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IDENTITIES OF AMBIVALENCE: JUDITH THOMPSON'S *PERFECT PIE*

This paper examines Judith Thompson's *Perfect Pie*, using Judith Butler's discussion of subjectivity in *The Psychic Life of Power*. According to Butler, stability as a subject necessitates a simultaneous recognition and denial of subjugation to power, but this stability is also constantly threatened by desire which promises to destabilize the subject. Desire is therefore thwarted in order to guarantee the subject's existence. As Butler points out, the process of subject formation resembles melancholia: the subject is never fully able to disengage from the discursive and psychic means by which it is constituted.

Thompson, in both the script and in her directorial choices in the Tarragon 2000 production of *Perfect Pie*, writes large the subordination of the subject and also demonstrates its links to binary oppositions. Thompson highlights the excessive nature of the subject by foregrounding the binary oppositions which govern the psychic and social worlds and by then confounding them, demonstrating the Derridean notion of the trace of the other within the self. In her destabilizing of these binaries, and in her orchestration of narrative, Thompson emphasizes identity as a site of ambivalence in which binaries are relinquished and difference accommodated.

Moser examine la pièce Perfect Pie de Judith Thompson à l'aide de la notion de subjectivité qu'expose Judith Butler dans The Psychic Life of Power. Selon Butler, la stabilité en tant que sujet exige à la fois une reconnaissance de sa soumission au pouvoir et un refus de ce mouvement. Or, cette stabilité est constamment menacée par un désir qui risque de déstabiliser le sujet, et ce désir doit être contré afin de garantir l'existence du sujet. Comme le constate Butler, le processus de formation du sujet ressemble à la mélancolie : le sujet ne peut jamais se détacher entièrement des moyens discursifs et psychiques à l'aide desquels il a été constitué.

Dans les choix qu'elle a fait au moment de l'écriture et de la mise en scène de Perfect Pie au Tarragon en 2000, Thompson illustre la subordination du sujet et montre son rapport aux oppositions binaires. Elle souligne la nature excessive du sujet en plaçant au premier plan les oppositions binaires qui gouvernent les mondes

psychiques et sociaux et en les confondant par la suite, illustrant la notion derridienne de la trace de l'Autre en soi. En déstabilisant ces éléments, et en orchestrant ainsi son récit, Thompson montre en quoi l'identité peut être le lieu d'une ambivalence où l'on abandonne les oppositions binaires et où l'on cherche à s'adapter à la différence.



Emotions can turn on a dime in the plays of Judith Thompson. A moment of intimacy, for example, is frequently met with humiliation when women striptease as acts of seduction, only to have their mate brush them off. “I gotta be somewhere,” says Joe to Sandy (31) in *The Crackwalker*, as he walks away, leaving her standing in her bra and pantyhose. In *Lion in the Streets*, Sue takes her clothes off in front of her friends in a last attempt to seduce her husband Bill, but he simply walks away. A frequent device Thompson uses to indicate this reversal is the interrupted kiss. In *I am Yours*, Dee tearfully begs Mack to come back to her. He finally relents, and they’re about to kiss when Dee yells, “Youuuuu sucker, you believe me?” (126). In *Lion in the Streets*, Michael moves to embrace Rodney only to throw him to the ground, calling him a queer (53).

Critics have examined this tendency in Thompson’s plays in terms of psychoanalysis, suggesting a primal, frustrated search for completion, in which oppositions invariably play a key role. Rob Nunn points out, for example, how the inscription of “Ich bin dein” on the locket in *I am Yours* “ironically holds out the offer of eternal love, of the desiring subject finding its lost complement in the other, but in fact, [...] the locket signifies loss. The promise is always already broken, the desired object is always already a signifier of that which is absent” (“Spatial Metaphor” 20). With respect to the inscription, George Toles points out how “these familiar words of self-surrender generally mean just the opposite, concealing a hard unyielding claim that ‘you are mine’” (127). Jennifer Harvie, who specifically cites some of the examples I’ve given above as extreme “vicissitudes of desire” (242), discusses Thompson’s plays within a theory of fantasy. According to Harvie, “fantasy articulates not only unconscious desires but also their interdiction, hence fantasy’s powerful, even threatening, ambiguity” (242). Again, the oppositional character is exposed: what we want is countered by our denial. These arguments all suggest fractious relationships: the promise that is broken, the self-surrender that is enacted as a claim,

the interdiction of desire.

