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“Legs apart as the tide came in”: Fluid Sexual Personae of Ann Quin

„Příliv vnikl do roznoží“: Fluidní sexuální persony Ann Quin

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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zabývá „sexuálními personami“ v díle britské autorky Ann Quin. Cílem práce je sledovat jistý přehled typů postav objevujících se napříč autorčíným dílem, poukázat na patrné vzorce v jejich konstrukci a přístupu k nim. Rozbor pracuje zejména se závěry dosaženými v dosavadním výzkumu týkajícím se autorčina díla a zohledňuje také závěry psychoanalytických textů, především pak z tvorby Sigmunda Freuda, jehož dílo z velké části popisuje fenomény sledované v jednotlivých postavách, nebo textů psychoanalýzou ovlivněných. Pro rozbor byly zvoleny čtyři oblasti opakovaně se vyskytující v díle Ann Quin: prostředí rodiny, genderové role, trojúhelníkové vztahy a násilí. Tyto tematické okruhy značně formují archetypální projevy jednotlivých postav. Práce poukazuje na významné rysy opakující se v autorčině díle ve vztahu k jisté „typizaci“ jejich postav v kontextu sexuality a zároveň se pokouší o srovnávací reflexi jednotlivých „person“.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Ann Quin, sexualita, persona, britská literatura, 60. léta 20. století, experimentální spisovatelka

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the “sexual personae” in the oeuvre of the British novelist Ann Quin. The aim of the thesis is to map out a basic overview of the types of characters appearing throughout the author’s work, point out the significant patterns involved in their construction and the approach to these figures. The analysis draws from the arguments maintained in the research regarding this author so far, and works of psychoanalysis, especially the oeuvre of Sigmund Freud since his works contain analyses of the phenomena discussed in relation to the characters observed in this thesis, and other texts influenced by psychoanalysis. The analysis follows four thematic spheres significant in the works of Ann Quin: the family environment, gender roles, triangular relationships and violence. These thematic circles significantly shape the archetypal nature of Quin’s characters. The thesis indicates the resurfacing attributes “typifying” Quin’s characters in the context of sexuality, and also attempts to provide a comparative reflection of these “personae.”

KEY WORDS

Ann Quin, sexuality, persona, British literature, 1960s, experimental woman writer

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Introduction – “Why does the sea move?”

Water is truly the transitory element. It is the essential, ontological metamorphosis between fire and earth. A being dedicated to water is a being in flux. He dies every minute; something of his substance is constantly falling away. Daily death is not fire’s exuberant form of death, piercing heaven with its arrows; daily death is the death of water. Water always flows, always falls, always ends in horizontal death. In innumerable examples, we shall see that for the materializing imagination, death associated with water is more dream-like than death associated with earth: the pain of water is infinite.¹

Discussions of the Brighton-born writer Ann Quin, whose works have become known for their vivid formal experimentation and innovative approach to language, often revolve around the very way Quin’s texts interact with reality. Adjectives associated with her writing tend to focus on its volatile nature – her writing is *ambiguous, promiscuous, fluid*. The last adjective seems to define her fiction on multiple levels. *Fluid* in Quin functions as an adjective but also as a crucial noun – there are ubiquitous bodies of water: the sea waves are splashing against the rocks, bathtubs are overflowing with hot water, geysers are bubbling from underground. The liquid imagery mimics the process of forming, shaping the discourse in her works. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines fluidity as “the quality of being likely to change repeatedly and unexpectedly,” “the quality of being smooth and continuous,” and “(of a substance) the quality of being not solid and able to flow.”² All of this can be seen in the content and form of Quin’s works which are in a constant state of exchange, blending, ebbing and flowing. As Philip Stevick has observed, “no one makes water more sexual than Quin,”³ and just as water and various other fluids seep through the very fabric of Quin’s writing, so does the ever-present erotic charge. Sexual act itself usually comes with a wide variety of bodily fluids such as semen, sweat, saliva, mucus, sometimes tears or even blood. The characteristic qualities of water and bodily fluids also extend to the functioning of fictional characters’ presence in Quin’s texts.

The narrative strategies creating these characters observes them in a fragmented fashion which sometimes even leads to dehumanization, reducing them to assemblages of

¹ Gaston Bachelard, ‘Introduction’ in *Water and Dreams. An Essay on the Imagination of the Matter*, translated by Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: The Pegasus Foundation, 1983) 6.

² “Fluidity” in *Cambridge Dictionary* <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fluidity>> 19 July 2023.

³ Philip Stevick, “Voices in the Head: Style and Consciousness in the Fiction of Ann Quin,” in: *Breaking the Sequence: Women’s Experimental Fiction*, edited by Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 235.

body parts. Literary critics frequently note that Quin's characters' presence is often felt in their absence, they are somehow "not there," whether physically or mentally. The characters' tangibility has therefore been problematized, as they seem to be fleeting and always in between "here" and "(already) gone", yet they manage to contain a very palpable language of signs and leave an atmospheric impact. In terms of imagery, there is a connection between the characters' physical presence and their relation to water, for they are ever so often in contact with it. They are immersed in water – bathing, swimming, showering, drowning? – and as a result, they might seem somehow *moist*, in their appearances, but also in their character. And this aura of humidity surrounding them almost always happens to be of somewhat sexual nature.

The focus of this thesis is Ann Quin's treatment of her characters as sexed and sexual subjects and/or objects, and it aims to observe recurring patterns in Quin's representation of sexual personae in their fluidity. The *fluidity* of her fiction operates within the logic akin to the flows of desire considered by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, but also relishes in a Dionysian fluidity of liquids such as sap and wine – the fluidity in Quin's work is movement, the delicate shape-shifting, but also slipperiness. The subject matter itself – Quin's characters – may seem problematized by this specific author's very poetics, as her characters are not presented in a light easy to interpret or grasp in a straightforward way – within the text and within the narrative they are absent, incoherent, and distorted.⁴ Quin's fascination with theatre is also interwoven into the construction of her characters who in result often resemble theatrical archetypes, positioning them into omnipresent triangular relationships motivated by a distinct formalist impulse. The four thematic categories chosen for this thesis (the family, gender, triangles, violence) are meant as certain viewpoints from which these sexual personae can be observed, however, it will become apparent that no such persona is to receive "stable" labels per se. The aim of this thesis is not to rigidly assign a certain role to each of Quin's characters – rather, it is an attempt to point out certain tendencies that are prominent in these figures in terms of their sexual behaviors and its significance for their respective texts.

This thesis approaches Ann Quin as an established writer, and so her position from the viewpoint of literary criticism or literary history will not be discussed in detail. However, for the purposes of introducing the elements that are at play within Quin's oeuvre besides those that are of immediate interest for the core arguments of this thesis, the contexts within which she operated as an author need to be considered. There are certain navigation points which

⁴ Julia Jordan, "The Quin Thing," *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 January 2018, 16.

help situating Quin as a writer – as a writer within a context of cultural similarities, as well as a writer existing quite in the liminal boundaries of any tradition, as transgressive as it may be.

Within the niche community of academia and avant-garde fiction enthusiasts, Ann Quin has become an almost mythical figure, “a voice like no other”, the mentally ill working-class woman writer who engaged with a range of unusual experiments in her writing as well as in her life. Her novels were published between the years 1964 and 1972, so most of her productive period fell within the scope of the sixties. The 1960s are often characterized as an era of change and all things radical, paradigm shifts in culture and society, various emerging social justice movements, sexual liberation and feminism impacting the public as well as the private spheres. The stream of innovation affected the British literary scene as well, and so a group of avant-garde authors emerged. This included such authors as Eva Figes, Christine Brooke-Rose, Bridget Brophy, B.S. Johnson, and Ann Quin. There were other relevant literary currents at the time to which Quin would be connected – such as the French nouveau roman, at which early reviewers of *Berg* hinted, although it was not confirmed if Quin had already read works of this very direction at that point.⁵ Nevertheless, as Lee O’Rourke noted, her writing is “ultimately European” in spirit, which reinforced this link.⁶

Claire-Louis Bennett points out some of the issues Quin would face in British cultural context specifically, extrapolating partly from her own experience as a writer. According to Bennett, there is a massive urge to compare a work of literature of any specific author to works of the other authors in Britain, which creates counterproductive boundaries.⁷ Quin seemed to be almost resistant to these types of thinking processes and comparisons which could possibly be one of the many reasons why she did not receive as much attention, especially in her homeland. In 1999, before the Dalkey Archive Press in tandem with *And Other Stories* reprints of Quin’s works, Lorraine Morley suggested some of the other likely reasons for Quin’s omission from literary canons to which she would belong, based on her experience and work. She could quite easily be grouped together with the “experimental” writers, or women writers of the 1960s, however, perhaps precisely because of the *singularity* of her writing, and also the inability to easily identify her with a specific ideological

⁵ Carole Sweeney, “Ann Quin: Forms Forming Themselves,” in: *Vagabond Fictions: Gender and Experiment in British Women’s Writing, 1945-1970* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020) 218. Sweeney amends the assumption made by Stevick that Quin was not familiar with nouveau roman at all, while she actually read some of the works by Nathalie Sarraute.

⁶ Lee Rourke, “Who cares about Ann Quin?” *The Guardian*, 8 May 2007, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/may/08/whocaresaboutannquin>>.

⁷ Leigh Wilson and Claire-Louise Bennett, “‘So thrilling and so alive and so much its own thing’: Talking to Claire-Louise Bennett about Ann Quin,” *Women: A Cultural Review*, 33:1 (2022): 23.

framework, she could not exactly fit into a neat category.⁸ Nevertheless, Quin has recently (from 2010s onwards) been receiving more attention – chapters and articles about her have been featured in works such as *Vagabond Fictions: Gender and Experiment in British Women's Writing, 1945-1970* by Carole Sweeney, and *British Avant-Garde Fiction of the 1960s'*, with a whole issue of *Women: A Cultural Review* being dedicated entirely to her in 2022. An ultimate explanation of this resurgence is not within the scope of this thesis – perhaps they are good-faith attempts to do her legacy justice, perhaps it is simply an exploration of an author whose work has been neglected. Though it is also possible that the motivations may be more practical, following the logic of shifting academic interests and the “vogue” mentality of cultural industry.

The 1960s British or European literary culture and experimental, i.e., aesthetically and formally innovative and norm-challenging, fiction writing would be one way to contextualize Quin the writer. Another approach frequently used when forming connections among author groups is reading them by acknowledging aspects of their identity, approaching them through gender, race, sexuality, class. The “canon-making” labels based on certain “lived experience”, however, seemed to work against Quin in a sense. The connotation of each of these categories also expands in the context of being “experimental” – for instance, as Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs discuss in their preface and introduction to *Breaking the Sequence*, fiction written by experimental woman writers had been neglected by male literary critics and feminist critics alike.⁹ Quin definitely was a woman of a working-class origin, yet her style would not correspond with the ideas associated with those brackets. When focusing on Quin from the perspective of “women’s writing,” she did discuss the position of a woman, especially of a woman as a writer in interviews as well as her works, she is aware of how gendered conditions are significantly disadvantageous for women, she experienced first-hand the hardships so common for women in the Western society. It would be exaggerating to define her writing as distinctly feminist, although in some aspects Quin employs strategies that could be read as “feminist,” but it is hardly a predominant feature of her works.¹⁰ As Morley notes, “Quin's writing is not faithful to any one of the aesthetic, cultural or social agendas that may be detected in her work.”¹¹ The issue with “feminist fiction” begins with the

⁸ Loraine Morley, “The Love Affair(s) of Ann Quin,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, 5:2 (1999) 139.

⁹ Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “Contexts and Continuities: An Introduction to Women's Experimental Fiction in English,” in: *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, edited by Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 6.

¹⁰ Sweeney, 215.

¹¹ Morley, 138.

very question of how to define it, what makes a text “feminist.” In *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Toril Moi has observed several feminist interpretations of Virginia Woolf radically rejecting Woolf as a “feminist writer,” despite her overt interest in feminism, for what those critics were seeking in a “feminist text” was often a “positive representation” of women; they also took issue with the formal aspects of Woolf’s writing (for they allegedly problematized the communication of the feminist cause), and her privileged position from which she observed the women’s struggles.¹² Feminism, even the “academic” one, has since then gone a long way, and as a result, some could argue that even the formal features Quin employs can be somehow interpreted as feminist or queer. Some could possibly even attempt to recuperate her into a canon of experimental *feminist* writers. The closest this thesis will get to a feminist framework is in the chapter dedicated to gender, considering some feminist theories regarding gender roles. Nevertheless, the issue of Quin as a potentially feminist writer will not be followed in any greater detail in this thesis.

Another identity related category of significance in Quin’s case is class, for she is rightly considered a “working class writer.” The “working class” label clearly applies to the conditions under which Quin lived and produced her works, but her fiction was not preoccupied with providing a social critique from a working-class perspective. Regardless, Quin’s writing technique can be contrasted and analyzed in the light of her background as a working-class author, since her style was a result of a journey of a self-taught writer who did not possess the advantages of being able to focus solely on developing her writing skills and not having to worry about her material condition.

So, while characterized as a “working-class author,” Quin’s working-class quality is extrapolated from her own lifestyle rather than from something that could be called “working-class writing” in the sense that her works would explicitly portray the social reality of lower-class people and would profoundly deal with the class-based injustice in society. Suggesting that her class origin would be a defining feature for her writing is, however, an idea subversive of the expectations that a working-class writer has to be someone who produces straightforward prose. Critics and academics quite often quote Quin’s claim that authors like

¹² Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 4.

John Braine and John Osborne “frankly stink with their dumb 19th century prose”¹³, and she herself declared that the way the novel in England dealt with class has been “overdone.”¹⁴

Claire-Louise Bennett has suggested that her connection to Quin was deepened precisely through a certain class solidarity, for in Quin she found a representation of a working-class woman who wrote experimentally like herself. There is a presumption that the working class cannot appreciate experimental fiction for various reasons, which has been argued through different perspectives.¹⁵ It is true that reading experimental fiction, typically but not necessarily, requires time, concentration, sometimes a certain degree of education, all of which would be rarely accessible to working-class people. One’s class origin does play a role when interacting with language, but there is never any ultimate way in which this predisposition plays out. Approaching language and writing as a working-class person is something that Bennett points out in relation to herself as well as Quin. She described Quin’s tonality of language with these words:

There’s something about the tone of Quin’s work, though. It’s irreverent and mischievous, as well as being deeply felt and considered. There’s a lot in it that’s tongue in cheek. She’s very playful. She’s very alive to the different meanings that words might have. If you are working class and you are writing, of course you have a different relationship with language. In certain ways you might feel that language has been a bit of an oppressive force in your life. You’re more critical of it; you’re aware of it failing you in many ways. So language becomes your subject as well as your medium. It’s not just a given that you get on with.¹⁶

This touches upon a major theme that looms over all criticism dedicated to Quin, for it arguably makes her works so extraordinary – her use of language, for which she was accused of engaging in self-indulgent experiments, not achieving anything beyond the astonishing frustration for its own sake.¹⁷ Her writing is arguably difficult, but still enticing. To engage with it fully requires giving up on certain common conventions: Quin’s lack of punctuation, denying the reader the satisfaction of being able to easily distinguish “who is speaking,” or paragraphs broken mid-sentence do indeed demand some reconsideration of how one reads a novel. Nevertheless, it is also precisely these qualities that enable Quin to capture some

¹³ Letter: Quin to Sward, 31st January 1966, Robert Sward Papers, series 1.1, box 8. Personal correspondence; letter: John Calder to Nonia Williams Korteling, postal date, 13th November 2008. In Nonia Williams Korteling, *Designing its own shadow’ – Reading Ann Quin*, PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing, May, 2013, 22.

¹⁴ Nell Dunn, *Talking to Women* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1965) 133.

¹⁵ In the introductory chapter of *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Toril Moi discusses the feminist critiques influenced by George Lukacs’ understanding of modernism as a bourgeois direction, praising “realist” fiction instead for its approachability. On the other hand, there is a common prejudice about “plebian” masses not understanding art which stems from the same place as this argument assessing the position of the working class.

¹⁶ Wilson, 20.

¹⁷ Nonia Williams, “Ann Quin: ‘infuriating’ Experiments?” in *British Avant-garde Fiction of the 1960s*, edited by Kaye Mitchell and Nonia Williams (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019) 143.

delicate psychological processes and fleeting linguistic moments so vividly. She balances the tender smoothness of intimacy with a harsh turbulence of violent forces, while switching from states of vigilance to those of sleep, drowsiness, always emanating an oneiric aura.

The very manner in which Quin develops a narrative indeed seems like one of the main obstacles to overcome. Her narration consists of “voices” that become indistinguishable at times. Philip Stevick’s chapter dedicated to Quin in *Breaking the Sequence: Women’s Experimental Fiction* has focused on the “voices in the head” as a way of shaping the discourse in Quin’s works. Stevick observes the unstable elements forming her “theatre of the mind”¹⁸, and explores the stylistic tendencies characteristic of Quin. He also analyzes the motifs and settings that typically appear in Quin’s fiction, establishing four aspects which are to be found in all of her novels. First, he notes that her characters are never home, reinforcing some unfamiliar impressions.¹⁹ The second prominent feature of Quin’s writing is its eroticism. As suggested by Stevick:

[T]he whole of experience in Quin’s fiction tends to be eroticized. There are, to be sure, scenes of explicit sex, “real” and imagined. And characters, even when they are in situations far removed from the sexual, seem preoccupied, implicitly, with the erotic. But, far more than that, the phenomenal world tends to appear as if charged with sexual energy. There are those images in which the conventions of Freudian symbolism are reimagined. [...] [T]here are those ordinary images in which, by some turn of diction, some nuance, the erotic is potently suggested. No one makes water more sexual than Quin: the sea, the river, the wash basin, the hot-spring pool, the hotel shower, the swimming pool. Sun, moon, vegetation, the wind, potentially erotic, are almost inevitably sexually charged in her work. [...] Clothes, in Quin, are always erotic.²⁰

The other two aspects of Quin’s writing pointed out by Stevick are fragmentation of wholes, and how discourse in her novels operates on multiple levels “simultaneously, alternately, contrapuntally.”²¹

Eroticism is crucial for Quin’s writing as the element stimulating both form and content, sensuality becoming a reason for and a result of any action. Alice Butler has characterized the way Quin writes sexual experience as using “form as a bodily eruption, a gestural intercourse of agitated rhythms, and image seizures.”²² Her writing captures the moments that are titillating with hints of just enough aggression to intensify the excitement. Desire in Quin presents itself as “poetic” and “mysterious” on one hand, graphically explicit and “overexplained” on the other – Quin’s texts finely transcend the modes of erotic

¹⁸ Stevick, 232.

¹⁹ Stevick, 234.

²⁰ Stevick, 234-235.

²¹ Stevick, 235-236.

²² Alice Butler, *Ann Quin’s Night-time Ink. A Postscript* (London: Royal College of Art, 2013) 60.

depiction. The central attribute of all things sexual in Quin observed in this thesis is their *fluidity* which is why such shifts in tone work almost seamlessly. Any category can become volatile at any given moment.

