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Notions of Otherness: Literary Essays from Abraham Cahan to Dacia Maraini

Mark Axelrod-Sokolov
Chapman University, axelrod@chapman.edu

ACCULTURATION, OTHERNESS AND THE LOSS OF JEWISH IDENTITY IN ABRAHAM CAHAN'S *THE RISE OF DAVID LEVINSKY*

Of all the tribes, sects, and cultures in the world, perhaps no single group of humans has suffered more from the onslaught of moral inequities and physical persecutions than have the Jews. Yet, in spite of, or because of, those humanitarian injustices, the Jewish people have survived; but in the process of surviving, whether from Russian pogroms or Nazi genocide, the Jewish people have slowly been losing what had distinguished them as being different: their identity. It is not the identity that others have recognized as being "Jewish" that is in jeopardy, but the identity that Jews, especially American Jews, have recognized as being Jewish. In the process of this historical evolution, one particular period seems to be significant: 1880-1920 and one particular writer presents himself as significant in portraying the genesis of this evolution and contributing it to us: Abraham Cahan. The word "contribution" has been interpreted in numerous ways. In some cases, it has been defined as "to add to," in others, "to bring together"; however, the origin of the word is Latin and can best be defined as "to bestow," and nowhere is that definition more applicable in a discussion of great Jewish contributions to American society than in the life and literature of Cahan, especially his novel *The Rise of David Levinsky.* The novel is a significant point of departure in understanding the fabric of the Jewish-American immigrant experience, its evolution, notions of otherness and the concomitant assimilation of a people into a place unlike its own. For both its literary and socio-historical content establish it as a seminal influence in American letters.

Cahan was Russian-born and immigrated to the United States in 1882 at the age of 22. Born near the small town of Vilna, Cahan's grandfather was a rabbi and his father a schoolteacher. Possibly, because of those influences, Cahan was an imaginative and inquisitive student who was more apt to question the existing order of things than to

capitulate to it. Upon leaving the Vilna Teacher's Institute in 1881 as a teacher, Cahan utilized those critical faculties and became involved in the more radical political movement of that era, namely Marxism. By the time he had reached America, Cahan was lecturing on Marxist philosophy to Jewish workers. Since his socialist philosophy worked coterminously with the newly organized Jewish labor movement of the late nineteenth-century, he not only became influential politically, but he established himself as a Yiddish journalist, a position which eventually led to a career in creative writing.

By 1886, Cahan was contributing short journalistic pieces to both the short-lived labor weekly, The New Era, as well as to a Jewish-Russian weekly called Russky Yevrey. Though the former pieces were devoted almost exclusively to the New York City labor movement, the latter ones dealt with what would eventually become a Cahanian motif: immigrant life. In 1897 Cahan founded New York's Jewish Daily Forward, a Yiddish periodical which he edited from 1903 until his death in 1951, and which offered him a unique opportunity to deal with the varieties of Jewish experience that were appearing on New York's burgeoning East Side. What was invaluable about his editorial experience was that it enabled him to mediate between various socio-ethnological levels: Yiddish, Jewish, Russian, Ukrainian, American. Cahan's ability to interpenetrate those various cultures and to synthesize from them certain cultural and ethnological values made Cahan's contribution to American literature and social history significant since as a Russian-Jewish-American writer privy to those cultural manifestations, Cahan, more than any other writer before him, laid the foundations for one of the major themes in Jewish-American writing of the 20th century: the problems inherent in cultural readjustment; that is, acculturation.