Although the sudden reversals make for compelling dramatic action, Thompson's plays also consistently offer a commingling of these oppositions in which a space of ambivalence opens up, hinting at a subject which struggles against its discursive and socially constructed limits. Along with these roller coaster interactions enacted between characters, there is an inner reality frequently replayed in Thompson: a character who contains impossible contradictions within herself. In *I am Yours*, for example, Mercy both testifies for and betrays her sister. She feels conflicted by her actions: she is both "sorry" and "not sorry" at the same time. There is simply no right, and no wrong:

MERCY. But I betrayed her, I betrayed my own sister. I thought, you know, I thought it was the right thing. I wanted to do the right thing for once in my life. I'm sorry you know but I'm not at the same time. Do you know what I mean? I mean I'm sorry but I'm not sorry I'm not I'm sorry I'm not I'm sorry I'm not I'm not I'm sorry. (173)

Positioned against the dynamic enacted externally in relations with others is this conflictual inner space, most often realized through a motif associated with the body: a kind of "identity panic," to use Thompson's own description of her experience of epilepsy ("Epilepsy" 6). Although other plays suggest this ambivalence, in the depiction of the seizures in *Tornado*, for example, or the pregnancy in *I am Yours*, it is Thompson's *Perfect Pie* which most consistently presents identity as a site of ambivalence, always in flux, negotiating between the past and the present, the conscious and the unconscious. Rob Nunn discusses this play using Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic notion of the abject, noting the "strange alchemy" that is triggered in the play, in which subjectivities combine ("Crackwalking" 320). *Perfect Pie*, as it orchestrates and then dismantles a hierarchy of binary oppositions and suggests a subtle framing in memory, can be read as an inquiry into the constitution of subjectivity. As Judith Butler suggests in *The Psychic Life of Power*, stability as a subject necessitates a simultaneous recognition and denial of subjugation to power, but this stability is also constantly threatened by desire which "aims at the dissolution of the subject" (9). Through an obsessive repetition or replaying of binaries and a careful orchestration of narrative, Thompson suggests the complexity and precariousness of subject formation. In *Perfect Pie*,

time and place cohere, as do subjectivities, not in some kind of blissful, primary state of wholeness, but as a temporary convergence resulting in excess and ambiguity. After a short summary of the play and of Butler's theory, I will demonstrate how Thompson manipulates (and thereby implicitly critiques) a series of binaries both in her characterizations and storytelling and in her directorial choices in the production at Tarragon Theatre in 2000, emphasizing an ambiguity in subject formation.

Perfect Pie is the story of the reunion of two women in their late thirties: Patsy, now a farmwife, and Marie, now a famous actor who has taken the name Francesca. In the course of the play, details of the past are filled in as scenes of their visit are intercut with scenes from their youth. There are four characters in the play, the older Patsy and Marie/Francesca and their younger selves, but the play is framed through Patsy's perspective and desire. It begins with Patsy as she recalls a Bible verse: "I will not forget you, you are carved in the palm of my hand" (3). The play ends with the same words.

This story has the signature Judith Thompson elements described at the beginning of this paper: at its core the promise of attraction and love is met with utter humiliation and repulsion. Both story lines of past and present lead to the same moment: a traumatic event in the past which was the cause of their separation as children. The play unfolds as an enigma with this story at its centre. From the beginning, the women's comments and reactions hint at a dark secret, finally revealed to be related to the persecution of Marie and a train crash. These early scenes read as melodrama, hinting at a mysterious past, unresolved guilt and a mixture of pain and fear. Patsy, as an adult, tries to explain her own guilt to Francesca. After she came out of the coma from the train crash, Marie had disappeared:

I always felt if I hadda told them. . . . About everything. . . . You know. Like what . . . happened, eh then they woulda gone after you. (*FRANCESCA moves away from PATSY as the mention of "what happened" fills her with terror*) But I wasn't sure. . . . You know, you were talking so -so -fast. . . . And wild, you were turning in circles and you were, like, in a state of shock, I guess. (21-22)

The revelation of this story, of "what happened," is the pivot of the play and it becomes clear that a great loss is at its centre. The scenes

with the older women move back in time to find it; the scenes with the young girls move forward toward it. Ultimately story lines and times converge in its telling.

The background to the pivotal story is carefully orchestrated to build to the climax of the play. Abused by her mother, taunted at school, Marie is a social outcast befriended by the confident, well-liked Patsy. Poor, acne-ridden, Catholic in a Protestant community called Marmora, Marie suffers regular abuse from the children at school: they rub dogshit on her coat and tease her relentlessly. Marie is also epileptic. But Patsy's friendship sustains Marie. Under Patsy's tutelage, Marie gains confidence, learns social behaviour, and in some ways, imitates Patsy. Patsy describes for her what it's like to kiss. Marie responds: "My mouth aches, it aches, Patsy," she says, "from wanting to kiss" (74). Patsy encourages Marie to ask a boy from another school to the Sadie Hawkins dance. The night of the dance, Patsy is too ill with the flu to go herself, but she dresses up an excited Marie. The transformation is complete; Patsy takes her to a mirror and says, "You are gonna be the prettiest girl at the dance. And they're all gonna go like, 'What happened to Marie Begg? I mean like where is Marie Begg?'" (77). When Marie and her date arrive at the dance, however, the boys from the school taunt her, calling her "the school dog" (79). When her date finds out how Marie is ostracized by the others, he abandons her. Marie's night of anticipation turns to horror. She stumbles home across the fields on her own, but the boys from the school follow her and won't leave her alone. They call her the town whore; they assault her. When she returns to Patsy, her dress is muddy, soaked in blood, semen and urine. Up to this point, the story seems to act out a similar scenario from other Thompson plays. Marie's desire of intimacy is met with the complete opposite: sexual assault. The assault by the boys comes to signify the abjected nature of Marie, a state of ostracism, of complete otherness. There are significant differences from other plays by Thompson, however, in the ways in which this experience is resolved in *Perfect Pie*.