In spite of the rather abstract and arguably complex character of Quin's writing, certain tangible figures can be observed in her texts. In this thesis, they shall be depicted as defined by their sexual behaviors and preferences, in the context of their interaction with their family environment, how their gender affects their sexuality, what role(s) they play in one of the central triangular arrangements which appear throughout Quin's work, and in terms of violent sexuality and sexual violence. There are common patterns that come into play when considering Quin's characters as sexual personae: these figures often become "perverse" as a result of trauma and repression, they struggle with establishing their own identity, they find themselves in mental states of transcendence and fusion. They are to be found between passivity and movement in the process of becoming: becoming something else, becoming each other, merging with other characters, expanding and crossing their boundaries. This thesis will attempt to capture how the fluidity, the water-like shifting and movement, operates in terms of sexual archetypes, analyzing the prevalent functions forming her personae. While central to this thesis, the sexual aspect of Quin's prose cannot be isolated from the other frequently explored themes. These include one's estrangement from others, dealing with one's neuroses, pretension, death, and dysfunctional relationships, all of which are framed by certain quests in which her characters engage as they travel and/or plot their revenge.

The central phenomenon analyzed in this thesis concerns the "sexual personae" (persona's etymological origin being a "mask," thus a concept related to Quin's poetics) that occupy Quin's fictional cosmos. The focus and title of this thesis are inspired by *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* by Camille Paglia, in which she observes sex as a force within art and decadence throughout the Western canon. While Paglia's criticism will not be predominantly central to this thesis, some of her observations are still taken into account. Inspecting significant works of Western culture in the light of sexual imagination, she distinguishes their chthonian, Apollonian or Dionysian aspects, illustrates the presence of paganism and nature in art, and points out the features that make art erotic. Although Paglia's conclusions regarding gender or the approach to some concepts do not entirely correspond with suggestions made in this thesis, they provide a refreshing possibility of interpretation of cultural imaginations. Her contemplations are provocative and present a stimulating contribution to how Western perception of transgression of art and its eroticism can be handled:

Pornography makes many well-meaning people uncomfortable because it isolates the voyeuristic element present in all art, and especially cinema. All the personae of art are sex objects. The emotional response of spectator or reader is inseparable from erotic response. [...]

We are voyeurs at the perimeters of art, and there is a sadomasochistic sensuality in our responses to it. Art is a scandal, literally a “stumbling block,” to all moralism, whether on the Christian right or Rousseauist left. Pornography and art are inseparable, because there is voyeurism and voracity in all our sensations as seeing, feeling beings. [...]

The weakness in radical critiques of sex and society is that they fail to recognize that sex needs ritual binding to control its daemonism and secondly that society’s repressions *increase* sexual pleasure. There is nothing less erotic than a nudist colony. Desire is intensified by ritual limitations. Hence the mask, harness, and chains of sadomasochism.²³

In this quote, Paglia points out the pornographic and tabooed quality of art. Among other dynamic features, it is also this sense of voyeuristic uncertainty that makes Quin’s characters alluring. She balances out the precise momentum of what is titillating and what works against excitement, proceeding to employ this distinction adequately. As a result, she operates within the dynamic of revealing and concealing. Many situations in her works involve exhibitionism and voyeurism; the characters are seen through a keyhole, heard via a partition or a thin wall. The narrator, and even more often the reader, is denied the whole sight or the whole experience of a scene taking place, left merely to suspect what actually could be going on. Quin’s characters are defined through cracks both metaphorical and literal, as is for instance the case of Alistair Berg listening to his father and his mistress through a wooden partition.

As stated above, this thesis will attempt to map out most tangible personae to be found in Quin’s works. The primary sources are Quin’s novels and selected shorter prose. From Quin’s earliest published works, the importance of sexual motivation plays out in her fiction: the crucial character traits are to be traced to their sexual development, their libido, or fantasies. The protagonist of *Berg* Alistair Berg feels inadequate as a man for he cannot escape the bond of his parents’ influence, and is still processing the absence of his father, while constantly under the control of his overly anxious mother, and subsequently finds himself trapped in his own cruel and infantile desires. The married couple in Quin’s second novel *Three*, Ruth and Leonard, are stuck in the boredom of their bourgeois married life, both suffering from the frustration of sexual repression and infertility. The mysterious S provides a sense of excitement and guarantees them artificial joys and sorrows of having a “foster child” to play with. Together with S they engage in roleplaying which allows them to channel some of their sexual temptations. While her presence temporarily relieves their frustrations and boredom, it also makes the ugly reality of their marriage even more apparent. The third and

²³ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 35-36.

Quin's personal favorite novel *Passages* was the one she herself called "pornographic," and indeed, its tone may be the most "lurid" one. Aside from the quest for a lost person as well as for the searcher's own identity, this text explores various levels of submission and dominance, the master-slave dynamics, while providing the sensual excitement via descriptions of fetishistic scenarios involving such stimuli as the feel of leather or painful enjoyment of whipping. There is a display of incestual and rape fantasies, juxtaposed with actual scenes of incest and violence. The Mediterranean setting provides a sense of "exotic" eroticism, enabling the Anglophone characters to experience the foreign culture as a fetish of sorts. Finally, *Tripticks* observes sex as a commodity, showing a catalogue of the American dream fragmented into categories constituting one's desirability. The "story" observes a "machoman" facing his inability to achieve the mythical masculine ideal, while recounting the narrator's marriages at a high speed, drifting through the love affairs in parallel with the journey of the narrator and his pursuers.

Quin's short prose also provides a variety of moments of sexual tension, illustrating phenomena similar to those observed in her novels, some of which are included in the analyses in this thesis. The story "Nude and Seascape" shows the most radical fragmentation of the female body in all of Quin's oeuvre, for it is merely a corpse of a deceased woman found on a beach. The man in this narrative is the creative force, his intentions almost akin to those of a sensitive artist whose aesthetic feelings urge him to create an art piece featuring this naked body at a seascape, mixed with the violent temptations of the masculine ego's necessity to manipulate the female body in order to suit his vision. "A Double Room" is a short story following an old man and a young woman in a frustrating sexual relationship where they fulfill their father-daughter roles. "Never Trust a Man Who Bathes with His Fingernails" depicts a time when a married couple living with another woman, their lover, had a Native American man working around the house. In this story written in the form of a narrative poem, it is not so much the proverbial "third wheel" that would cause the disturbance of a dual dynamic of marriage as the fourth element of an intruder who does not quite fit into the household ecosystem. In "Ghostworm" Quin explores nearly paranormal dimensions – the protagonist is apparently speaking with her deceased lover's ghost in the first part of the story, recounting their love lives. Typically for Quin, this story deals with strong feelings of alienation, as the female central character is attempting to locate herself between England and America. The titular fragment of Quin's unfinished novel *The Unmapped Country* follows a young woman institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital, dealing with attempts at life in the institution and recollections of her life before she got there. Remarks were made on how this

was Quin's most straightforward piece of writing, far less complex and confusing than the others, speculating about the impact of electroshock therapy on Quin's ability to write. The fact that this piece of writing was never finished complicates the assertion in terms of which specific characteristics could have been more fully developed in the novel.

As can be observed from the overview above, Quin's fiction heavily confronts the "perverse" aspects of sexuality that often stem from neurotic disorders and repressive processes. These practices might seem repulsive, as they feature tabooed forms of sexual expression and stimuli – they trigger such response as a result of motivated by shame, morality, and/or disgust.²⁴ She portrays incest, cross-dressing, bisexuality, cuckoldry, non-monogamous arrangements, and so on, many of which on their own are not too shocking, but rather accentuate the implications of such occurrences within a specific, more disturbing context. Even in a relatively "normal" setting (i.e., a husband and a wife engaging in some sort of sexual activity), the sexual behaviors and desires are in opposition to what would be considered "normal" sexuality. Related to this tendency is the issue of understanding sex as a means of propagation. Quin's characters rarely conceive in a way that would be significant: they usually deal with infertility, impotence, miscarriages, abortions, and fear of procreation. The urge to procreate is never the purpose of sexual desire for these characters. And when children do appear, such as in Aly Berg's memories, they are usually cruel and/or objects of adult neglect or violence. They promote the fear of passing one's genes onto another human being.

Quin's characters are almost antithetical to the sexual norms established in the Western society of bourgeois majority. The obvious hints at explicit sexual motifs and deviances are supported by other cultural signifiers with erotic motivations. For instance, animals in Quin bear significance for the sexual expression of their owners or those who observe them. There are cats, birds, goldfish, etc., which often mirror a character's behaviors or struggles. Similarly to human characters, animals in Quin's fiction often tend to disappear – usually because they are killed, which further reinforces the Eros–Thanatos dynamic at play, and the violent undertones of her writing. Quin also points out the fetishism of exotic desire – she employs defamiliarized surroundings and objects detached from their meanings as sources of excitation. She also introduces (non-white) characters of foreign origin, who often function as (possibly fetishized) disruptions of the atmosphere maintained by the culturally and racially white protagonists.

²⁴ These are the root reasons for rejecting perversion/classifying something as perverse as argued by Freud in *Three essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.

Quin's texts cannot be "normal" and the characters that appear in them refuse to be "normalized." Their apparent "normalcy" is always disrupted, especially in the sexual realm. They are revealed to be severely frustrated, neurotic, infantile, and perverse. All of these aspects are to be explored in the following four thematic areas (the family, gender, triangularity and violence) selected for the purposes of this thesis. The assertion that sexual behavior of Quin's characters is not "normal", is supported by, but not limited to, the definition of normal sexual life which Sigmund Freud proposes in his essays on the theory of sexuality. Freud describes the normal sexual life of an adult as that in which "the pursuit of pleasure comes under the sway of the reproductive function and in which the component instincts, under the primacy of a single erotogenic zone, form a firm organization directed towards a sexual aim attached to some extraneous sexual object."²⁵ The normal sexual life is the final outcome of sexual development, which is a stage that the protagonists in Quin's novels are unable to reach for various reasons. They are sexually immature, uprooted, stuck in their past, and cannot process the present.

The first chapter is dedicated to the role of the family in the realm of sexual developments and expression. In Quin, family is often a source of neuroses and tension, the environment is full of unhealthy patterns which frequently result in trauma. When Quin's characters' upbringing is discussed, it becomes apparent that these figures were raised under such conditions which did not allow them to mature normally, and so they are met with the inability to proceed past those conflicts in their adult lives. This chapter follows sexual personae defined in terms of one's position within their family, namely as a mother, father, or a child. This chapter's analysis draws the theoretical framework from the works of Sigmund Freud, mainly *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, and studies engaging with family on the grounds of psychoanalysis, such as those of Nancy Chodorow. As Quin's characters are often impacted by their childhood experiences, these theories provide guidance in interpreting the tendencies prevalent in the development of sexuality and its impact.

The second chapter observes gender in relation to sexual presence. Gender in Quin can be ambiguous while still tangibly apparent. She does provide subversive perspectives on gender and sexuality, her practices involve blurring the lines of gendered narratives through the form or ascribing typically gendered conduct contrary to expectations. Negative attributes associated with gender stereotypes are present in Quin and she leans into them, sometimes as

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 2018) 63.

a ridicule, other times in a brutal earnestness, mirroring some of her own contemporary phenomena. The awareness of these manifestations further deepens the understanding of the inability to achieve any ideals: the myth of divine femininity/masculinity, the myth of an ideal monogamous heterosexual love, or the negative of an ideal created as a purely vitriolic dehumanization of either gender. This chapter takes into account the developments of discourse regarding gender roles, contrasting “fixed” and “fluid” gendered connotations presupposed by the myths of Western patriarchal society, with the possibility grasping the concept of gender as fluid and ever-shifting. This chapter engages with selected criticism on Quin’s writing, feminist theory, as well as psychoanalytical observations regarding gendered behavior.

The third chapter is dedicated to triangularity within which Quin’s sexual personae operate. Three is a number possessing magical connotations in various cultural contexts, and in Quin’s works many of these associations unravel. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, it is agreed upon that the number three is a phallic number,²⁶ and as the Christian trinity is deeply charged with patriarchal energy, it is undeniably central to (not only) Western culture. Being an odd number and the first prime number after two makes the number three almost intuitively fascinating; it is the only number where there can be only one couple included, but also the only number allowing direct connection of every element involved. The number three resonates throughout each of Quin’s novels: there are three family members, a couple and an intrusive lover, three omens, three ex-wives, etc. The analysis of the primary texts will be conducted by drawing from the conclusions suggested in the previous chapters, considering the triangularity of Quin’s personae in the context of family and love affairs.

The fourth and final chapter observes Quin’s sexual personae in relation to something that circulates throughout her work, and is at least as inseparable from Quin’s fiction as sex: violence. Violence in Quin appears in the form of bruises and scars, but also dead bodies. The range of cruelty is astonishing: a whimsical sadomasochistic session takes place on one page, only to be later juxtaposed with public executions, showing the imbalance of how pain can be inflicted and understood. The scenes of sexual violence or violent sexuality may serve as a crucial revelation of the motivations and/or anxieties each person imposes onto their relationships to the outside world, as well as often their grasp of selfhood. In this chapter the sadistic and masochistic tendencies in Quin’s work will be considered alongside the brutal escalation of sex and violence combined resulting in sexual violence or death. The theoretical

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 2010) 371.

texts employed in this chapter focus on the significance of violent urges and death drives, considering them in sexual context, namely Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and observing the connection between death, violence and sexual excitement with Georges Bataille's *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality*.

The theoretical methodology chosen for this thesis is influenced by psychoanalysis while working with the conclusions maintained in the critical studies regarding Quin's work. As mentioned above, the impulse for the choice of the subject observed within Quin's writing came from the seminal work of Camille Paglia. The sexual personae in Western culture may provide grounds for a reaction or reassessment of such imaginations, invoking figures such as the *femme fatale*, the theatrical epicene and the effeminate male. This thesis attempts to map out the sexual archetypes recurring in Quin's ensemble of characters, analyzing the themes and poetics contained within her pathological triangular structures.

Chapter 1: Family – “A happiness I would not care to reproduce”

Quin’s novels often explore family bonds in terms of navigating trauma and neuroses that originate precisely in the environment of one’s family. This is where one first encounters various taboos to be acknowledged, the most blatantly present, yet perhaps one of the most repulsive ones being incest, which lingers over Quin’s characters at most times. Mothers in her fiction tend to usurp the breathing space, fathers prefer to not participate in their role too much, and children often feel inadequate and frustrated within these structures. The inability to overcome traumas and infantile fixations becomes an obstacle that prevents them from developing sexually in a healthy manner. Not only are the patterns learnt in a dysfunctional family perpetuated, there is also an emergence of new variations of perverted behavior to be addressed.

Ultimately, identifying intrinsically in terms of one’s role within the environment of a family constellation can be a decisive factor for one’s sexual behavior. The issue here is the pathological repetition of toxic interactions and the obvious frustration from the unfulfilled desires and expectations. The discrepancies in family life result in what could be understood as repression, pushing their memories of traumatic experiences into the unconscious, which leads them to cope with their neuroses through cruelty and perversion, as is the case of Alistair Berg whose quest is lined with murderous desires. A very blatant conflict that many of Quin’s characters address, even if indirectly, is their incapability of escaping the family-bound fixations despite their physical movement far away from where their family ties might had been.

Quin also depicts relationships between people whose life experiences are unequal and whose expectations of one another differ rapidly and yet they are framed within a family-like dynamic. This is most apparent in the case of couples where there is a significant age-gap between the partners, implying the interpretation of such a connection through the prism of a faux-parent-child type of arrangement, adopting roles typical within a family. Young women find themselves conflicted about their desire for father figures, which makes them seek older partners, yet they are inevitably disappointed. Older women, on the other hand, tend to lean into the maternal characteristics of their psyche and attempt to offer their kind, gentle, caring side, while remaining strict, disciplining, even suffocating. Men who have issues with their parents are overcome with violent urges by way of compensating for what they lack

emotionally and/or sexually. They cannot sufficiently cope with their disturbed childhood development and as a result, they turn into grown men with issues treating their wives and lovers, they are stuck in a loop of being approached as incompetent and somewhat child-like despite them being adult. The presence of quasi-incestual dynamics further adds into the disturbing atmosphere of the usually dysfunctional relationships.

Freud remarks that “there are ways more direct than inheritance by which neurotic parents can hand their disorder on to their children,”¹ pointing to the impact of external factors of parental disorders affecting the children. This is precisely seen in Quin’s representation of parental figures, as their neuroses are hardly observed from the viewpoint of genetics and inheritance in a biological sense. It is confirmed that Quin was familiar with Freud’s works, actively applying her knowledge in order to employ, subvert, and parody the concepts proposed. At times, she is obviously referring to the issue of the Oedipus complex, while also implicitly dealing with the remains of infantile sexuality present in her novels, the effects of repression, and the significance of dreams. The incestual quality of familial bonds is definitely one of the more overt connections between Freud’s works and Quin’s novels. The family is characterized in terms of forbidden sexual tension that accompanies the development of understanding love and relations to the external world in general. Nevertheless, even in a relatively healthy environment, there will always be challenges to be overcome regarding relationships to other people or, specifically, family members. One of such challenges is admitting the sexual desire felt towards one’s relatives:

It [...] must be said that whoever is to be really free and happy in love must have overcome his deference for women and come to terms with the idea of incest with mother or sister. Anyone who in the face of this test subjects himself to serious self-examination will indubitably find that at the bottom of his heart he too regards the sexual act as something degrading, which soils and contaminates not only the body. And he will only be able to look for the origin of this attitude, which he will certainly not willingly acknowledge, in that period of his youth in which his sexual passions were already strongly developed but in which gratification of them with an object outside the family was almost as completely prohibited as with an incestuous one.²

Freud’s analyses are infamously male-centric and their validity has been widely questioned.³ Regardless, if we take these theories into account when analyzing familial bonds as represented in Quin, what gets revealed is precisely the tainted image that is parodically alluded to; all male protagonists in Quin’s novels desire their mother, daughter, sister in some respect, be it symbolically or literally, and in some cases, this also applies when the genders

¹ *Three Essays*, 90.

² Sigmund Freud, *Sexuality and Psychology of Love*, edited by Philip Reiff, (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 55.

³ There are Freud’s analyses focused on women, however, as various feminist critics point out, they often rely on misogynistic prejudices.

are reversed. Nonia Williams observes the significance of the oedipal taboo in Quin's work as it is featured not only in *Berg*, but also in her short prose where the motif of young girl anticipating her father occurs – typically, this incestual desire is accompanied by a simultaneous repulsion.⁴

The parents' role within the family system is crucial, as they are the ones shaping the very environment, and they usually operate in different spheres of influence; the mother is “responsible for the care of individual family members,” while the father is “primarily responsible for providing for his family as a unit in the environment,” each being in charge of a different domain.⁵ In Quin's portrayal of the family, these attempts tend to fail. While Freudian analysis of infantile experience focuses on the importance of libidinal drives, object-relations theory emphasizes rather the centrality of the parental objects, and the psychoanalysts Harry Guntrip and Ronald Fairbairn suggest that the moments when an infant is neglected or deserted by a parental figure lead to development of a schizoid personality.⁶ In his study of Quin's writing in the context of object-relations, Josh Powell proposes that her characters exhibit symptoms of schizoid behavior, a pattern that recurs throughout her work.⁷ Tracing this phenomenon to the effects of childhood experience serves as another piece of evidence for the claim that family structures play a significant role in the development of Quin's characters, often such that alter the whole of their personality irreparably.

In his essay “‘Civilized’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness,” Freud remarks on how human civilization is founded on the suppression of instincts which is an undisputable fact, and then he points to the effects of this reality on the development of nervousness and show how it affects sexuality.⁸ This is very crucial to the family settings in Quin's novels, as the parents, especially mothers, are the very image of nervousity and enforcement of suppression. This naturally affects how they bring up their children who then (to the mother's surprise) seek liberation through perverted means.