As can be witnessed in reading modern North American Jewish writers, Cahan was influential on such writers as Saul Bellow, Alfred Kazin, Bernard Malamud, Phillip Roth, I.B. Singer and Mordecai Richler who are all, in some way, indebted to Cahan for bestowing upon them and upon Jewish-American letters an approach to the difficulties in harmonizing the dualities of Jewish Europeanism and Jewish Americanism. Though Cahan's early work took the form of short stories, he established himself as a serious novelist in his three novels in English: Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto (1896); The White Terror and the Red (1905); and his masterpiece The Rise of David Levinsky (1917). What clearly distinguishes Cahan's early work as a seminal influence in the Jewish literature to come, was his marvelous adaptation of the American-Jewish experience as expressed in the dialect of his immigrant characters. Cahan invigorates his characters by making them speak in a crude, idiomatic fashion that exposes the vulgarizing effect that America has had on them. Cahan's use of such European Judeo-American dialects and his ability to poeticize the English that is spoken through Yiddish dialect predates such use in the works of Malamud and Singer. Cahan's work reflects that change in Jewish perceptions to the world around them, specifically through the loss of language. As the texture of Cahan's fiction changed, so did the rhetoric of his characters. What was evolving in Cahan's work was the slow, but determinate, assimilation of his characters into American society as expressed in their use of language. This immigration to American acculturation manifested itself most poignantly in The Rise of David Levinsky since it is with that novel the language expresses most fully the complete, or nearly complete, assimilation of the characters into American society and, concomitantly, their gradual loss of their most important source of identity: their native tongue.

What Cahan presented in a way not presented before was a unique narrative treatment of a slowly evolving social, ethnic, and linguistic process that transformed the European Jew, with all his cultural, ritualistic, and mystical sensibilities, into an American Jew devoid of any traditionally based culture. This final evolution was expressed most clearly in Levinsky, the publication of which was probably the single most influential Jewish-American novel of its time. John Higham, in his preface to a 1960 edition of the novel notes that Cahan, through a Russian sensibility, had uniquely conveyed the American theme of success by combining it with Jewish subject matter. Though the novel does owe something to William Dean Howell's The Rise of Silas Lapham, (the author of which greatly admired the book and helped Cahan's career), The Rise of David Levinsky is truly unique in that it brings to Jewish-American letters the first real example of what had been heretofore considered a European form: the Bildungsroman. Though the novel owes much to its European predecessors, especially to the fiction of Tolstoy and Chekhov, it blended the traditional aspects of that genre, reflected in such novels as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, *Werther* and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist of a Young Man* with the added component of tracing the development of the hero throughout his life and including contemporary aspects of American industrial society, thus advancing a novel form which not only contributed greatly to American letters, but to American social history as well.

The novel's form is reflective in that it opens with a successful, middle-aged David Levinsky flashing back on his apparent rise to fortune. In the first four books. Levinsky recounts growing up in and finally leaving Antomir, his Russian village home. The remaining nine books deal with David's gradual dissimulation from his heritage and concomitant assimilation into a new culture, for once David is in America, he begins the

slow process of acculturation. He shaves his beard, loses his chastity, continues his educational pursuits, learns English, begins his business career in the garment industry, falls in and out of love, and, finally, becomes successful. Yet with all his apparent success, he is not fulfilled. The lack of fulfillment and the loss of his homeland and language are not only significant plot points in the story of the novel, but are significant in the American acculturation of Russian, Ukrainian and East European Jews and in the transformation from being “the other” to something “other.”

It is not coincidental that Howells' novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* was influential on Cahan's Levinsky. Though both protagonists had particular moral and ethical values which had to be obeyed if they were to survive in American industrial society, Howell's hero rises through the materialistic enterprise only to "fall" because of his moral ambivalence, then chooses to return to his farm in order to alleviate that ambivalence. The difference ends there however, since Levinsky has no real home to return to and hence is a true “outsider.” For Lapham, home is still America; for Levinsky, America is still a surrogate homeland.