Marie doesn't tell Patsy exactly what happened. Instead, distraught, she mutters a stream of consciousness incorporating bits of her own dialogue with those of the boys (82-84). Incoherent, she runs off to the woods, heading to the train tracks at the back of the house, in her desperation to leave Marmora. Patsy runs after her, begging her to stop. But Marie climbs on the tracks and stands in the direction of an oncoming train, stretching her hands out towards it. Patsy tries to pull her off the tracks, but then, feverish, she herself becomes transfixed by the

approaching train and stays in its path: "Yeah. Me and Marie, me and Marie," she says, "We are gonna die beautiful, we are gonna get crashed by the train and then fly through the sky" (88). It is Marie who comes to her senses, realizes what may happen, and tries to pull her off. The crash occurs.

Strange things happen as a consequence of the accident. Both girls are hospitalized; Patsy is in a coma. When Patsy recovers, she is now prone to epileptic seizures. Patsy stays in Marmora and lives on the family farm; she marries and has children. Marie heals from the accident more quickly. She runs away from Marmora, lives on the streets for a while, and re-invents herself as an actor. Remarkably, she no longer has seizures. She changes her name to Francesca. The revelation of the story in the time of the play provokes a kind of therapeutic response in Marie/Francesca, who seems to come to terms with this past trauma, triggering the faint return of the "Marie" she has suppressed as an adult.

The Psychic Life of Power by Judith Butler helps us to read the story of Patsy and Marie/Francesca as a study in subjectivity and in the subjection that is implied in this term. Butler notes that the "subject" is sometimes used interchangeably with 'the person' or 'the individual' (10), but she protests: "the genealogy of the subject as a critical category, however, suggests that the subject, rather than be identified strictly with the individual, ought to be designated as a linguistic category, a placeholder, a structure in formation" (10). Butler, drawing on Althusser and Foucault, discusses the subject with all the connotations of "subjection:" " 'Subjection' signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject. Whether by interpellation, in Althusser's sense, or by discursive productivity, in Foucault's, the subject is initiated through a primary submission to power" (2). Clearly Marie's subjection to power is obvious; as the story of her past demonstrates, she constantly tries to remake herself according to the discursive formations in which she finds herself: whether innocent girl at the school dance or famous actress who deigns to visit a country friend.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler inflects a Foucaultian discussion of subjectivity with psychoanalysis. She describes how "no subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent" (7). Butler goes on to note: "No subject can emerge without this attachment, formed in dependency, but no subject, in the course of its formation, can ever afford fully to 'see' it. This attachment in its primary forms must both *come to be* and *be denied*; its coming to be must consist in its

partial denial, for the subject to emerge” (8). Butler describes how this denial “accounts in part for the adult sense of humiliation when confronted with the earliest objects of love—parents, guardians, siblings, and so on – the sense of belated indignation in which one claims, “I couldn’t possibly love such a person” (8). The “humiliation” that Butler describes is so frequently apparent in Thompson’s plays, and especially in this one, when Marie is brought to an abject and public low.

Read in Butler’s terms, the position of subject is inherently ambiguous, predicated both on subordination and on its denial, constantly re-enacting this dependency and denial. The threat to the containment of the subject, however, is ongoing: “Through that neurotic repetition the subject pursues its own dissolution, its own unraveling, a pursuit that marks an agency, but not the *subject’s* agency—rather, the agency of a desire that aims at the dissolution of the subject, where the subject stands as a bar to that desire” (9). Desire, therefore, is to be thwarted, in order to ensure the subject’s own existence: “A vexation of desire, one that proves crucial to subjection, implies that for the subject to persist the subject must thwart its own desire” (9). This thwarting of desire describes the tensions that run through *Perfect Pie*: characters verge on dissolution (as in the train wreck) and are haunted by an(other).

