

ADRIANNE KALFOPOULOU:
*A DISCUSSION OF THE
 IDEOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN
 DREAM IN THE CULTURE'S
 FEMALE DISCOURSES: THE
 UNTIDY HOUSE*

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 2000, pp. 200.

The subtitle to the study ('The Untidy House'), and the Introduction ('Unhousing the (Gendered) Self') devoted to the understanding of untidiness, suggest the central metaphor of the discussion - that of the father's house and the related discourses of pain. The father's house has recently been deconstructed by various 'scapegoated' groups, among them women and people of color, which the Author notices when she mentions David Mintner's *A Cultural History of the American Novel*, a study of 1994. Earlier, in 1992 Anthony Appiah offered an important study criticising the father's house from the Black perspective (*In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*), now Adrienne Kalfopoulou deconstructs the concept from the feminist standpoint. 'Untidiness suggests disorder and the inversion of specific values implicit in the image of order', states Kalfopoulou on the first page and she makes her point clear: tidiness within the home structure transcends the sphere of the practical and becomes the metaphor of patriarchally imposed sense of propriety. Failure at domesticity is therefore an important symbolical act of subversion.

The initial feeling is that, perhaps, entropy is at stake. In *Entropy and Art* Rudolf Arnheim demonstrated how in the interest of orderliness, which - paradoxically - maximises entropy, superfluous components are eliminated from a system and those which are needed are supplied. Adherents of tidiness frequently try to negate tendencies towards disorder by unrandomising divergent fac-

tors, by orderly delineation and erasure of what is thought to form irrelevancies. The concept of necessity is thus yoked to the idea of orderliness. But Kalfopoulou's study, as it begins with Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, does not proceed in the entropic direction, instead it takes as a point of departure Derridean postulates of the contradictory coherence implied by any system. The Author uses deconstructive method and adopts Derrida's canonical understanding of 'difference' in dismantling ideological and gendered issues of identity. Adrienne Kalfopoulou convincingly demystifies structuralist procedures involved in the construction of the 'tidy house' - an enclosed, self-sufficient unit. She summarises the coercive - through its restrictiveness - role of the father's house in enforcing the patriarchal policies. Key rhetorical strategies implemented in the production of the central metaphor include enclosure and hierarchization.

Hester Prynne, the heroine of the main part of the introduction, is also the subject of the entire first chapter ('Hester's Ungathered Hair') where Kalfopoulou's theoretical considerations are supported by elegant illustrative analyses systematising the problematics of Hester's fate from the feminist perspective: Hester's initial defiance against the convention that seeks to contain her sexuality, the cultural conditioning she undergoes, the dynamism of contradictions within her and the society, the silencing process of the protagonist, the process of her dismissal and neutralisation, her eventual domestication into a figure from sentimental fiction. Hester loses her singularity and this provides her with the sympathy of the conventional reader and affirms dominant cultural values. The Author talks both of Puritan conditioning (Hester's world) and Victorian conditioning (Hawthorne's own world). Hester, claims Kalfopoulou, 'becomes the

archetypal female counselor, [the] ideal of the selfless matriarch who preaches from her purely domestic sphere' (p. 41).

The Second Chapter ('Out of the Father's House: Toward a Chronology of Desire') consists of three parts. The first one is initiated by a captivating interpretation of the marginal episode from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where the Black servant's chaotic housekeeping is seen as a demonstration of the clash between the workings of the unconscious and the stillness of the domestic world untouched by desire. Hester's fantastic embroidery and the Black servant's housekeeping suggest the workings of the unconscious which threatens the convention of the tidy house. But Kalfopoulou presents *Uncle Tom's Cabin* only as *hors-d'oeuvre* because the text that she is more deeply interested in is Gertrude Stein's story 'Melanctha', the longest of the narratives that form *Three Lives* (1909) and the one where Stein takes direct issue with 19th century paradigms of proper gender conduct (p. 45). Kalfopoulou argues that Stein presents those paradigms as cultural and linguistic constructs, not natural and biological ones. In effect, standard stereotypes of decency become their opposites. 'Melanctha' is not seen as a typical text of female victimisation, rather it is a text which attempts to reveal how to gain power without falling prey to patriarchal ideology which disempowers female autonomy, a text which attempts a form of escape from the confines of a symbolic discourse which privileges male power (pp. 47-51). The Author compares Melanctha and Sara Smolinsky of Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925). While Yezierska's protagonists are often caught in a rhetoric of affirmation when pursuing their dreams of self-realisation and end up in male-centered ideological and linguistic traps of the discourse, Stein locates Melanctha