What becomes almost palpable in Cahan's work and which makes it such an invaluable tool in the understanding of the Jewish-American acculturation process is that for the immigrant Jew the new land and the new life are, essentially, illusions. In the attempt to secure the values of American success, Levinsky loses those things essential to his being: his language and his Talmudic values. He is obviously sated with the extrinsic elements of his travail: money, prestige, a new tongue, but none of those things are directly applicable to his growth as a Jew or his appreciation of the Jewish experience. His rise has a concomitant loss: a direct relationship between the augmentation of his character as an

American and the attenuation of his essence as a Jew. For that reason, he is constantly a stranger, an outsider, an alien, a "wandering Jew" who is always in conflict with a society that neither accepts nor rejects him. He is also, as Cahan himself put it, an "allrightnik": an upper, middle-class Jew who has denied, become indifferent to or forgotten his roots. Certainly, for a parentless youth whose life in the shtetl held no real potential for success, America was the ultimate answer. His choice to pursue the persiflage that was American materialism was purchased with the loss of his spirituality. This loss magnifies itself in the last chapter of the last book, "Episodes of a Lonely Life," which begins with the question, "Am I happy?" That statement could well be the motif for the entire novel if not for the entire sociological question of Jewish assimilation since the novel is framed by two significant passages. The first appears at the beginning of the novel, when Levinsky says:

"Sometimes when I think of my past in a superficial, casual way, the metamorphosis I have gone through strikes me as nothing short of a miracle. I was born and reared in the lowest depths of poverty and I arrived in America--in 1885--with four cents in my pocket. I am now worth more than two million dollars and recognized as one of the two or three leading men in the cloak-and-suit trade in the United States. And yet when I take a look at my inner identity it impresses me as being precisely the same as it was thirty or forty years ago. My present station, power, the amount of worldly happiness at my command, and the rest of it, seem to be devoid of significance (Cahan, 3)."

The second passage appears at the end of the novel when Levinsky states: "I can never forget the days of my misery. I cannot escape from my old self. My past and my present do not comport well. David, the poor lad swinging over a Talmud volume at the Preacher's

Synagogue, seems to have more in common with my inner identity than David Levinsky, the well-known cloak-manufacture" (Cahan, 530).

The last few words of the novel, "a well-known cloak manufacturer," are not afterthoughts. Cahan was weaned on Russian Realistic fiction and, like his masters Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgenev, and Dostoevsky, knew that certain passages or phrases held more than transient meaning. The cloak is only a metaphor for that which covered Levinsky's Jewishness, for the cloak is nothing more than a garment to be worn over one's true self. It not only protects us from the outside, but also does not let others see who we are, what we protect, what is truly our own: our essence. As a student of irony, Cahan must have been aware of the fact that Levinsky's fortune was made as a fabricator of garments that concealed. As an inspector of himself, Cahan must have been aware of the similarities between himself and his protagonist.

Ronald Sanders, whose biography of immigrant Jews, *The Downtown Jews,* writes, "Cahan, after a time of seemingly endless struggles had lived out an American success story. He was a fifty-year old smiling public man; his outer life had become the expression of two generations of Jewish immigrants....Who could deny that this destiny was the projection of something that had risen from deep within himself? And yet something else remained locked within. as ineradicable as it was inexpressible, which insisted that all this activity. All this success, all this mastery of an American reality was false, a violation of its own hidden truth" (Sanders, 391). Sander's also quotes an outburst that Cahan printed in a 1902 copy of the *Forward*: "My thoughts, my wish about h ow men should live in the world, my belief, my firm belief that it will someday be so--this has remained unaltered, it has stayed within me and wills to stay for as long as I remain in the world. How terrible

my life would be if these rays were not to glow in my heart, if my idea did not glow! My dear, my sacred idea! You are as young to me as I myself was twenty years ago; you give me light in my darkest moments, you give me a shred of self-respect when, in the humdrum course of things, I sometimes lost faith for a moment in my own decency....Oh! But now I am a practical man; I am no longer a greenhorn! I no longer think of my home town....I sleep in peace and look peacefully upon the world; I do not yearn....I know that I am right in being like this, that twenty years ago I was too green, but nevertheless...I yearn for my greenness of old....I yearn for my yearnings of twenty years ago" (Sanders, 270).