Butler’s formulation of the subject negotiates precarious impasses to agency. For if the subject is implicated in the power it opposes, how does one take an oppositional stance; how does one achieve agency? Butler attempts to define a new approach: “That agency is implicated in subordination is not the sign of a fatal self-contradiction at the core of the subject and, hence, further proof of its pernicious or obsolete character. But neither does it restore a pristine notion of the subject, derived from some classical liberal-humanist formulation, whose agency is always and only opposed to power” (17). The way that Butler manages to avoid both of these alternatives is by drawing attention to the ambivalence of the subject:

If the subject is *neither* fully determined by power *nor* fully determining of power (but significantly and partially both), the subject exceeds the logic of noncontradiction, is an excrescence of logic, as it were. To claim that the subject exceeds either/or is not to claim that it lives in some free zone of its own making. Exceeding is not escaping, and the subject exceeds precisely that to which it is bound. In this

sense, the subject cannot quell the ambivalence by which it is constituted. (17-18)

This quelling of ambivalence refers to the quelling of primary attachments which are never really overcome; the subject is “haunted by an inassimilable remainder, a melancholia that marks the limits of subjectivation” (29). Butler, going back to Freud, describes how a reading of melancholia in subject formation accounts for this ambivalence, recognizing a subject that is always already plural: “Melancholia rifts the subject, marking a limit to what it can accommodate” (23). Freud sees melancholia as the inability to sever an attachment to the ego, resulting in an incorporation of the lost object in the ego: “If the ego cannot accept the loss of the other, then the loss that the other comes to represent becomes the loss that now characterizes the ego: the ego becomes poor and impoverished” (qtd. in Butler 187). Butler re-reads melancholia in her discussion of the subject and its relationship to power:

To make of melancholia a simple ‘refusal’ to grieve its losses conjures a subject who might already be something without its losses, that is, one who voluntarily extends and retracts his or her will. Yet the subject who might grieve is implicated in a loss of autonomy that is mandated by linguistic and social life; it can never produce itself autonomously. From the start, this ego is other than itself; what melancholia shows is that only by absorbing the other as oneself does one become something at all. (195-96)

Butler uses melancholia to describe the inherent plurality of a subject always already interpellated by discourse—the Lacanian subject (94-98) —noting, further, that “what remains unspeakably absent inhabits the psychic voice of the one who remains” (196). Above all, what Butler’s account demonstrates is that “to persist in one’s being means to be given over from the start to social terms that are never fully one’s own” (197). In this formulation, Butler imagines a subject that is always necessarily plural: “the power imposed upon one is the power that animates one’s emergence, and there appears to be no escaping this ambivalence. Indeed there appears to be no ‘one’ without ambivalence, which is to say that the fictive redoubling necessary to become a self rules out the possibil-

ity of strict identity” (198).

In *Perfect Pie*, the subordination implied in Butler’s formulation of subjectivity is enacted and foregrounded through a series of binary oppositions and their hierarchical deployment. Thompson’s work writes large this subordination and also demonstrates its links to binary oppositions. The oppositions are enacted on several levels, both in the script and in the production Thompson directed at Tarragon in 2000, and form a kind of psychic and social landscape for the play. Subjects are formed through subordination, but this process is always ambivalent. As Butler points out, the process of subject formation resembles melancholia: the subject is never fully able to disengage from the discursive and psychic means by which it is constituted. Thompson highlights the excessive nature of the subject by foregrounding the binary oppositions which govern the psychic and social worlds and by then confounding them, demonstrating the Derridean notion of the trace of the other within the self (167). In *Perfect Pie*, identity is configured as a site of ambiguity in which binaries such as a subject/object, right/wrong and self/other are necessarily relinquished, achieving an accommodation of difference in which ambivalences prevail.

As a child, Marie is not pretty (she tries to burn acne cysts off her face); she is poor and abused. Patsy, on the other hand, is well-liked and confident in herself and her abilities. She knows how to get rid of Marie’s lice with margarine; when she performs Marie’s makeover for the dance, she assures Marie that blue mascara is all the rage. As the two stories are juxtaposed, however, significant shifts occur. The oppositions of naïveté and sophistication established in the scenes from the past are blatantly reversed in the present scenes with the adults. Verging at times on cliché, the women play out a country/city opposition in which the adult Patsy appears naïve and quaint in mannerisms and dress. Her dialogue is peppered with colloquialisms and anecdotes. Francesca, on the other hand, is proper and precise in her speech, dress, and behaviour. Patsy recalls Marie’s seizures when she was a little girl: “I remember your face turning purple. Like an eggplant” (49). It is Francesca who can supply the appropriate term: “Cyanosis” (50). Other oppositions are also set up. Francesca romanticizes farm life. In the hay mow, she exclaims, “My favourite place in the whole world. Ohhh the smell is glorious.” Patsy counters this remark with her matter-of-fact commentary: “You like that? Can’t stand it. Dries my sinuses right out” (54). Although in both past and present scenes there is an implicit hierarchy in which Patsy is more

successful in the society which defined them in the past and Francesca is more successful in the present, there is a recognized struggle between the two in both past and present. They constantly vie with each other, testing each other's love and friendship. This struggle is realized in the arm wrestle, for example, both in the past and the present. The scene in the past takes its cues from the scene in the present: "*They both try really hard. The GIRLS mirror the action. YOUNG MARIE loses to PATSY. The Women end up at an impasse*" (60). In the juxtaposition of past and present scenes, Thompson sets up oppositions between the children that she then puts into question by reversing them in the scenes with the adults. Hierarchies are destabilized.

