

The construction of the female subject: Belghoul and Colette

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Farida Belghoul's *Georgette!*¹ and Colette's *Claudine à Paris*² are examples of female subject narrative, that is, a fictional text by a female author whose principal character and narrator is also a woman; they are situated in widely different fictional universes but feature certain similarities with regard to the access of self-determination of the heroine or I-persona. In each case, the heroine is undergoing a rite of passage of some kind, of which her first person narrative or 'diary' is both a record and an important element, putting into language the internal and external conflicts of her education, or *éducation sentimentale*.

Aujourd'hui je recommence à tenir mon journal, forcément interrompu pendant ma maladie, ma grosse maladie—car je crois vraiment que j'ai été très malade!

Je ne suis pas encore très solide à présent; mais la période de fièvre et de grand désespoir m'a l'air passée. Bien sûr, je ne conçois pas que des gens vivent à Paris pour leur plaisir, sans qu'on les y force, non, mais je commence à comprendre qu'on puisse s'intéresser à ce qui se passe dans ces grandes bêtes à six étages. (CP, 5)

Thus Claudine has arrived in Paris and there begins the series of conversations and encounters which will constitute this phase of her development and end in her marriage. At the same time, to read the two texts in chronological parallel of the heroines' narrations, the young heroine of *Georgette!*, who does not give her name, is also adapting to the encounters and conversations which constitute this phase of her development and which will end in her own crisis. Like Claudine, Georgette (as we shall call her) is in Paris because her father brought the family there for professional reasons, although there is an enormous difference in socio-professional category. Georgette's father speaks thus:

1 Farida Belghoul, *Georgette!* [G], Paris, 1986.

2 Colette, *Claudine à Paris* [CP], Paris, 1963.

J'écris tranquillement la parole de Dieu sur l'cahier de ma fille et regarde le résultat: ta mère, elle m'envoie l'bombe atomique sur ma gueule. Quand j'l'ai ramenée ici, elle savait même pas bonjour-bonsoir, maintenant elle veut monter sur mon dos. L'chef y monte dessus toute la journée: quand j'rentre à la maison c'est ta mère! Elle fait l'maline dans votre tête...Mais j'préfère vous tuer tous. Ou bien j'embarque tout l'monde à Marseille. Vous allez manger une galette sec et un oignon. Comme ça vous comprendrez qu' c'est moi l'père. (G, 46-7)

In both these milieux, it is the father who decides where the family is to live, although the two families are differentiated by class, level of education, culture and race. They are also differentiated by wealth or its lack; since the basic problematic in this comparative analysis is the question of socialisation through language for the female subject, there is a specific relationship between the heroine and money. Money is one of the languages of social interaction, and one of the most powerful. The power structure within which the heroine is placed is usually defined and often resolved through money and its displacement.

I have suggested that both Claudine and Georgette are in a period of transition and of construction of the subject; they are not, however, the same age. 'Parce que vous savez, je suis plus maigre que l'année dernière et un peu plus longue: malgré mes dix-sept ans échus depuis avant-hier, c'est tout juste si j'en parais seize' (CP, 6). Georgette, on the other hand, says of herself walking in the *cour de récréation*: 'Je me promène d'une certaine façon. Un pied devant l'autre, évidemment. Mais j'ai le dos courbé, mes yeux regardent par terre. Je fronce les sourcils et je croise les doigts dans mon dos. Je marche comme un vieux de soixante-dix ans. C'est une raison de me respecter. En vérité, j'ai sept ans' (G, 9). It is interesting that both experience an inadequation of their actual age to their appearance and that there is some attempt to reconcile the age they want to be to the age which they think they are perceived to be. There seems to be a motivation of anxiety behind this, for instance, when Georgette talks to her friend at school:

—Qu'est-ce que tu veux?

—Ta façon de marcher...

Je suis fière. Elle l'a remarquée!

—Ça se voit que t'es l'arabe comme tu marches!