As mentioned in the introduction, attempts at reproduction and starting a (functional) family in the landscape of Quin's oeuvre are doomed. In *Tripticks*, the narrator's first wife speaks of her miscarriage during the divorce hearings, which is an immensely vulnerable position. However, the passage relating this information is not concerned with the pain of loss at all – instead, it points to the negative connotations of starting a family:

⁴ Nonia Williams Korteling, *'Designing its own shadow' – Reading Ann Quin*, PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing, May, 2013, 34.

⁵ Miriam M. Johnson, “Sex Role Learning in the Nuclear Family,” *Child Development*, 34:2 (1963): 320.

⁶ Josh Powell, “Ann Quin, object relations, and the (in)attentive reader,” *Textual Practice*, 35:2 (2021): 250.

⁷ Powell, 251.

⁸ *Sexuality and The Psychology of Love*, 15–16.

Certainly she blamed me for her miscarriage, even though she was secretly relieved. She hated the idea of getting fat. Loathed my fantasies of her suckling a baby as well as myself. The whole image, in fact, of The Mother. Besides she was quite convinced it would have been a monster or the messiah.⁹

The no.1 X-wife does not desire motherhood, she is nauseated by it – the miscarriage is merely another leverage to be used against her ex-husband, whom she perceives as infantile and repulsive. *Tripticks* leans into the exaggeration and grotesqueness of consumerism, hence its obsession with appearance and the cumulation of grandiose slogan buzzwords, nevertheless, the image of The Mother genuinely haunts most of Quin’s works, and the inability successfully to procreate is ubiquitous.

1.1 Mothers

The mother figure in Quin occupies the text from various positions. She does not have to appear in the flesh – her presence is made known through memories, letters, and her impact on the child. In her story “Motherlogue,” Quin captures the mother’s side of a conversation over the telephone. In this dense text the mother rambles for eight pages, leaving only tiny gaps for her daughter’s response. These gaps are a very emblematic visual representation of the space the mother lets the child occupy for self-expression in the case of most Quin’s fiction.

A child’s bond with its mother has been always emphasized in various contexts, and Freud emphasizes the significance of a child sucking on its mother’s breast as the prototype of every relation of love.¹⁰ This form of contact is believed to be one of the origins of the sexual dimension of the motherly bond, as sucking on a mother’s breast brings a specific type of pleasure. Although Quin’s mothers retain some of the traditional expectations associated with motherhood, their role is also disordered; in the context of Quin’s fiction, one has to consider what motherhood looks like in a disturbed woman. In his study on modern nervousness, Freud observes that

the neurotic woman who is unsatisfied by her husband is over-tender and over-anxious in regard to the child, to whom she transfers her need for love, thus awakening in it sexual precocity. The bad relations between the parents then stimulate the emotional life of the child, and cause it to experience intensities of love, hate and jealousy while yet in its infancy. The strict training which tolerates no sort of expression of this precocious sexual state lends support to the forces of suppression, and the conflict at this age contains all the elements needed to cause lifelong neurosis.¹¹

⁹ Ann Quin, *Tripticks* (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2022), 143.

¹⁰ *Three Essays*, 88.

¹¹ *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, 28.

The mother's dissatisfaction with her husband, the father of their child, is also a significant aspect of Quin's writing, for the father is frequently either absent, alienated, or dead. Probably as a result of this frustrating outcome of their marriage, Quin's mothers of men try to control their sons, attempt to emasculate them, and thus forbid them from growing up, preserving their boyhood, even though they may have affected their sexual precocity. Their actions are often motivated by selfishness under the guise of selflessness. Quin's mothers, quite like the mothers Paglia characterizes in her art criticism, and those who appear Masoch's fantasies, are often cold, even cruel, detached from the affection they are expected to provide. Their warmth is rather withheld than given freely, which, while negatively affecting the child, may in fact empower the mother by enabling her to feel like she is in control.

The first figure of the mother encountered in Quin's oeuvre is Edith Berg, whose presence is made known through the letters she sends to Berg, in tandem with his memories and fantasies of her. Early on in the novel it becomes clear that their relationship is not ideal, not only because of Berg's erotic fixation on his mother, of which she is possibly aware, but also because of the subtle ways that mothers specifically tend to employ in order to control their children's lives – manipulation and emotional blackmail. Edith may position herself as the one wishing the best for her only child, however, her actions are primarily formed by her interests and moral prejudices. She imagines herself as the martyr who did everything within the scope of her abilities to ensure that her child was safe, and that she could guarantee a proper upbringing for him, despite the obviously less than ideal position of a single mother in mid-20th century England. Her concern for the son is nevertheless deeply motivated by her own idea of what his life should look like, as she “would rather [Aly] had died” than to confront his interest in pleasuring himself at the dormitory.¹² Such an exaggerated reaction to a prepubescent boy exploring his sexuality, calling it an “evil lust,” is possibly triggered by the reality of Edith denying the existence of her own sex drive, and thus making her even more upset by the display of such conduct in her son, for it is forcing her to acknowledge the sphere of life which she had suppressed since Nathaniel abandoned her.

Imagining Edith as sensual may seem paradoxical, as she is usually described in terms of being “chaste” and “virginal,” (cf. Morley's study), and she seems to be primarily perceived as a desexualized frigid old woman. Her purity is however tainted by the knowledge of her intrusive invasions into her son's sexuality; as Williams argues, the desire Alistair feels towards his mother is reciprocated, which is clearly seen in the incident of Edith

¹² Ann Quin, *Berg* (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2019) 16.

punishing Aly with a leather strap until he bleeds, and then gently comforts her battered child.¹³ The novel contains a few other fantasies and memories of Edith before she became virtually anti-erotic. Chodorow claims that “[A] boy’s mother, living in a male-dominant society, and in a family where her husband is not around as much as her son, cathects him heterosexually precisely on account of his maleness.”¹⁴ This seems to be the case with Edith – Aly is the substitute recipient of her desires which she held for Nathaniel, as she cannot process them otherwise. Edith never found a different lover, and despite her ability to transpose some of her emotional needs onto Aly, she is aware of the emptiness in her life, which is possibly why she gets so excited when she receives a letter from Nathaniel, believing he “needs” her. And possibly she is correct – it seems that throughout the novel’s narrative, both Berg junior and senior only seek Edith when they need something from her – usually, financial support.

The other significant female character in *Berg*, Judith Goldstein, realizes her motherly potential through a step-mother dynamic, being “new mother” the father has chosen as his sexual companion. This quality is precisely what makes her attractive, as the taboo of incest is present, but also, unlike Edith, she is realistically approachable, physically attractive and younger. Judith as such is not painted as a motherly figure, it is in relation to Edith and Nathaniel that Berg conceptualizes her in the maternal light. His desire for Judith as a substitute mother is to a large extent fueled by the obsession with his father.¹⁵ Nevertheless, on several occasions, the narrative focuses on Judith’s breasts, exploring her body as the possibility of projecting this role by invoking the imagery of nursing and milk, suggesting that the attraction is also based on this very first type of pleasure recognized by infants, as Berg is unable to escape his infantile mindset. Otherwise, Judith’s image of motherhood is, much like her overall appearance, artificial – her apartment is filled with wax flowers and stuffed animals, her hair is dyed an unnatural “yellow,” her persona drowns in imitation.

Another example of an atypical mother figure in Quin is the character of Ruth in *Three*, for she is also childless and she does not portray the nurturing caregiver role generally associated with maternal behavior. She is a mother in Quin’s neurotic sense – her desire is to inspect others with her judgmental sight, basing her power coming from on her helplessness and passivity. Ruth is portrayed as an uptight bourgeois wife, who is quite easily offended and never satisfied. Commenting on their lower-class neighbors, their acquaintances, and also S,

¹³ Williams, 43.

¹⁴ Nancy Chodorow, “Mothering, Object-Relations, and the Female Oedipal Configuration,” *Feminist Studies*, 4:1 (1978): 147.

¹⁵ Williams, 50.

Ruth rarely appears to express genuine sympathy towards them, she merely processes how their behavior affects *her*. In the context of Ruth's and Leonard's failed attempts at conception, this factor may perhaps suggest there are many reasons for why she is not meant to become a mother.

In her journal S mentions that Ruth once visited an analyst who concluded she had a "mother-fixation" by which Ruth was amused, since her mother was "tyrannical and tiresome."¹⁶ The absence of a father and a usurping mother is a pattern prolific in Quin's fiction, and while in the context of the whole novel, the focus on dysfunctional family bonds is clearly sought after in S's life, Ruth is also confirmed to grow up in a flawed environment. These circumstances suggest that Ruth is also trapped in a cycle of reproducing the patterns she had been subjected to in her early life.

While *Passages* is not a novel preoccupied with parental relationships, a vivid image of the male narrator's mother is presented. Although she appears only briefly, the journal entries concerning her are memorable, uncomfortably graphic recollections of her dying days. The man despises her for the shameful condition of succumbing to death, recalling the smell of it and his temptation to urinate in the hot drinks he was making for her, as well as his desire to have sex with his sister in front of both of their parents.¹⁷ His last words to her being "there are maggots in the mincepie" mirror the horror of something once delicious and sweet becoming rotten – the maggots would soon devour his mother's body as well. The image of the mother is reduced to the epitome of decay, memorized as the first encounter with death soaked with fear and hatred.

The narrator's mother in *Tripticks* is, much like Edith Berg, present through her letters. Similarly to Edith, she also bears contempt for her son's expressions of sexuality. She is the voice of disapproving judgement laid onto her son, dissatisfied with his life choices, perceiving him as incompetent. The narrator is acutely annoyed by her actions and his behavior is still motivated by the urge to rebel against authority, as he is stuck in the mindset of an adolescent. His mother's letters are full of nagging, moreover, the novel invokes the image of an old "square" in opposition to the hedonistic culture of drugs and "free love," their disagreements mirroring the generational tensions in the society.

The mother image in Quin is burdened with fear (hers or *of* her), possessiveness, and intrusion. Even, or especially if, she is loved (the only tangible case being that of Edith, and even there Aly's love is questionable), she is a threatening reminder of the beginning of life

¹⁶ Ann Quin, *Three* (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2020) 74.

¹⁷ Ann Quin, *Passages* (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2021) 33.

and the guilt tied to being born imperfect, different from the mother's demands. The mother always invades the sexuality of her children, be it as a source of excitement, contempt, anxiety, or disgust.

1.2 Fathers

The role of the father in Quin is obscured by his frequent absence. Physically and/or mentally, the “head” of the family fails to deliver on his duties properly, significantly affecting his children and his (then) wife. As mentioned above, the father is the point of fixation in Quin, as she employs the trope of a young girl pretending her father is her lover who will take her away, save her from the life surrounded by women (as is the case in *Three* or “Every Cripple Has His Own Way of Walking”), but there are also tangible traces of disgust felt upon finally meeting her faux-lover.¹⁸ The only closely explored father-son relationship is that of *Berg*, which, albeit in different situations, observes a similar dynamic forming the fixation. In the family ecosystem, the father represents the outside world and independence to the children, and it is thus assumed that it is typically the father who imposes the gendered roles on children.¹⁹ While the mother does not differentiate between children based on gender as much, once the Oedipal stage has been reached, the father tends to play the roles of “a husband” to his daughter and “a mentor” to his son in order to mold their gendered expression.²⁰ As was mentioned above, the daughter in Quin does indeed engage in the game of becoming pretend lovers with her father, craving the appreciation of her feminine presentation, be it from her actual father or an older man providing this function. The father-son relationship fails to achieve this mentoring activity, and it takes place merely in parody.

The most profound account of fatherhood in Quin's texts is indisputably Nathaniel Berg – the father who failed to be there for his only son, and the man who could not resist his foolish desire to become a touring ventriloquist. The grotesque quality of Nathaniel's presence functions as a perfect caricature of an incompetent father – he leaves his wife with a child at a very young age, he steals money and valuable items from the women in his life, and he fails to take any responsibility for his life whatsoever. Morley characterizes him as “ineffectual and brutish, a hideous parody of the strong patriarchal father with whom the Oedipal son must traditionally identify in order to separate from the mother.”²¹ Although Alistair is incapable of identifying with Nathaniel successfully from the Oedipal perspective,

¹⁸ Williams, 35.

¹⁹ Johnson, 322-323.

²⁰ Johnson, 320.

²¹ Morley, 129.

he is to be identified with him through their shared negative attributes. Not only is he impractical and incapable of ensuring an independent living for himself, their taste in women is similar, even motivated by his father's actions. Judith confides in Alistair Nathaniel's family history, including the history of sisters-swapping leading to his father marrying the wrong sister. The resemblance of his father to himself is possibly yet another motivation for the parricide – the proximity it too revolting, it is too much to bear; it might be posited as a choice between killing his father, or killing himself.

The crystalized model of the other prominent father figure in Quin's oeuvre, the one who rewards his daughter for her performance of femininity, is explored in the story "A Double Room." The "father" in question is an older married man having an affair with the significantly younger female narrator, who enjoys the kinky connotations of them being perceived as "daddy and his little girl," although she is very much dismayed by the reality of their relationship. Following the development of their weekend trip, it becomes clear that while the man is affectionate and nurturing, the narrator does not really love him, yet, she still pursues the man because she is "in love with the situation. Hope of love. Out of boredom."²² She is nearly repelled by the old man's conduct, yet, it is unrealistic for her to give up on this affair. Towards the end of the story, they decide to "break up," with her claiming it is "impossible" for them to see each other, only for her to call him and make an appointment, as she begins to smile. While the mother in Quin's fiction inserts herself into the children's lives, the father is to be pursued by the child. Despite his negative impact on the child's life, the father is desired.

Three's Leonard does not emanate the repulsive aura of the above-discussed father figures: he is younger and far less grotesque. He admits that S probably saw him as a father figure, and he enjoyed to introduce her into the world of roleplay and literature, in a manner of father-like guidance. As much as he enjoyed the "child-like" admiration, and throughout the novel the actual conception of a child is a focal point for Ruth, but no so much for Leon – he prefers to fertilize the orchids which he also delicately and sensually fingers.

All of these "fathers" have in common more than meets the eye – they cannot provide for their children in a way that would allow them to become completely independent of them. The children idealize or demonize the father in their lives as an expression of their desire for the father element. It is an attempt to receive the recognition which would enable them to proceed further.

²² Ann Quin, *The Unmapped Country. Stories & Fragments*, edited by Jennifer Hodgson (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2018) 31.

1.3 Children

The child's role in Quin's fiction seems to be that of someone in an uncertain position, confused and seeking a form of self-expression. The figures of "children", retain some qualities of infants, reflected in their inability to process the outside world wholly. They do comprehend the logic of their surroundings more clearly than a literal child, but eventually they are faced with a similar sense of helplessness – they merely become more frustrated with the family structure confronted.

In the case of Quin's characters, traces of infantile sexuality often surface thanks to the reenactment and reminders of situations resembling childhood, and the traumatic events that would take place at that time of their lives. Freud notes that the sexuality of "neurotics" remains or comes back to the infantile state²³ which is quite applicable to many of these characters, as they are likely to deal with severe mental issues. There is a repetitive pattern that most "children" in Quin's works follow: they are forced to face their fear of commitment which was possibly caused by the unsuccessful attempts at commitment surrounding them, they have to acknowledge that they are seen as "failures" by their parents in some sense, and the bonds with their parents are significantly altered.

Alistair Berg is the character most tightly identified with the filial role, as Morley observes, he is preoccupied with the attempts to separate from one's parents and develop a sense of sexual identity, to become a separate person.²⁴ Throughout the novel, Berg's childhood memories appear in relation to what is currently unravelling in his present, providing a connection to what he has already experienced and suggesting that it still has an impact on his life and that his issues are cycled, but these occurrences may also serve as possible hints of explanations for his present conduct.

Berg has a phlegmatic approach to life, an apparent lack of ambition regarding his sense of direction (Edith asks, "what is it you want out of life, Aly?"²⁵), as well as his romantic life, in which he would prefer masturbation over actual human connection. It is indicated throughout the novel that Berg junior has never been very successful in his sexual advances, not only because of his unpleasant appearance, but because of his psychological damage. His parricidal quest is intertwined with memories, including the image of his sadistic spinster elementary-school teacher, his mother punishing him with a leather strap, classmates bullying him for being poor and effeminate, and his drunk uncle Billy drawing Berg over his

²³ *Three Essays*, 38.

²⁴ Morley, 129.

²⁵ *Berg*, 129.

knees. These fragments of Berg's childhood cast shadows on his crooked approach to interpersonal relationships and sex, for his value system has been molded by encounters that significantly affected his sense of self-worth.

S in *Three* holds an entirely different position, although her fixation on the "father" is also central to her sexuality. Her journals also provide an insight into her childhood experience which is very similar to that described in Quin's story "Every Cripple Has His Own Way of Walking" – there is a number of women (aunts, a grandmother, a mother) taking care of the girl while her father, a pianist, is touring. When it is confirmed that S has dealt with dissatisfying patterns in her biological family, it leads to the question whether her life with the married couple might be an attempt to act out a better version of her childhood and youth in this faux-family. Unlike her actual childhood, she is now able to comprehend and interpret the motivations of people around her more accurately and act accordingly. Her observations are similar to a child noticing behavior of their parents – if they express affection for each other, how they interact, what issues do they seem to deal with. Children are cautious observers who may often discover more than their parents suspect, often prefer to act as if child would not be able to understand the "adult stuff", despite the children sometimes being way more sensitive to the slight alterations in their environment. Reading S's journals and listening to her tapes, Ruth comments that she would not have recognized herself and Leon in them – it is because of how desensitized Ruth has become to her own life, and as Williams rightly points out, "Ruth and Leonard are unreal."²⁶

S admits she feels a "recognizable nausea [that] provokes the desire to become something in their lives, anything."²⁷ It is as if she were attempting to deliberately attract their attention, in a similar way a neglected child may, by being "naughty." An instance of such behavior is her flirting with the workers, dancing "obscenely", dressing provocatively, in a way that will offend Ruth and sexually stimulate Leonard. She is aware of the uniqueness of her position in relation to Ruth and Leon alike – that although she is a "victim" somehow trapped in their marriage (like a child who is not responsible for their parents' disagreements), she realizes how much power she potentially holds, as she can decide which one to "betray" and which one to side with.

Another image of the "child" is found in *Tripticks*, which is deemed to be the most ironic, cacophonous, and difficult-to-follow work by Quin, and its narrator is the medium through which this consumerist and vulgar cut-up vision of the US is observed. He is

²⁶ Williams, 88.

²⁷ *Three*, 60.

portrayed as a man who never grew up (although he considers himself to be mature), in a world of consumption, enchanted by the magic of the materialistic world, hungry for instant sexual gratification and constant stimulation of television programs and illegal substances. The nature of his family relationships is explicitly announced when he “states his personality” and literally declares that “relationship with my family is fucked up.”²⁸ His mother, as discussed above, is generally opposed to everything for which her son stands, and his father is dead. The narrator expresses a wish that his mother would have initiated him into sex life, which she did not, and instead married a man 15 years her junior.²⁹ This regret is followed by wondering what it feels like when “[Y]our mother loves you and your father admires you and your relatives like the way you wear your hair.”³⁰ This succession of impressions is a parodic depiction of what “love” and happy family life mean. The cut-up technique functions as a factor of randomness taking away the agency of the author to a certain extent, which in *Tripticks* is acknowledged as the narrator realizes he is trapped in somebody else’s words. He interprets the world around him through the prism of “ads, texts, psalms”³¹ making him lust after everything that is available to him. He is destined for the destruction which eventually comes in the form of the Inquisition.