The worlds of adults and children are also presented in contrast in performance. Oppositions of child/adult are physicalized as four actors play the characters. Casting and directorial and acting choices in the Tarragon premiere, directed by Judith Thompson, foregrounded certain similarities and differences. In this production, Patsy was played by Tara Rosling as a child and by Nancy Palk as an adult; Marie was played by Liisa Repo-Martell as a child and by Sonja Smits as an adult. The doubling of Patsy's character is plausible as played by Rosling and Palk, especially because dialogue patterns in the script are retained. Because of certain physical similarities between the actors, we can imagine Patsy as a child becoming Patsy as the adult. The physical differences between Repo-Martell and Smits, however, as Marie and Francesca, are jarring. A girl with dirty blonde hair and unconventional looks becomes a dark brunette with conventional beauty. As an adult, Francesca is nothing like the child Marie: she is cool, well-groomed and well-spoken. Marie as a child and Francesca as an adult seem like two completely different people, emphasized in the script by the fact that they have different names as child and adult, but best realized in performance with such a casting decision. Sonja Smits is also eminently recognizable, well-known for her work on television. In this way, another level to Francesca as "famous actor" is added—there's a distinct extra dimension to her character that estranges her from her past. Furthermore, Francesca speaks quite differently as an adult than she does as a child. Patsy remarks on how she strains to "hear" the old Marie. As the play progresses, however, and the story of the train crash is revealed, gradual hints of the old "Marie" appear under her façade. It is only when she finally recounts the horrific story of the assault by the boys that significant transformations occur. As the telling of the story becomes closer, boundaries begin to destabilize. As

Francesca's sense of self shifts in the second act, hints of Marie's voice come through. She starts to drop final consonants, signaled in the script and remarked upon by Patsy (57). In performance, Smits affected a voice change in the second act, accentuating the shift that starts to take over. Again, in this way, strong oppositions are foregrounded and then undermined, showing the lingering remains of one within the other.

Oppositions in space and time are also emphasized and then collapsed, facilitating the integration of past and present selves, adult and child. In the Tarragon production, the set featured railway tracks that ran high along the back of the stage and then swooped down stage left, intersecting the space. The scenes with the women move from the inside (stage right) to the outside, as they go for a walk in the woods and end up at the train tracks. The scenes with the girls move from the outside to the inside, until the final scene, which, of course, happens outside, in the woods, by the train tracks. Time operates in a similar fashion. Although the play has two distinct times—the present featuring the adults and the past featuring the girls—the preoccupations of each are reversed: the women spend much of their time remembering the past and the girls exist in a resolutely present time. A rhythm of alternating scenes is orchestrated between the past and present worlds until the accident occurs and the times coalesce. At this point, both the adults and the children exist in the same moment. With the impact of the train, time and space in the two worlds collide. Furthermore, the physical space around the tracks is shared by all four actors. As these worlds converge, so do the characters. In particular, the two Patsys begin to act as one. As Marie stands on the tracks, young Patsy begs her to come down: "Marie you come offa this track. I think I hear something" (86). Immediately the adult Patsy echoes her words as she narrates: "And I'm standing behind you and I'm sayin' 'You get right down offa here, Marie.' I think I hear something" (86). But then Patsy, feverish, mesmerized, embraces Marie on the tracks and will not come down. As Marie tries to pull Patsy off the track, the adult Patsy describes her resistance: "I feel it I feel it in my feet and your fingernails diggin' in I am the train I am big I am metal! I am moving so fast I am –" (88). "Flying" the young Patsy completes the thought. "We flew. Through the air" (89). An intermingling of the young and adult Patsys is realized theatrically in the sharing of lines. After the train crash, the two Patsys end up on one side of the tracks, Marie and Francesca on the other.