Je lâche sa main. Je lui réponds même pas. Je marche comme un vieux: je le fais exprès! Elle ignore le respect, celle-là! (*G*, 12)

Claudine's father when her first marriage proposal is received, says:

Bougre de bougre, j'ai pourtant une assez belle diction pour que tu comprennes tout de suite! Ce brave petit Monsieur Maria veut t'épouser, même dans un an si tu te trouves trop jeune. Moi tu comprends j'oublie un peu ton âge, depuis le temps. Je lui ai répondu que tu devais avoir au juste quatorze ans et demi, mais il affirme que tu cours sur tes dix-huit: il doit le savoir mieux que moi. Voilà. (*CP*, 201)

and later: 'Je le trouve très gentil, oh! tellement gentil, de me juger digne d'une attention aussi... sérieuse' (*CP*, 202).

In each case the female subject seem to be conscious of experiencing a process of self-construction, which is, however, fragilising and renders her vulnerable. She needs validation from others. Georgette wants to appear like an old person, who must be respected, not like an Arab; Claudine wants to appear like the woman she feels herself to be, not a girl under the guidance of others. However, each of them is imprisoned in a body which others will decode quite differently. The corporal image of the brown child with the 'different' accent, or the white girl with dowry, family and prettiness is reified in social terms and has fixed assigned values in social relations. The heroine's struggle is to break through these barriers to become herself. It may be said that the extraordinary courage of *Georgette!*'s seven year old heroine, doggedly marching around the *cour*, does not have as moving a counterpart in the heroine of *Claudine à Paris*: that is to say, the heroine's potential for free self-realisation is there, but the way in which her dilemma is finally resolved veers toward the anecdotal male-centred happy ending. There is a fundamental problem in analysing the discourse of the heroine of the Claudine books, posed by the problem of authorial responsibility: whether the influence of Willy is to be discerned in the recurrence of macho cliché.

Again in each case, this construction of the self is manifested in language. The narrative strategy of both texts is that the heroine is narrating her own story. Claudine is writing a diary, so that the text-object we read is as it were the printed version of her text-object; *Georgette's* narrative is more mysteri-

ous, being expressed in the form of a diary or autobiographical extract, but written by a narrator who cannot yet write, or indeed adequately read:

Le jour où elle a écrit la liste des fournitures, j'étais bien embêtée. Je suis incapable de la lire moi-même! Une lettre après l'autre, j'y arrive un peu, mais une page entière c'est impossible! Je suis pas la seule: les autres dans la classe peuvent pas non plus et mes parents ont le même problème. Je suis sortie de l'école: j'ai rien dit à mes copines. On sait jamais! Si on se dispute, elles dénonceront mes parents à la maîtresse. De force, elle les inscrira en classe et toute la famille crèvera de faim. Mon père peut pas se couper en deux entre l'école et son travail.

J'ai couru à toute vitesse chez ma petite vieille. Elle m'a lu mon carnet d'un coup et je l'ai retenu par coeur. Je l'ai récité jusqu'à la maison et voilà comment je me retrouve encore plus bête devant un père idiot! (G,18)

So who is writing 'je'? This problem becomes crucial at the end of the narration, when the text suddenly shuts off at a crisis point. Claudine is equally disarmed in constructing a self through language, since it is in the language of the body and of money that the narrative will be resolved: her search for autonomy and self-realisation will be short-circuited by the fact that she is after all a marriageable *parti* herself, because her mother has left her a dowry. This is the somewhat flawed device which enables her to achieve independent agency, or its appearance, in her choice of partner and future.

