodies of women between borders of male ownership. In John 4:1-35, Jesus sits at the site of the well, house of the gaze, not to invoke union, but to obliterate the body (thus woman's textual posture) of woman (4.1-4.4).

The well narrative then goes on to establish the foundation from which to meditate on Jesus as writer. In John 8:1-11, we encounter the story of two texts: the body-text of the adulterous woman and Jesus' text of dust. The body-text of woman is obliterated in the spirit of the ether-body that urges baptism (5.1-5.4).

My "reading" of the Johannine narrative ends with the figure who was central to those readings: Mary Magdalen. By reading various paintings I arrive at Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen*[82], Mary Magdalen here houses the hidden swan which is a sign of woman's intimate union/connection with the abyss or that which exists past imposed narrative boundaries. This strange picture confronts us with woman's celebratory posture (6.1-6.3).

The journey provided by walking through the Johannine narrative makes it possible in Chapter 3: Women's Contemporary Fiction, to enter into the realm of the crisis of "celebration" in some of its re-membered manifestations.

[82] Gould. *The Paintings of Corregio.* p 58.

Figure 1

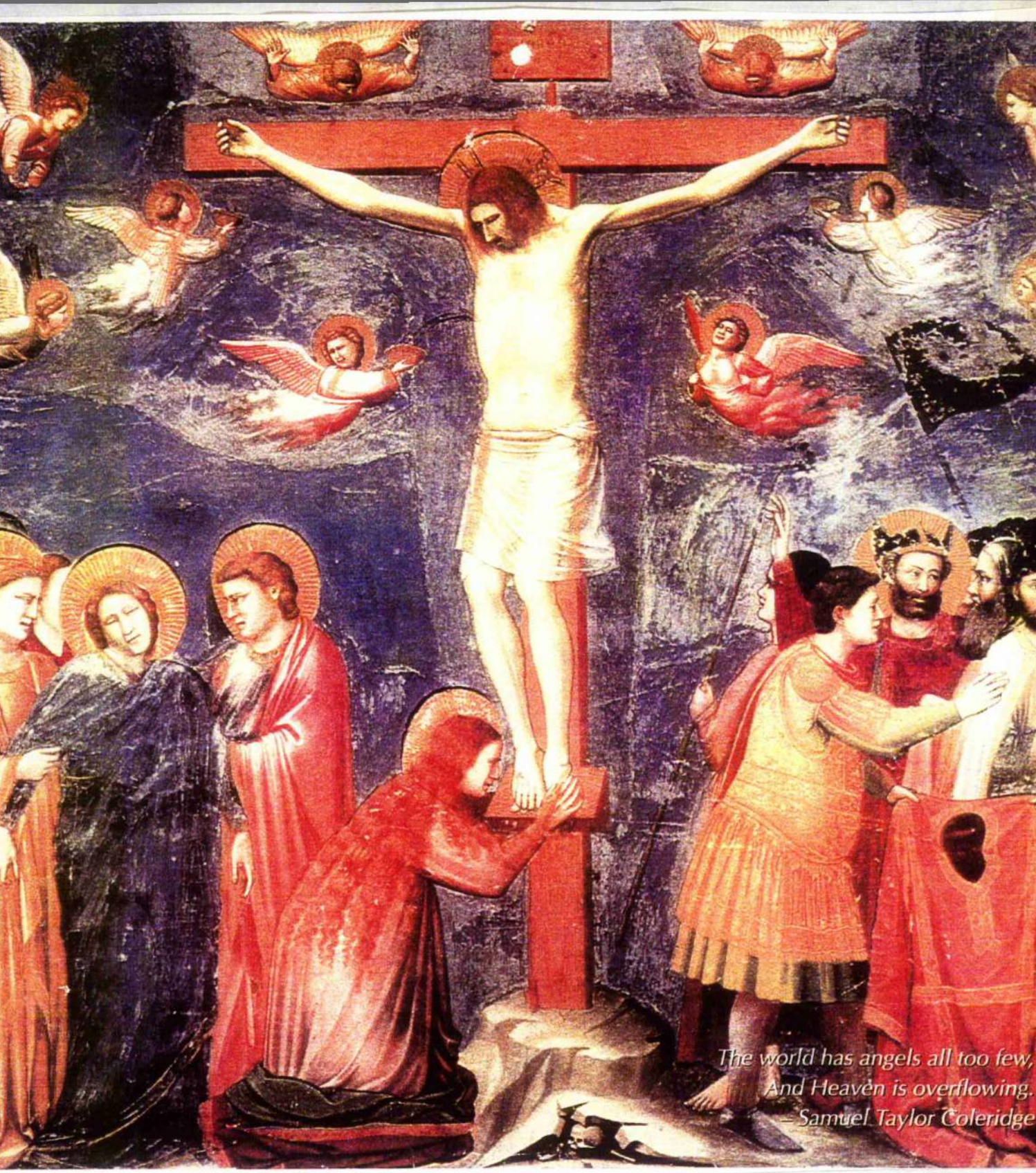
The world has angels all too few,
And Heaven is overflowing.
– Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Figure 2