The train crash, at the centre of the story, can be read as a metaphor for subjectivity. The ecstatic embracing of the two girls

can be considered as a primary attachment, an “other,” an ideal. As an adult, Francesca asks Patsy where she finds “ecstasy.” “I don’t know,” says Patsy. “Here and there. (*Pause.*) Where do you find it?” Francesca responds with “I haven’t” (41). The next scene is a scene in the past, with the young girls pretending to be in a sleigh and inventing romantic names and personalities: the beautiful Annabel Lee and Miss Bon bon McFee. They imagine themselves pulled in a sleigh by six white horses in a snowstorm; they happily pretend, as they share telling the story, that they are lost in the snow, fall asleep, and freeze (41-43). Indeed Butler would argue that this primary attachment, between same sexes, is foreclosed in a largely heterosexual culture and consequently is of a melancholic nature: “When certain kinds of losses are compelled by a set of culturally prevalent prohibitions, we might expect a culturally prevalent form of melancholia, one which signals the internalization of the ungrieved and ungrievable homosexual cathexis” (139). Nonetheless, the separation, or loss, that the crash signifies can be considered simply as a necessary separation for the subject to come into being: the two Patsys are separated from the two Maries. For the articulation of subjectivity to occur, separation is necessary, but is never complete, as Butler points out in her discussion of subjectivity and melancholia. At the moment of the train’s impact, several changes occur. Most significantly, Patsy takes on the epilepsy that Marie loses, incorporating this aspect of Marie into herself. Marie, as the adult Francesca, takes a different route. In retrospect, the crash was for her a kind of “resurrection” (55), allowing her a chance to start over, to reject Marie, becoming the adult equivalent of what Patsy was as a child. But she has allowed this identity to overwhelm her other self. She’s completely denied Marie. By the end of the play, Francesca comes to embrace this other aspect of herself and moves toward recognizing the inherent plurality in identity, rather than struggling to achieve a pure and defined singularity in identity. The train crash signals the birth of subjectivity while also demonstrating its inherently melancholic character, in its inability to completely separate from the other. Epilepsy comes to signify this plurality.

As in other plays by Thompson, epilepsy plays a key symbolic and dramatic role. Early in the play, the adult Patsy has a seizure in Francesca’s presence. Patsy uses the image of a “stalker” to describe her sense of an approaching epileptic seizure: “Last week, in the Kingston Shopping Centre, there he was comin’ out of the Cotton Ginny Plus store, smiling, smoking and he comes towards me and the floor starts moving and I’m lookin’ around I’m saying oh my

God no, no, somebody help me my God and the walls are shifting” (50). As in other plays, a scream signals her way out of the seizure. The “stalker,” however, is something she has come to live with. On the other hand, Francesca represses this aspect of herself. After the childhood trauma and the train wreck, Marie remakes herself as Francesca. This action, as well as her career choice of actor, seem ways of escaping the old Marie, of playing out other identities, while not accepting them. When she feels the “Marie Begg Stain” as she calls it (33), she utterly rejects and denies it, whereas Patsy integrates the “otherness” of the epilepsy into her life. Rob Nunn describes how Patsy lives on two planes, the conventional and the imaginative: “To put it another way, Patsy has always known that her subjectivity is not simply and straightforwardly answerable to the interpellation of the social formation in which she lives” (“Crackwalking” 320). As an adult, Francesca denies what her experience as Marie represents. She tries to maintain a singularity to her sense of self as Francesca, running away from any hint of action or dialogue that resembles Marie. She admits that she doesn’t want to have children because she is afraid that she would give birth to Marie Begg (71). But finally Francesca experiences a substantial transformation in the recounting (and re-living) of the story of the assault and the train accident. Theatrically, this shift begins to be realized when the women are on their walk in the woods, before they get to the train tracks. Francesca enters into “pre-seizure” mode, as she recalls the assault by the boys. The epilepsy that Francesca experiences is an indication of this larger ambivalence in subjectivity which she is coming to recognize: “*She is there, and she is not there,*” the stage directions indicate (78) as she enters pre-seizure mode. The epilepsy frames the remembering of the sexual assault and the subsequent train crash.

The experience of the epileptic seizure, as terrifying as it is, is equated with an accommodation of otherness: this “identity panic” resembles the “dissolution of self” that Butler describes, which the subject is always fighting, in its excessiveness, always just keeping it at bay. After this experience by Francesca, it is clear that a significant change for her has happened. Theatrically it is realized through the seizure, but it is also explained through a shifting in perception. In the re-telling of the train accident, we learn that Marie saved Patsy all those years ago. In a sleight of hand, Thompson reverses the expectations of where the narrative leads us. Given how Patsy and Marie have been characterized, we expect that Patsy will save Marie from the tracks, that her injuries are Marie’s fault. This is also how Marie/Francesca has remembered the event: “Are you saying that I

... saved *your* life? Patsy?” she asks (89). Marie/ Francesca moves from victim to saviour. “You saved my life...” says Patsy. Then she continues, putting even the childhood scenes into a different perspective: “but you always had... saved my life, Marie. Ever since we were little girls” (89).