on the margins of mainstream culture, in the realm of the chaotic, like the Black servant in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Melanctha is linguistically and discursively chaotic, and her untidiness is an alternative way of knowing. Because she refuses to be made legible in the established social context, 'Stein creates a linguistic 'space' for what remains unnamed by the established value system' (p. 59). Yet, in the end Melanctha dies, without fully affirming her identity.

Fathers produce discourses coded in advance and hence the need to overcome them. Adrienne Kalfopoulou aptly introduces Lacan's concept of *le nom du pere* while reaching her provisional conclusions. However, we need to remember that the more hysterical one becomes about eliminating *le nom du pere*, the louder the fathers become, because *le nom* itself always remains intradiscursive, i.e., language-trapped and narrativised. No point is free of texture and textualisation. I am signalling the issue at this point with a view to the conclusion of Adrienne Kalfopoulou's intriguing study. Incidentally, in feminist literature Cynthia Ozick's *The Messiah of Stockholm* is a perfect example of how one can deal with the Name of the Father.

The subtext of female bonding, so apparent in Stein's prose resurfaces in other texts of the period and in the second part of the second chapter Kalfopoulou provides a convincing analysis of Nella Larsen's *Passing*, suggesting that both Stein and Larsen parody the terms of propriety but nevertheless demonstrate that the authority of those values can be dogmatic, while the efforts to empower female sexuality within a mainstream context prove destructive (pp. 65-67). The complications multiply in the case of African-American women writers, as expressions of black female sexuality are at least doubly problematic. Kalfopoulou discusses the case of Zora Neale Hurs-

ton to demonstrate both the removal of the heroine from the cultural mainstream and the presentation of female identity unconstrained by convention. Making a distinction between the language use of Stein and Hurston the Author suggests the difference between the rhetoric of lived experience (Hurston) and the rhetoric of constructed experience (Stein). No matter what Stein's shortcomings are, she shatters the standard meanings of conventional valuations with her linguistic play, she deconstructs the values implicit in language, disturbs its consolidating function and questions the faculties of rational consciousness, while in Stein's later work female sexuality is directly linked to textuality (pp. 74-75).

The third, brief part of the chapter signals the mother-daughter relationship as crucial, as the mothers who are subsumed in their roles have no alternative discourse to offer to their daughters. Therefore, an urgent need arises to change the patrilineal paradigm into the matrilineal one. Kalfopoulou uses the term matrilineal to describe a discourse which is antithetical to the binary valuations specific to symbolic constructions, and commonly located in those that remain marginal to mainstream contexts.

In Chapter Three ('Shaman: Daughters' Texts/Mothers' (Con)texts) it becomes clear that the last section of the previous chapter was written in preparation of what is presented in the study now, i.e., the emergence of the mother's tongue. Four texts are presented here: Hisaye Yamamoto's 'Seventeen Syllables', Thalia Selz's 'The Education of a Queen', Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*. The role of the father in those narratives is peripheral, the somatics of the language is more important than conventional structures. In Yamamoto's and Selz's texts the daughters manage to move beyond the mothers' domestic worlds but their