Figure 3

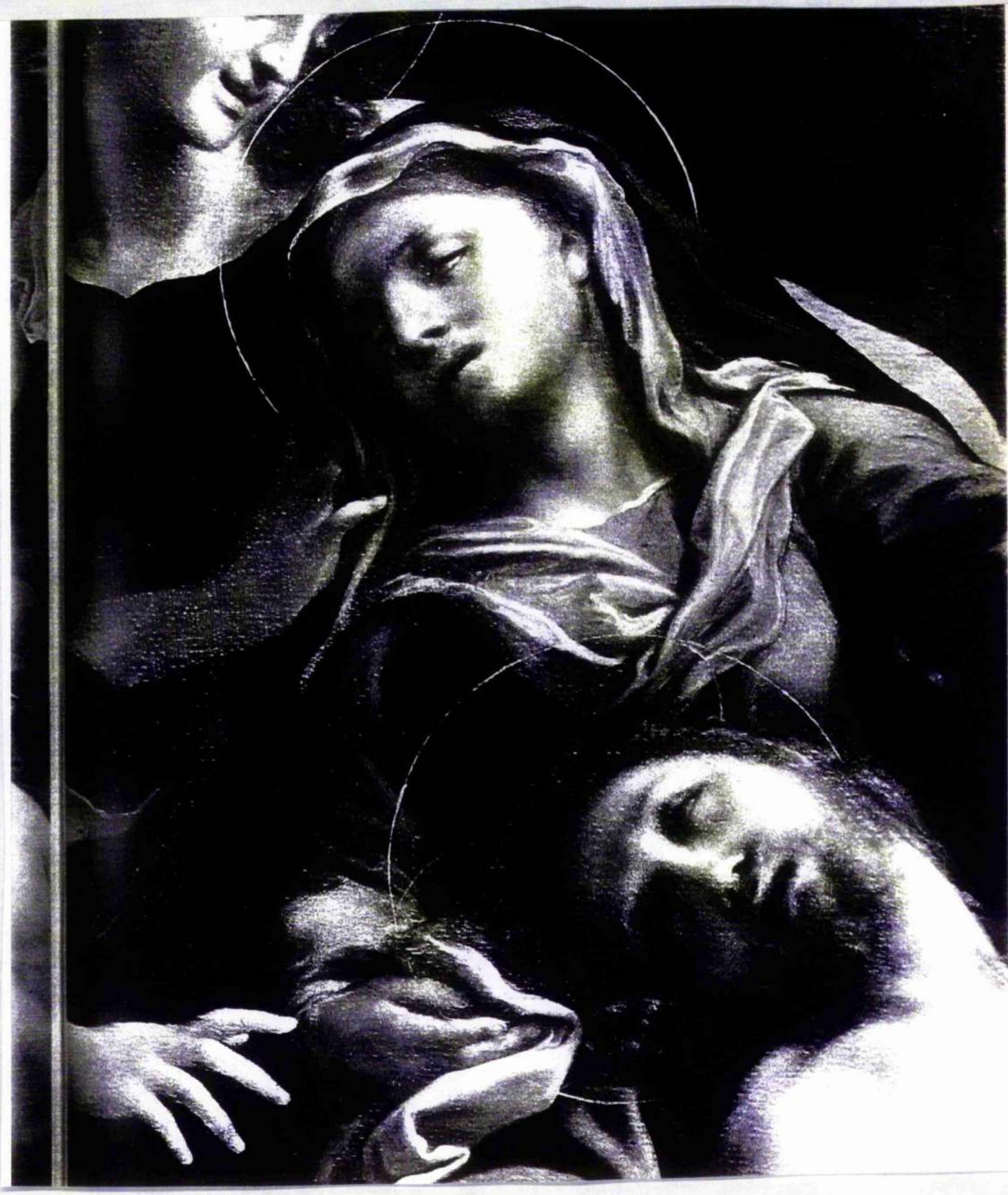

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

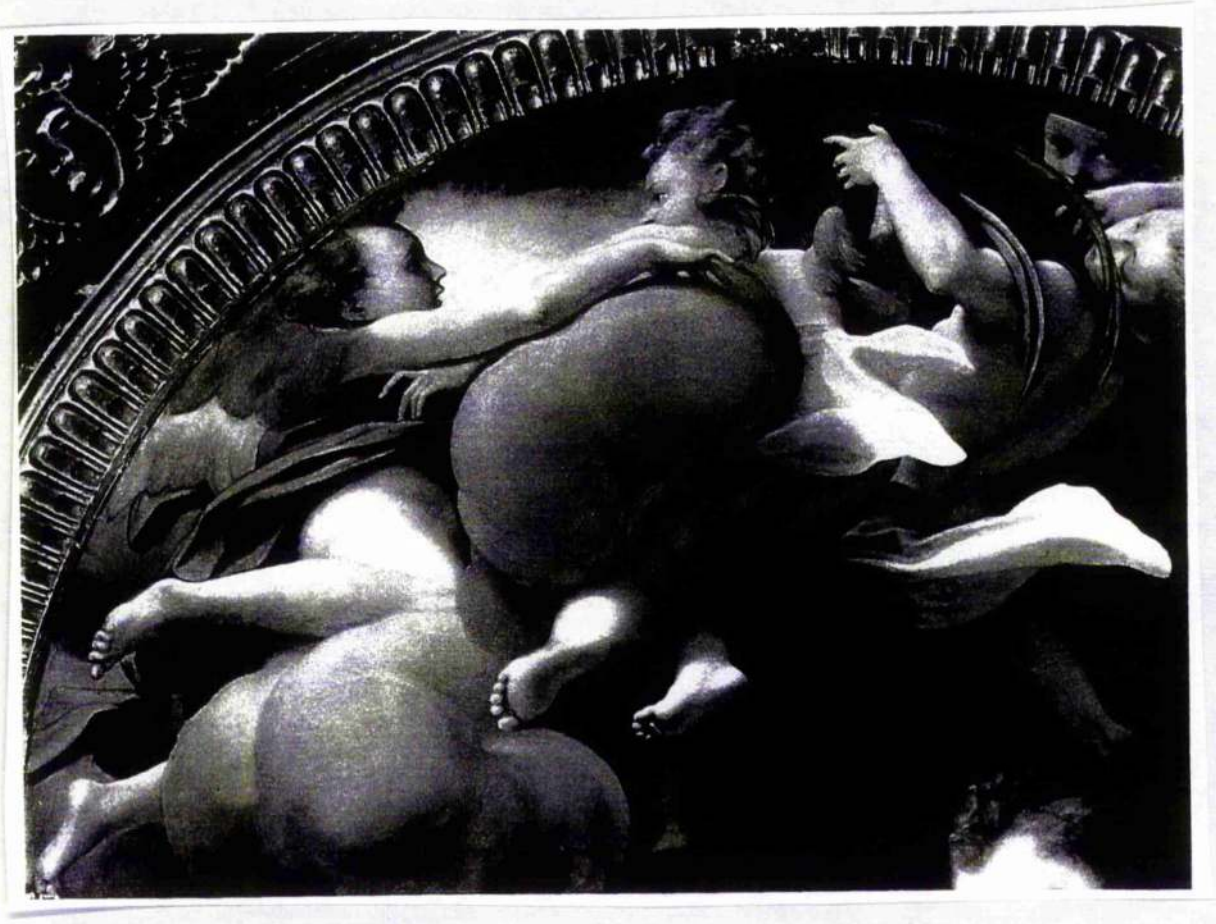

Figure 8

Figure 9

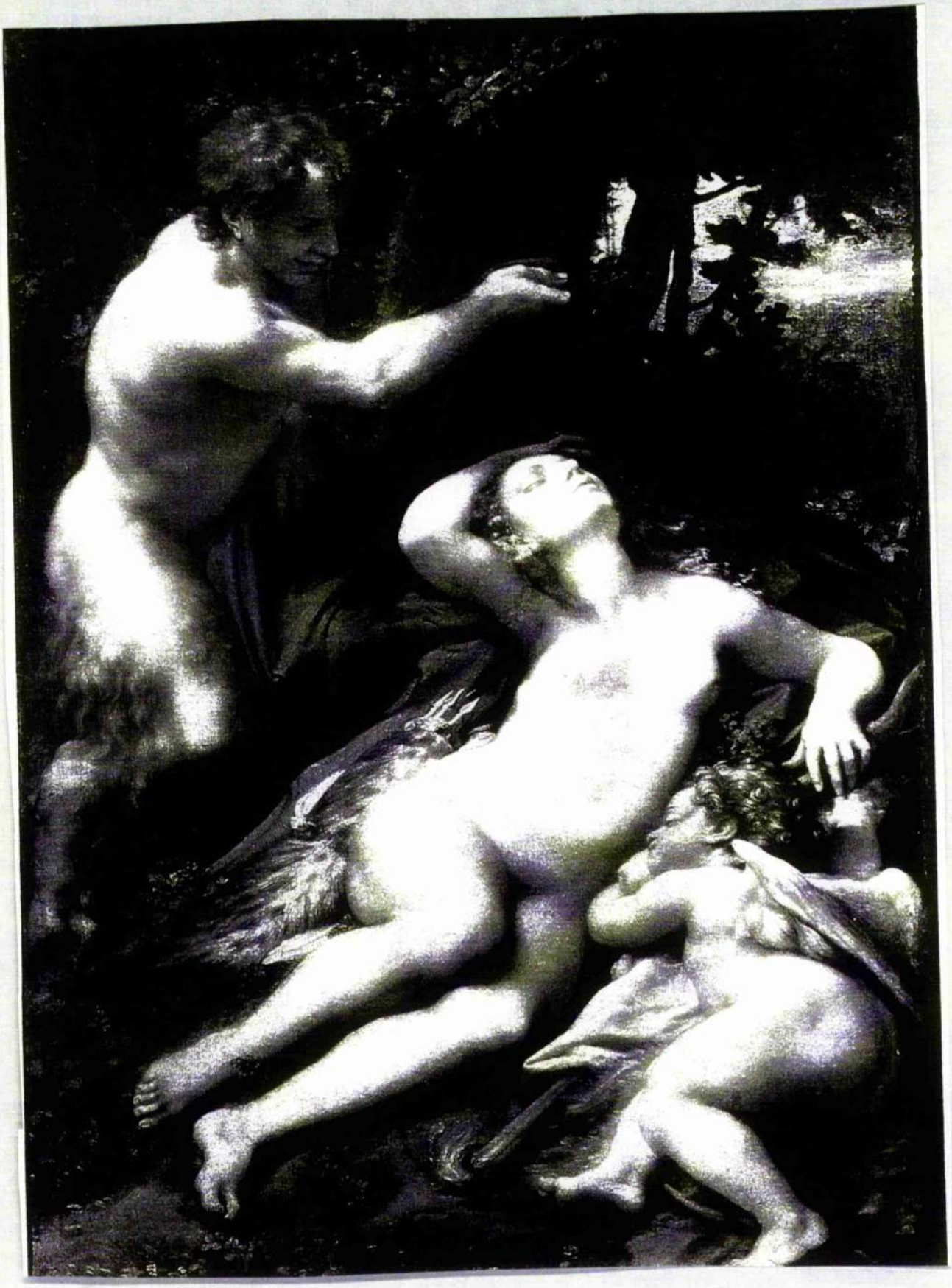

Figure 10

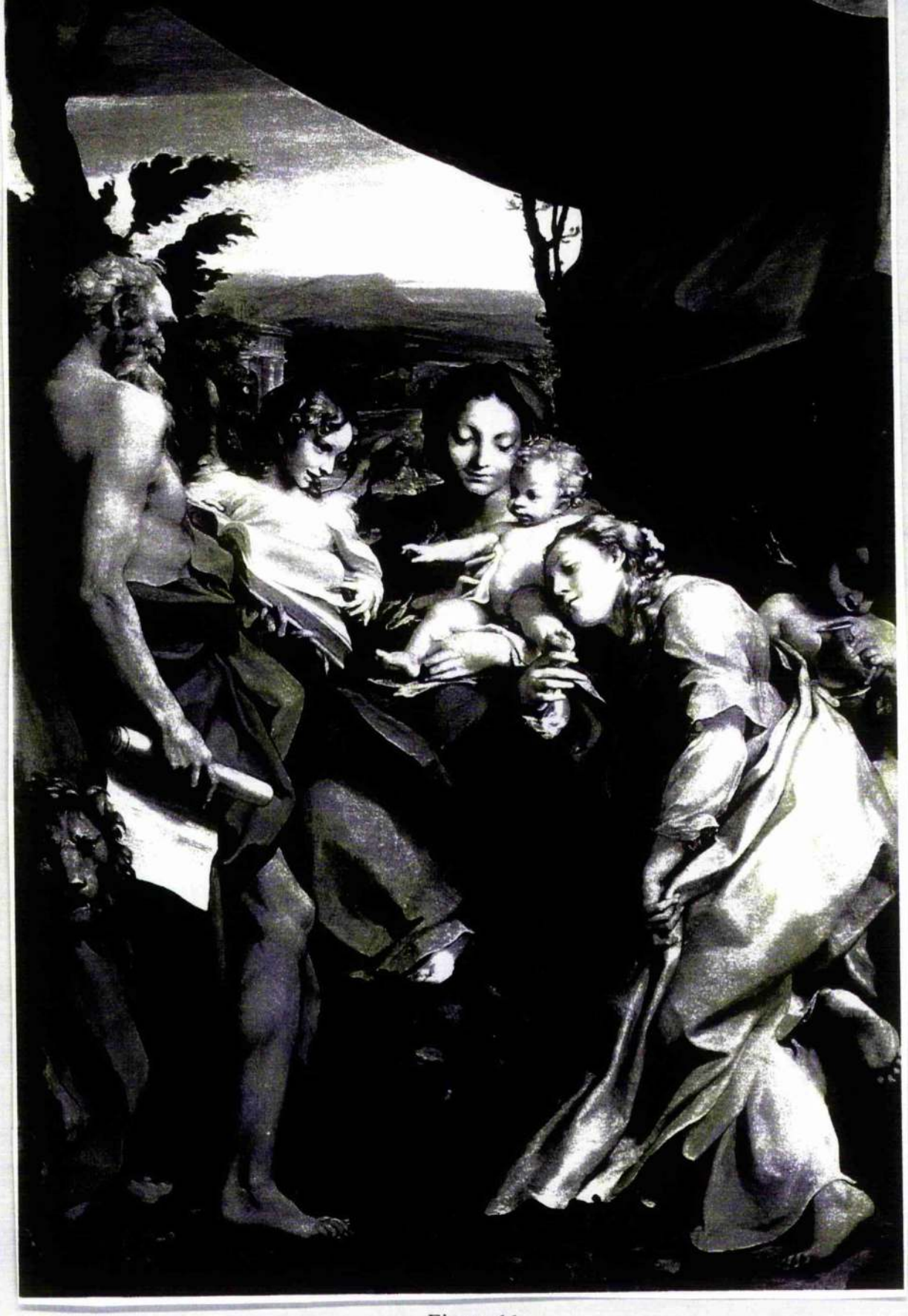

Figure 11

Figure 11:detail

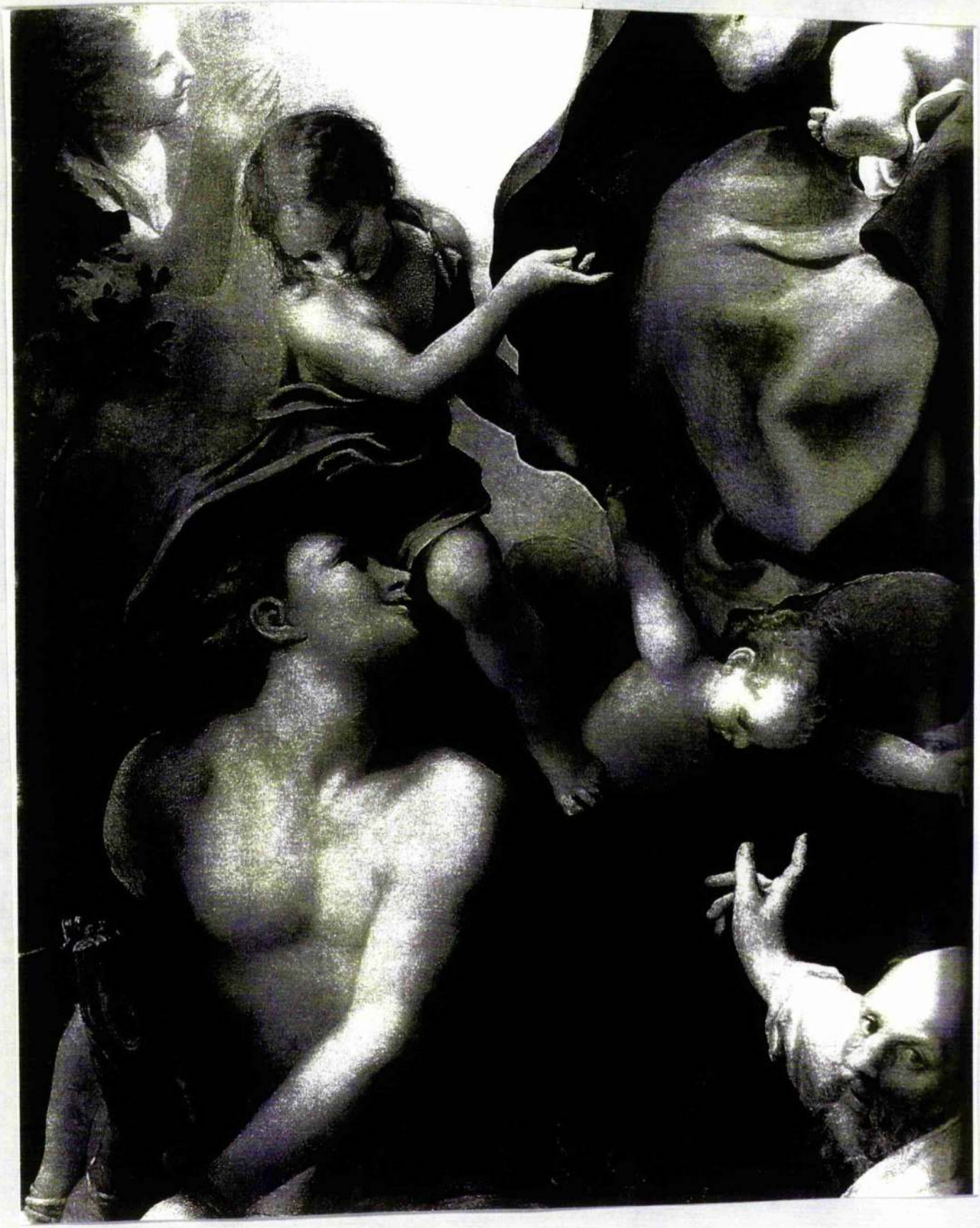

Figure 12

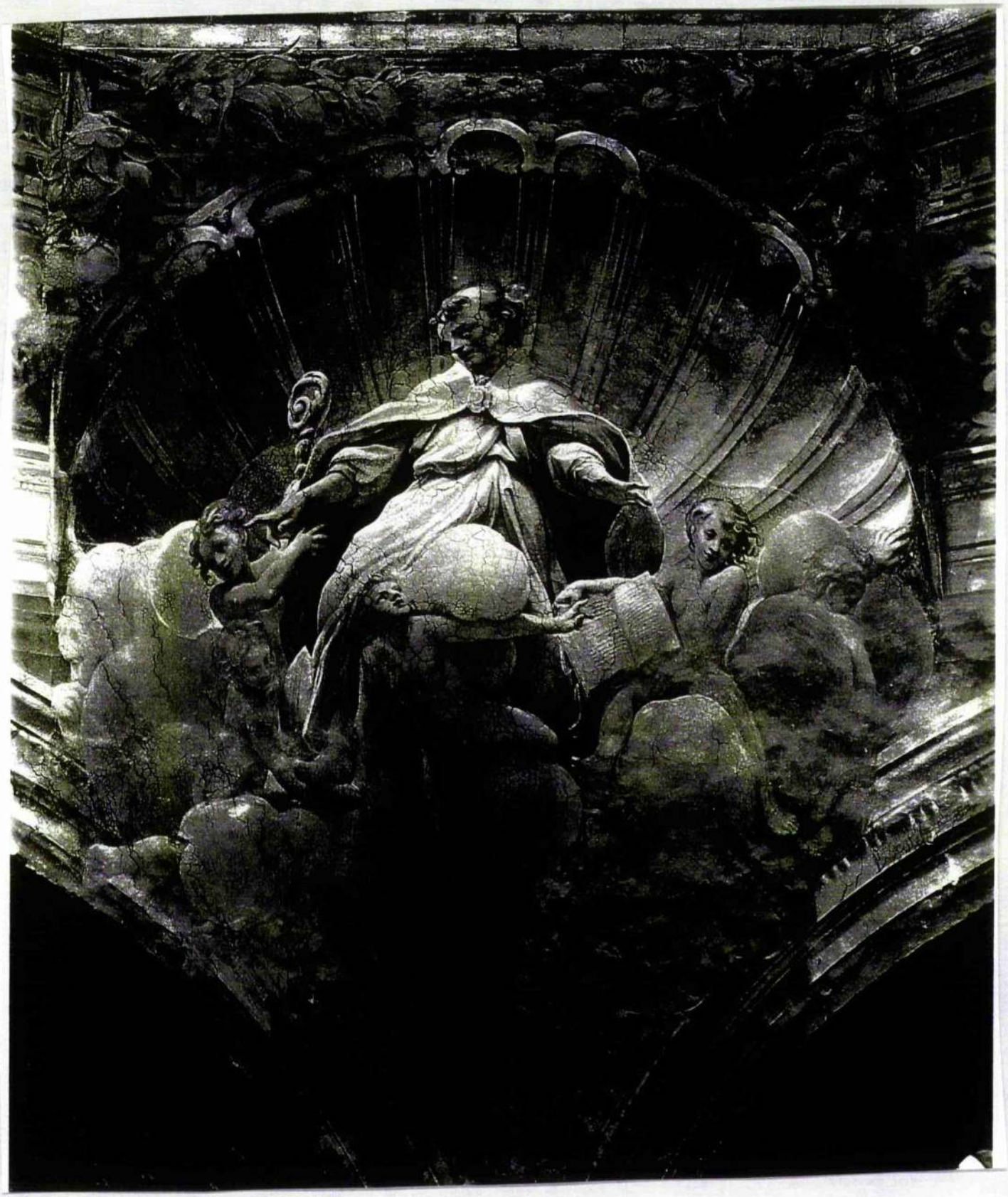

Figure 13

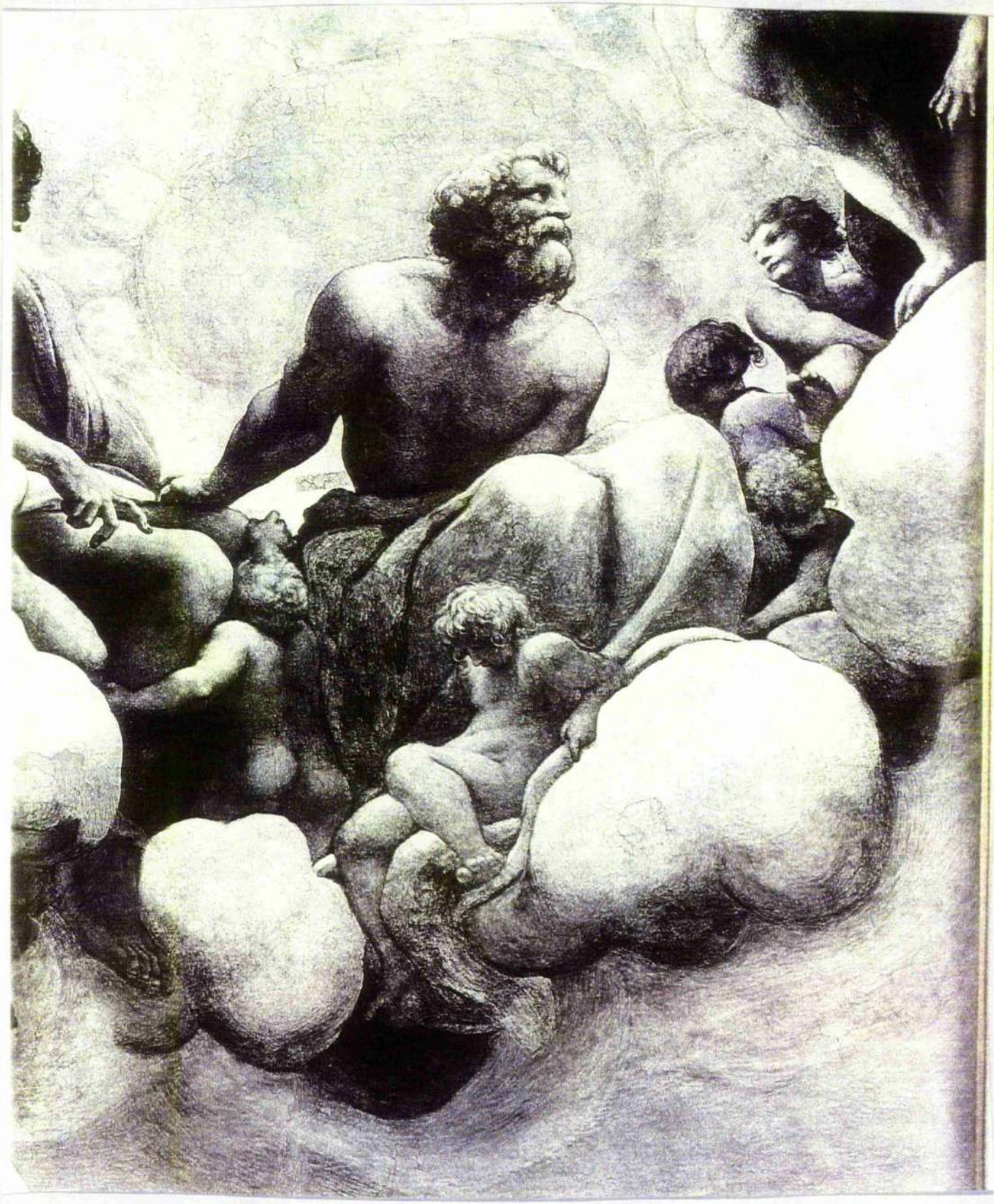

Figure 14

Figure 15

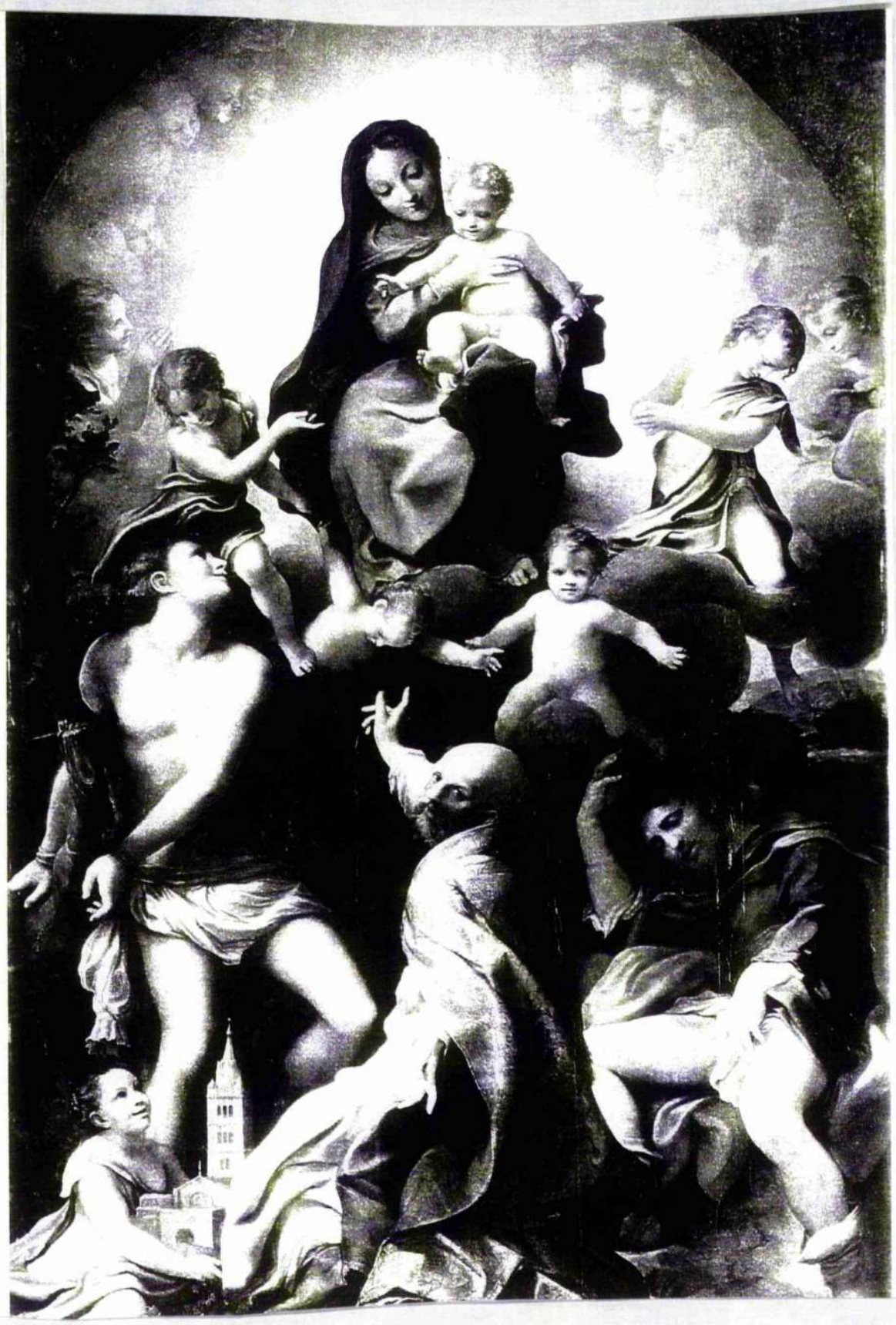

Figure 16

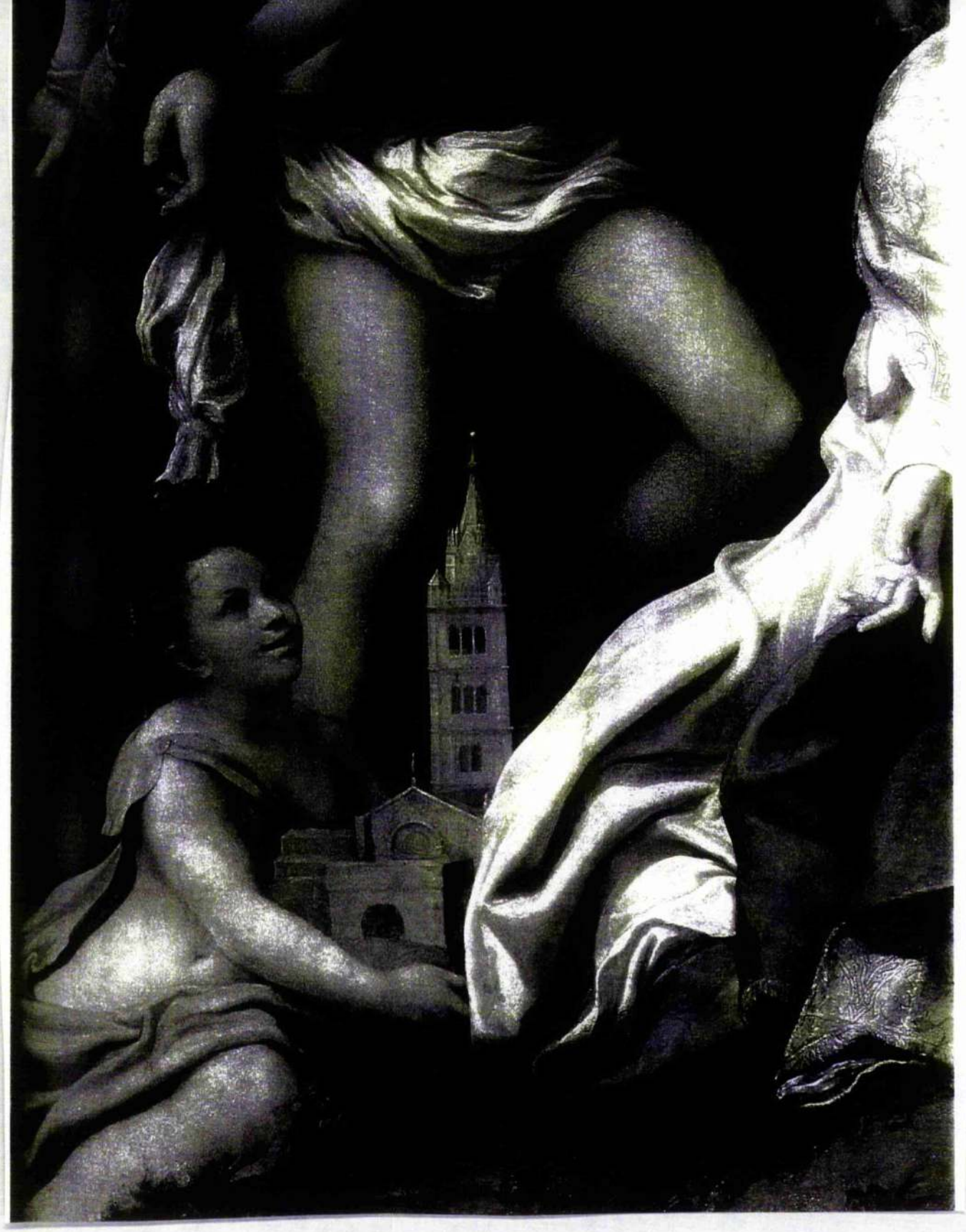

Figure 16:detail

Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

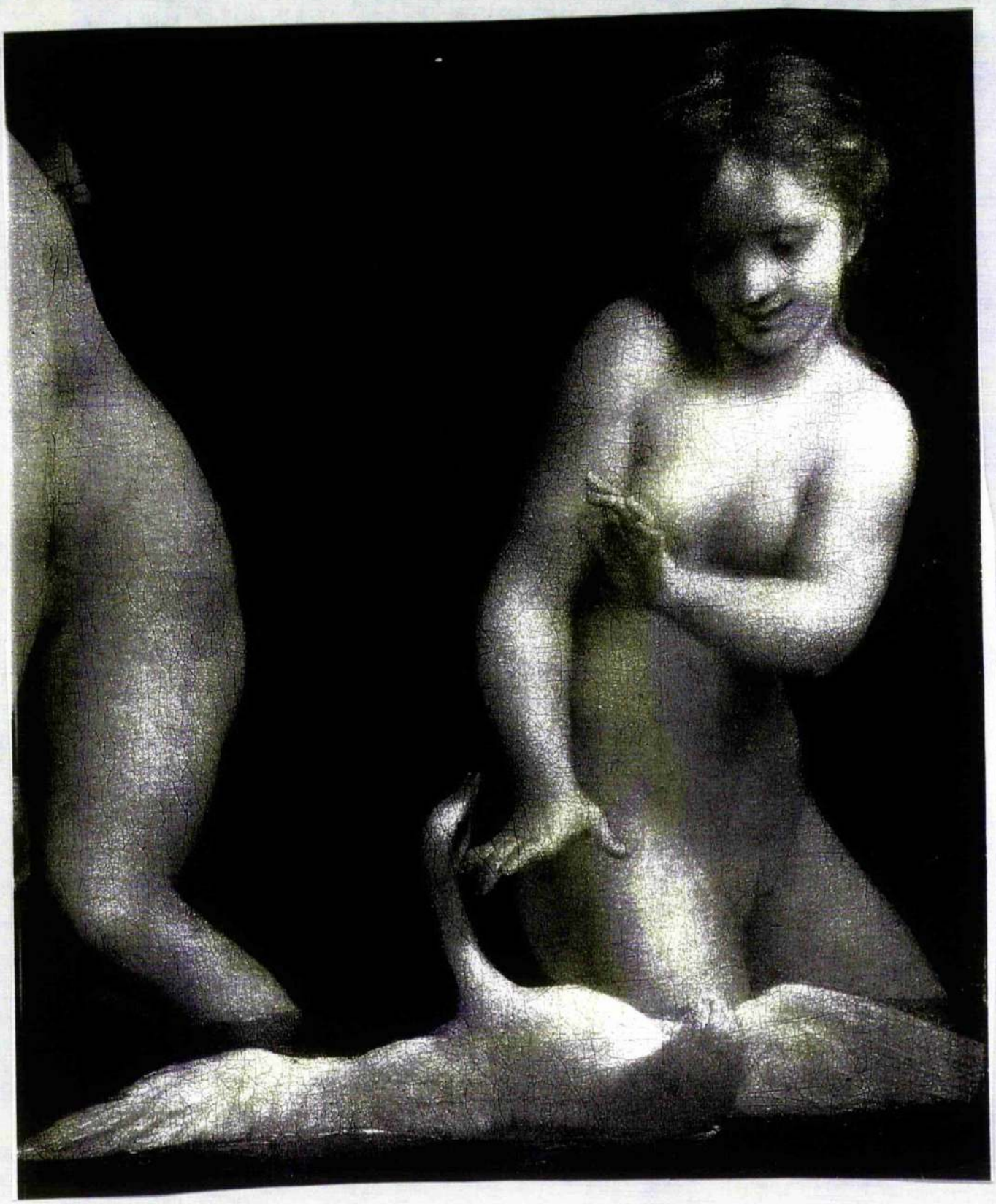

Figure 19:detail

Figure 20

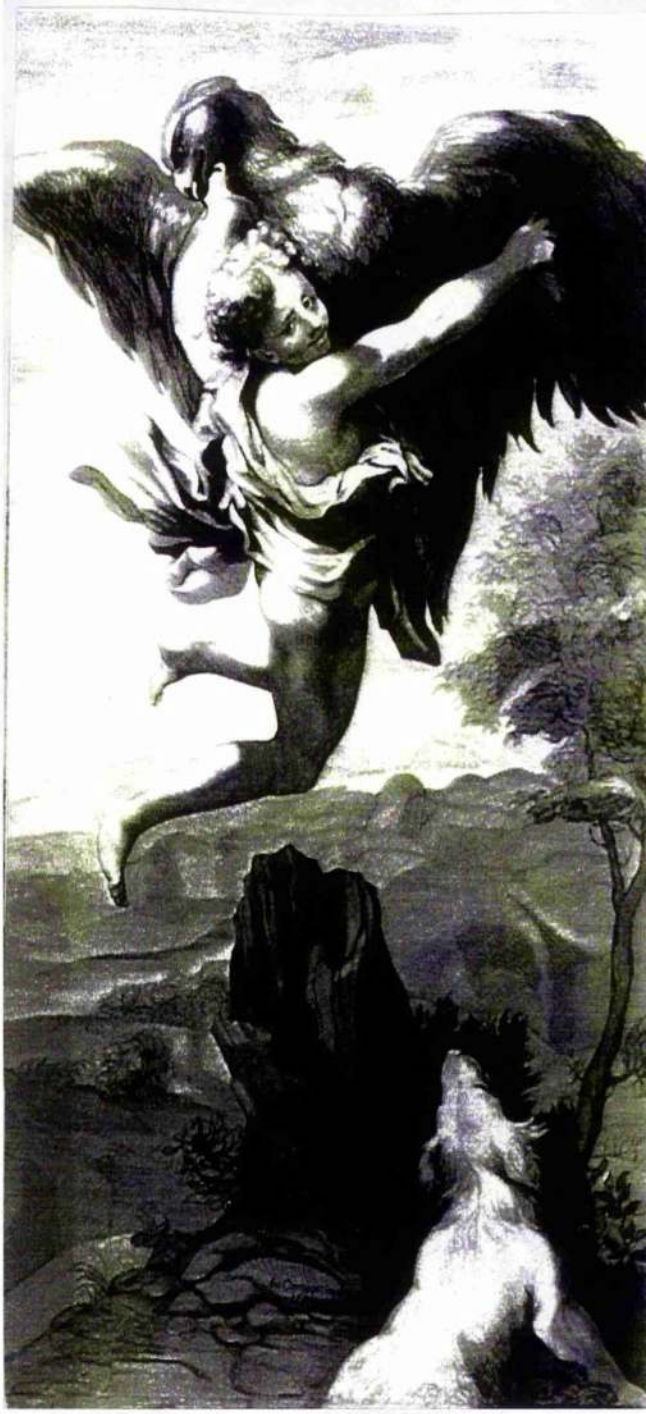

Figure 21

Figure 22

Figure 23

Chapter 3: Women's Contemporary Fiction

1.1 Introduction

Thus far, this inquiry has done two important things. It has established woman's textual situation (Chapter 1: The Phenomenon of Ordination[83]) and it has begun to trace what I have called a woman centred hermenutical tradition (Chapter 2: Reading the Johannine Narrative[84]). To bring these claims into the sphere of women's contemporary fiction, I offer a brief review of the first two chapter's most basic claims.

In Chapter 1: The Phenomenon of Ordination, I explored ordination's intstitutional definition and conduded that ordination, meaning 'to call out', is not an ecclesiastical invention, but an event that belongs to the realm of language. This is so 'to call out' recalls language's most basic attempts to trace the void and to move towards the signed[85]; therefore, ordination is a manifestation of the very frustration of language itself. Furthermore, women's bodies are 'called out already'; they are naturally ordained by their self-sufficiency. When women read, write or interpret – when women 'call out' in any way – they are confounding their already 'called out'/ordained status; therefore, women's reading, writing and interpreting are inherently excessive. Woman's bodily status conditions her relationship to language and this is a specific and unique basis for what will prove to be a woman centred hermenutical tradition[86].