²⁸ *Tripticks*, 16.

²⁹ *Tripticks*, 73.

³⁰ *Tripticks*, 73.

³¹ *Tripticks*, 192.

Chapter 2: Gender – “Beware of the demons”

I think women are different in many ways. Men are always trying to assert themselves, a certain vanity, and women are not so conscious of trying to assert themselves, they're much more adaptable – they like playing a role that a man will throw upon them, they have many roles, there's a lot of the chameleon in women.¹

In the quote above, Quin was asked about the difference between men and women, and she proposes that typically women are subjected to playing roles designed for them by men. In her writing, Quin subtly manages to observe instances of this dynamic, while also portraying men emasculated in this very sense – they are also forced to play the roles women thrust upon them, which often results in bursts of anger, states of emotional ambivalence, and frustration, releasing the negative emotions onto these women.

While Quin does not explicitly make a point of representing gender non-conforming characters, gender-specific connotations are played with by means of juxtaposing roles and subverting expectations – whether expectations of “patriarchal society” dictating what roles one should adopt according to sex-based realities, or the expectations of how a *woman writer* depicts men and other women. Gender in Quin can be presented as a point of confusion, but never an arbitrariness. Despite the *fluidity* with which gender can be transformed within her narratives, an emphasized gendered code in Quin always aims at deliberate associations, and precisely because of these connections, such as when a woman is the sexually dominant partner and when a man passionately pursues gardening, enable Quin to further ridicule the social expectations of how gendered images and characteristics work.

Even Freud, criticized for his misogynistic prejudices interwoven into his analyses, argued that a certain degree of androgyny in an individual is *normal* – an “ultimate” woman or a man is impossible. Moreover, as many feminist critics have maintained, there is no such thing as ultimate “essence” of any gender and sex, and to attempt to essentialize necessarily means to give in to ideological bias. It would be impossible and counterproductive to even attempt pathologically to define each and every feature of human behaviors or appearances as inherently male or female, masculine or feminine. Freud declares that “it appears that a

¹ Dunn, 137.

certain degree of anatomical hermaphroditism occurs normally. In every normal male or female individual, traces are found of the apparatus of the opposite sex.”²

The choice to observe Quin’s sexual personae from their gendered aspects is a very pragmatic one, motivated by the fact that each of the characters in Quin’s landscape (or rather a seascape) is somehow gendered. They navigate sexual and gendered expectations, contain certain Western patriarchal stereotypes, be it in parody, as is the case of *Berg*, or in earnest, as may be the case of *Three*’s Ruth presenting a familiar image of the frigid bourgeois wife. The aim of this chapter is to map out the dynamic of gender in Quin’s oeuvre: to observe how the characters of women and men function in texts, and how they are affected by the connotations traditionally tied to masculinity and femininity. The gendered attributes manifest themselves through various means, as David Vichnar points out in the case of *Berg*, he observes that the novel’s plot is coupled with

extensive animal parallelism underwriting and accompanying the crucial Oedipal triads: Nathy’s budgie Berty always endangered by Judith’s cat Seby — until both are dispatched as surrogate sacrificial animals by Berg. Quin constructs the sexual identities of her characters through animal tropes. Dead or alive, these animal allusions form alienated images of gender and sexuality that leave the characters in the novel void of any meaningful relationship.³

Animal parallelism is featured in other Quin’s works as well. In *Three*, Leon gifts Ruth two goldfish for her birthday, however, she does not seem to be excited about them at all. One of the goldfish dies while Leon is away, and Ruth disposes of it quite emotionlessly, putting it into neighbor’s trash. Only when the other one starts visibly grieving does Leon notice that one of them was missing – according to S’s journals, he completely shuts off afterwards. While Ruth did not care for the goldfish, she adores her cat Bobo, whom Leon abhors and believes that this hatred is mutual. The cat also endangers Leonard’s true passion – his orchids. A trope of romantically involved men and women disliking each other’s pets or hobbies functions here a conspicuous illustration of the disharmonized nature of their relationship. Marriage as a model of a relationship dynamic between a man and a woman in Quin’s works tends to fail, as it is often tied to domesticity and its dangers of alienation.

² *Three Essays*, 7.

³ David Vichnar, “Ann Quin’s *Berg* and Stewart Home’s *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess*: Schizophrenic Text-Types.” *Angles* [Online], 13 | 2021, Online since 15 December 2021, connection on 29 December 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/angles/3759>. Downloaded PDF, 3.

2.1 Female Trouble – Ann Quin writes women

As Carol Sweeney puts it, “the representation of women in [Quin’s] novels is ambivalent to say the least,” as misogynistic notions are embedded into the behavioral patterns of her characters.⁴ Sometimes these portrayals may be understood as the patriarchal prism of the male characters, such as when Berg thinks of Judith and Edith, or a depiction of a societal paradigm, but there are also characters whose qualities truly conform to the sexist stereotypes. This may be also seen as one of the strengths of Quin writing women, for she does not attempt to idolize them, and thus achieves a more honest representation which admits the importance of stereotypically female attributes’ impact in the context of sexual and romantic relationships. Quin’s female characters are allowed to be naïve, annoying, oversensitive, or stupid, without the necessity to explicitly declare the awareness of the harmfulness of such depictions and the prejudiced connotations they carry.

Paglia, Bachelard, and Irigaray, each following a different logic and manifestations, all hint at the “liquid” qualities of women. And in each context, this claim is problematic because of its essentializing nature and reliance on the past patriarchal imaginations. Elizabeth Stevens’ text, “Feminism and New Materialism: The Matter of Fluidity” interrogates the concept of fluidity from a feminist and new materialist perspective, dedicating a significant portion of the study to the re-examination of “The Mechanics of Fluids” by Luce Irigaray, suggesting in conclusion that this text shall not be reduced to a bio-essentialist study, but a nuanced attempt to appropriate the imagery of fluidity, paying attention to the material as well as conceptual aspects. Stevens argues that for Irigaray

fluidity is not unproblematically or unequivocally aligned with the positive and progressive; rather, its dynamic nature, its conceptualisation as a field of forces, means that one must pay attention to the specific instances of each manifestation, instead of making generalizing assumptions about its effects. Fluidity may enable a “transgression and confusion of boundaries” but it does so always as part of the (very conventional) construction of femininity, and of the materiality it represents, as essentially other to the logic and rationality of the “ruling symbolics.”⁵

The “fluidity” of Quin’s characters does not necessarily relate to their gender, but still, to an extent her writing does perpetuate the imagery of a “solid” man and a “fluid” woman. This is conspicuously illustrated by the relation to actual bodies of water – whereas it is usually women who resembles a liquid, the man tends to be merely in a close proximity to this substance. The bodies of water are tied to Quin’s personae in a metaphor or in their literal

⁴ Sweeney, 215.

⁵ Elizabeth Stevens, “Feminism and New Materialism: The Matter of Fluidity,” *Interalia: A Journal of Queer Studies*, 9 (2014) 199.

whereabouts. Being intimate with a woman is like entering the sea, woman's body is viewed in terms of liquid imagery. As Stevick claims, water (and generally water-like substances) in Quin is always sexual.

The representation of women is undoubtedly burdened by patriarchal paradigms, portraying them as inferior to men. Quin's writing does invoke some of these images, especially when it comes to a woman's sexuality – in both *Berg* and *Three*, there are two women contrasted in relation to their form of sexual expression: one being sexually repressed, inhibited by mortal shame, the other embracing her desires. However, the splitting observed in Freud's account of the object choice made by men who have not successfully processed the Oedipal period, according to which men find themselves in a situation where they perceive a promiscuous woman as immensely attractive, yet, not worthy of proper respect, whereas women who are worthy of deference are regarded as pure and not appealing sexually, does not take place in Quin – both women, even those whose expression of sexuality is somewhat muted, are desired by men, but neither of them is truly respected. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous proclaimed that

[m]en say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex. That's because they need femininity to be associated with death; it's the jitters that gives them a hard-on! for themselves! They need to be afraid of us. [...]

Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule-immense area of their bodies; not about destiny, but about the adventure of such and such a drive, about trips, crossings, trudges, abrupt and gradual awakenings, discoveries of a zone at one time timorous and soon to be forthright."⁶

Quin's portrayal of femininity retains some of the qualities of the laughing Medusa, disturbing the phallogocentric order and taking risks in pursuing her desires. The mosaic of femininity as represented by Quin does contain multitudes – the woman who at once seems to be liberated from the prison of patriarchal mimesis desires to be objectified by her companion, reduced to the object of his longing. Julia Jordan observes that Quin's works suggest that "the experience of being female is akin to existing in parts, parts that might feel detached and fragmented, that one might glimpse at an odd angle in a mirror and not quite recognize."⁷ While fragmentation is applied to render a character regardless of gender, it may be true that in case of the female characters, their legs, arms, and breasts are to be perceived in a far more lurid manner than those of men. This may be caused by the connotations sustained by the patriarchal perception. While women in Western culture are central to the cultural

⁶ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1:4 (1976) 885.

⁷ Jordan, 16.

symbolism, be it as pagan fertility goddesses or virgin saints, these images were crafted by men and contained a considerable portion of fear of the woman as a symbol, while the real women remained powerless.⁸

Just as there is no unified version of “femininity” in general, there is not one singular representation of Quin’s women. The following paragraphs are an estimation of which “types” of women appear in Quin’s works, navigating through the quasi-feminist appropriations of man-made myths of femininity, as well as certain acceptance of resemblance to the sexist stereotypes of women.

The narrative of *Berg* focused on two women, Edith and Judith, who are seen through the prism of Alistair’s perception. To himself, Berg acknowledges the dependence of the woman’s image on “her” man in the cultural tradition: “How often one plays with a projected fictional love: the image of a Ruth, a Helen, Beatrice, Cleopatra. Woman, the mythical creature who warmly welcomes the part her lover hands her.”⁹ In her assessment of Freud’s analyses, Irigaray recognizes this approach as the male desire to seek a representation of himself in the woman,¹⁰ and Quin’s women quite often reflect precisely the impact a man has had on their realization of selfhood, letting him see himself through her, especially the figures of Edith and Ruth.

The figure of Edith Berg, as discussed in the preceding chapter, is rooted in her role of a suffocating mother invading the life of her child. Her motherhood encapsulates her femininity as a whole, it seems to contain all of the sexual anxieties that she invokes throughout the novel. There are very few hints of what her life was like before she gave birth, or rather before Nathaniel left her, as without him she does not have any motivation to venture outside of the boundaries of her motherly role. She remains naively faithful to Nathaniel, and never pursued another man romantically, except her son. As already discussed, Edith may at first seem to be pristinely anti-erotic, except for the moments when she exercises dominance over her son. Nevertheless, there are several passages establishing Edith’s sexuality prior to her ostensibly performative chastity of the present day. Her repressed self is juxtaposed with Aly’s memories of her having sex with Nathaniel in the woods, and the fantasies of her he has fabricated in passages such as this:

[a] part of her, he would never know, a consciousness undeclared, a bride hardly virginal that vamped your dreams, a cry in the dark, clutching bouquets through the night’s half orgies, a hand groping for the light switch, staring into the mirror after midnight, the hangman’s steady gaze at the empty bed, the familiar furniture and objects scattered

⁸ Paglia, 42.

⁹ *Berg*, 65

¹⁰ *Moi*, 134.

about the room, yet no longer belonging. The noises behind walls, the faint tapping — convicts sending out signals to the distressed. Murder they whispered to your heart's ease, and you shouting for attention. Edith entering, her eyes half-closed, listening to a sphinx's secret, hiding under the pyramidal palaces of her flesh, no answer to your insistence.¹¹

While Edith is apparently no longer physically attractive, she retains an implicit sexual quality. In opposition to Edith stands Judith, as a realization of the unchaste urges that Edith had suppressed. Judith Goldstein is situated at the intersection of being presented as a love interest and a nuisance simultaneously, a parodic shell of a femme-fatale. In his narrative, Berg calls her a “bitch-goddess,” Nathaniel complains about her, suggesting she “ought to get children”¹² in order to become less selfish. For both Berg senior and junior, she represents the womanly charms, as well as the ultimate repulsion.

According to Baudrillard, seduction is not a natural occurrence, but a result of artificial construction,¹³ and Judith seems to be the very epitome a crafted form of seduction. Her seductive power is maintained through her unnatural appearance, cheap sex-appeal with her tacky makeup and accessories. Her hair in a net is referred to as a “yellow bush,” not blonde, which further reinforces the defamiliarized, dehumanized aura of this woman's presence.¹⁴ She is followed by the smell of wet fur (fur, according to Freud, is fetishized for its resemblance to pubic hair¹⁵), her flat is filled with fake flowers, wax fruit, and stuffed animals. Considering the parodic tone of *Berg*, it is only natural, that the seductress will be made strange:

He heard Judith moving about, the sound of plates, and strange sucking noises — perhaps she licks herself? She wasn't a bad-looking woman really, not his type though. [...] She really wasn't bad at all; large breasts were quite a compensation for anything else that might be lacking. He reached for the mirror. If she accepted a man approaching his sixties, what would she reject?¹⁶

Judith is at once perceived as a prospect of easily satisfied desires, but also as Bataille suggests, the decisive factor when judging a woman's attractiveness is never objective, but rather dependent on an intangible aspect of her personality, which spiritually reaches whoever is attracted to her.¹⁷ This “intangible aspect” of Judith's personality would be her

¹¹ *Berg*, 104.

¹² *Berg*, 53.

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, translated by Brian Singer (Montréal: New World Perspectives CultureTexts Series, 2001) 2.

¹⁴ Vichnar, 4.

¹⁵ *Three Essays*, 21.

¹⁶ *Berg*, 20.

¹⁷ Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality. A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo*, translated by Mary Dalwood (New York: Walker and Company, 1962) 29.

entanglement with Berg's father, her pronounced breasts making her seem more maternal, and the convenience – while other descriptions of Judith suggest that overall she seems quite repulsive, to Berg she becomes irresistible. An example of such display would be for instance the following passage:

the powder on her cheeks had dried into small particles round her nostrils, and her hair, a blondness that made one wonder what colour she was elsewhere. An imitation pearl necklace encircled her flushed neck, a few of the beads chipped—decaying teeth against three circles of her neck, above these her scarlet mouth, that yawned and yawned wider, nearer.¹⁸

The detailed, unfamiliarized description of Judith's "bust" is the peak of the disgust-desire dynamic that Williams proposes as a significant quality of eroticism in *Berg*. But her appeal is also embedded in a very conventionally "feminine" image of her artificially altered body, which Berg fondly remembers upon seeing a woman in a fur coat reminding him of Judith: "[F]or a moment he cherished the memory of the impact of her body, her round soft belly, the quick relief of her opening thighs, the smell between, like hyacinths, the blue ones that grew in abundance under the garden wall at home."¹⁹

Berg does not stop at pondering about Judith's appearances – he ventures into fantasies about the insides of her repulsively enticing personality:

Isn't she the very prototype of the woman one dreams of being caught up by, at rest in her omnipotence, knowing her to be ruthless, but never accepting the fact, half the fascination in wondering how far she will go—the wiles, lies, all the vanities accepted, but never quite confronted? The so-called mystery of a woman, so involved in the many-sided portraits of herself, eternally eluding one's grasp, knowing she would lose all if she ever showed her true identity, her real worth. Love is purely a temporary artifice, and why should I disregard the fact, why should I desire to be in the throes of illusion, when I know that love comes in disguises and is rarely recognised at the time or ever appreciated?²⁰

This passage invokes the concealment and pretense at play in Quin's works, which is maintained as a stimulating aspect of interpersonal relationships with an erotic thrill of uncertainty, pointing to the dynamics of exhibitionism and voyeurism between her characters.

With the character of Ruth, Quin's *Three* looks closer into the psyche of an ageing bourgeois female neurotic, seemingly uptight and frigid, attempting to reclaim her sexuality. Ruth's presence is often framed as causing irritation as her mannerisms are rather bothersome, which makes her hard to ignore, for she is scared of being left out. She may leave S and Leon alone for a moment, and then appear "sniffing in the doorway, cheeks smudged in mascara."²¹

¹⁸ *Berg*, 79.

¹⁹ *Berg*, 93.

²⁰ *Berg*, 134.

²¹ *Three*, 71.

She plays the insecure fragile wife, uncertain of her position in her marriage. The inability to conceive, which may be caused by medical reasons or by being so mentally disturbed by the disharmonized reality of her relationship with Leonard, is one of her most pronounced frustrations. She is ashamed of her past to a significant degree – S investigates Ruth’s past, finding out about her extensive plastic surgery, discovering hidden bags of cut hair in the closet and torn photographs.

Basically powerless in her marriage, she compensates by constantly pestering Leonard or criticizing just anybody within her proximity. She often remembers the S’s manners, which she finds inappropriate, painting her to be vulgar and “too loose,” which is perhaps motivated by her self-doubt: she is seeking the means of coping with the fact that this is precisely why S might have been so attractive to Leon, and also why she repressed her regrets of her own loss of freedom, while also processing the traumatizing reality of S’s absence. Moreover, as the novel unfolds, her unpleasant conduct becomes more understandable with the further revelations of how Leon and other men treat her.

A piece of information to consider when assessing Ruth’s relation to sexuality is that much like Edith Berg, her only sexual partner was her husband. In her journal, she admits she initially idolized him way too much, and was forced to “always hold back.” With regret she reckons she was “too passive I realise he made me so.”²² In his essay on civilization and modern nervousness, Freud mentions research suggesting that sexual freedom within a matrimony is not enough to compensate for the years of abstinence, pointing to the passion fading away from the marriage.²³ Ruth is suffering not only from the lack of experience, but also because their sex life with Leonard is not concerned with her pleasure, only his, perhaps leading to her denying his sexual advances throughout the novel, and shifting her focus to the delights of masturbation instead.

Another one of Freud’s observations which applies to Ruth’s situation is that “the more strictly a wife has been brought up, the more earnestly she has submitted to the demands of civilization, the more does she fear this way of escape, and in conflict between her desires and her sense of duty she again will seek refuge in a neurosis. Nothing protects her virtue so securely as illness.”²⁴ Throughout the novel, Ruth is seen going through various health issues, often feeling physically or mentally unwell. She was already struggling with insecurities of various origins, and becomes only more upset when S enters their lives with a growing

²² *Three*, 124.

²³ *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, 21–22.

²⁴ *Sexuality and The Psychology of Love*, 23.

intensity, thus becoming another source of anxiety, a sense of threat. S is described as sensual, promiscuous, portraying the “harlot” unburdened by shame, but on the contrary enjoys expressing her sexuality. Ruth is triggered by S being comfortable in her body, dancing enthusiastically, swimming naked, enjoying the miming roleplay, and her apparent interest in Leon’s translations, thus, realizing that the allure of S’s personality and her bond with Leonard are founded precisely on the qualities Ruth seems to lack.

It is maintained that *Three* is an exploration of female sexuality, with Ruth diving into her autoerotic fascinations, as she licks the beads, placing them on her nipples, and puts on S’s clothes, and S’s journals and tapes indicate her sexual experience and masochistic fantasies, making her the object of the couple’s desiring gaze. Her entries are raw, dripping with moist imagery. Unlike Ruth, she is not mortified by shame which would force her to meticulously conceal her cravings. In her fantasies, she wanders beyond the domestically conventional boundaries of conventional sexual scenarios, and climbs towards the tumultuous throbs of her yearning.