The construction of the self is problematic both for Claudine and for Georgette: they have specific vulnerabilities embedded in general vulnerabilities. The quest for love is always problematic, but in Claudine's case there are the additional problems of being under her father's control in matters of marital choice; being a country girl in the city, having speech patterns and manners which are not compatible with the Parisian young ladyhood of her class. Georgette must in addition to the painful rites of passage of all children (she is seven, the ritual age of reason) and the question of social acceptability of French residents of Arab origin, whose French is dysfunctional, and whose political and economic status is low, deal with the additional disempowerment of women relative to men, daughters to brothers, and the specific *clivage* brought about by her situation as scholar. The very attentiveness she brings to her school work (her efforts to please the teacher, her courageous attempts

to understand, become involved, and bridge the gaps between herself and her peers and authority figures, in sum, all her efforts at self-development within the French social system) are bringing upon her serious problems of communication between herself and her family and community, particularly the adults who as first generation immigrants have no experience of the French education system and understand French culture less than she does.

Georgette is having difficulties communicating with her *maîtresse*, as a *beur* child in a French school: the school environment in question is that of a number of years ago, since the practice of hitting children on the ends of the fingers with a ruler obtains. The *maîtresse* moves between scolding and striking Georgette when she remains mute, and helping her with her hands, smiling and encouraging. She says at the end of the second of three parts of the text: 'Allez! je ne convoque ni ton père ni ta mère. Mais si tu t'entêtes, je le ferai. Et nous parviendrons à nous comprendre. La langue n'a jamais empêché de communiquer. Ça veut dire se parler' (G, 124).

This highly ironic utterance comes at the end of a scene where the *maîtresse* calls Georgette into the empty classroom where she has emptied Georgette's desk, laying out all her *fournitures*, her *cahier* in which her father had written, a green sock from the day when Georgette had worn odd socks, red and green. Georgette is horrified by seeing this display of her things, about which she has experienced such anxiety. All the coded values of school culture, proper use of furniture, having the right equipment supplied from home, clean hands and clothes, *faire la révérence*, are alien to her and she feels hopelessly handicapped in her brave efforts to succeed and please, while at the same time being torn between the cultural codes of school, which she recognises as having value, and those of her family, whose value she also recognises. However, the adults who define and master each of these sets of codes do not necessarily respect or understand those of the other. The second part of the text ends with a long and complex sequence in which the teacher, frustrated by Georgette's silence in class, calls her into the classroom where she has been investigating Georgette's desk. In this sequence the differing points of view of one generation and another, and of one culture and another infuse the passage with irony, pity and anger: the constant references to *langue*, *parler*, *bouche*, *dialoguer*, *communiquer* point at once to the crucial objectives of the characters and to

the personal prisons from which they are trying to enact relationships. Georgette, as she follows the teacher into the classroom, is already planning survival strategies: 'C'est pas grave: je la suis et dès qu'elle s'arrête, je lui parle. Je m'arrange une solution avec elle. Je discute et je lui propose un échange. Mais je sais pas ce qu'elle veut...(...) Surtout, je parle la première. Sinon, je serais obligée de l'interrompre. Et la maîtresse n'aime pas du tout qu'on lui coupe la langue' (G, 118). Georgette is then paralysed by the sight of her desk contents spread out on the table. She can now neither speak nor move: 'Je suis un vieillard paralysé; malade, en plus. Il est foutu, le vieux. Dans une seconde, il s'écroule par terre et crève aussitôt la bouche fermée' (G, 118-9).

The teacher begins:

—Si tu veux bien, nous dialoguons, toi et moi. .

Je dis rien. La pisse me brûle les fesses, les cuisses et les jous. Elle sourit.

—Dialoguer ça veut dire se parler.

Je réponds pas. Son sourire grandit.

—Tu ne parles jamais?

Je bouge pas. Je suis toute nue devant mon père, debout sur un étalage du marché aux puces.

(...)

Elle baisse la voix.

—Je sais que les hommes de là-bas frappent leurs femmes et leur enfants comme des animaux.

(...)

Elle imagine que je vais tout répéter à mon père. Elle le connaît pas!