In Chapter 2: Reading the Johannine Narrative, I take the foundation that women maintain a unique relationship as conditioned by their bodily, naturally ordained status into the Johannine text where I begin to trace this woman centred hermenutical tradition. This woman centred hermenutical tradition is not bound to the fourth gospel, however I feel the Johannine narrative is an appropriate text infected with issues regarding reading and writing

[83] See page 1

[84] See page 32
[85] See Chapter 1: section 3.6, page 26
[86] See Chapter 1: section 3.7, page 27

in a gendered sense. The hermenutic I engage to read various moments in the Johannine text maintains its own rules which are critical but not strictly academic. As a result, my creative readings became the instrument to expose moments of slippage within the text. It is in these exposed moments that the woman centred hermenutical tradition is revealed[87]. By 'reading' Jesus' relationship to women in the Johannine text and by 'reading' the body of Jesus (and focusing on Jesus as reader/writer), this woman centred hermenutical tradition emerged. The basic feature of the woman centred hermenutical tradition involves women as unique readers based on their bodily, ordained status which conditions their textual relationships. When women read, write, or interpret (when they 'call out' in any way) they are behaving in excess. My readings of various textual moments revealed that this excess responsibly and continually confronts history and disputes textual closure. This reading and writing posture posits woman in the unique position of being able to 'tell the story that cannot be told' or to 'journey towards the end of the story that cannot be told'[88]. However, the Johannine narrative seeks to subvert this textual position by destabalising this reading and writing posture and ultimately offers and urges another prescribed relationship to language[89]. As a result, women's proclamations are disbelieved. In the biblical sense, disbelief of women is a feature of narrative[90]; however, this disbelief of proclomation is not confined to biblical texts, but a phenomenon sensed in a multitude of historical experiences. Examples include women not being allowed to administer the sacraments, vote, own land, or seek higher education. Therefore, the disbelief of women's proclamations is a feature of the woman centred hermenutical tradition that I have outlined. Proclamation means 'to call out' and this is also the definition of 'celebration', thus women celebrating/proclaiming is seen in its fullest crisis.

In Chapter 3: Women's Contemporary Fiction, I bring this structure of a woman centred hermenutical tradition I have established and explored into the realm of women's contemporary writing. Because this is contemporary fiction written *by women*, excess is

[87] See Chapter 2: section 1.2, page 33
[88] See Chapter 2: section 2.8, page 55
[89] See Chapter 2: section 3.5, page 67

supremely available for our consideration. This excess (the 'called out' calling out) offers models of dealing with the crisis of women celebrating in its rawest manifestation: having established that a woman centred hermenutical tradition exists, exploring its structure and its features, I now look to this hermenutic in action. In other words, women's actual writings are the celebratory postures I will here trace. It is in this sphere that the redefining, or rather the re-membering of what 'celebration' means can be traced in some of its manifestations.

In Chapter 2: Reading the Johannine Narrative, I took the concept of a woman centred hermenutical tradition through the biblical text (while maintaining multiple dialogues on various levels) in order to establish and explore its features. In concluding that chapter, I not only validated the woman centred hermenutical tradition as an actual hermenutical experience, I sighted a subversive celebratory posture that demonstrated other articulations regarding what 'celebration'/'proclamation' means. This posture was maintained by Mary Magdalen in Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen* (figure 1). Housed beneath her billowing robe is Leda's swan. This hidden bestial union signs woman's intimate union with the abyss or that which resides past imposed boundaries. No longer does the 'impossible union' of beast (representing that which resides past normal boundaries) and woman exist only within the sphere of the mythological: *it is the biblical character of Mary Magdalen who maintains this posture.* Here the text she reads is developed, no longer connected to the body of Christ. With her gesture of leaning on the text, the text and her posture become one. She looks directly from the site of her bulbous fabric which indicates and protects her connection to that which exists past supposed boundaries. We first encountered Mary Magdalen as a figure to whom other narratives within the fourth gospel always read towards. As she directly confronts us with her subversive celebratory posture a gateway is opened through which to explore other subversive articulations regarding women, celebration and proclamation: the subversive articulations regarding celebration and proclamation we suspected throughout the fourth gospel are fully realised within her posture. From her subversive celebratory posture, we may now take the established woman centred

[90] See Luke 24:8-12 and John 20:1-18

hermenutical tradition into new territory. The beast which transverses the boundaries of mythology to biblical imagery reaches to traverse a new boundary: women's contemporary fiction. The fragmented stomach I traced in order to arrive at Mary Magdalen's subversive celebratory posture now breaks into other curvatures that lead to other stomachs. The contemporary text I will use to explore other subversive posture is *The Shawl* by Cynthia Ozick[91].

1.2 Focusing on Bodies

As discussed in Chapter 2: Reading the Johannine Narrative, women's bodily, ordained status conditions their relationship to texts. This relationship to language is non-negotiable. Thus Jesus' offering/urgings of another relationship to language is understood as a devastating obliteration to woman as a textual being[92]. Staying true to that which establishes women's relationship to language, I begin with the body of a woman in the text that I have chosen, in particular I will focus on this woman's stomach. This focus keeps the image of Mary Magdalen's hidden Leda within the threads of the present narrative thus continually reconfirming that the woman centred hermenutical tradition exists *and* this tradition is responsible for generating *other* articulations regarding what 'celebration' means. In addition to this feature, by focusing on the stomach of a woman, I maintain a constant and continual nearness to the source of that which produces and maintains women's subversive re-memberings of what 'celebration' means: it is the rounded stomach that invokes the rounded shape of the beast/swan which signs woman's unique textual relationship to the abyss or that which exists beyond imposed boundaries.

In the text I have chosen, a multiplicity of bodies in relation to other bodies exist and are vitally important. Accordingly, I will explore these relationships; however, I maintain a focus-body: in *The Shawl* I will focus on the body of Rosa Lublin. I have made the claim that women's bodies condition their textual relationship to language; therefore, to focus on a

[91] Ozick, Cynthia. *The Shawl*. New York: vintage International, 1980.

body in this context is to 'read' how women make their proclamations.

The body maintains a *very* important feature. The swollen, bulbous stomach. This is the impregnated body or the body that has been pregnant. The pregnant body in this context however is not a sign of motherhood as a bodily mode. Rather, the pregnant body in this context is the re-membering of the woman centred hermenutical tradition's structure and it powerfully recalls the crisis of celebration which means 'to proclaim'. In this sense the pregnant body of the contemporary text I have chosen re-members the woman centred hermenutical tradition's structure I have traced in Chapter 2: Reading the Johannine Narrative. The pregnant body then is a cross-roads: it signs the biblical text that so aptly illustrates the woman centred hermenutical tradition as it confronts the crisis of celebration/proclamation in the realm of contemporary fiction.

Focusing on stomachs is to read curves leading into and breaking into the curves of other bodies: with every 'break' or 'curve' into a new stomach/body-text the fragmented texture of the body-text is invited to generate its own articulations; no longer are 'scraps of flesh' discarded – indeed, these areas are targeted and valued for the creative and critical energy they generate. In this way not only is the body-text of one individual valued, the process of re-membering by which we arrive at that body-text is also valued.

As we move from the Johannine narrative into the actual space of subversive celebratory postures (that is women's actual writings) I would like briefly to forge and re-member Johannine body-texts within the metaphor of the stomach. The ballooning mother-belly re-members the Virgin Mary in her own swollen absence in John 1, the sky-cult birth narrative of Jesus, the only son from the father[93]. The bulbous sign re-members the women at the well, the site of union recast by the Johannine Jesus as the site of 'no-union'. The impregnated body here re-members those women that were chosen from the site of the well to continue the blood lines in its child-packed weight as it also re-members the obliteration of the text of the Samaritan woman's voice as Jesus urged the un-bodily condition of 'no-thirst'

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[92] See Chapter 2: section 3.5, page 67
[93] See Chapter 2: section 3.1, page 58

or an alternative to the very thing that establishes woman textually – her body[94] and here the impregnated body heaves with the air-packed weight of exclusion. The maternal distended belly re-members the woman taken in adultery. the body that smelled of thick ash from the charring transition from the sexually charged space of moisture absorbing and seeping into the dry seething space of the unthirsty Jesus with his text of dust. This is woman put in a textual situation: between the gaze and the finger/pen, she who has not been allowed to touch/read, write or interpret[95] is now the text who remains unread. The stomach re-members her because pregnancy is the most available sign of women's naturally ordained status – her body's amazing ability for self-sufficiency – therefore, the round belly re-members what Jesus refused to read. The fat, tight mother-stomach finally re-members Mary Magdalen as a reader in Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen* (figure 1). Mary Magdalen, elbow on text, *looks at us*. Her blue robe does not conceal her nakedness; she is bodily available as signed by her visible breasts. Instead, her robe is house a bulbous glow, Leda's hidden swan, and this is the most powerful sign that brings this journey of re-membering into the present moment. Here, Mary Magdalen's distended stomach's weight is suspended in tension as she leans on the text to support her body. The language of the text upon which she rests is signed by her swollen stomach – body and language here find their shared image; it is the image of the woman reader/writer par excellence. *She looks at us*. In her directness, all lines of discussion within this inquiry intersect. To look away, to break the stare, is to disregard the legitimacy of women as readers/writers maintaining their own articulations regarding what 'celebration' means. To continue to look, is to agree to withstand the possibilities of what is under her swollen gown; it is to be witness to the rawest response to the crisis of women celebrating/proclaiming[96].

Mary Magdalen's pregnant posture directly links us with the swelling stomach I will read in Ozick. Her gaze not only looks at us, it looks into the countless other rounded stomachs. The Pregnant body is two fold in task: it is a sign of what it represents, the

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[94] See Chapter 2: section 4.3, page 74
[95] *Noli me tangere* as and invocation of disallowal; See Chapter 2: section 2.8, page 55
[96] See Chapter 2: section 6.3, p 97

woman centred hermenutical tradition, and thus it re-members bodies and it is an actual model that infects the present moment, re-membering bodies of the here and now. In the text I will read, the focus body's ability distend is a model of redefining or re-membering what 'celebration' means; it is the live possession of the crisis of celebration and the confronting of it. I the case of this text, excess is a model that the woman centred hermenutical tradition prescribes for itself thus making important claims about how this tradition works and what happens when you get to 'the end of the story that can't be told'. With Corregio's *St. Mary Magdalen,* we follow the dark hem of Mary Magdalen's robe as the inviting line curves into its own folds. To follow this line is to meet other models of pregnancy's live action, kicking and squirming in the smarting air: the crisis of women celebrating/proclaiming in action.
Again, I acknowledge the untraditional nature that my own hermenutical method invokes by 'not minding the difference' between academic concept-critical rhetoric and creative, metaphorical rhetoric and in the spirit of women's subversive articulations regarding celebration/proclamation, I continue.

1.3 Types of Pregnancy: the Pregnant Corpse

I have said that the body I will focus on in the text I will read is a pregnant body/body that has been pregnant. The pregnant body is a sign of a model of live excess actually confronting the crisis of proclamation and celebration. In *The Shawl* by Ozick, the focus body is what I will call a pregnant corpse. Because this event is so unusual and will prove to bear most interesting claims regarding women celebrating/proclaiming, I would like to comment on this phenomenon before moving directly into the text itself. In this section, I wish only to establish and qualify the unique position of the 'pregnant corpse'; therefore, I would request patience from my reader if he or she feels that particular concepts are unexplored. The phenomenon of the pregnant corpse will be discussed in great detail in the individual sections dealing specifically with the text.

The first important point of agenda regarding the event of the 'pregnant corpse' is to

identify the conditions that establish a body as a pregnant corpse. The first condition necessary to render a body a pregnant corpse is that the bodies in question must be assigned to the realm of death, yet not belong to that realm exclusively. Naturally, the most basic proof of this condition comes from actual text description.

In Ozick's *The Shawl*, we meet the focus-body of Rosa Lublin. Page 2 reads,

Rosa did not feel hunger; she felt light, not like someone walking but like someone in a faint, in trance, arrested in a fir, someone who is already a floating angel, alert and seeing everything, but in the air, not there, not touching the road.