discourses do not yet provide revisionist alternatives. The emphases of Kingston's and Jones's texts are more subversive. The repressed difference becomes the dominant force and Kalfopoulou links it with the fact that both writers belong to ethnic minorities (Chinese American and African American respectively). Theorising the issue with the help of Barthes and Margaret Homans's distinction between the languages of 'literalization' and 'figuration', Kalfopoulou arrives at a conclusion: Jones and Kingston subvert the authority of the symbolic order and its privileging of the phallus by moving in the direction of the mother-daughter discourse. 'The language of literalization is a language of presence, as opposed to the symbolic language of representation, which signifies the presymbolic, literal presence of the mother and her sensual attributes' (p. 116). Perhaps, somewhat hastily, the Author concludes that turning to the oral stories of their mothers' experiences the protagonists come up against the linguistic deadlock of identities. In the long run we are, after all, dealing with written representation of the oral stories, hence this conclusion will always deconstruct itself. Yet, there is no denying that the central argument of the chapter is correct: in all four narratives the mothers embody a language that disrupts the scripts of gendered roles. At the same time they express the limitations of family location. In other words the mothers' texts are only sub-texts, even if they are subversive. It is the daughters who need to find in those sub-texts transformative potential and the subtexts of the mothers must lead to texts by their daughters.

The fourth chapter ('Borders of the Self: Visiting the Possible') shifts the focus towards a new group of works. If in the texts discussed in the previous chapter the world of the father and the father's house was retreating into the

background, now the father figures are either dead or violently rejected. Kalfopoulou concentrates on Marilynne Robinson's *The Housekeeping* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and analyses the radical assertion of female selfhood, reversal of conventions, privileging the marginal sphere of unarticulated nature [this matches very well with the initial arguments concerning Hester Prynne] and the ways in which the edges of the symbolic become the centre of the world of signification.

Kalfopoulou writes that protagonists turn to water because it becomes a quintessential element that entombs and regenerates, confuses the borders between dream and consciousness, between death and life (p. 152). While the use of fluidity in the analysed texts does allude to the functions of the female body as well as to water's abilities to cross through boundaries, one should remember that even though it may be made much of, the concept is not new. Freud and Jung knew about it and among early feminists Anais Nin elaborated on all the above possibilities. Kalfopoulou, somewhat in the manner of Lucy Irigaray aims to demonstrate that the protagonists, by giving themselves to the realms of consciousness defined by maternal paradigms, move into elemental rather than architectural space and in the elemental space patriarchal order is abandoned while women attempt to speak a semiotics of the body's functions (p. 158). In elemental spaces they can reclaim their bodies which had been violated in the patriarchal symbolic order (violated in man's violating language, to remain within Irigaray's semantics).

There are certain obvious limitations in a study like the one reviewed here and the Author is aware of that. Kalfopoulou admits in the conclusion that even though the heroines move out of the Father's house - the symbol of patriarchal

order and containment, even if the House is shattered by the potential of explosive female subjectivity, even if the protagonists choose personal rather than social or cultural ties, and even if they replace their violently enacted absences with versions of a maternal text - the alternative discursive possibilities are not immediately provided. 'If this study's discussion of a mother tongue does not manage to move beyond the effort to speak its silences within a culturally dominant, male privileged discourse, it is because the texts themselves move, historically, from Victorian notions of gendered behavior to what becomes the deconstructive efforts of contemporary writers to articulate the historical damage of such erasure within dominant cultural contexts.' (p. 182) The female subject has no immediate language with which to empower her subjectivity. The language of absence is given a textual presence and that is - in different degrees - true to all the discussed works. It may be concluded that the protagonists indeed make a revisionist home out of the centralised absence. This suggests that the solution is somewhat problematic. Feminist narratives seem to remain in a limbo of transience and Kalfopoulou writes in the last paragraph in a rather resigned tone: 'When so many parts of unregenerated loss remain without the bonding presence of a subject to voice itself, we are left, simply, with longing' (p. 184). Indeed, this is true in more senses than one and we are left to wonder if this is not a more general sign of feminist exhaustion.