Si je dis un truc pareil, il m'égorge immédiatement. (G, 119-21)

Georgette is horrified by the criticism of her father, but quite unable to confide her problems in him, or in the teacher. As the teacher continues to question her about why she does not speak, even her mental dialogue ceases: 'C'est le silence total dans mon cerveau'. Belghoul's achievement in conveying the feelings of a child constructing 'sense' out of an alienating environment is all the more remarkable in that the other characters, teacher, classmates, parents, while they are acute sources of anxiety and pain, are by no means demonised. The teacher is portrayed as someone who is trying to understand: 'Ton écriture est déjà très belle. Tu as bien suivi les lignes et bien séparé les mots. Oui, je suis contente de ton travail. (...) Et nous parviendrons à nous comprendre. La langue n'a jamais empêché de communiquer. Ça veut dire se parler' (G, 124).

This conclusion to the second part will add irony to the crisis which ends the third and final part of the book, a crisis precipitated by the teacher's proposal to 'dialogue' with the child's parents.

This connotative and denotative use of signifiers of speech, orality, sound, adds a further semantic layer to the narrative, that of the importance of speech and language in the construction of the personality. There are many different approaches to the question of language and the growth of the individual, from the areas of cognitive psychology, sociology and socio-linguistics, psychoanalysis and its various avatars. Without attempting to resolve the different pedagogic or analytical models in this area, it may be useful to reflect on both these texts as embodiments of language acquisition and mastery as a part of a process of self-development. This entails not just learning to speak, to read, to write, crucial as these acquisitions are to personal development and social interaction, but all relationships to languages: learning manners, body and behaviour codes, cultural and social codes, the languages of interpersonal interaction (particularly the languages of sexuality), and, of course, the languages that mediate acculturation, the complex process by which the individual finds identity within the partnership, the family, the community, the peer group, the society, the race/culture, the human species. Françoise Dolto's work with children has brought out the importance of communication with children from a very early age, and has pointed out how this communication is established through speech and listening, as well as eye contact, observation of body language, and how bodily functions, enuresis for example, are signifiers of unconscious and conscious messages to the child's environment.³ In Georgette's case there is the problematic of trans-cultural acculturation: the *beur* child in the French school; in Claudine's, the *jeune sauvage* brought up in the country with as little recognition as possible of the overdetermined status of bourgeois young ladies, coming face to face with the urban sophistication of Parisian social networks, economically coded adult sexual relationships and the various power/money hierarchies and power relationships of homosexuals,

3 Françoise Dolto, *Lorsque l'enfant paraît* [LEP], Paris, 1977; *Psychanalyse et pédiatrie* [PP], Paris, 1970.

father/son relationships in which inheritance is all-important, young prostitutes and old rich men, dowries and marriages of convenience, and so on.

Considering the role of language acquisition in acculturation or socialisation involves both the normative and the dysfunctional: how language acquisition manifests or represents, as well as contributing to, and constituting, socialisation, and then, how language disorder or dysfunction symbolises (but also probably counteracts) some dysfunction in socialisation. Lacan defines neurosis as: 'Manière déficiente de parcourir l'ordre du langage selon des relations demeurées imaginaires (refoulées)' and psychosis as: 'Déficience radicale—effet de la forclusion—qui se traduit par une inaptitude à rapporter correctement le signifiant au signifié ou le signifié au signifiant'.⁴

Françoise Dolto has spoken of the arrival to language of the young-subject as an interiorisation related to the experiences of the organism. In *Le Cas Dominique* she reflects on the importance of language and symbolisation in general in supporting the construction of the young personality facing life's vicissitudes:

Quand au choix de ce cas [le cas Dominique], le lecteur pensera peut-être qu'il y a rencontré très particulière d'événements réels; qu'il se détrompe. Chacun, névrosé ou non, a dans son histoire beaucoup d'événements particuliers. Ce ne sont pas ces événements qui sont importants psychanalytiquement, c'est-à-dire dans la dynamique inconsciente qui structure le développement du sujet, on s'en rendra compte; c'est la façon dont y a réagi le sujet, du fait de son organisation pulsionnelle et personologique en cours. Les événements vécus en famille n'ont reçu de signifiante traumatizante que lorsque le sujet a, à cause d'eux, échappé à la castration humanisante, aux divers niveaux de son évolution libidinale. Dans le cas qu'on va lire, les instances de la personnalité en cours d'élaboration n'ont pas trouvé dans l'entourage parental le support, au minimum verbal ou gestuel, caractéristique d'une symbolisation humaine, pour l'impuissance mutilante qui lui provoquait l'angoisse. C'est au contraire son angoisse, qui a pris valeur de réalité principielle de l'entourage familial et social, image-souffrance pour lui de l'angoisse, mais image sans parole et sans geste d'autrui.⁵

4 J.-B. Fages, *Comprendre Jacques Lacan*, Toulouse, 1971, 116.

5 Françoise Dolto, *Le Cas Dominique* [CD], Paris, 1971, 11–12.

Georgette is very sensitive to the sound quality of her father's voice: 'En vérité si mon père me la vend, je n'achète pas sa langue. Je collectionne juste ce qui brille. Tant pis! Le principal c'est la beauté de sa voix. La sienne, je la paye tout de suite' (G, 35).

Both Georgette and Claudine are torn between two languages. In Georgette's case it is that of her family, whom she loves and respects, but whom she sees as stigmatised compared to the language of school and of mainstream French culture; in Claudine's, it is the patois and the customs of the Fresnais, school lifestyle, breast-feeding habits and the presence of nature and animals, all of which is stigmatised in the language of Paris. To complicate the matter, Luce, that other native child of the countryside, poor unlike Claudine and unprotected by her family whom she hates, has dealt with the discrepancy between the poverty of her country life, and the comfortable urban life she desires, by learning the language of money exchanged for body use and is living in sexual slavery to her uncle.

Georgette and Claudine experience acute anxiety as to conformity in dress and physical appearance. Georgette wants to be neat, like the others, and compares her mother's vibrantly coloured clothes unfavourably with the *maîtresse's* grey suit (G, 91). Claudine follows Marcel's and her aunt's advice in order to make herself fit in with Parisian ideas on dress. They both respond to stress by mutism and retirement into the self: Claudine has her own space, her own room, her cat, Mélie, whereas Georgette must rely at seven upon the resources of her own imagination, finding survival strategies to endure the anxiety of going to school, spending the *récréation* on her own, enduring the scrutiny of teacher and fellow pupils, trying to please, working out a magic spell to cure her friend Mireille's speech impediment or 'asticot dans la bouche'.

What speaks for you when you can't speak, or cannot be heard as you wish to be? Money. When Claudine falls in love with Renaud, Marcel's reaction displaces the narrative from emotion to finance, from personal relationships to *mariage bourgeois*:

Son nez fin, pincé, est aussi blanc que ses dents. Je ne dis toujours rien, quelque chose m'empêche (...) mais oui, mais oui, vous savez bien ce que je veux dire. Eh! eh! quoi qu'il ait croqué pas mal d'argent, Papa est encore ce qu'on appelle dans son monde, un joli

chopin...

Plus vive qu'une guêpe, j'ai jeté tous mes ongles dans sa figure...
(CP, 234)

Now when Claudine received her first proposal, she went to Papa to ask if she had a *dot* and found she had, and at that: 'Cent cinquante mille francs que t'a laissés ta mère, une femme bien désagréable' (CP, 206). And so she offers herself to Renaud as his *maîtresse*, whereupon he, like the heroine of *Gigi* goes to her guardian to ask her hand in marriage, in best French bourgeois style. Georgette has no such weapon and relies on discourse to mediate between her self and the power figures around and above her. She does so with remarkable verve: indeed her prescience is beyond that of a seven year old. This fact, together with the embedding in the narrative of historical elements (the representation of the practice of 'taper sur les bouts des doigts' situates the narrative in the early sixties at the latest and more probably the fifties), adds to this present-time narration a nostalgic quality. The narrative voice describes events as happening within the reader's present, but the echoes of the education system of the past, and the extraordinary maturity of observation of the narrator, add resonances of memory, of the autobiographical, of retrospective relation, perhaps indeed of the author's past.