Rosa no longer feels the conditions that establish the body in the cycles of life. She has gone beyond the known grid in which the normal body lives. Her physical flesh is replaced by a combination of both dead and live flesh. Indeed, the text actively names her as 'someone who is already a floating angel'. Rosa *is* the angel of death in so far that she wears deathly qualities; however, her flesh still hangs onto her being, though it may be 'dead' flesh because it no longer functions. Her unique flesh status prevents a total death qualification for her body. Pages 4 and 5 read,

Without complaining, Magda relinquished Rosa's teats, first the left, then the right; both were cracked, not a sniff of milk. The duct-crevice extinct, a dead volcano, blind eye, chill hole, so Magda took the corner of the shawl and milked it instead[97]**.**

and

Rosa did not menstruate[98]**.**

The imagery used to describe Rosa's breasts conjures up the word 'abandoned'. In this

[97] Ozick. *The Shawl*. p 4

context, it is the normal feminine bodily functions that have been abandoned, yet the flesh as a relic remains. That Rosa no longer menstruates is a further sign of the abandoned feminine bodily functions. The 'normal' functions of the feminine body that have been abandoned are replaced by a new condition: the bodily function of the pregnant corpse.

I have made the claim that women's relationship to language is conditioned by her natural, bodily status. Furthermore, I have said that the pregnant body or the body that has been pregnant is not only a sign of the woman centred hermeneutical tradition, thus re-membering bodies, it is also a model of how women deal with the crisis of celebration/proclamation. In the case of the pregnant corpse, we encounter a body whose unusual status, not qualified as wholly live or wholly dead, disputes life and death boundaries and expands notions of embodiment. This body makes strong abysmal connections which ultimately colours its articulations/responses towards the issue of woman celebrating/proclaiming. Rosa's abandoned sexual organs are our first subversive offerings of the re-membered understanding of what 'celebration' means.

The second, and perhaps obvious condition that renders a body a pregnant corpse, is this: a body that is assigned to this realm, but does not exclusively belong to this realm must also be a pregnant body or a body that has been pregnant.

In *The Shawl*, we are presented with the corpse/body that has been pregnant. Rosa is the mother, the walking cradle[99], of Magda. Reading *The Shawl* is to read Rosa's body, the body of the pregnant corpse, as it contorts around and traverses the length of Magda. In this sense, it is a painful story of curvatures.

Having established the two conditions of what qualifies a body as a pregnant corpse, I hope I have begun to reveal the interesting and complex nature of the model of the pregnant body or body that has been pregnant as a model of confronting the crisis of re-membering what 'celebration' means. In subsequent sections the issues I have raised here will be more fully explored.

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[98] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 5

1.4 The Unique Status of the Pregnant Corpse: A Demand for the Realisation of the Complex Nature of Issues regarding Women and Celebration

Before moving on, I am immediately aware of this unique bodily situation's refusal to locate itself in known embodiment theories. To demonstrate this refusal and to ultimately decide what this refusal means, I will place the concept of the pregnant corpse in competing understandings of embodiment. To fully realise the problematic nature of the issue at hand, I have chosen embodiment understandings as voiced by Luce Irigaray and Camille Paglia, two very different and opposing understandings – to say the least. Not only have both scholars influenced me greatly, I feel that the range between the two theories gives space to draw out the problematic nature of the pregnant corpse. Fully realising this problematic nature is the most appropriate place to begin individual and detailed examinations of each focus-body in question.

Both Irigary and Paglia offer volumes of commentary on gender issues. For the purposes of this inquiry, I will briefly examine three characteristics that shape their understandings of gender and then attempt to locate the 'pregnant corpse' between these understandings. The three characteristics I will focus on include: a basic and brief review of their gender theories, a basic and brief review of their understandings of motherhood, and finally I will briefly examine their understandings of the relationship between gender and writing (calling out).
By way of offering a basic and brief review of Luce Irigaray's understanding of gender, I offer her constitutional style commentary on human dignity for women[100]. Human dignity for women means a) stopping the commercial use of women's bodies and images, b) valid representation of women in actions, words, and images in all public places, and c) stopping the exploitation of motherhood, a functional part of women, by religious and civil powers alike. In all of Irigaray's points of action, the body is implicated. Human dignity for Irigaray is a state in which women's bodies are honoured. She is seeking to pitch the de-valued feminine body into a new realm of relation. Irigaray celebrates difference and cites an

[99] Ozick, *The Shawl*, p 2

inherent difference between male and female logic which she argues underlies western thought and has been supressed by phallocentric principles[101].

Regarding motherhood, as Irigaray's commentary on human dignity for women indicated, she reads religious and civil powers as institutions of exploitation regarding the maternal body. Her own understanding of motherhood locates the pregnant body as the site for a new ethic of responsibility. In this model the relationship between woman and placenta becomes a new map or code for a type of relating to the other (the placenta negotiates and reveals the other). Motherhood to Irigary then envisions the exciting possibility of a realm where people relate to the other in a whole new context[102]. Irigary and others, notably Helene Cixous[103], champion a specific type of feminine writing. This type of writing is grounded in the body and the celebrated difference of this body. One writes out of their body towards life. In this context writing yourself/story equates to one's body 'being heard'[104].

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Camille Paglia would rather not choke on the afterbirth, so to speak. In Paglia's text, *Sexual Personae*, she reclaims phallocentric stereotypes of gender and boldly reinstates them as working truths. On page 9 she writes,

Woman was an idol of belly-magic. She seemed to swell and give birth by her own law. From the beginning of time, woman has seemed an uncanny being. Man honoured but feared her. She was the back maw that has spat him forth and would devour him anew. Men, bonding together, invented culture as a defence against female nature. Sky-cult was the most sophisticated step in this process, for its switch of the creative locus from earth to sky is a shift from belly-magic to head-magic. And from this defensive head-magic has come the spectacular glory of male civilisation, which has lifted woman with it. The very language and logic modern woman uses to assail patriarchal culture were the invention of men.

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[100] Moi, Toril, ed. *French Feminist Thought: a Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.
[101] Irigary, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. London: Athlone Press, 1993.
[102] Toril. *French Feminist Thought: a Reader*.
[103] Toril. *French Feminist Thought: a Reader*.
[104] Irigaray, Luce. *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Sexual Difference*. London: Routledge, 1993.

For Paglia, the body of woman is a chthonian realm: a swampy, unstable arena that bursts with its own fatty-slimed tissues from which no matrix can become anything more than a blood-jellied clot.

Regarding motherhood, Paglia writes:

Woman does not dream of transcendental or historical escape form natural cycle, since she *is* that cycle. Her sexual maturity means marriage to the moon, waxing and waning in lunar phases...She knows there is no free will, since she is not free. She has no choice but acceptance. Whether she desires motherhood or not, nature yokes her into the brute inflexible rhythm of procreative law[105].

Motherhood is not a choice, but a condition to be endured for better or worse. In this context, menstrual blood is the 'birthmark of original sin, the filth that transcendental religion must wash from man' that is remembered each month as woman's will is defeated again until she becomes pregnant which in the best case scenario is a 'happy sacrifice' and in the worse case scenario, '(the) foetus is a benign tumour, a vampire who steals in order to live. The so-called mirade of birth is nature getting her own way[106]. According to this prescription of motherhood, mothers and children, specifically sons of mothers, maintain a specific relationship in which mothers are fatal. Though mothers give life, their connection to the chthonian realm reeks death. Culture, a male invention, is a defence, a safe-hold from the unstable, organic body that devours and dissolves. To be caught in the realm of the mother is to suffer the sticky swamp that constitutes woman's body: jellied fragments, fatty tissue, placental jelly-fish, aborted membranes and it is in this way par excellence that the mother blocks freedom from her son, drowning him in his worst nightmare[107].

Like Irigaray's commentary on gender, writing makes an important appearance in the work

[105] Paglia. *Sexual Personae*. p 10.
[106] Paglia. *Sexual Personae*. p 10.
[107] Paglia. *Sexual Personae*. p 14.

of Paglia. Paglia understands men as sexual conceptualisers and projectors who 'rule art' because art is his response toward and away from the body of woman[108]. This status involves writing,

Male sex is repitition-compulsion: whatever a man writes in the commentary of his phallic projections must be rewritten again and again[109].

Writing, 'calling out', is a male invention. It is the line drawn against mother nature's dangerous curves. Woman could not have invented writing because the line, the mark, the word, is always written against her. Furthermore, this writing bears the feature of 'repitition compulsion'. Man must continually re-inscribe his phallic projection/word because he must continually separate himself from his slimy origin which is represented by the body of woman[110].

Irigaray and Paglia sit on opposite ends of the embodiment spectrum and by engaging these extremes, I would now like to posit the 'pregnant corpse' in-between these competing theories to illustrate the rich complexity of the crisis of re-membering what 'celebration' means.

To begin with Irigaray, I will restate her understanding of writing and gender. She argues for a feminine writing that is grounded in the body. In this context, woman writes from the site of her body towards life. This motion equates story and body so that making one's story heard is to make one's body heard. My inquiry agrees with Irigaray that a fundamental difference between male and female logic exists and that this difference has been supressed by historical phallocentric principles. My own understanding of the woman centred hermenutical tradition I have traced, seeks to 'celebrate' this difference as well. Like Irigaray, I too believe woman's body and writing are inherently linked. However, Irigaray writes from the site of her body towards *life*. The pregnant corpse, a definite textual event that signs

[108] Paglia. *Sexual Personae*. p 31.
[109] Paglia. *Sexual Personae*. p 27.
[110] Paglia. *Sexual Personae*. p 28.

woman's own prescriptions for dealing with the crisis of 'celebration' as it offers counter-articulations towards actual working models of excess for women, disputes this motion Irigary champions. The pregnant corpse disputes boundaries concerning life and death. This ability to 'go beyond' the normal grid of experience resonates back to the woman centred hermenutical tradition that it represents in which features of this tradition included disputing 'supposed ends' and going beyond narrative boundaries. The pregnant corpse houses the tension and violence of both life and death realms. Indeed she will write from the site of her body, but not only towards life. Rather, her unique embodiment gives her the expanded vocabulary to address the abyss, the realm that spans life and death. Accordingly, this disruption by the pregnant corpse into Irigaray's understanding of woman's body and writing calls into question her understandings of woman's body and motherhood by revealing the complex nature of issues surrounding celebrating/proclaiming.

Unlike Irigaray who understands women writing towards life, Paglia understands writing as a male invention that writes against his own death that ultimately must be re-inscribed repeatedly. In this context the body of woman, which is the thing written against, is repeatedly re-inscribed. To demonstrate the problematic features of Paglia's understanding, I offer the pregnant corpse body of Rosa, the focus-body I will 'read' in *The Shawl*. The text strongly indicates that Rosa becomes pregnant as a result of being raped by SS officers in a concentration camp[111]. As I stated earlier, Rosa's body is assigned to the realm of death but does not exclusively belong to this realm *and it is this type of body that is raped.* To entertain Paglia's theory, we might understand these men inscribing their phallic projection unto a death text, the body of Rosa. Death text in this context equates to a type of pulp fiction: the text meant to stay on the floor of the brothel, the vermin text, the text never meant to be read. That Rosa becomes a pregnant corpse is not something these phallic projections counted on. In this sense, she becomes the page that got away. In other words, the pregnant corpse becomes the page that reads against Paglia's understanding of woman's body and writing because for Paglia, it is woman's body, an unstable watery realm that is written

[111] Ozick, *The Shawl*. p 5.

against because of male fear of death; however, the pregnant corpse writes against the nature boundaries Paglia establishes. In the case of Rosa, woman's body is not so simply confined to 'earth cult'. The body traverses the arenas of life and death. To only write against woman because she represents chthonian nature, literally the bowels of the earth[112], is to miss half of her territorial span. Accordingly, as the pregnant corpse disrupts Paglia's understanding of the body and writing, the dynamics of her understandings of woman's body and motherhood are called into question by the demand to review and re-member what 'celebration' means for women.