Out of the reviewer's duty I need to make a technical remark. Titles of chapters in the Table of Contents differ somewhat from the actual titles and the reader occasionally stumbles because of misprints. One would have expected from the Publisher that an impressive study, an ambitious academic endeavour, an

important voice in the feminist debate, a beautifully printed and expensive volume, should have been more meticulously edited. I do hope this critical remark will not be seen as a patriarchal complaint about the untidiness of the house.

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*MODERN LITERARY THEORY.
A READER.*

Edited by PHILIP RICE and
PATRICIA WAUGH. Arnold
Publishers and Oxford University
Press, London and New York 2001,
fourth edition, pp. 492.

Antologia w swoim czwartym, mocno zmienionym po śmierci Philipa Rice'a wydaniu (pierwsze było w 1989 r.) zawiera wybór tekstów teoretycznych sześciu najbardziej istotnych dla szeroko rozumianej współczesności kierunków w badaniach literackich: formalizmu, strukturalizmu, marksizmu, feminizmu, postmodernizmu i postkolonializmu. W osobnej części zebrano najbardziej wpływowe, „źródłowe” teksty marksizmu, psychoanalizy, strukturalizmu i feminizmu w badaniach literackich, jednoznacznie wskazując na preferencje redaktorów. Część II *Po dekonstrukcji* uszeregowana jest według problemów: subiektywność i płeć, historyczność i tekstowość, postmodernizm oraz postkolonializm. Część III przynosi ułożone dialogowo i kontrastowo teksty na temat czterech relacji: kanoniczności i wartości, studiów literackich i etyki, badań literackich i instytucjonalności oraz badań literackich i wiedzy. Książka zawiera wybraną bibliografię, indeks oraz

krótkie omówienia zawartości poszczególnych części.

Należy podkreślić, iż antologia jest bardzo popularna na uniwersytetach brytyjskich i że stanowi wyraz jasno sformułowanych preferencji, a układ tekstów przedstawia wizję teorii literatury jako szeroko zakrojonych badań nad kulturą.

„Modern theory” w tym kontekście oznacza bardzo luźnie rozumianą nowoczesną teorię, której nie można pomylić z modernistyczną teorią literatury. Można nawet wręcz stwierdzić, iż pod tym względem antologia jest anty-modernistyczna, jeśli przez typową modernistyczną teorię będziemy rozumieć poglądy krytyków z kręgu New Criticism: tych poglądów nie ma prawie wcale w recenzowanej antologii (jest jeden tekst Brooksa o literaturze jako języku paradoksu), zniknęły, unicestwione przez antyformalistyczny ruch głębokich, retorycznie motywowanych i politycznie ugruntowanych badań nad kulturą. Autorzy antologii odpowiadają tym samym krytycznie na propozycje jeszcze przedmodernistyczne, wyrażone na przykład w *Kulturze i anarchii* Matthew Arnolda (1869). Zamiast Arnolda, patrona konserwatywnych i romantycznych w istocie poglądów *New Criticism*, antologię otwiera fragment Marksowskiego antyidealistycznego szkicu o niemieckiej ideologii pochodzący z tego samego „romantycznego” okresu, w którym powstał manifest komunistyczny (1846). Patronem przedsięwzięcia wydaje się cytowany przez redaktorów we wstępie oksfordzki marksista Terry Eagleton: „Teoria literatury nie jest przedmiotem intelektualnych dociekań, kierujących się własnymi prawami, a raczej szczególną perspektywą, z której należy oglądać historię naszych czasów”. Każde odczytanie literatury posługuje się jakąś teorią, ale żyjemy w czasach po kryzysie epistemologicznym, w czasach „załamań komunikacyjnych”, po kryzysie Wielkich Narracji (Kuhn, Lyotard), kiedy niemożliwe jest