Cahan's quote brings us back to where we began; namely, with the notion of contribution. Now, over a century after its publication and, ironically, of public domain, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, stands as a prophetic book. Its artistic merits may be argued by literary scholars, however, its inherent theme cannot; that is, the slow creation of a spiritual ennui which has become almost pandemic within the American-Jewish community. It is a topic explored and exploited by Bellow's Augie March and Herzog, by Roth's Portnoy, by Richler's Duddy Kravitz and by any American Jew who realizes that without a palpable spiritual homeland he is spiritually homeless.

Cahan's contribution is, at the same time, both influential and insignificant. To be sure, it is a major contribution to the American-Jewish experience, to the experience of all Jews who have become assimilated into the mass market of American consumerism and materialism, and who have paid for that accumulation of the "good life" by nearly exhausting their spiritual roots in the attempt to overcome their “otherness.”; however, it is insignificant if it is not taken as a prophecy to be dealt with. The power in Cahan's work lies in its extraordinary perception of the final assault of the American experience on the

Jewish sensibility: the past and present do not comport well. Poignantly and prophetically, Cahan shows the inevitable result of such an aspiration nearly two generations before the fact; however, without an appreciation of that prophecy, of the contribution to the consciousness of the American Jew, which Cahan has bestowed upon Jews, we are doomed perpetually to exist in the vacuum of our own desiccated thoughts. Without a thorough understanding of that prophecy in its manifold implications and a willingness to reinstate the past prosperity of our roots, Jews are doomed to an existence of increasing dispirited faith while living within the luxury of American darkness. In short, American Jews are doomed to live like Cahan within the success of his failure, Levinsky. Should we not hear Cahan, should we choose not to understand him, and his bestowal will lie as fallow and insignificant as a neon candle upon the paper linen draped across a Sabbath table.

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THE PROSE OF OTHERNESS IN BRUNO SCHULZ'S *STREET OF CROCODILES*

What one knows of Schulz the man one can discover in the preface of the novel, *Street of Crocodiles*: small, sickly and murdered by the Nazis in 1942. He was exceptional on a number of levels not the least of which were his unique abilities to both draw and write and one sees in his prose an infinite reliance on the visual in terms of color, composition and imagery; often dark imagery, but imagery nonetheless.

But there are certain themes that return again and again in Schulz's work and it is to those themes that the essay shall discuss. Schulz lived in what was a Jewish-Polish-Ukrainian shtet**:** a small Jewish town or village formerly found in Eastern Europe. What was common to shtetl life was that it was composed of mad religious dreamers, marriage brokers, shop keepers and zealots of various descriptions and it was out of that mélange of characters, that tradition of shtetl inhabitants from which Schulz emerged. When one juxtaposes that life with the fact the Nazis occupied the shtetls and exterminated Jews between the years 1938-42 then one recognizes the foundations for an atmosphere replete in a horror one might only survive with the help of fantasy. In his *Great Works of Jewish Fantasy and Occult,* Joachim Neugroschel writes fantasy is often "an attempt at understanding what rational and daily experience fails to grasp: forces, notions, possibilities frequent in everyday life, often at remote points in our coordinates of infinity and eternity" (Neugroschel, http://www.ibiblio.org/yiddish/Book/Neugroschel2/jn-fantasy-forword.html). In addition to suffering as the "other" in terms of his Jewishness, Schulz suffered from a panoply of behavioral issues all of which he seemingly dealt with in his prose.