This chronological layering, in which events are denoted in the reader's immediate present but at the same time connoted in the past, gives to the text something of the flavour of magic realism, where the narrative of an individual life is invested with echoes, peripataeia and reference to the story/history of the race, people or region. Interculturality is certainly present in the sequence where Georgette tries to help Mireille through her speech needs:

—C'est dommage pour toi: t'as un asticot dans la bouche!

C'est la vérité mais je le dis aussi pour rire. Mireille pleure sur sa figure et je regrette la vérité.

—Je connais le moyen pour le faire sortir de ta bouche.

(...)

—Tous les matins, très longtemps, tu craches par terre trois fois avant d'aller à l'école... L'asticot est foutu! Il peut pas croire qu'il est dans sa maison; il peut pas s'installer. Il a toujours peur de tomber de ta bouche. (G, 37)

Georgette's long, repetitive saga about how the *asticot* will finally be defeated is a beautiful exercise in imagination, derived from a cultural framework in

which orality is privileged and the 'magic' power of language is still felt, as in Irish satires which were supposed to bring warts to the face of the person mocked: the sense that language can weave spells to empower or disempower, and that mediation through discourse, particularly discourse giving full rein to the imaginative and the instinctive, can overcome barriers to expression and understanding, as well as creating them, that talking and listening can disable, and cure. Georgette's spell rebounds on her, however: Mireille's ritual of spitting gets her in trouble with her mother and Mireille turns on Georgette, calling her an 'inzienne' (*G*, 68–81); this failure of word magic foreshadows the end of the narration:

Je reste seule. Mon coeur résonne mais je suis soulagée. Elle est partie! Oui, va-t-en! J'espère que l'asticot va te bouffer tout entière. J'espère qu'il va te massacrer.

Je suis dans la cour. J'ai froid au corps et faim dans le ventre. Et l'incroyable: je marche comme un peau-rouge! Je suis une inzienne!

The heroine's words are not after all powerful enough, and her narration ends: 'J'étouffe au fond de mon encier' (*G*, 163).

Discourse theory applies at three levels to this interpretation of *Georgette!* and *Claudine à Paris*. First of all, all discourse is subject to re-enactment on the part of the reader, analysed either as reception or representation; this has become common ground in applied linguistics:

Any approach to discourse analysis and pragmatics has, presumably, to represent two distinguishable but related discourse worlds in the pursuit of its objective, namely the characterization of speaker/writer meaning and its explanation in the context of use. On the one hand, more nomothetically, discourse analysis must portray the structure of suprasentential text or social transaction by imposing some framework upon the data, explicitly or implicitly. On the other hand, more hermeneutically, discourse analysis should offer us a characterization of how, in the context of negotiation, participants go about the process of interpreting meaning (whether this is reciprocal as in conversation or non-reciprocal as in reading or writing need not detain us here, suffice that the process is interactive).⁶

6 Malcolm Coulthard, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis [IDA]*, London, 1985, viii.

Coulthard argues further, having accepted Austin's⁷ demonstration that all utterances are performative (that is, that the saying of the words constitutes the performing of an action) and that issuing an utterance can be the performance of three acts simultaneously, locutionary or act of saying something; illocutionary or act performed in saying something, and perlocutionary, act performed by or as a result of saying:

When we first analyse a spoken text we are interested in the acts performed by those situationally defined as doctors, teachers, chairmen, patients, pupils and committee members, but ultimately we need to be able to make statements from the opposite end—in other words, being a teacher is constituted by performing the appropriate acts... (IDA, 17–18 and 183)

Coulthard gives a number of examples of stylistics and text linguistics applied to heuristic approaches to literary texts; the same principles may apply, however, to the analysis of the unconscious and rhetorical aspects of the literary text. The functions of mediation and negotiation are no less at work where the text is produced to some extent by free association and where the reader is called upon to use some form of floating attention so as to be sensitive to the non-pragmatic aspects of literary utterance, and to suprasentential features such as metaphor, idiolect or intertextuality.