Ann Wilson discusses this movement from victim to saviour in *Lion in the Streets*. Wilson describes how at the end of the play Isobel “shifts from wanting to be saved to presenting herself as the saviour of her community, as the person who will kill the lion in the streets. What is remarkable is Thompson’s shifting of Isobel from a victim to an agent of salvation” (168). Wilson goes on to note how this becomes a “mechanism for healing. The political implication of her dramaturgical strategy is that women, even though victims of a particular crime, need not forever define themselves as victims. [...] Isobel’s determination to face the lion is a necessary step for her to reclaim control over her life” (168). But the lines between victim and saviour are not so clearcut in this play. Patsy seems to believe Marie saved her life; whether Francesca does is less certain. She says, “No no no we were there together and we both wanted to fly away, that’s all we wanted, to – fly away, to –” (89). We begin to wonder what we saw when the train hit: the stage directions, which simply indicate “*The Crash*” (88), are inconclusive. Perhaps it is the promise of this dissolution, this “flying away” remembered that leads to Francesca’s shift. Significantly, by the end of the play, Francesca’s transformation at the conclusion of the play is ultimately in an ambiguous space; neither one identity nor the other has won out: she tells Patsy she has already lost “Francesca” and that she’s not going back to Marie Begg either. “Is this all good?” asks Patsy (90), rhetorically.

In *Perfect Pie*, the depiction of the subject is as a site of struggle. The movement between the past and present selves in this carefully structured play can be read, through Butler’s lens, as a birth into subjectivity. To act as a subject means to be simultaneously subjugated and to deny that subjugation. The overlay of melancholia provides a way of understanding the complex position of the subject as always already interpellated into discourse. In typical fashion, Thompson amplifies Marie’s subjection in the attack by the boys. Significantly, it is the tyranny of social roles and hierarchies that Marie is trying to negotiate her way through. This is made clear in the differences in the way the attack on Marie is described when she is a child and when she is an adult. It is significant that the young Marie has no perspective on the event and can only repeat snippets of dialogue:

She she does it all the time she does that all the time all the cute girls do. All the cute girls do; the cheerleaders, gymnastic team, really really you gotta trust us: Okay, are you sure? Is that true? Really is that true that all the cute girls do this? Holly French, and Carol O’Roarke and Nancy Tanks they all do this?...]. Would you like to come with us and party ... hard? “YOU DOG TURN OVER YOU DOG. I’LL SCREW YOU TO DEATH.” (82-84)

From the point of view of Francesca, however, as she finally tells Patsy the whole story, she uses the first person:

And they were suddenly there [...] and they pushed me from behind, and then from the front and they were laughing. And saying my hair looked nice. And wouldn’t it look nice with sperm all over it. I didn’t understand that... And I started to feel sick, sick to my stomach... and in my head like I was going to have a seizure. (80)

On one level, this shift demonstrates how Marie/Francesca has come to terms with the event. As an adult, she has some distance to her experience and is able to process what has happened to her. The experience of the children is raw and unmediated; the experience of the adults is reflective and narrated. Francesca’s journey, however, is towards a recognition of how that experience of “I” is fundamentally melancholic and always contains traces of the other.

Rob Nunn points out how Marie, as a child, is “the abjected one” (“Crackwalking” 319); he identifies her difference from others: “Something about Marie,” says Nunn, “—the potential artist, perhaps—made all the things that set her apart from the others threaten them” (320). In the aftermath of the train accident, Marie attempts to deny this difference within herself and eliminate it. She leaves Marmora and re-invents herself; she chooses a new name, a new identity, and ultimately a profession in which she is always becoming someone else. This shift into a new identity entails a series of repressions: she denies her past; she fears when “Marie” turns up suddenly; she even lies about the “gala” in her honour that she has to rush to Montreal for. Patsy, on the other hand, has had a different experience through the accident. As a child, she followed the rules and always fit in. In her experience with Marie, she was the helper; she had the answers. After the acci-

dent, in which she embraced Marie's choice, she has internalized the difference that Marie represented, symbolized through the epilepsy. Although she anticipates her seizures with dread, she does not reject them. As Nunn says, "her subjectivity is not simply and straightforwardly answerable to the interpellation of the social formation in which she lives. The transfer of epilepsy from Marie to Patsy symbolizes the otherness that has also been transferred and whose marks Patsy cherishes" (320). Patsy exists in a more fluid state of consciousness.

Characters in Thompson's earlier plays find themselves in situations where a reversal is enacted upon them, where they find themselves in positions of abject subordination, usually to an externalized power. *Perfect Pie* still has such moments, in the vividly and horrifically described assault in which Marie is abused. However, what is remarkable about this play is the way in which there is a palpable shift in the remembering of this event and the accompanying train wreck, as it is internalized and ultimately accommodated by the women. As Rob Nunn points out, the shift in *Perfect Pie* occurs when a helper appears: Marie and Patsy have each other ("Crackwalking" 319). Furthermore, both Marie and Patsy come to recognize that it is the balance of these two, of victim and saviour, of the experience of self and other that leads to wholeness. It is also significant, however, that the changes which Patsy and Marie experience occur through a story-telling which offers resolution in an ambiguous space which also involves relinquishing, temporarily at least, the push-pull of binaries.