In the dark, the outline of the fire escape, I choose the nights spent in shared fantasies. Of other places, and places that replace boundaries of bed, floor, walls. A cliff edge, the sea spilling into sky. Back to front. Kneeling. Like dogs. He said. Arms stretched out, bodies arched, more submission demanded. And rolling over as in waves. With the waves. That later came. Kept coming. I want to fuck you on stairways, in telephone booths, in public places. Tie you up, and let them all see you, fuck you, do what they will, and whip you, lick you, and fuck you again. A whole line of us fucking, like a train rushing through the darkness. And he put spittle on my nipples, made me feel them as well—buds sticky with rain. We’d lie in warm wetness, and all day the odour, his, mine, like water, flowers have been taken out of. [...] Never the same pattern no matter how many times.²⁵

S’s writing encapsulates the poetics of Quin’s eroticism intertwined with the themes of restriction and exhibitionism with fluid imagery. The moist sensations seep through the whole of the bodies, motions following the rhythms copying the wave-like movement. S represents the possibilities of fulfilment for both Ruth and Leonard, playing the role of a *femme fatale* for both of them, but her position as such is maintained precisely because she is not like them. The stifling atmosphere of the micropolitics of the couple’s household indeed could not change for the better, but as seen towards the end of the novel, it was in fact possible for the escalation of the tension between them to worsen.

The characters in *Passages* are in a sense the least graspable – their journals point towards the polyvalent possibilities of identity and language. “She” is apparently obsessed with searching for her brother, invoking the image of Antigone, a recurring motif in Quin’s fiction, as it reappears in *Tripticks* and “Leaving School – XI”, nevertheless, the search at

²⁵ *Three*, 71.

times seems as an excuse for other types of investigation and digressions. Williams points out the transgressive nature of her depiction as the explicitly female voyeur, who is not merely the objectified object, but also the one who objectifies, adopting the metaphor of “eye/I” as a symbol of the sexualized female gaze.²⁶ Still, her adoption of the gaze does not necessarily liberate her from the paradigms of sexism in society. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger observes the dynamic of seeing and being seen as a woman, finding that “[w]omen watch themselves being looked at,” as they were taught to do so ever since childhood.²⁷ The female protagonist is also caught in the ongoing layers of seeing: she observes herself, but also observes the man observing her.

Buckeye remarks that “Quin shifts from first to third person and back to draw our attention to the woman the woman is—the I who stands aside observing what she does, as if she were someone else, not the I, or perhaps one of the shes the I might be.”²⁸ The multiplicity of women contained within the female protagonist is then externalized by the male protagonist distinguishing and defining some of her specific roles in his journal, categorizing her faces as those of a “mature woman,” “femme fatale,” “the Mystic,” a “country girl ‘at heart,’” each developed in a string of adjectives, noting that, much like the character of S, she revels in the possibilities of playing a role, but sometimes under the influence of drugs she forgets which archetype she is supposed to embody – “leaving the man confused or even more infatuated”.²⁹ Perhaps, the ability to play a role also serves as a coping mechanism, preferring the illusions which keep her preoccupied in order not to reflect on herself and the trauma of loss.

The women in *Tripticks* emit dangerous brutality, resembling the Amazonian warriors hunting down the narrator. The novel is inspired by the advertisements which glamorize insatiable consumption, pulp fiction, pornographic and sensational stories of crime, with the source material for Quin’s cut-ups being precisely the texts of this sort, and Carol Annand’s collage-like illustrations emphasizing the overall inspiration with the “lower” forms of entertainment. The America of *Tripticks* resembles the campy aesthetics of John Waters’ films, and the famous message of Babs Johnson in *Pink Flamingos* (1974) does sound like a proclamation that could be heard in the tangle of voices in this novel: “Kill everyone now! Condone first degree murder! Advocate cannibalism! Eat shit! Filth is my politics! Filth is my life!”

²⁶ Williams, 135.

²⁷ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997) 47.

²⁸ Robert Buckeye, *Re: Quin* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2013) EPUB, 35.

²⁹ *Passages*, 39–40.

While filthy seediness of the motels and brutal criminal spectacles occupy the overall poetics of the novel, the main theme emerging is consumption. Compared to previous works by Quin, *Tripticks* includes far more characters, glimpses of whom are rushing through the narrative. In the original British edition of the novel, there is a summary describing the narrator's ex-wives as "pepped-up, freaked-out, culturally-confused,"³⁰ which is a fitting description of these women. They are of course constructed through the prism of the narrator's voice, reflecting his misogynistic attitudes. His perception undoubtedly objectivizes and dehumanizes them, however, this is the standard procedure with everything in the novel, following the logic of free market fueled by the desire to consume, devour. His views are also distinctly influenced by extensive consumption of TV ads, mind-numbing shows, and sensationalist tabloid articles. He envisions the female deviousness:

What man can resist the siren song of sex? Down through the ages, feminine wiles have brought mighty men to their knees, empires have been lost and reputations have been ruined by temptresses who have seduced the gullible to gain what they desire, and then consign their hapless victims to a destiny of doom! Only recently a blonde beauty whispered sweet promises to a lonely bachelor and lured him to a desolate spot where, instead of fulfilling his desires, she delivered him into the arms of death. At one point when the victim-to-be showed signs of losing interest in the blandishments of the sirens, the girls put on an impromptu performance that made Salome's dance of the seven veils resemble a Girl Scout's festival.³¹

The "evidences" of immoral women ruining the lives of men support the casual misogyny the narrator revels in, as he also reckons that it is "women," perhaps a female conspiracy, who are at least partially to blame for his unfortunate condition. The love affair with each of his three ex-wives begins with the promising freshness of novelty, eventually leading to their realization of incompatibility with the narrator. He regards the women in his life as either objects of desire, or misogyny, and for the most part he perceives them as both.

The novel's preoccupation with materialism is reflected in rendering the characters' appearance: when the first wife is getting prepared for the wedding, numerous beauty products are mentioned, a "makeup man" is present, cleansing her skin, fixing her hair – the fact that his first wife was born into wealth is boldly on display, Quin paints a portrait of feminine vanity far from the cheap visage of Judith Goldberg. With the second wife, called "Karate Kitten," there is a reflection of the emergence of the cult of the body; she is characterized by her well-maintained figure and ceaseless physical activity. She also forces the narrator to reconsider how he regards women:

³⁰ Brian Evenson and Joanna Howard, "Ann Quin," *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 23:2 (2003) 67.

³¹ *Tripticks*, 23–24.

I had up until meeting her the fundamental male concept of females: that they were wet, shrill, hysterical, formless, irrational and deciduous. Soft too. She had a softness even though she was physically stronger than me. Her daily routine included a 45-minute session of isometrics and a workout with the dumbbells: ‘I’ve got to keep in good shape – it kills me that my insurance policy forbids bobsledding though I don’t mind its ruling out getting into the prize ring and skiing.’ I watched these sessions once, as the performance somehow proved to be so sexless that I didn’t even get one mild tingle from the acres of flesh that paraded about as thrillingly as a bathtub of jello. On the other score, however, when she wrestled with other women I had to leave in my embarrassment of a continual hard-on.³²

Aside from being really into fitness, she is the woman who manages to emasculate the narrator in the most blatant and erotically enjoyable ways, by having him wear, during intercourse, a long Victorian robe gifted to her by her mother. She also reminds him of her past lovers and colorful experiences filled with drugs and cultish orgies, triggering his jealousy to an extent, but also his excitement. The novel makes use of cliches and stereotypes with popular roleplaying scenarios in the bedroom as well. Recalling his first wife, the narrator recounts:

Ah yes that bed. And others larger, smaller, narrow, wide, where we played out our experiments. I the dwarf, she the Queen. Sister. I the President, whose favourite plaything is a ball of twine which I shed with hair on the furniture and visitors. The go-go cage outside the doors has shapely dancers, who do not actually appear sans apparel, they wear various coverings to simulate the impression. Waitresses clad in bikini bottoms and pasties serve noon-time Bloody Marys and roast-beef sandwiches. We even dressed up for these scenes, and had all the necessary equipment:

- Prostitute half-bra of shimmering satin the sensational lift supported the under bust urging her up and out and leaving her excitingly bare but fully supported.
- Lesbian a penis-aid to assist, non-toxic, flesh-like material with LIFE-LIKE VEINS
- Nymphet grease-resistant - easy to clean. Soft. Pliable.
- Flagellist a raised clitoral stimulator. Comes in three colours.³³

Women in *Tripticks* resemble lists of items on a menu, each promising an appetizing experience, embodying the flavors one can get to taste in the buffet of free love in the early 1970s. They are depicted as thrilling caricatures to be chosen from, but it is done so in an obviously hyperbolic manner that perfectly ridicules the macho narrative which truly believes that “women [are] misanthropic totems, man-eaters at once seductive and savage.”³⁴

As mentioned above, Quin does not engage with the issues of feminism and women’s movement explicitly or extensively, however, in *Tripticks* an ironic depiction of “women’s

³² *Tripticks*, 57–58.

³³ *Tripticks*, 40–41.

³⁴ *Tripticks*, 124.

lib” organizations does make an appearance. As this novel indulges in cumulation of words, slogans and acronyms, these alliances are also labeled in this very manner, such as WITCH – Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, and D.R. (Daughters of the Revolution). Towards the end of the novel, the narrator encounters such a group, engaging with an esoteric dimension of female superiority:

The story of Eve, she is happy to announce, was a fable, and woman was in no way responsible for the problems of the universe. ‘Each month the ovum undertakes an extraordinary expedition from the ovary through the Fallopian tubes to the uterus, an unseen equivalent of going down the Mississippi on a raft or over Niagara Falls in a barrel. One might say that the activity of ova involved a daring and independence absent in fact, from the activity of spermatozoa, which move in jostling masses, swarming out on signal like a crowd of commuters from the 5.15. From this one can only conclude that women must be the more daring, individualistic and imaginative sex.’³⁵

The female superiority depicted here seems to parody the real feminist movement trying to assess a positive picture of femininity, molded by the fascination with female biology, and subvert the patriarchal myths. While doing so, Quin’s novel provides an actual subversion of patriarchal prejudices, exposing their absurdity and weaknesses exploiting the very material perpetuating these schemes.

Sandra, the protagonist of “The Unmapped Country,” is coded as deeply paranoid and unstable, resulting in her incarceration in a mental institution. She struggles for the sense of her own identity, navigating through the liminal space of having to co-exist with other people in a hostile environment where she cannot escape being infantilized by the doctors and nurses, and the ubiquitous sensations of other women’s smells, their movement, passionate love-making and voices. Her surroundings force her into curating disguises in order to cope with this mode of living. She notes:

I am a bird hovering, searching for human shape, from the vapours of air, space, I settle into the waters of the womb and dream ancestral dreams. I am the Lady of the Lake, my hand rises out of a circle of light. Merlin’s spectre emerges from a crack in the wall. I climb up enamel cliffs and step into the shape of a woman I no longer know, or is it I know her only too well?³⁶

While trying to maintain a sense of self, Sandra is experiencing acute attacks of paranoia. Her existence is composed of glimpses her hospital life, going through the cycles of therapeutic sessions, and remembering the life prior to her treatment. A connection with the life before is preserved through the visits from her (former) lover Clide, for whom the visit is worth it primarily because of the oral sex, while he is anxious to flee this situation. Sandra’s character contains the nervousness regarding altered states of mind – the fear of “madness” and by

³⁵ *Tripticks*, 161–162.

³⁶ *The Unmapped Country*, 193.

extension, the one suffering from it explicitly as if it were contagious. Moreover, the story leads to the examination of how “the madwoman” is kept “in the attic” now, as well as to perhaps map the unmapped territories in the experience of receiving psychiatric care.

The story “Nude and Seascape” is probably the most objectified a woman ever gets in Quin’s fiction, as she is literally a dead female body manipulated by a man. She is found in “a pool of pus-like water” tangled in seaweed, truly becoming one with ocean’s ecosystem, and her body encourages agalmatophilia-like fascination in the man.³⁷ Inspired by the sight of her body, he proceeds to arrange her remains accordingly to his aesthetic sensibility. Then her body becomes his exploration site, and admittedly, his fingers poking her armpits and his delight at the softness of her flesh may somehow feel even stranger than were the story to include a graphic description of him having intercourse with the corpse.

Not only does he find the body to be of aesthetic fascination, he also becomes quite attached to it. When he noticed he left the body behind, he feels as if “separated from a loved one, his mistress, wife, mother, women he had loved, or never loved.”³⁸ Spending the night by the seascape, in the morning he comes to see that the body is needed no more – recreating the gesture of Perseus, he separates her head from her body, overcome with joy at the beauty of the decapitated Medusa.

The woman is reduced to the very components of her corporeal existence, but even in her death she cannot find peace from a man imposing roles upon her. This story seems to parallel the fate of S in *Three*, not only because in both cases a young woman dies by the sea, but also because what Ruth and Leon perform with her “remains” resembles a more sophisticated, less crude version of manipulating a dead body.

2.2 The importance of impotence – Quin’s masculinity

There is an apparent recurring pattern in Ann Quin’s depiction of men – they always seem to be somehow emasculated, repressed, frustrated. This characteristic obviously affects their sexual expression. The “male” sexual personae written by Quin are threatened by and scared of the women in their lives – their mothers, their wives, their lovers. They have a number of options how to navigate these situations, and typically they choose violence in varying degrees of impact. When they encounter other men, they usually have to face defeat or their inferiority in comparison (such as when the narrator of *Tripticks* meets the drug dealer and cultist Nightripper). Quin’s men rarely benefit from patriarchal system unless they give in to

³⁷ *The Unmapped Country*, 25.

³⁸ *The Unmapped Country*, 28.

their urges to abuse women, because it is precisely the patriarchal logic which views them as “insufficient” men – they are effeminate in their appearance or behavior, weak, depressed.

Berg overtly parodies the narratives of grand tragic masculinity of Oedipus and Hamlet with Alistair Charles Humphrey Berg being the ostentatiously repulsive hair- tonic seller. The “sissy” Berg has been bullied and ridiculed for his appearance or demeanor since his childhood, bathing in inferiority: Berg’s masculinity is dysphoric and defeated. On several occasions, it is pointed out how frustrated Alistair is with regards to his sex life. At the very beginning of the narrative, it is revealed that he is sterile, but “at least he wasn’t impotent,”³⁹ however, even were he not sterile, he probably would not care for the prospects of starting a family either. Perhaps because of his own trauma, his capacity for sympathy is limited. In his desires he tends to be selfish, virtually all of his motivations are concerned with meeting his own needs. His attraction to Judith is almost entirely driven by his father fixation:

Making love to her prior to really getting rid of the old man would surely bring greater satisfaction, indeed he had to admit it, there was the possibility she would not prove so fascinating after his father’s death. For the time being masturbation was perhaps better in the mind as well as the body, no commitments, no responsibility; thoughts leaking out with dreams, becoming whole, entire universe made up of myself alone.⁴⁰

While Berg sometimes seems actually to care for the women in his life, eventually, it is revealed to be a mere reflection of his own desire for satisfaction and his own comfort, the way he treats them being one of the indicators of his disturbed sense of relating to the world. Powell suggests reading the way Nathaniel and Alistair approach Judith as a manifestation of the schizoid condition; both of them are simultaneously drawn to her, but also feel the urge to escape her, being ultimately overwhelmed by her presence.⁴¹ Williams proposes to read Judith’s interference between the two men as a way of disturbing the boundaries between Alistair and Nathaniel, which makes the father and son find her repulsive.⁴²

Nathaniel Berg, as discussed in the previous chapter focused on family roles, does represent a more assertive version of what Berg junior aspires to be. Despite his age, he manages to be quite vigorous, which is something Alistair is to experience firsthand, when he is disguised in drag, and Nathaniel assumes he is Judith:

This is how it had been, with Edith, with Judith, how they must have revelled in it, giggling, panting, helping the old man’s hands, opening their thighs, unsnapping their suspenders, arching their backs, opening up everything, wide—wider. Lead him on, lead

³⁹ *Berg*, 13.

⁴⁰ *Berg*, 65.

⁴¹ Powell, 252.

⁴² Williams, 50.

him right there, produce it in his face, in his ear, in his eye, let him have it, so he'll remember to the day he dies.⁴³

Facing his father in this light makes him further aware of his and his father's positions in the lives of the women he regards in a "maternal" respect, and although Judith is assuring him of how much she enjoys being intimate with him and how much better he allegedly is than Nathaniel, it cannot negate the direct experience of how Berg senior handles women. To Nathaniel, it comes naturally to demonstrate his masculine power, however, there are obvious weaknesses. Nathy is an incompetent man, he is definitely not the masculine ideal of a strong and reliable partner for life, he does not hesitate to steal from the women in his life, and he is an inconsiderate brute. Ironically, while Nathaniel does not appear to respect women much, his tattoos are dedicated precisely to them, saying "EDITH MY LOVE AND JOY" and "IN MEMORY OF MY BELOVED MOTHER,"⁴⁴ Although he claims he got them "just for fun," this choice could perhaps suggest the depths of his own fixations.

A completely different, yet somewhat similar in effect, manifestation of masculinity is to be seen in the male protagonist of *Three*. Leonard is an educated man – he often seems to be reading, translating, tending to his orchids, feeding goldfish, listening to the taped records, but rather than *actually* engaging with these activities, he is constantly preoccupied with physically interacting with various objects, but does not seem to actually engage with them.⁴⁵ As Powell argues in his reading of Quin in the context of object-relations and schizoid personality, this is a significant part of Leonard's character when read in the context of Guntrip's findings. Leon is often seen torn between multiple stimuli at once, attempting to proceed further, but also withdrawing from each whenever possible: "one desires something but is also frightened by the desire so is constantly moving to and away from it."⁴⁶ This symptom of schizoid behavior is coupled with the "pathologically destructive need" channeled onto Ruth, culminating in the brutal rape scene.⁴⁷

Leon attempts to assert dominance on multiple occasions throughout the novel, and not only in the physical sense, but he inevitably fails, prevented by the very structures they created together with Ruth, within which neither of them achieves happiness. A scene emblematic of Leon's sense of emasculation is the bathing scene, in which he attempts to initiate intimacy. There is his "purple flesh protruding from water," only to be denied by Ruth

⁴³ Berg, 110.

⁴⁴ Berg, 19.

⁴⁵ Powell, 255

⁴⁶ Powell, 256.

⁴⁷ Powell, 256–257.

and to watch “the purple tip disappear, swallowed up by the grey water.”⁴⁸ This imagery is evocative of castration anxiety, the genitals being absorbed into nothingness, it is a visual representation of his advances being futile, his penis being obsolete. His inability to communicate with his wife and the repetition of coercive behavior may also be referred to in S’s entry saying “nothing will change” – perhaps it is Leon’s inability to respond to women in his life.⁴⁹

Another demonstration of Leon failing to maintain a stereotypically masculine position is posited by the encounters with the trespassers terrorizing the garden, which further frustrate him. The nature of his involvement with the violent men is unclear, but it is possibly dubious in nature. Furthermore, Leon’s attempts at preserving security seem to transform into the desire for destruction. Seeing the same man who in a childlike manner covers his ears with seashells being capable of brutally raping his wife suggests that it is not unthinkable he might be capable of murder, in effect not being too different from the men he fails to confront.⁵⁰

The second narrative strain of *Passages* apparently belongs to the woman’s lover accompanying her on their journey, although it was speculated whether this voice could be an altered version of the woman speaking. The man’s entries are overflowing with notes in the margins, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* being one of the source materials for these observations. The connection between the notes on the side and the individual entries is sometimes very obvious – at other times, completely indiscernible. Very much like the woman’s narrative, his entries tend to be depersonalized, slipping into the third person, the disruption of selfhood being a prominent feature of Quin’s oeuvre as a whole.