Having posited the condition of the pregnant corpse in-between two embodiment theories, I have hoped to expose the pregnant body or body that has been pregnant as a rich and complex model that signs other articulations towards models of excess for women as it actively feels and re-members the crisis of what 'celebration' means. If the pregnant corpse as a sign of the woman centred hermenutical tradition and a model presently engaged in dealing with the crisis of celebration/proclamation does not mean these things, two theories that represent a range of embodiment theories, what then does it mean? To begin to answer this question I will now move on to examine the focus-bodies in question in a more thorough exploration.

2.1 *The Shawl*: Introduction

I began this chapter's discussion with focusing on the pregnant body or body that has been pregnant. This bodily status is not a sign of woman's biological function but rather a sign that forges a link to the woman centred hermenutical tradition I traced in biblical narrative to women's contemporary fiction. In this sense, the pregnant body or the body that has been pregnant re-members the woman centred hermenutical tradition it represents as it signs a model prescribed by this tradition in which subversive articulations regarding women and celebration emerge.

[112] Paglia. *Sexual Personae. p 13.*

There are two guiding features that establish the conditions that qualify a body as a pregnant corpse. The fist feature is that the body in question must be assigned to the realm of death but not belong to this realm exclusively. The second feature that begins to colour this unique bodily status emerges when this type of body is pregnant or this type of body has been pregnant. This unique condition demands a radical review and/or re-membering of what 'celebration' means as demonstrated by attempting to place this bodily condition in known embodiment theories.

The focus body of Rosa in *The Shawl* brings the condition of the pregnant corpse into this narrative from the point of view that Rosa moves from the live, normal feminine bodily functions into the realm of death where she becomes pregnant and bears a child, Magda. My goal in the following pages is to 'read' Rosa's bodily condition. To do is to examine a subversive posture of woman celebrating This posture is signed by the fact that the story of Rosa is by a woman writing Rosa is the manifestation of a woman's 'calling(s) out'. In addition to this, the specific attention that will be paid to the condition of Rosa is attention paid to her stomach, the stomach signing the woman centred hermenutical tradition and the actual crisis of women celebrating/proclaiming.

As I have just said, I will 'read' various moments within *The Shawl.* This 'reading' is in the same spirit of Chapter 2: Reading the Johannine Narrative, in which I engage my own hermenutical formula for exploring texts and making particular claims. The hermenutical tool I employ to accomplish this are my own readings of various narrative moments. This hermenutical method is critical, however it does not require specific academic rules to monitor its movement.

Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl* contains two separate texts that brutally intersect to form a concentrated and powerful narrative. To begin the following discussion, I offer this brief summary of the narrative. The first part of *The Shawl* is a short story, 'The Shawl' (pages 3-12). The second text which forms the second half of the narrative is a novella, 'Rosa'. The diptych texts area Holocaustic tale. 'The Shawl' takes place in a concentration camp. A woman, Rosa, houses her child, Magda, in a shawl while Rosa's niece, Stella, a ravenous girl

of fourteen, looks onto this maternal scene with sadness and envy. The shawl conceals Magda from being found out by the camp guards who would certainly kill her as it also sustains her by providing a type of super-natural form of nourishment that Rosa's own body cannot provide. As the shawl sustains and protects Magda it proves to be a brutal form of security that maintains a devestating set of conditions that shape life for Magda. Rosa cannot give the shawl with its hidden bundle away because the reciever may reject it by dropping it thus killing Magda. In addition to this, as long as Magda stays within the realm of the shawl she remains mute. During a camp roll-call Rosa leaves Magda on a bed in the bunker quietly nesting under her shawl. Stella removes the shawl claiming that she was cold thus exposing Magda to the open air. Magda toddles on her ulcerated bones into the sunlight where she is found by camp guards who murder her by throwing her into a wire fence. This horrible scenario is completed by Rosa taking the shawl and swallowing it, and drinking it 'until it dried'.

In 'Rosa' (pages 13-70) the same woman, Rosa Lublin, appears thirty years later in a Miami hotel. The Miami hotel is her home after having to leave New York where she destroyed her business, a bric and brac shop, with her own hands. She is waiting for Stella, her niece living in New York, to return the sacred vestige of Magda's babyhood to her, the shawl. While waiting for the return of the shawl she meets 'Persky' at a laundry-mat. By a mis-adventure, Rosa loses a pair of her underwear, an event she views with shame. In seeking her lost underwear, she has a series of adventures that pitch her relationship to the shawl into its most painful context, thus raising edges of her 'story' that constitute a powerful testimony of experience. 'Rosa' ends with the return of the shawl and Rosa's 'calling out' to Magda, her daughter, with whom she maintains an unusual relationship.

2.2 The Shawl Emerges

'The Shawl' is where we first meet Rosa, the pregnant corpse. The pregnant corpse's body buzzes with a tension that heralds the emergence of the shawl. 'The Shawl' begins,

Stella, cold, cold, the coldness of hell. How they walked on the roads together, Rosa with Magda curled up between sore breasts, Magda wound up in the shawl. Sometimes Stella carried Magda. But she was jealous of Magda. A thin girl of fourteen, too small, with thin breast of her own, Stella wanted to be wrapped in the shawl, hidden away, asleep, rocked by the march, a baby, a round infant in arms. Magda took Rosa's nipple, and Rosa never stopped walking, a walking cradle. There was not enough milk; sometimes Magda sucked air; then she screamed. Stella was ravenous. Her knees tumours on sticks, her elbows chicken bones[113].

Upon meeting these bodies walking, immediately the conditions of their breasts come to our attention: Rosa's sore breasts and Stella with 'thin breasts of her own'. Between these sets of breasts atrocity has caused a horrible collapse. In Karl Plank's work, *Mother of the Wire Fence: Inside and Outside the Holocaust*[114], he discusses this type of 'maternity infected by atrocity': 'Such acts violate our expectation of motherhood, but leave us no ground from which to understand, let alone judge'[115]. Indeed, it is this type of maternity that conditions the scene we now face. Stella is fourteen, she is just becoming a woman; however, the atrocity of the Holocaust has frozen her in a passage of physical muteness: she cannot go on to assume her womanly body, nor can she reassume her childhood body. Rosa's body is the impotent stalk that hovers between the competing wants of those with whom she 'walked on the roads together'. The body of the pregnant corpse cannot provide nourishment for the two dependants, Magda and Stella. The atrocity of the Holocaust has collapsed a mother's ability to nurture and sustain: the body that had passed puberty into the realm of the cyclic and the self sufficient now seethes in its own still and hollow dryness. The anxiety that hovers on the dry edges of the four abandoned breasts and the infant finds its most devestating articulation in the lack of nourishment. There is no nourishment from

[113] Ozick. *The Shawl*. p 3.
[114] Plank, Karl A. *Mother of the Wire Fence: Inside and Outside the Holocaust*. Westminister John Knox Press, 1994.
[115] Plank. *Mother of the Wire Fence: Inside and Outside the Holocaust*. p 30.

the site where we expect it, the maternal body; however, something else arises: a super-natural form of nourishment from the shawl which sustains as it simultaneously establishes brutal conditions for existence.

The shawl becomes the other: the wound of our violated expectations of motherhood. The shawl maintains three functions as it enters the abandoned habitat of what was a normal womanly body: it sustains, it is the invocation of a deathly silence, and it is the 'choiceless choice'.

2.3 The Shawl: the Sustainer, the Invocation, the Choiceless Choice

The shawl answers the void of the abandoned crevices of Rosa's flesh left behind as she passed into the condition of the pregnant corpse. The shawl's first response to this dry and brittle landscape is to be the sustainer. In this context, it sustains by protecting Magda and nourishing her. The text reads,

The duct-crevice extinct, a dead volcano, blind eye, chill hole, so Magda took the corner of the shawl instead. She sucked and sucked, flooding the threads with wetness. The shawl's good flavour, milk of linen. It was a magic shawl, it could nourish an infant for three days and three nights. Magda did not die, she stayed alive, although very quiet[116].

And

Rosa knew Magda was going to die very soon; she should have been dead already, but she had been buried away deep inside the magic shawl, mistaken there for the shivering mound of Rosa's breasts[117].

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[116] Ozick. *The Shawl.* pp 4-5.

Sustaining Magda by nourishing her and protecting her, the shawl proves to be the 'foul' nourisher. Indeed, the second function of the shawl is to be an invocation of a deadly silence. This invocation of silence is deadly in two senses: it silences Magda, freezing her in the deathly realm of the non-verbal and when the shawl is taken away from Magda this silent ban is released and she 'speaks' and accordingly is killed. Not to speak is to be exiled from normalcy; it is to be a half-formed being: symbolic death:

Ever since the drying up of Rosa's nipples, ever since Magda's last scream on the road, Magda had been devoid of any syllable; Magda was a mute. Rosa believed that something had gone wrong with her vocal cords, with her windpipe, with the cave of her larynx; Magda was defective, without a voice; perhaps she was deaf; there might be something amiss with her intelligence; Magda was dumb[118].

To speak is also death: once the shawl has been removed from Magda,

But now Magda's mouth was spilling a long vicious rope of clamour. 'Maaaa' It was the first noise Magda had ever sent from her throat since the drying up of Rosa's nipples...She saw that Magda was grieving for the loss of her shawl, she saw that Magda was going to die. A tide of commands hammered in Rosa's nipples: Fetch, get, bring! but she did not know which to go after first, Magda or the shawl. If she jumped out into the arena to snatch Magda up, the howling would not stop, because Magda would still not have the shawl; but if she ran back into the barracks to find the shawl, and if she found it, and if she came after Magda holding it and shaking it, then she would get Magda back, Magda would put the shawl in her mouth and turn dumb again[119].

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[117] Ozick, *The Shawl*. pp 5-6.
[118] Ozick, *The Shawl*. p 7.
[119] Ozick, *The Shawl*. p 8.

The shawl, no matter its location, is always the invocation of deadly silence.

The third function of the shawl is that it is the 'choiceless choice'. The 'choiceless choice' is a dilemma that reveals 'maternity infected by atrocity' in its most horrific context. The 'choiceless choice' describes the vacuum space of the Holocaust where every choice is only always death. In the words of Plank, 'Is this choice between two horrors any choice at all?[120]' The shawl as an invocation of a deadly silence most certainly reeks of the horror of the 'choiceless choice': the shawl prevents 'calling out'. If Magda were to put the shawl in her mouth, she would 'turn dumb again' and would not 'speak'. That which replaces the normal function of the maternal breasts, the shawl, alters Magda's relationship to language; therefore, the shawl pitches Magda outside the realm of her body: in order to speak, she must die.

The dilemma of the 'choiceless choice' is also felt as Rosa meditates on possibilities for saving Magda:

Rosa, floating, dreamed of giving Magda away in one of the villages. She could leave the line for a minute and push Magda into the hands of any woman on the side of the road. But if she moved out of line they might shoot. And even if she fled the line for half a second and pushed the shawl-bundle at a stranger, would the woman take it? She might be surprised, or afraid; she might drop the shawl, and Magda would fall out and strike her head and die[121].

To keep Magda means choosing death (death by SS guards or death by the 'foul' nourishment of the shawl), to give Magda away means choosing death (Magda and/or her own). The only choice is death: not hierarchical motions arrange questions; all questions become the single answer – death.

2.4 Tasting the Supernatural Depths of the Shawl: the Abysmal Connection

[120] Plank. *Mother of the Wire Fence: Inside and Outside the Holocaust.* p 27.

Rosa has left the normal feminine functions of her body; as she passed into the condition of the pregnant corpse, a shadow marking and unreturnability to her previous condition as a normal live-flesh body makes a permanent appearance on the scene. The pregnant corpse condition of Rosa cannot undo what atrocity has collapsed: the ability to nourish in a normal live-fleshed way. In the spirit of not being able to function in a live-flesh manner, Rosa does something quite extraordinary that no live-flesh body could ever do: she consumes the shawl, tasting its supernatural depths.