The play is structured as a series of oppositions, of course, between the past and the present. The shifts in story-telling become predictable as we weave between two time lines. But Thompson skillfully brings these two strands together at the time of the train crash. Theatrically, this moment is stunning: a palpable shift occurs when the adults and the children inhabit the same physical and mental space. The spectator has been tracking the worlds of the past and present, the inside and outside movement, the correlation of characters. There is a strangely cathartic satisfaction in experiencing the intermingling of the two worlds as the two strands of the play come together. A certain narrative closure is achieved by understanding the conclusion of the girls' story. An imaginative iteration is achieved through story-telling—for Francesca in re-living the event and for Patsy in her possible re-imagining of the whole experience which is the play. Intimately linked to this ambivalence in subjectivity is the narrative structure of the play. To a certain extent, the play employs a traditional narra-

tive, setting up an enigma that is slowly revealed by clues that are dropped in bits of dialogue. The twist in roles of Francesca and Patsy is well-orchestrated, providing a *frisson* of surprise. Although there is a largely linear movement to the play, there is also a kind of rhizomatic structure, given the nodes of attachment that link the two worlds of the play. The reminiscences provide points of contact for the childhood sequences to be enacted. In some ways, *Perfect Pie* is similar to the plays Ric Knowles discusses in his formulation of the “dramaturgy of the perverse,” in which in *Lion in the Streets*, for example, “the identities of the characters [...seem] to be contingent upon the changing stories they tell of themselves and one another” (50). Instead of being discreetly different identities, however, foregrounded by the switching narrative lines, in this play the characters persevere, instead of switching narrative lines or being destroyed by warring internal oppositions; the transformation hinted at in Isobel’s shift at the end of *Lion in the Streets* seems to be more fully realized in *Perfect Pie*.

The ending of the play is written in such a way as to shift our perspective again. The final conversation between the two women ends ambivalently, putting what we’ve just seen into question. “We aren’t going to see each other again, are we, Marie... ?” says Patsy. “We aren’t going to see each other ever again. It’s going to be like you were never here. Like you were a dream” (91). The conclusion, echoing as it does the beginning, frames the play as a possible experience of dream, memory, or fantasy. As Rob Nunn suggests, perhaps Marie did die in the train accident: “the narrative line is ambiguous enough for the whole play to be read in retrospect as a story about Patsy keeping the precious gift of her dead friend alive in memory” (“Crackwalking” 320f). Indeed, the first incarnation of *Perfect Pie*, as a long monologue by one woman, Patsy, makes this suggestion more strongly. The monologue begins and ends with Patsy recording a letter to Marie, but in the course of the letter, she describes the train crash as though Marie died: “Marie, listen to me for God’s sake, even if you had lived you wouldn’t have made it out of Marmora” (“Perfect Pie” 169). In the conclusion of the full-length version, Francesca slowly backs out of the set until she disappears: as a final line, Patsy reiterates the biblical passage from an early scene in which she recalls the death of her mother. Thompson omits the quotation marks from the first sentence, perhaps emphasizing Patsy’s story and perspective: “I will not forget you. ‘You are carved in the palm of my hand’” (91). “I’ll be looking at that snow,” Patsy says, “and I will feel the pastry dough in my hands and I will knead it and knead it until my hands they are

aching and I think I'm like making you. I like... form you; right in front of my eyes, right here at my kitchen table into flesh" (91).

In this scenario, the framing device provides a containment, marking the psychic territory of this discussion of subjectivity and power. As Butler argues, the discursive and the psychoanalytic go hand in hand. Subjection, she suggests, "must be traced in the peculiar turning of a subject against itself that takes place in acts of self-reproach, conscience, and melancholia that work in tandem with processes of social regulation" (18-19). Similarly, the inner and outer are imbricated. Butler argues that the process of interiorization of the "norms" of society also "*fabricates the distinction between interior and exterior life*" (19, emphasis in original). This territory has always been Thompson's playground: the interior/exterior divide. It is, perhaps, no surprise then that, as in other Thompson plays, this may be a dream or a memory. For Thompson always emphasizes the realm of the imaginary, as though this is the place in which agency can be effected. *Perfect Pie* ends on a note of ambivalence, but unlike in other plays, here the ambivalence signifies an accommodation, if provisional, of difference. Through a heightened exaggeration of binaries, a formulation of the subject as melancholic and an ambiguous narrative structure, Thompson evokes a psychic and social landscape, providing recognizable markers by which we come to realize our own precarious subjectivities. ❁

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