He is of Jewish origin, which is discussed in relation to his upbringing and mentality. Although he maintains, that he does not identify with Jewishness any more than with the roles of a family member, an addict, a writer, and a “beast,” it is possible that Quin slightly leans into the stereotype of a “self-hating Jew” with her depiction of him as severely depressed, and his implied failures in his professional life, and “degenerate” fantasies. The self-loathing and aggression can be channeled through his sadistic fantasies and sexual preferences, directing outwards the aggression felt for the self.

The narrator of *Tripticks* is “a man of many names and appearances,” the epitome of the inability to pin down Quin’s characters. He represents the shift of the cultural paradigm

⁴⁸ *Three*, 44.

⁴⁹ Evenson and Howard, 60.

⁵⁰ Williams, 111.

and the rise of the “post-oedipal male.”⁵¹ His “personality” is presented through a list of various qualities and interests, some of them seeming mutually exclusive. The identity and values are in a state of a constant flux of confusion of a loud world of commercialism.

As discussed in the previous subchapter, the narrator is endowed with the most cartoonish misogynistic imaginations, which often testify about his infantile perception of the world. He dreams of being a “love slave” to a gang of outlaw women, or imagines himself saving women from a variety of grotesque dangers, these fantasies being a product of the media he consumes and also his perception of women as two-dimensional canvas onto which he may thrust his own projections, because it pleases him.⁵² His idea of interacting with the world is ruled by the source materials Quin used for the cut-ups, the above-mentioned assortment of pornography, advertisements, etc.

He often speaks of food and sex in very close proximity, which hints at the indiscriminate desire for consumption and gratification of these basic needs as the alpha-omega of life: “I stripped bananas and thrust them up her, half way, ate the rest, poured sour cream over her and buried my tongue, fingers in the remaining pink areas.”⁵³ Although this novel buries the Freud-adjacent frameworks, according to Freud, there is a “cannibalistic” pregenital organization, during which pleasure is tied to the hunger for food.⁵⁴ Viewing his tendency as such fortifies the assertion that his view of the world is in some respects infantile, as he has not progressed into a developed individual separating between the two. The subject of therapy and analysis, though, is remorselessly parodied throughout the novel.

She frigid. I impotent. She mentioned something about impotence being already formed by the tenth week of intra-uterine life. She was always ready with some home-spun psychology to make matters even worse, and liked analysing my dreams. Soon I learned it best not to relate these to her; I was psychotic enough without the extra neuroses she delighted in handing out for me to deal with.⁵⁵

Despite his attempts to avoid being further investigated by the analysis of his wife, he eventually ends up analyzed “professionally”:

“his main problem is guilt over a galloping voyeurism along with secondary problem of a rejecting mother, not so much a desire for innocence as an attempt to re-capture the lost milk/love-giving breast of childhood.’ [...] ‘an inability to love. Afraid to get close to people especially women, he must treat them as objects of his imagination - a role that implies both control and distancing. His narcissism is his attempt to regain the lost

⁵¹ Morley, 137.

⁵² *Tripticks*, 20.

⁵³ *Tripticks*, 41.

⁵⁴ *Three Essays*, 64.

⁵⁵ *Tripticks*, 58–59.

omnipotence of childhood. [...] a ‘compulsive liar’ ‘We’ve all heard a lot about penis envy, but what about its opposite?’⁵⁶

The analysis does indeed reflect some of the processes indicative of such behavior at play throughout the novel, while essentially being a mere shallow collage of the common psychoanalytical lingo. It ironizes the need and search for self-identification at times when the sense of identity is lived through the mode of consumption, where analysis and self-knowledge can also become primarily a service to be monetized, and secondly a tool of therapy. The analysis in *Tripticks* is not represented as beneficial in navigating trauma and mental issues, rather a means of inventing and reproducing them.

Although the workshops on dealing with trauma and analytical approaches to psychology are presented here as exploiting the chaos of consumerist frenzy, socio-cultural tensions escalating and the war conflicts within everybody’s reach thanks to television, it is undeniable that the narrator is not the best-adjusted individual, precisely because of this environment. His character ridicules the system, while he himself is constantly ridiculed in his personal life. The manifestation of his infantility and lack of originality, merely reproducing what he has encountered elsewhere, is articulated in Karate Kitten’s letter attacking his sense of eroticism:

frankly your sense of an orgy is a bourgeois fun machine, an ensemble madness amidst velour curtains and chaises longues. It has the predicaments of farce (the secret rendezvous, the hidden lover, the foolproof plan) and your laughter affirms a world of jaded wealth, sweaty affaires, passions conceived out of boredom, and a fascination with gadgets and games of the nouveaux riches. As for your erotic fantasies well they’re the kind that make horny, middle-aged businessmen sibilate the litany ‘this is shit - what is this shit?’ And your ideas have the idiot simplicity of a high school sorority hazing.⁵⁷

His story embodies a parody of “modern manhood” and its supposed crisis, which is to be traced back to the decaying sense of identity in general. He is trapped in the clutches of various streams of language, navigating through the mainstream culture, counter-culture and subculture, losing the sense of self. In this novel, Quin is “on the cusp of postmodernist celebration,” and her approach is similar to “Kathy Acker’s hearty acceptance of irretrievable flux.”⁵⁸

The male personae in Quin are frustrated and frustrating – they cannot accomplish anything, nor do they desire to accomplish anything. They are depressed, schizoid, or comically incompetent, caricatures parodying masculine myths. The “patriarch” is severely incompetent, the “intellectual” is a rapist, the “explorer” is sadistic and severely depressed.

⁵⁶ *Tripticks*, 175.

⁵⁷ *Tripticks*, 115.

⁵⁸ Evenson and Howard, 71.

The representations of men in Quin also implicitly navigate through a developing cultural landscape threatening the phallogocentric paradigm, which cope by adopting aggressive strategies.

2.3 Ambiguous? Androgynous? Quin's fluidity in gender

Morley points out Quin's ability seamlessly to identify with both male and female protagonists and "masculine"/ –"feminine" attributes regarding her writing of sexuality.⁵⁹ Indeed, Quin's text offer implications of maintaining multiplicity regarding sexed and gendered interpretations, "queering" up the discourse.

Quin's characters indeed enjoy the possibilities of gender merging and drag – literally and figuratively. In a highly postmodern fashion, the binary of sex is flexible, wo/men in Quin tend to be ambiguous, even within gendered stereotypes fluidly switching gender "in passage", the most obvious case being *Passages* where the "s/he" narrator becomes difficult to follow gender-wise at times, Sweeney suggests that the two strands of narrative may be actually contained within one indeterminately gendered voice.⁶⁰ But even when reading a dialogue between Ruth and Leonard in *Three*, it can be at times challenging to distinguish between them, even though their personalities are so widely divergent.

Rather than presenting a blatantly "gender non-conforming" character, Quin insinuates how her personae deviate from gender-based expectations, an instance of which being the female protagonist of *Passages* becoming the voyeur objectifying other women dominated from outside the window with a masculine passion, and S's journal entries inspecting the duality of roles, wondering what is in between or beyond them. And while these techniques are subversive and question the nature of binarism, there is also a character who portrays a beautifully grotesque presentation of gender ambiguity – non other than Alistair Berg.

Berg is the bisexual epicene *par excellence*, torn between his attraction to both of his parents, while also being *like* both of his parents. His manhood is ridiculed and questioned throughout the novel, leaving his sense of gender and sexuality severely twisted, forcing him to make his own sense of it outside the "normality". Illustrative of his sense of emasculation is one of the scenes invoked at the beginning of the novel:

Once he had ventured across, and brought back a giggling piece of fluff, that flapped and fluttered, until he was incapable, apologetic, a dry fig held by sticky hands. Well I must say you're a fine one, bringing me all the way up here, what do you want then, here are you blubbering, oh go back to Mum. Lor' wait until I tell them all what I got tonight,

⁵⁹ Morley, 134.

⁶⁰ Sweeney, 236.

laugh, they'll die. Longing to be castrated; shaving pubic hairs. Like playing with a doll, rising out of the bath, a pink jujube, a lighthouse, outside the rocks rose in body, later forming into maggots that invaded the long nights, crawled out of sealed walls, and tumbled between the creases in the sheets.⁶¹

The flaccid phallic imagery employed here is immensely disappointing – a dry fig and jujube fruit are visual representation of shriveled smallness. The moment of rising from the bath is reminiscent of Leonard's penis "protruding" from the water in *Three*, and while there the phallus is a symbol of threat, in *Berg* it is the member which seems rather threatened by the desire for castration.

Not only is Alistair Berg dissatisfied with his position as a man, he also wonders what being female feels like:

Through space, suspended almost, then the shock of meeting the ground. Let it just be like this for an eternity, like before waking up properly, or could it be before birth, half in, half out? They said my head was in the wrong position. She must have conceived on her side. Perhaps I liked it that way, maybe that's the cause of my never really finishing anything? Maybe women felt like this after being made love to? What could it be like having heavy pendulous pears strung practically round one's neck, a triangular fur piece, blood every lunar month?⁶²

While this fascination is not prevalent in Berg's narrative, there is a whimsical curiosity about women's existence and their bodies, which is stimulating and titillating. In the section where Berg chooses crossdressing as a form of disguise, he examines the ritualism of putting on makeup, applied in order to flatter "the ego of men" while also satisfying "the vanity of woman," and putting on nylons brings him an "almost erotic pleasure."⁶³ Williams interprets Berg's transgression of the gendered boundaries through Bakhtin's notion of carnival as a process of reversals, inversions, and revelations of the hidden traits.⁶⁴

The implication, however, is not encapsulated by Berg's desire for achieving womanhood, rather by him seeking a relief from the burden of manhood. The erotic sensations and his approach to the female body suggest that women's clothing induces a fetishistic response in Berg. Paglia asserts that "[F]or men, female clothing is religious or cultic. It is the costume of the mother, with whom the son unites by ritual impersonation,"⁶⁵ and this very perception of drag is presented in Berg "becoming Jewish," and experiencing his father's lustful advances, through which his bond with her as well as Edith is reinforced, thus

⁶¹ *Berg*, 10–11.

⁶² *Berg*, 104.

⁶³ *Berg*, 109.

⁶⁴ Williams, 54.

⁶⁵ Paglia, 416.

gesturing towards another direction in which sexual and gendered fluidity is maintained throughout the novel.

Quin's androgyny is not quite like that of Djuna Barnes or Virginia Woolf aesthetically, even though it definitely follows a similar tradition of commenting on the volatile nature of gender. Androgyny in Quin appears rather as an implied possibility of existence beyond the binary – as a “third option,” hidden in the shadows.

Chapter 3: Triangularity – “You don’t know whose hand it is”

*‘You ask “What role do you think sexual fantasy played in her writing?” Three, that’s it. Three. Three. Three.’*¹

The number three is a magic number (not only) for Quin. It is one of the numbers heavily featured in folklore, religion, and overall cultural imagery across the world, remaining a prominent recognizable pattern in all forms of storytelling. When Quin was working on *Three*, she wrote to her friend Father Brocard Sewell: “The relationships between three has [sic] always fascinated me, being I suppose partly because I have never known the family unit, and partly the influence of the Roman Catholic convent I spent my childhood in (the trinity etc.) [...] Does all this sound too Freudian for words?!”² In her assessment of love triangles in Quin’s work, Alice Butler proposes that “Quin’s unfamiliarity with the archetypal family unit re-emerges in her writing as a subversive hostility towards it, a gesturing towards alternative kinships and sexual relations, illuminating the spectral, seductive, and shifting forces of the ‘intruder.’”³ The implications of trinary configurations point in multiple directions – the third “intrusive” element, on the one hand, threatens dichotomies, on the other, it is often precisely the necessary stabilizing component of the other two.

In his introduction to *Three* Joshua Cohen recounts the role the number three plays in the cultural context:

Three is the trinity of Quin’s Catholic upbringing and the governing sum of space (three dimensions) and time (past, present, future). Three troubles the scales of dichotomous, guilt-and-innocence-judgement and tips the dialectic. In classical psychoanalysis, we are told that our sex problems are always created through unhealthy binaries, either between ourselves and a mother, or between ourselves and a father, and never through the always healthier trinaries of other prospective sexual partners [...].⁴

Each examination of the role of the number three in Quin’s works seems to repeat several points: the number is featured in her works to a significant extent, it is almost necessarily

¹ Personal correspondence; email: Sward to Nonia Williams Korteling, sent 17th November, 2008, 12.38 am. “Further, as John Hall puts it in ‘The Mighty Quin’, her prose ‘is a landscape strewn with three-corned dances; the shape is the prime figure of Quin’s geometry’,” (*The Guardian* 29th April 1972, 8) in Williams, 75.

² Jordan, 16.

³ Alice Butler, “‘Have You Tried It with Three?’ Ann Quin, Love Triangles, and the Affects of Art/Writing.” *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry* 2:3 (2021): 93.

⁴ Joshua Cohen, Introduction in *Three*, viii – ix.

sexual, but it is also a means of connection to the systems prevalent in Western society.

Discussing triangular relationships and threesomes in Quin's oeuvre, Buckeye suggest that:

[t]he goal of the threesome, however it is understood, is to complete the triangle. As much as sex may be seen as a means to regain a paradise lost, one cannot be innocent, except, willfully, to blind oneself. Sex always connects itself to other triangles—family, social, religious, bureaucratic and economic—that determine its values. In this sense, Quin's emphasis on sex is political in its argument for a better life in conscious opposition to the one that exists. She does nothing less than put family, religion, and society in the dock.⁵

Although not necessarily because concerned with threesomes, Quin's eroticism does confront the "bourgeois stronghold" of British middle-class values, and diagnoses the stifled constrictions of domesticity. Therefore, the emergence of a "third" comes to disrupt, as Butler maintains, the schemes enforcing conformity.

Another biographical link often pointed out in the discussions of Quin's relationship to the number three is that she herself played a "third" to many of the married couples among her friends – she remarked that in these situations she naturally "adopts the role of the child" but these bonds were also often intersecting with the erotic dimensions of a triangle.⁶ Her fascination with the possibilities of such an arrangement are interwoven into each of her novels, and many of her stories. The fascination with trinities does not entail only the triangular relationships between three people, but is also employed wherever Quin needs any numeral information.

The triangular relationship may signify a struggle resulting in an elimination one of the three elements, and these anxieties are almost always tied to the conflicts related to sexual desires and frustration, inciting jealousy and anxiety. It is a game of comparisons – who is *better*, who deserves more, who *gets* more, triggering mechanisms observed by psychologists theorizing the significance and implications of triangular relationships. While there is a copious amount of the ways in which the number three is used in Quin's works and an abundance of implications of the number three in the Western cultural consciousness, the prevalent modes of significance in terms of sexual implication chosen for this chapter will be the triangle within a family, and that of a love affair. The fluidity of these configurations is implicitly always present in the movement across the "scheme," and moreover, as has been manifested in various analyses of Quin's works, no classic scheme is able to contain the transgressive forces which Quin plants within them.

⁵ Buckeye, 30.

⁶ Williams, 101.

3.1 Family “love” triangle

This subchapter elaborates on the analysis in chapter one, this time dealing with the specific family roles as applied within a triangular matrix, seeing the movement of each persona in a constellation, resembling the gesture of taking off a mask and passing it onto another character. In the field of psychology, a mechanism called “triangulation” is associated especially with the works of Murray Bowen, who has theorized the processes within three-party familial relationships. Triangulation essentially means including a third party into a relationship of two people, using the third person as a channel of communication between the two:

Within the family emotional system, the emotional tensions shift about in an orderly series of emotional alliances and rejections. The basic building block of any emotional system is the triangle. In calm periods, two members of the triangle have a comfortable emotional alliance, and the third, in the unfavored “outsider” position, moves either toward winning the favor of one of the others or toward rejection, which may be planned as winning favor. In tension situations, the “outsider” is in the favored position and both of the emotionally overinvolved ones will predictably make efforts to involve the third in the conflict.⁷

Bowen explores specific mechanisms taking place within a triangular relationship, especially in the ecosystem of a family. The descriptions of these situations resemble the basis of the mime play as described in S’s journal, capturing the dynamics of alliance, acceptance, and rejection. In both *Berg* and *Three*, the triangles follow mechanisms which seem to be apparently quite common in clinical practice of family therapy: the child allies with the mother against the father (Berg and Edith), the parents conspire against the child (Ruth and Leon voyeuristically inspecting S’s death), the father and the child undermine the authority of the mother (S and Leon): all of these basic interactions are present in the novels.

In *Berg*, there is an explicit aspect which further interferes with the triangulations – the merging of identities. Judith actually fails to distinguish between Nathy and Aly at one point, perceiving them as if they were one. Likewise, Judith and Edith, despite their diametrically different aesthetics and approach to their sexual expression, begin to dissolve into each other, as the voice of irritation imposed onto Berg’s existence.

Although *Three* is not a distinctly Oedipal or Freudian novel, there is a pattern regarding a girl’s oedipal development manifested as the girl is likely to “maintain both her parents as love objects and rivals throughout the oedipal period.”⁸ The connection to two women in an incestuously bisexual dynamic is familiar enough. Rather than the Freudian

⁷ Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004) PDF, 185.

⁸ Chodorow, 151

framework, Morley therefore proposes a reading of *Three* in terms of the Sadeian family configuration, presenting the tension between S and Leon as the alliance of the “sexual anarchist” father and daughter against the mother upholding the Law they are meant to uproot.⁹ However, the gesture of creating a union with the father can be grasped as an ambivalent expression of the girl’s simultaneous love and hate for her mother:

Every step of the way, a girl develops her relationship to her father while looking back at her mother, to see if her mother is envious, to make sure she is in fact separate, to see if she can in this way win her mother, to see if she is really independent. Her turn to her father is both an attack on her mother and an expression of love for her.¹⁰

Even though the bond between S and Ruth is not developed any further because of Leonard’s nearly constant presence, disrupting their moments of intimacy, they get to share certain moments of closeness, within which they attempt to maintain connection. Within the triangle, it appears to be Ruth who is in the “outsider” position for the most part, while a reading in which Leon would be the outsider is also possible – S has become ultimately the channel connecting them.

As is the hallmark of Quin’s fiction, the positions within the triangle are unstable, and the consideration of family seems to be always disturbed, not only because of the semi-incestuous implications. When considering the Oedipal and Sadean frameworks operating in Quin’s writing, Morley, Vichnar and Williams separately reach the conclusion, that Quin radically modifies and transcends the implications of those narratives.

3.2 Ménage à trois, and the issue of jealousy

Reading Quin’s novels, it becomes apparent that faithfulness in a relationship is rarely attainable. The acknowledgement of the virtual impossibility of maintaining monogamy does not necessarily mean that jealousy would be abolished. While Quin describes situations in which the involvement of a third party in a sexual or a romantic relationship is regarded as non-threatening (on the contrary it is presented as an exciting exploration), this arrangement may rest upon conditions which could change at any given moment.

Jealousy often stems from insecurity, the desire to manipulate from the driver’s seat, and the belief that the person experiencing jealousy is more deserving of whatever the person they are jealous of is receiving. In the context of romantic and sexual relationships in the Western culture, there are remnants of the patriarchal notion that a woman is man’s property, therefore, he shall regard her possessively, maintaining his ownership, while a woman is not

⁹ Morley, 131.