Secondly, the I-persona, as a specific type of first person narrator—a character at the same narratological level as the other characters, as distinct from omniscient narrators or other narrating agents—being in the role of 'telling his story', one meaning of the necessarily ambivalent expression *raconter* (or *réciter*) *son histoire*, is engaging in that 'rencontre de deux discours' which is the literary text in reading (*le texte en lecture*). This is also analysis, with, however, the crucial distinction that the process of literary creation, and that of recreation/interpretation in reading, has neither a clinical nor a nosological function. As a rider on this question of analysis, the status of the female subject/narrator, and the nature of the specific performative function of the female subject, must be a particular case in point, if only along

7 J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, Oxford, 1962.

the principle of secondarity, that is, the phenomenon by which one sex or gender arrives second into a given domain: later access to education, to literacy; later access to literary life, later admissibility into the situations of culture, or other instances of second-ness. This is not to make a political case, or even argument: it may be worth making it clear that this concept of secondarity is not ontologically linked to questioning the canon, feminist separatism, or reverse censorship, nor does it posit a closed question with a limitative answer, still less attribute guilt; what is suggested here is that secondarity in female authorship, readership or representation, having been constructed out of a causal context, must necessarily have some implications, for example, reception, or interpretation of the text, or critical history or methodology, and that these implications bear investigation.

Thirdly, the *éducation sentimentale* type of narrative structure describes or represents the young hero/heroine growing up, achieving adulthood or some phase of development, or moving through some period of significant change (examples other than those analysed here would be the other Claudine novels, *La Princesse de Clèves*, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, *Manon Lescaut*, *L'Éducation sentimentale*, *Madame Bovary*, *Le Rouge et le noir*, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, *L'Amant* and so on). When the narrative structure is that the I-persona, the 'unconscious' narrator who is as involved in the action as anyone else, rather than distanced by irony or omniscience, the character is 'speaking himself', telling his own story, and according to Françoise Dolto, and to cognitive psychology, constructing the personality in part through access to speech, access to literacy and access to self-expression. The device used is that the narrator is experiencing everything in the narrative but leaving a space of consciousness wherein the reader sees what is happening with an extra experiential perception. One example is the educated present-day reader's reaction to the way the French school system used corporal punishment, or treated children of different ethnic origin; the Irish reader can relate this, consciously or not, to the cultural colonialism of the treatment of the Irish language in schools under British administration, and other reader groups' reception will similarly be enriched by other cultural contexts. Familiarity with the experiences represented, analogies with it, memories of it, or the fact

of being utterly surprised by it, all will serve the text's function, and indeed this type of narrative structure is a constant in cultural history.

'Speaking himself' *supra* is not an oversight: the young female hero is rarer, and more problematic: I have suggested elsewhere⁸ that the heroine is conceptually different to the hero, and with respect to the two texts analysed in the present study, I would argue that cathartic identification with the young heroine's having successfully and safely undergone the rite of passage and achieved self-determination, will not on the whole be a feature of the merit, interest, and pleasure of both novels. At the same time, however, together with *La Princesse de Clèves*, one of the rare representations of autonomous heroines in French literature, they will remain excellent as well as accessible objects of study for undergraduates.

8 A.M.T Ryan, 'Kathleen Ni Houlihan and her discontents: the heroine in Anglo-Irish drama', *Alizés*, IV, 1992, 21-46.