The text reads,

She (Rosa) only stood, because if she ran they would shoot, and if she let the wolf's screech ascending now through the ladder of her skeleton break out, they would shoot; so she took Magda's shawl and filled her own mouth with it, stuffed it in and stuffed it in, until she was swallowing up the wolf's screech and tasting the cinnamon and almond depth of Magda's saliva; and Rosa drank Magda's shawl until it dried[122].

Rosa's fantastic swallowing is the response to the death of Magda whose 'feathered round head and her pencil legs and ballonish belly and zigzag arms splashed against the fence...'[123]. The significance of Rosa's gesture begins to be sensed in Plank's own commentary regarding motherhood within concentration camps:

The very fact of the fence's two sides had, in one sense, already effected her release of the child and set her at a distance. It does not seem, however, to have overcome a manifest will to accompany. Although the mother cannot finally surpass the barrier, she acts to establish a presence that joins to the forbidden edge. As noted in other

[121] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 4.
[122] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 12.
[123] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 12.

instances, it is possible for her to despair or to turn away. She does not. She speaks. She gestures. In these acts she freights the moment with a tangence that touches the other side[124]**.**

Rosa's stuffing of the shawl into her mouth is the gesture that 'touches the other side'. It is the pregnant corpse that can weather the violence of such a fantastic 'stuffing', and it is the pregnant corpse which maintains the extra-sensory ability to taste the 'cinnamon and almond depth of Magda's saliva'. The pregnant corpse can do these things because its condition erases boundaries between life and death; the condition of the pregnant corpse is to span the abyss – to inhabit freely (though not painlessly) the realm that exists past imposed boundaries. It is in this sense that the 'pregnant' feature of the pregnant corpse recalls the stomach which signs the woman centred hermenutical tradition. What is the result of this ability to span the abyss? The result is a subversive celebratory posture.

2.5 Two Lost Things: the Shawl and the Underpants

We leave the site of the fantastic swallowing to re-visit the character of Rosa Lublin thirty years later, 'a madwoman and a scavenger', living in a residential motel in Florida[125].Again, we re-meet those who 'walked on the roads together'. Then, the dry crevices of breasts collapsed by atrocity screeched through the text. Returning to those same breasts thirty years later, the screeching remains, caught in the hell-hot air of a roasting Florida. Rosa is waiting for Stella to return the sacred vestige of Magda's babyhood[126] - the shawl. Immediately, within 'Rosa' two things are lost: the shawl and Rosa's underpants[127]. In order to arrive at the subversive celebratory posture inherent within this tale, we must first chart the mis-adventure of the lost underwear until the underwear intersects with the other lost thing: the shawl.

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[124] Plank. *Mother of the Wire Fence: Inside and Outside the Holocaust.* p 35.
[125] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 13.
[126] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 30.

2.6 The Underwear Pilgrimage

Rosa makes the scorching journey to the laundry-mat where she meets Persky, a Polish-American. In extreme counter-distinction to the character of Rosa, Persky is the essence of friendliness and flirtation. Rosa rebuffs Persky's advances. This series of rebuffs; however, in no way deletes Persky's presence within the narrative; not only does she learn his story, he learns parts of hers. After returning from Persky's company, Rosa discovers that a pair of her underpants are missing, 'An old woman who couldn't even hang on to her own underwear[128].' Rosa believes Persky, 'a sex maniac;, had them in his possession; however, she begins a pilgrimage of seeking the lost underwear as the tension of Persky's perversion prevades her quest.

Rosa begins her pilgrimage of finding the lost underwear in the residential motel where she lives,

To retrieve, to reprieve. Nothing in the elevator; in the lobby, nothing. She kept her head down. Nothing white glimmered up[129].

She moves on to search the road,

The whole day's burning struck upward like a moving weight from the sidewalk. Rosa's nostrils and lungs were cautious: burning molasses air. Her underpants were not in the road[130].

Her pilgrimage lead her to trash cans,

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[127] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 33.
[128] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 33.
[129] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 33.

Dented garbage barrels, empty near the curb. Pants already smouldering in ash heap, among blackened tomato cans, kitchen scrapings, conflagarations of old magazines[131].

not finding them, she remembers the laundry-mat,

Or: a simple omission, an accident, never transferred, never removed. Overlooked. Persky unblemished. The Laundry-mat was locked up for the night, with a metal accordian gate stretched across the door and windows[132].

Her pilgrimage then leads her to a newspaper store,

Persky might have bought his paper there. Suppose later in the day he had come down for an afternoon paper, her pants in his pocket, and dropped them?[133].

Rosa's pilgrimage now takes a poignant turn,

If someone wanted to hide – to hide, not destroy – a pair of underpants, where would he put them? under the sand. Rolled up and buried. She thought what a weight of sand would feel like in the crotch of her pants, wet and heavy sand, still hot from the day. In her room it was hot, hot all night. No air...She came to a gate; a mottled beach spread behind it. It belonged to one of the big hotels. The latch opened...In the dark, in silhouette, the towered hotel roofs held up their merciless teeth. Impossible that any architect pleasurably dreamed these teeth...The sand was littered with bodies...Her pants were under the sand; or else packed hard with sand, like a piece of

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[130] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 45.
[131] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 46.
[132] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 46.

torso, a broken statue, the human groin detached, the whole soul gone, only the loins left for kicking by strangers...When she came back to the gate, the latch would not budge. A cunning design, it trapped the trespasser. She gazed up, and thought about climbing; but there was barbed wire on top[134].

Rosa's pilgrimage does not lead to the finding of the underwear. Her lost possession cannot be found where she lives, in the street, in the trash, in the laundry-mat, or in the news shop. Her underwear haunts none of these domains. Moving towards the hot sand, her pilgrimage scene invokes another familiar scene: life within a concentration camp: barbed wire, anonymous architects of death, mounds of bodies, hot burning coals of incineration. It is the beach that recalls the concentration camp, the site of the loss of her daughter, that the underpants intersect and powerfully meet the shawl in a moment of the utmost relevance. Her pants under the sand are like 'the human groin detached, the whole soul gone'. The gross and humourous image of an old lady's shapeless missing underwear is a powerful image of the other lost thing: the shawl.

2.7 The Lost Things Re-member One Another

Rosa's underwear are a sign of her genitalia, the most intimate part of a woman's anatomy. It is her underwear, the sign of genitalia which re-members woman's non-negotiable relationship to language as manifested by her bodily status, which she has lost: she has lost access to that which maintains her relationship to language. Rosa was able to swallow the shawl by her pregnant corpse condition which enabled her to exceed normal boundaries. This fantastic gesture changed her relatioship to language: the shawl became part of her body and it is the body that establishes how woman 'calls out' in any way. To be apart from the shawl is to be isolated from language. It is to be unable to testify because the subversive articulations of what 'celebration'/'proclamation' means is rendered unavailable.

[133] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 47.

The lost underpants, then, intersect with the shawl: the two together become a powerful sign of her unique relationship to language. Rosa's search for the underpants is a pilgrimage because she is seeking to re-member her abysmal connections by which she can speak.

2.8 The Upwards Motion of Woman's Celebratory Posture

After Rosa's pilgrimage,

In the morning, washing her face – it was swollen, nightmares like weeds, the bulb of her nose pale – Rosa found, curled inside a towel, the missing underwear[135].

Within moments of this discovery, Rosa receives the shawl sent from Stella.

Rosa writes to Magda. The text tells us that 'the room was littered with these letters'[136]. These letters however litter the room; they remain unsent, inactivated until the found underwear and shawl meet, re-member Rosa's connection to the abysmal, and restore Magda's presence. Recalling the image of Magda's feathered head as the grainy voices of the barbed wire popped her ballooned belly, we know Magda is dead. However, the letters to Magda present another picture; one in which Magda is a grown, successful woman or sometimes a shy pubescent young lady. In other places however, Rosa seeks to tell Persky that she *was* a mother[137]. The point is not to qualify Magda as either living or dead, but to reiterate that Rosa's bodily condition by which she cannot return to normal live-flesh functions allows her to span the abysmal distances between life and death, past normal imposed boundaries.

From the in-descrepancies regarding Magda's status, however, a subversive celebratory posture emerges; through these cracks we must begin to look upwards to take in what this posture looks like. Rosa's story that 'can't be told', is signed by these in-discrepancies so

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[134] Ozick. *The Shawl.* pp 47-48.
[135] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 61.
[136] Ozick. *The Shawl.* p 14.

that to tell Rosa's story is to tell several stories at once. It is to tell the story of Magda's simultaneous death and life. As I read Rosa's story I cannot proclaim it under the vocabulary ceiling of what 'celebration' means traditionally. I require a subversive articulation that allows me to celebrate/proclaim not from a grounded locus, but from several locuses at once: this is what is required by the body-text that spans life and death. Encountering Rosa's story, not only am I encountering a subversive celebratory posture, I am participating in the proliferations of these postures.

The shawl and underwear returned, Magda fills Rosa's room with her presence (a lovely girl of sixteen[138]), all of Rosa's letters activated, sent, delivered. The phone then rings,

' – Mr. Persky: should he come *up* or would she come down?'

'He's used to crazy women, so let him come up,'

Shy, she (Magda) ran from Persky.

Magda was away[139].

To take in the full view of the subversive celebratory posture inherent within this body-text is to look/come up. To not do so is to say that this story is 'unreadable'. Celebration for women means that as we call out in any way we not only exceed imposed boundaries by proclaiming the one story, we tell multiple stories simultaneously.

3.1 Conclusion: The End (The Beginning)

Throughout this inquiry I have maintained multiple discourses on several levels,

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[137] Ozick. *The Shawl*. p 59.
[138] Ozick. *The Shawl*. p 64.
[139] Ozick. *The Shawl*. p 70.

occasionally acknowledging the dangers in doing so. Woman, who is naturally ordained and therefore maintains a unique relationship with 'calling(s) out', houses the natural response to go past imposed boundaries; therefore, the 'danger' in not honouring rhetorical convention was in the spirit of what proves to be the answer to the question: *how does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women?*

How does reading and writing become a celebratory act for women? Reading and writing become celebratory acts for women when 'celebration' expands to traverse the distances that a woman's body travels regularly. For women, celebration means proclaiming or calling out in any way to tell multiple stories at once – in much the same way that this inquiry has maintained multiple dialogues on several levels, using multiple metaphors to carry across dialogues.

The severed feminine body within Detweiler's notion of 'religious reading' and the feminine bodies of the fourth gospel read, write and interpret *anyway*. These subversive callings out find their fragmented manifestation in the posture of St. Mary Magdalen. Under her bubbous robe, the profoundly untraditional (by phallocentric standards) beast squirms. The length that such a posture traverses – what is known (traditional expectations of the figure of Mary Magdalen) to that which is past what is known (the hidden swan in union) can weather the fragmented references to the subversive subculture of women reading, writing and interpreting *anyway*. Mary Magdalen, our central guide throughout this inquiry, leans and becomes one with text: the text is a part of her posture and it is her posture which presents to us her body. This text, signed by her posture, is not one story, but many; indeed, it is her posture which collects the fragmented texts of so many other feminine bodies. To look away from woman's celebratory posture is to refuse to hear/see woman textually and physically.

With Rosa we encounter the celebratory posture that Mary Magdalen represents. Here is woman maintaining this posture. *'Reading' Rosa is to take that which this inquiry had discussed and to see and hear it.* Rosa leave us with the wisdom of this posture when she tells the operator, 'He's used to crazy women, so let him come up'. This statement is not a

comical statement – indeed, in no way is it haphazard and to assume it as simple is to not hear and not see. Her statement is a host of stories; it represents a multitude of testimonies, some conflicting and some not, that pitch the moment into the desire and pain that living truly requires.

'...so let him come up' signs the upward spiraling motion that woman's celebratory posture maintains. It is at once a beautiful and powerful affirmation of woman's textual and physical situation. Finally, it is an invitation to all who truly seek to read, write and interpret, to call out, indeed – to celebrate *to celebrate.*

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