¹⁰ Chodorow, 151.

expected to interfere with her husband's or lover's affairs. Regarding gender difference in experiencing jealousy, it seems that whereas in women jealousy is perceived as a terrible loss, a deeply depressive state, in men it manifests itself rather as anger and paranoia.¹¹ This corresponds with the idea of how men and women are encouraged to express their emotions in a patriarchal society, and Quin's depiction of these codes does not significantly deviate from this assertion.

The dynamics in *Three* are significantly shaped by the theme of constant *roleplaying*. Williams identifies Leon and Ruth as acting out the roles of the "playful husband" and a "disapproving wife" in their marriage, pointing out the necessity of maintaining certain scripted behaviors in order to deal with the reality of their unhappy marriage.¹² The overt manifestation of the playing roles is manifested in the mime play with masks, externalizing the internal mechanisms of the tensions between them and their personae. S describes the basic models of the scenarios as "two reject one, or one rejects two, or all three reject each other, or equally accept."¹³ Ruth's opinion of these games is ambivalent – while she joins them rather half-heartedly, Leonard convinces her that she eventually enjoys them. To Ruth in particular the mime may be painful, as the scenarios may mirror the mechanisms at play among herself, Leon and S. She fears being displaced and feels that with S around, her position in Leon's life is threatened, although she is not satisfied with the marriage either.

According to studies dedicated to different experiences of jealousy in men and women, women "always seem to be fascinated by their rival, whether they love her or hate her," an impulse which implies a possibility of homosexual desires enveloped within the sensations of jealousy.¹⁴ This explanation resembles the way Ruth seems to approach S, as she perhaps wished they could be intimate together without Leon's interference. While S was still alive, there were rare moments spent alone together, and she notes the change in the way Ruth was acting, that is, she seemed more relaxed and approachable. Ruth does not desire to be *like* S, but rather to be *with* S. As Butler argues, observing the scenes of S brushing Ruth's hair and Ruth's naked skin flashing from under the covers, Leonard's absence allows the two women to express themselves with homoerotic freedom:

Theirs' is a queer affection that 'springs' up—like a sudden source of water bursting forth from the ground—when the male figure, the property owner, the husband, the publisher of books, is absent. By figuratively aligning S and Ruth's partnership with water, Quin shows how their sexual orientation has flipped or moved off-kilter, the fluid excesses of

¹¹ Toril Moi, "Jealousy and Sex Difference," *Feminist Review*, 11 (1982): 61.

¹² Williams, 92.

¹³ *Three*, 66

¹⁴ "Jealousy and Sex Difference," 65.

their desire causing new ripples, new currents, new freedoms, within the shifting shapes of the love triangle.¹⁵

The triangularity of *Passages* operates in a noticeably ambiguous manner. The third absent element, the woman's brother, is the force and the very reason behind their journey, however, his absence is not intrusive in the way S's disappearance is, for he was not included in the relationship in the first place, and so in Williams' wording, the brother operates as a "shadow."¹⁶ However, there is also the possibility of discerning a third party within the two narratives, as if it were a journey of three people; but there also arises the possibility of the narrative being related by merely one person, observing their own different personae.¹⁷

The sexual triangularity in the novel does not invite a specific third party – it extends its welcoming embrace to the faceless others, joining one of the two lovers on their erotic journey. There are mentions of other men and women engaging with both protagonists, but there is not a semblance of any fixed formation of characters as was the case in the previous novels. The others are rather faceless, more manifestations of the environment than characters in their own right. While the novel includes several allusions to the number three, the most iconic scene of three people engaging sexually is the erotic Sadean set-piece taking place at a drug-filled party, described by both of the narrators in a static and condensed manner, parodying the narratives of Sade and Bataille.¹⁸

Tripticks also provides a number of triangles: there is the initial image of the narrator being trailed by his "no 1 X-wife" and her "schoolboy gigolo" lover, then his second marriage is joined by his soon-to-be third ex-wife, and then the trinity of three women to whom the narrator has been married. All of these configurations contain ingrained jealousy. In both the short story version and the novel, the narrator is confronted with the sounds of his ex-wife having sex with her current lover, left wondering why she never asked him to do the things they engage in, her moans suggesting that she is way more satisfied with her current lover, leaving him with pangs despite the fact he does not really wish for their reunion. This forces him to recall her amphetamine-triggered fellatios, angered by the vision of somebody else enjoying such pleasures, angered by the fact he was so easy to replace. These depictions of the narrator resemble caricatures of a jealous husband dismayed by his marriage falling apart. His jealousy obviously does not stem from the belief in monogamy or his preserved affection – he seems to be bothered by another man being involved. The triangular relationship he

¹⁵ "Have You Tried It with Three?," 95.

¹⁶ Williams, 112.

¹⁷ Evenson and Howard, 62–63.

¹⁸ Williams, 141.

pursues with his number two and three ex-wives is actually the fulfilment of his ultimate fantasy:

The girl remained, there was a recognition between the three of us. Obviously my wife was turned on by her, or more possibly turned on by the attraction of competition. So for 6 months we shared her, or rather they shared me. There was very little jealousy, except when I might make love to one without the other being there. As long as they both had their turn then things were relatively clear and right between us.¹⁹

The aspect of sharing is crucial, as it presents a rule to be followed – it explicitly declares the necessity for an order in a relationship which existed prior to the inclusion of the third party. At the same time, the rivalry which is often seen as a negative aspect of triangular relationships, is here turned into a motivational factor, perhaps increasing the effort put into the romantic and sexual performance.

While sex in *Tripticks* is often described according to the consumerist logic, in terms of transaction in the form of a catalogue of pleasures which can be obtained, enacting the contents of a porno magazine, there is a scene capturing a threesome which employs imagery unironically resembling Quin's poetics of fluidity:

A fluid dance, and all our limbs flowing into, out, through, until I had no idea whose hands, breast, leg I touched, or was touched by. Time seemed no longer time of real life but a hugely amplified present. When fantasy has the weight of fact; and fact has the metaphoric potential of fantasy. The experience existed only within its own context, on its own terms. A certain rhythm, a nervous montage. Trips not on established trails. A series of spectacular switch-backs. Domes and carvings, arches and flying buttresses. Subterranean desert life. I stretched out along a floor of inland seas. Their bodies merged into a river flowing upside down.²⁰

This triangular set-piece is very different from the erotic staging in *Passages*; whereas the latter aimed to portray a subtle parody of the cumbersome artificiality present in sadomasochistic sessions depicted in classical literature with its static cadence, here, an out-of-place architectural extasy is expressed within the absurd and ironic critique of commercialism.

In the case of "Never Trust a Man Who Bathes with His Fingernails", the woman playing the role of the third is not the intruder; it is the fourth element which is disturbing. The married couple and their female lover are presented as an established organism – the half-Cherokee man is the alien intruder in their ecosystem. The power dynamic between the two men is maintained by the husband's constant need to manifest his dominant position with the intention of preserving it. He constantly points out the ways in which the Native American laborer is inferior to him while perpetuating racial stereotypes. The uncomfortable tension

¹⁹ *Tripticks*, 62.

²⁰ *Tripticks*, 64.

culminates at a hot spring, where he assures himself of his masculine power, comparing his “largeness” with the other man’s diminutive construction. Enacting the story’s title, the man proceeds to scratch the dirt off of his body using his nails, instantly triggering the husband’s impulse to insinuate the man’s flawed character as manifested by his habits. The story explores how the desire for phallic dominance can be readily maintained through the disgust caused by white people’s cultural taboos.

Chapter 4: Violence – “I want you to hurt me so I might feel something”

Only violence can bring everything to a state of flux in this way, only violence and the nameless disquiet bound up with it. We cannot imagine the transition from one state to another one basically unlike it without picturing the violence done to the being called into existence through discontinuity. Not only do we find in the uneasy transitions of organisms engaged in reproduction the same basic violence which in physical eroticism leaves us gasping, but we also catch the inner meaning of that violence. What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners? A violation bordering on death, bordering on murder?¹

It is almost necessary to include a discussion of violence or discomfort when dealing with Quin’s works – the atmosphere and occurrences in Quin are described as “sinister,” “terrifying,” and “nightmarish.” The bodily reality of her characters is “often evoked by moments of violence – threatened, wished for or actual.”² The “darker” tones of her fiction are discernably incorporated into the sphere of sexuality as well. Bataille asserts that the domain of eroticism is also that of violence, with the ultimate result of violence being death.³ In that respect, Quin’s writing definitely promotes the image of violence as that which enhances the quality of the erotic, and also maintains sex and death as the means of overcoming the disconnect between individuals, as described by Bataille. The intersections of sex and violence are ever-present in Quin: sex becomes violent, violence becomes sexual, and death is sexualized.

Freud suggested that sadism and masochism are the most common forms of perversion and often found on the “normal” spectrum of sexuality.⁴ In Quin’s oeuvre, it seems to be a nearly default approach to sex – the desire to inflict pain or be hurt manifests itself throughout her depictions of erotic matters: there are whips, and ropes, biting, bruises and blood. The connection between pain and pleasure is accompanied by the desire to dominate or be dominated, such as when S dreams of being tied-up and exposed to rough sex with various faceless men in public and desires to be put into a submissive position, to be tamed. While pain and humiliation are important factors, the state of ecstasy rarely depends on them alone, it is the chemistry between the people makes the scene complete.

¹ Bataille, 17

² Jordan, 16.

³ Bataille, 16

⁴ *Three Essays*, 23.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud attempts to explain the occurrence of phenomena operating beyond the logic of pleasure principle, considering that besides the libidinal drives of Eros, there are drives governed by Thanatos, the death drives, which seem to be responsible for the presence of destructive human tendencies. These impulses are basically embedded in Quin's narratives, as their focus prioritizes sights of decay, aggression, and death itself. In *Three*, the dominance of the death drives is possibly the most palpable of all of Quin's works, as it shows the repetition compulsion (Ruth and Leonard always circling back to the traumatic event of S's death), masochism (S's fantasies and experiences), death-wish (S's predictions of her own disappearance), and aggression (Leonard's behavior and rape of Ruth).

The fluidity in terms of dominance and submission, giving and receiving, is always implied in Quin – these roles are transmitted throughout her works from one person to another, such as when Berg enjoys being punished by his mother, and then takes pleasure from inflicting pain as he sinks his teeth into Judith's skin, and when the narrator of *Tripticks* likes to dominate women, but also desires to be humiliated by them. There is a sense of uncertainty regarding power structures in these texts, with the possibility of exchange looming over all dichotomies: the victim becomes the pursuer, the masculine turns feminine, and every exhibitionist is also a voyeur – even if not every voyeur is an exhibitionist.

Quin's personae convey the fine overlaps of sadistic and masochistic impulses which are also maintained in the works of Masoch and Sade, whose sadistic libertines deliberately subject themselves to torture, and the masochistic protagonists come to appreciate being the ones inflicting the pain, although their enjoyment of these experiences does vary.⁵ Quin's poetics gravitate towards encapsulating the possibilities of violence as an ever-present element which arises also in the sexual realm. Both violence and sex cross certain boundaries set by society as well as the individuals involved, both contain the power radically to change the quality of an interpersonal interaction and both may overcome discontinuity among people. Although at first glance, Eros and Thanatos appear to form a clear opposition, they may in fact, as suggested by the texts of Freud and Bataille, quite often reach a point of fusion. Delicately, Quin presents the acts of deliberate vulnerability and submission to pain in juxtaposition to the desire for elimination or dehumanization of the other, using similar means. Death looms over these scenes and enhances the precious bliss, reconciling the verge of an orgasm with that of a near loss of consciousness.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, translated by Jean McNeil (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1991) 38–39, 45.

4.1 Violent sexuality

Quin's most detailed and graphic erotic descriptions tend to involve pain; as mentioned above, there are ubiquitous sensations of pleasurable discomfort that leaves marks of impact. The liminality of the experience of giving up physical (and mental) autonomy, or the pleasure of being in charge of another person's wellbeing, is immense. Quin presents the possibility of pain as immediate and visceral, even joyful, but she also makes use of commonly recognized fetishistic gear (leather straps, high heels, whips) as a motif pointing towards other forms of restriction and the actions of revealing and concealing within the narrative.

The scenes in which sexuality turns violent vary, from spontaneous outbursts of energy, to scripted roleplays. The dynamic is usually presented in a gendered way. The masculine dominance is maintained by the means of such instruments as ropes or whips, while the feminine dominance tends to be more subtle – men kissing women's feet, or forced to put on a negligée. However, the most iconic instance of a woman exercising her dominance over a male must be the scene of Edith Berg beating her son:

[H]er flushed face as she took you inside, produced the leather strap, the buckle end for you, for naughty boys who never love their mother. The white arms with veins, dimples and wrinkles at the elbow; you static over her knees, she rhythmically moving, the pleasure in her eyes, the pleasure that was yours. The sheer delight of not giving in to a single cry, and afterwards running out, blinking back the tears, whistling, splashing yourself with water. Later her sighs, her soft kisses covering the bruises, the wiping away of blood that took longer, far longer than the cause.⁶

The scene following the punishment resembles “after-care,” a common practice following a sadomasochistic session, but also a person regaining consciousness following a state of trance, and realizing what they have done – Edith's case perhaps being a fusion of both. The impact of such scenes is necessary in order to paint the full portrait of the relationship between Edith and Berg, as her disciplining him deepened his fixation on the mother as the one who delivers pain and pleasure at the same time.

With *Three*, the female desire attains the spotlight, as opposed to *Berg's* preoccupation with the tragicomic masculinity and its perverse manifestations in relation to women. S's journal and tapes include, as discussed in the chapter regarding gender, graphic descriptions of her masochistic and exhibitionistic fantasies. She explicitly craves pain, and in a truly masochistic fashion, focuses on the aspects of suspense, the moments of desperately awaiting the physical impact.⁷ She writes:

[...] Hurt me hurt

⁶ *Berg*, 113.

⁷ Deleuze, 33.

me hurt me
there
here
anywhere. This way. If you like. Talk to me talk.
Talk
to
me
Was it like this with
Never before. Not like this. No one has touched me ever
never never
like this. Before. Like waves. The coming
slowly. Dual roles
realised. Yes yes
yes
Be a boy. If you like. Anything. Be
Just be⁸

Invoking the imagery of sea mimics the way in which pleasure is experienced, coming in successive waves of anticipation and contact, as well as the act of being swallowed by the water resembles the act of willfully giving in to the influence of violent forces beyond one's control, submissively drowning in the intense awareness of one's body, testing the limits of what it can handle. A similar desire is expressed in Quin's story "Ghostworm," in which the protagonist declares "I want you to hurt me so I might feel something. I want to feel my body again it's a vehicle moving the weight I no longer feel."⁹ The pain is presented as an instrument of transformation, of reconnecting with one's desensitized body. Interpreting this story may prove to be somewhat problematic, as it is in a truly Quinian fashion a text with little to no indication of where whose utterance begins and ends, whether the narrative is following a dream-like fantasy or describing the actual whereabouts of the voices speaking, representing the hallmark of Quin's "infuriating experiments." Nevertheless, it can be assessed with certainty that the narrative is occupied by a woman demanding to feel pain in order to reconnect with her corporeality:

Yes I can begin again once I've... You're on the outside looking in. You dragged me in. Yes by the hair and you loved it don't tell me otherwise. Oh not that violence. He snarled as she lifted her hand. Hands held, head hit, body knocked. Head thrust against the wall. Goddammit I'll kill you. He shouted. Go ahead kill me then anything anything but... She felt the wall several times as he banged her head against it. The violence at such times amazed her. Wanting that when they made love. Forcing it on him hurt me hurt me. And he tried. Afterward she wanted more. Wanted him to want but he slept. When he wanted she longed to talk. When she talked he insisted on something else. Some happening. Something always had to happen. Sensationalist. Speak for yourself. Learn when to say yes. No. Yes to life. Yes to death. Yes to love as it happens and yes when it doesn't.¹⁰

⁸ *Three*, 114.

⁹ *The Unmapped Country*, 134.

¹⁰ *The Unmapped Country*, 138–139.

Apparently, the first experience of violence is nowhere near consensual, but the woman realizes she finds the sensation sexually stimulating and starts to demand it. However, the narrative also conveys the fleeting character of these tensions, with the transience of the violent desire – the man and a woman struggle to meet at the intersection in which they would enthusiastically embrace their sadistic and masochistic roles. The situation develops from a sadistic treatment into a masochistic fantasy driven not by the urge to degrade, but by the desire to receive pain, as it is the masochist's destiny to persuade their punisher how to deliver the painful sensations.¹¹ In the text, “love”, “life,” and “death” are overlapping, virtually becoming fused, manifesting that “the urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge towards death.”¹²

The spectrum of sadomasochism is also explored in *Passages*, a novel which at once hints at the subtle incorporation of submission and dominance into literally every aspect of life, but also illustrates the externalization of these mechanisms with regards to sexual expression. The most discussed manifestation of this is the aforementioned erotic set-piece, found to be disappointing by some and incredibly stimulating by others. While the male narrator engages in a sadomasochistic threesome with two nameless women, the female narrator voyeuristically observes the whole act through the window:

as the three

lay there, their legs, arms linked in the formation of a dance. Under the chandelier they moved slowly. [...] The leather strap he passed through suspenders. Black slithered across the white, between the less black. [...] He balanced a whip in each hand. The girl strapped to the chair. Her head swayed over the back, hair hung down. Legs apart, fruit placed between. Sound of whip meeting flesh, into a rhythm, slow at first.¹³

Then the same scene is then described by the man:

I handled the whip, her body as though they were the most natural things in the world, something I had always done. Perhaps in retrospect the most exciting part of all this was not so much my whipping the girl, but seeing her so abandoned, submissive and obviously getting more and more excited, roused under me, under the strokes I dealt.¹⁴

The female voyeur's gaze includes her in the act from afar, perhaps as a form of retaining of some of the sadistic pleasure.¹⁵ She is thrilled by the sight, just like the man is – the most rewarding to him is the girl's submission, the instruments of dealing damage are a mere tool employed in order to reach the result, to be presented with the lurid image of growing despair and excitement. It is maintained that this scene perfectly illustrates the scripted and formulaic

¹¹ Deleuze, 21.

¹² Bataille, 42.

¹³ *Passages*, 21.

¹⁴ *Passages*, 55.

¹⁵ Williams, 136.

nature of such scenes found in Sade and Bataille, parodying the masculine narratives of desire by explicitly invoking the clichés of the genre.¹⁶ While doing so, Quin also entertains the idea of a masculine rape fantasy through the character of the male narrator, which she also employs quite explicitly in *Tripticks*. The narrator is pondering the thought of his bride-to-be craving brutal sex, projecting it onto her as her own desire:

Maybe she wanted me to rape her. Wanting that all the time, to be hauled out of her tower, gagged, bound, stripped, dragged across rocks, tied to a tree and beaten. There was a kind of flowering dullness about her, a boredom in rosy bloom, though at times she had a sequinned sexuality, slightly parted lips, petulantly cajoling baby voice, silvery teased and teasing hair, but she belonged to another age.¹⁷

Despite the word “rape” used in this passage, the context implies this does not necessarily mean an actual breach of consent – colloquially, the word “rape” can be used to denote rough sex, seemingly similar to that which lacks consent completely. “Wanting” to be raped seems oxymoronic, as rape is defined by the unwillingness of one of the parties involved. He, however, dismisses the suspicion that she would be willing to enact such a scene, although according to him, it could potentially lure her “out of her tower” of detachment. In its cumulative manner, *Tripticks* delivers plenty of fetishistic and sadomasochistic titillation. Many of the characters live through scenarios as if cut out (as they most likely were) from the average pornographic novella:

She had, of course, masochistic longings, apparently allowing some wino to abduct her. ‘He did not purposely harm me in any way,’ she said, with a rather sad smile, ‘other than the fear, the tension, and the hardship of being in the woods, and being away from my family.’ At night when he slept, she was chained by her neck to a tree. She showed me the marks, touching them with her stiletto nails. In fact they looked more like scratches than scars from a chain.¹⁸

The novel goes through several SM scenarios in a way a catalogue of common sexual fantasies and fetishistic practices would, as if to contain all the clichés of perverse sexuality, and ridicule them. It invokes the stereotypical images of “a sadistic leather fetishist, chained her to the bed, locked her in the attic”¹⁹ or being “addicted to cigarette burns on her chest, black leather lingerie on her body, and shoes with stiletto heels on her feet, she howled”²⁰ All of these sketches are visually emblematic of what props the BDSM scene is associated with aesthetically: the lingerie, the heels, chains, and the sharp imagery are all incorporated into the vision.

¹⁶ Williams, 141.

¹⁷ *Tripticks*, 47.

¹⁸ *Tripticks*, 48.

¹⁹ *Tripticks*, 69.

²⁰ *Tripticks*, 160.

4.2 Rape – sexual violence

Rape is an act in which sexual advances become weaponized, a tool of power and destruction designed to degrade. In Quin's fiction, rape is gendered as a form of violence used by men against women, and as such it is usually seen through the prism of the victim, although not exclusively – Quin also explores the male rape fantasy, the twisted desire to conquer that which goes beyond acceptable boundaries, with the intention of degrading a person until they are dehumanized.

While the undertones and subtle hints of sexual violence can be found throughout Quin's work, the only explicitly described rape scene appears in *Three*. The event of Leon raping Ruth is preceded by several attempts at intimacy which Ruth either prevents, or is forced into. In 1966, the year of publication of *Three*, marital rape was acceptable and even legal in Britain.²¹ The act of rape is the escalation of negativity accumulated between Leon and Ruth, with S as an intrusive force further deepening their alienation from each other:

Erotic freedoms cannot be cleanly extricated from material and social realities. S is presented as a liberated and instinctive sexual risk-taker, who arrives following what would have been a criminal abortion at the time of *Three*'s publication in 1966. However, when her subversive influence within the domestic sphere inspires Ruth's resistance to her husband's sexual advances, proprietorial boundaries must be dramatically reinstated. Quin's novel mobilises shock, engendered by a brutal depiction of marital rape, to foreground the banal and legitimate violence already enshrined by the legal apparatus. This connects the threat of infringement upon traditional familial privacy, male experiences of perceived emasculation and their subsequent (sexually) violent response.²²

While in S's case, it is an act of transgression to say yes, for Ruth it is transgressive to resist, each of the scenarios resulting in a woman's vulnerability being abused. Leon's hatred toward his wife may be a manifestation of the aforementioned schizoid desire for destruction, but also in a broader context, it is the reminder of the way masculine repression is manifested and described – stereotypically, a man's frustration results in the acts of aggression. The foreshadowing of Leon sexually assaulting Ruth is manifested throughout the novel, among such occurrences is the scene in which they receive an information that a woman who got murdered for she “kept running about banging doors”²³ – the image is grotesque, for resolving to kill a person because they act irritatingly seems bizarre, unreasonable, but so would be the possible “explanations” of Leonard's aggression.

²¹ Nell Osborne, “‘I’m telling you to stop’: Staging the drama of rape, experiment and sexual consent in Ann Quin's *Three* and Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat*”, *Angles* [Online], 13 | 2021, Online since 15 December 2021, connection on 29 December 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/angles/3818>, downloaded PDF: 10.

²² Osborne, 11.

²³ *Three*, 78.

In one of S's journal entries, she mentions the time Ruth was visited by an osteopath, asking S to stay with her, grunting and biting her lips until she starts bleeding, and afterwards relating that "his hands wandered further than necessary," hastily adding that perhaps he himself was not aware of it, and that he "wouldn't have done anything while you were with us."²⁴ On the next page, S also recalls Ruth visiting a psychiatrist, and then coming back from an appointment all pale and quiet, giving up on the therapy. It is implied that Ruth had experienced some forms of sexual harassment before, positing her into the role of a victim.

In *Passages*, the male protagonist does not seem to assault anybody sexually in reality, his unfiltered sexual aggression is presented through a series of fantasies and dreams, in which he rapes especially very young girls. The female protagonist is an object of these fantasies as well: "In his dreams he knocked her over, raped her, beat her until the blood covered them both, and finally he strangled her as he had the chickens for his mother at the age of twelve."²⁵ He does not entirely succumb to the urges invading his mind, he manages to channel them through consensual means, but he also becomes aware of the tempting possibilities of *real* violence, which remain in his consciousness, and also surrounds him as he observes the locals who are forced into submission, such as during the encounter with a woman whose veteran brother is most probably forcing himself on her, and he sees an underage girl being prostituted by her mother as a source of income.

Rape is present in *Tripticks* as well, in a fashion appropriate for the novel. There is a "Phantom rapist" who is also a murderer, cruising the same highways as the narrator and his pursuers:

The attacker may be a sadist who bites slowly and intentionally, leaving well-defined teeth marks. Mainly found on the breast, neck, cheek, top of arm etc. Their degree of viciousness can vary tremendously, from the nipples being completely bitten off to one bite only, a 'love nip'.²⁶

It is a vulgar, spectacular sight combining the influences of aforementioned genres of entertainment, which feed off sensationalism. A criminal on the loose whose crimes are of sexual nature is fascinating; it is the sense of fear and thrill, a sort of "death drive" impulse in itself, as these crimes are often unpleasant to imagine, yet, receiving news of such crimes is captivating.

The anonymous terror of sexual solicitation of women is also pictured in an encounter described in "Ghostworm," when the main character takes a subway in New York City:

²⁴ *Three*, 73.

²⁵ *Passages*, 100.

²⁶ *Tripticks*, 10.

Sickly bespectacled youth opposite her, his eyes on her legs, and yet further up, moved his hand in his trouser pocket. She uncrossed her legs, but crossed them again, tried to pull her skirt down. His hand moved more quickly. She got out. Was he going to follow? Her heart moved with her clicking heels, was that panting behind her? In broad daylight who would have thought but rapists would live in their own time.²⁷

This situation is representative of the sense of threat that women commonly experience in public spaces, frequently feeling unsafe because their environment is occupied by people aroused by the thought of them being intimidated. The emphasis on “broad daylight” is especially poignant, for there is truly no way of escaping sexual violence, as it may come from any direction, as has been shown throughout Quin’s work. She illustrates various models of how sexual violence may play out – as marital rape, in the form of a sadistic desire to overpower somebody, and the insinuated shadow of sexual violence embedded within the environment of everyday.

4.3 Death

The death and its presence surround Quin’s narratives through various angles. It can be clearly seen even from summaries of her novels: Berg comes to the seaside resort with the intention to murder his father, then grotesquely “killing” the ventriloquist’s dummy, while actually killing two animals. *Three* is preoccupied with death upon the event of S’s suicide/murder. The woman’s brother in *Passages* is most probably dead, as they travel through a country where people are dying in the streets, either being executed by the officers of the authoritative regime, or of hunger. The trial awaiting the narrator at the end of *Tripticks* most probably results in him being killed. The sense of mortality underlines the “strangeness” of each of her novels, enhancing the excitement of danger accompanying the portrayed sexual relations, making them ever more thrilling.

The domains of death and sexuality are intertwined in *Berg* from the very beginning – the motivation to annihilate the object of destruction, the father, is coupled with the sexually charged relationship towards the mother. The pleasure of brutality reaches almost carnal qualities, and they are frequently combined throughout the novel, a peak instance of which is the sense of Judith’s aesthetics – her apartment is filled with objects alluding to death, such as stuffed animals, but also with her seductive garments. Another blatant example of death posited in relation to arousal is when Judith imagines Berg as the passionate “hero” who would kill Nathaniel because of her – the deception of this scenario is experienced as very

²⁷ *The Unmapped Country*, 147.

exciting to both of them.²⁸ The narrative of *Berg* is also significantly influenced by one of the manifestations of death drives: the repetition compulsion. Berg is constantly reliving traumatic moments from his childhood and youth for in his case, as Freud remarks, “no lesson has been learnt from the old experience of these activities having led instead only to unpleasure.”²⁹

As proposed in the introductory section of this chapter, *Three* is the most “death-driven” work of Quin’s. The very narrative is enmeshed by the event of S’s death, manifested by “pre-emptive echoes of itself throughout the text like an inverted *déjà-vu*, as if it is something that has always already happened.”³⁰ The fascination with the death of S extends into fascination with death in general – be it on the radio, in the newspaper, or on television, from the beginning to the end of the novel, most news Ruth and Leonard receive speak of death, yet they maintain the special position of S’s death. While S seems strikingly alive in her journal entries, on the film, and on the tapes, she is in fact constantly mechanically resurrected through her personal belongings. Perhaps even as Osborne suggests:

The novel repeatedly invokes the gruesome spectre of S’s barely submerged and spoiled body as a “return” that threatens the precariously repressed sexual aggression of respectable, middle-class culture. Indeed, this incrementally insinuates a scenario in which the novel’s free indirect narrator is S herself, albeit disembodied, and returned from her watery grave.³¹

The roots of the fascination with death are revealed as already present in Ruth and Leonard’s life prior to S’s death, such as when Leonard enthusiastically kills a crab, and when during the mime roleplay acts out the motions of hanging himself, salaciously adding that death by hanging is frequently accompanied by an erection. This alludes to the image of autoerotic asphyxiation, as one of the pleasures which is a practice basically emblematic of Bataille’s assertion that the pursuit of death and those of eroticism are connected and work both ways.

In *Passages* death and sexuality explicitly meet in the male narrator’s sadistic fantasies and dreams – whether an exciting fantasy results in an orgasm or death (or both) becomes permutable. Besides these specific instances, death resembles the domain of eroticism for they assume a similar mode of operation: both are always implied and both induce waves anxiety and fear, seeping through the narrative. Contrastingly, *Tripticks* embraces death as yet another spectacular feature of its collages. Death is integrated into the

²⁸ Williams, 67.

²⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961) 15.

³⁰ Williams, 112

³¹ Osborne, 9.

landscape of fetishized scenes irresistible to look at as a recognized trope of every noir story.

Leaving an abandoned ghost town, the narrator fantasizes:

I could die here quite happily, no longer confuse the mainspring of the movement with the movement. And when he bleeds, falls and dies, he does so in a beautifully obscene slow motion, a star swimmer in his own aquacade of blood. A moment in death when the body no longer functions, when it becomes an object and has a certain kind of detached ugly beauty. And a tortured Earth Goddess with the shimmer of luxurious shoulder-length gloves of stretch nylon would lean over me, unbuttoning, folding back one of her gloves to close my eyes. Smooth, resolved and beautiful.³²

This fantasy is the very epitome of *Tripticks*'s vulgar poetics – switching into the third person in order to narrate his own death as in a pulp novel, necessarily adding the presence of an attractive woman, shows the glamour of mass-produced media and the banality of violence, but also suggesting death as means of relief: only in death do the voices go quiet and the constant movements cease. This subtly foreshadows the final scene of the novel, in which the narrator reaches a point when he cannot scream, recognizing the loss of his selfhood in the various streams of words and voices. Death in *Quin* is grotesque and horrifying, at once comical and banal – similarly to how she portrays sexuality, in accord with the overall setting of each text. The forces of Eros and Thanatos are blending into each other in her fiction, as a form of a dark twisted fantasy which may or may not require casualties.

³² *Tripticks*, 25–26.

Conclusion – “Is it her body I hold in my arms or the sea?”

*Avoiding Ernest Hemingway, I detour instead towards Ann Quin. Disliking Hemingway, I detour instead towards Ann Quin. Avoiding Stein, I detour instead towards Ann Quin. Disliking Stein, I detour instead towards Ann Quin. Feeling Beckett is too obvious a point of reference, I detour instead towards Ann Quin. Despite ongoing rumours of a B. S. Johnson revival, I feel our attention could be more usefully directed towards Ann Quin.*¹

The personae of Ann Quin balance between irony and brutal earnestness. The aim of this thesis was to characterize the tendencies regarding Quin’s rendering of her “sexual personae,” masks of sexual expressions as explored in different contexts, suggesting that the four selected thematic circles are the most compelling for their assessment. Often their uniqueness relies on the subversion of expectations, of what one expects in the realm of family and gender, and how the transformation of these roles is carried out in the setting of triangular relationships, i.e., how these configurations are reflected with regards to violent urges. In each of these spheres, there is a sense of transmission and transformation, a liquid movement carrying the connotations tied to the familiar figures which become defamiliarized as a result.

The aspect of fluidity is maintained as Quin’s *modus operandi* in her writing – the individual elements of her works possess an underlying liquidity, their movement mimicking the waves of the ocean clashing against the cliffs, or the constant flow of the river – be it through the use of language registers, her switching of tones, or through the change of personae. Her fiction indeed reflects Quin’s fascination with theatre, and the concept of persona as a mask, a theatrical prop, also gestures towards the stage and modes of acting. A mask implies the transitional aspect of switching between the roles that invoke specific images by employing specific props, and so, the one and the same character, while distinctly identifying with a specific coherent set of features, the way a stock character does, may just as well show a face that has not been revealed before.

There is a certain underlying repetition similar to the waves moving in ebbs and flows, but as S remarks in her journal, the pattern is never *exactly* the same. Rather, the motions of the flows activating the narratives seem to adopt certain aspects, and rearrange them – the qualities at the core of a certain persona or a characteristic feature are familiar, yet, exploring entirely different angles of such elements. It was not the aim of this thesis to sketch out a neat morphology of Quin’s eroticism (were that even possible) – rather, it was to focus on some of

¹ Stewart Home, *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2012) EPUB, 129.

the predominant structures regarding the construction of sexual expression within specific contexts, to provide a certain basis of how these types of conduct are manifested. This thesis proves that Quin's writing contains considerable patterns regarding the construction of her characters as archetypal, providing an analysis of the most palpable ones.

What the analysis makes apparent is how difficult it is to extract individual elements from Quin's work as they are tightly entangled. However, when the "character types" are put into context of their similar manifestations, the temporary separation from their source texts enables one to grasp potential development of certain tropes in Quin's oeuvre more clearly, which is also why the analysis was conducted within thematic circles rather than by following each novel or story individually. As was suspected, Quin repeatedly proves the possibilities of reworking, parodying and embracing clichés and stereotypes frequently employed in literature, and presenting them in her perverted cosmos of tender brutality and murky waters. Typically for her, these images are inserted into the omnipresent triangular structures of pathological mental disturbances.

But, after all, what *are* the "sexual personae" of Ann Quin specifically, what can be tangibly grasped as tropes frequently employed in her fiction? Based on the analysis undertaken in this thesis, a few recurring images emerge. One of the most prolific ones is the reworking of the classic figure of the *femme fatale*. A bizarre femme fatale is Judith with her unnatural visage, and so is S with her self-destructive urges, and the female narrator of *Passages*, who loses herself in the sounds of her voices. Any of the X-wives in *Tripticks* qualifies as a femme fatale, as all of them drastically affect the narrator's life and all of his marriages lead him to the very end at the pulpit.

Another continuously recurring persona is "the aggressive male," who can be found in almost every one of Quin's masculine protagonists. Aggression being one of the common results of frustration is necessarily implied in the many of Quin's male characters whose sense of identity and reassurance of their masculinity are distorted. "The aggressive male" is impersonated by Alistair Berg in his childish cruelty towards animals, as well as in such figures as Leonard, whose brutality may reach beyond what is clearly confirmed within the narrative. The aggression of the man in *Passages* indisputably shapes his presence throughout the novel to a significant extent.

The figure of the "suffocating mother" palpably haunts most of Quin's narratives. The mother, biological or metaphorical, comes to usurp the breathing space and induce anxiety. This persona is frequently coupled with the image of "the incompetent father" who fails to deliver a healthy parental guidance. Other dualities – which are to be assaulted by an intrusive

third – include for instance the dynamic of “the victim” and “the predator” (Ruth and Leonard, the narrator of *Tripticks* and his pursuers, the nude corpse of the woman by the seascape and the man who finds her) and the ubiquitous exchange in the positions of a “voyeur” and an “exhibitionist.” The latter represents one of the peaks of fluidity in Quin’s writing, as these two categories are constantly transmitted – it is a cycle of watching and being watched, inducing paranoia as well as excitement.

The matter of fluidity may not be explicitly foregrounded throughout individual analyses, however, it is maintained by the very gestures observed in the specific characters and their development. The modes of presentation employed in the construction of each persona or the mechanisms causing the crucial events to escalate are imitative of the tides of the sea. The motions of exchanging, substituting one mask for another are conducted with delicate discretion, while containing possibilities not visible at first glance. For instance, while this thesis assessed the character of Ruth as a faux-mother figure, in Butler’s interpretation there are arguments in favor of seeing Ruth as a “child-woman” desiring for S to take care of her,² further showing the fluid flexibility of implications conveyed within Quin’s narratives.

As assumed, a strong formalist impulse shapes the figures represented by Quin, employing recurring functions enacted through various roleplaying scenarios, which is also emphasized by the selection of the thematic focus of this thesis. Each of the thematic circles chosen was designed to explore the significant settings and mechanisms within which Quin’s characters are situated. The succession of individual chapters was chosen deliberately in order to follow the layering of the personae’s construction: beginning with the family, the first environment with regards to which a sense of sexuality is shaped, followed by gender, for it largely affects the connotations of sexual expression within Western society, proceeded by triangularity, as the triangle is the basic scheme within which these characters frequently articulate their sexual desires, and finally considering the domain of violence, as its impact is molded in accordance to the previously inspected frameworks. This thesis does not primarily theorize Quin’s writing, but rather demonstrates that Quin’s thematic and narrative structures provide a theory of their own, following the theatrical qualities of her approach to the development of characters. Each chapter further proves the observations already suggested about Quin’s works – that they contain multifaceted, polyvalent implications, that they are transgressive – but also elaborates on these foundations.

² “Have You Tried it with Three?.” 95.

An essential and all-pervasive aspect deliberately omitted from the analysis is Quin's writing style and technique. The reason for this neglect is pragmatic in nature – her writing style itself did not concern the analysis, for the aim was to focus rather on the images produced by it. Admittedly, it is precisely thanks to Quin's handling of the writing style that the personae were rendered in such forms, further underlining the significance of specific tropes, although to properly consider the implications of these relations was beyond the scope of this thesis. This thesis maintains that Quin's poetics significantly rely on recurring formations of archetypal characters, which enable exploration of sexual expression in various contexts, and the insights suggested in this thesis may provide a solid, yet *fluid* perspective on reading Quin's characters as sexed and sexual. The theme of Quin's personae is by no means exhausted by this thesis – Quin's texts generate far more possible readings, and they contain multitudes of identities; so, this analysis shall be a mere first step towards taking stock of the wide range of sexual implications and connotations encompassed in her works. But hopefully, a first step that may serve as a basis for a further fruitful discussion of the multifaceted oeuvre of Ann Quin.

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