Though Jews did not regard the Bible as fantasy, they did resort to other texts for mystical inspiration. Much of these came from what has been called Hassidism which was

an Eastern European outgrowth of what was called Kabbalistc mysticism. Contrary to popular belief, Kabbalah did not begin with Madonna and her circle of Beverly Hills Housewives. Kabbalah literally means a "receiving", in the sense of a "received tradition". The word is an esoteric form of Jewish mysticism, which attempts to reveal hidden mystical insights in the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and offers mystical insight into divine nature. A delineation of the Kabbalah is beyond the scope of this essay, but to put it simply, "To understand the intellectual premises of the Kabbalah or of Jewish esotericism--which are those of esotericism or metaphysics in general—one must be imbued with the idea that its doctrines have spiritual contemplation, pure inspiration, or 'intellectual intuition' as their point of departure, and not the autocratic activity of reason" (Shaya, 7).

As Neugroschel contends, "seeking out fantasies, one actually tears existence into two parts: the rational and pragmatic, the irrational and mystical" (Neugroschel, http://www.ibiblio.org/yiddish/Book/Neugroschel2/jn-fantasy-forword.html). And though they may appear to be fantasies, they often preserve the "unity of human life. They show that divine and supernatural forces are quite human and natural; or vice versa: that the human and the natural are really integrated into a cosmos that allows for anything in the human or divine imagination" (Neugroschel, http://www.ibiblio.org/yiddish/Book/Neugroschel2/jn-fantasy-forword.html).

In combination with the horrors of the occupation, the "need for a reintegration of all experience, for a synthesis of all apparent contradictions between rationalism and fantasy" (Neugroschel, http://www.ibiblio.org/yiddish/Book/Neugroschel2/jn-fantasy-forword.html). was incumbent upon the inhabitants of the ghettoes. These two traditions,

rationalism and fantasy, are so interwoven as to point out a recurrent theme: the attempt to reintegrate mysticism and messianism into religion and practical experience.

But one also has to think about Schulz's relationship with women and how that fits into his prose as well as his drawings. The two are effectively inextricable. The best foundation for an understanding of Schulz's work is evinced by some quotes from Schulz's Letters and Other Writings taken from Jerzy Ficowski's, *Regions of the Great Heresy.*

1. Why criticism is insufficient to the work:

"I think that the rationalization of the vision of things rooted in the work of art is like the de-masking of actors. It is the end of the game, it is the impoverishment of the question of the work. Not because art is an anagram with a hidden key [and] philosophy is this same anagram--solved. The difference is more profound. In the work of art the umbilical cord is not yet cut that joins it to the whole of the problem. The blood of the mystery is still circulating; the ends of the vessels escape into the surrounding night and return full of dark fluid. In a philosophical interpretation we now have only extracted an anatomical specimen for an entire problem." (Ficowski, 30)

2. Being is forged in common:

"I need a companion. I need the closeness of a kindred person. I long for some affirmation of the inner world whose existence I postulate. To persistently cling to it by my own faith alone, heave it despite everything with the strength of its resistance--it is the labor and torment of Atlas. Sometimes it seems to me that with this strained gesture of lifting I hold nothing on my shoulders. I would like the power for a moment to set this weight down upon someone's arms, straighten up my neck and look at what I have been carrying.

I need a partner for undertakings of discovery. What for one person is a risk, an impossibility, a caprice stood on its head--when reflected in two pairs of eyes becomes a reality. The world waits as it were for this partnership: until now closed, confined, without further plans--to begin to mature with the colors of a dahlia, burst and open up inside. Painted panoramas deepen and open into actual perspectives, the wall lets us into a dimension formerly unattainable, frescoes painted on the horizon come to life like a pantomime." (Ficowski, 57-8)

3. On the willfulness of matter:

"There are no dead, hard, limited objects. Everything diffuses beyond its limitations, and lasts only for a moment in a particular shape in order to leave it at the first opportunity." (Ficowski, 65) [Ficowski writes: "As Father says in 'Treatise on Tailors' Dummies,' 'there is no dead matter. Lifelessness is only a façade concealing forms of life unknown to us.' This is the attitude of primitive man, but also of the child and the poet. To exist in childhood means to find oneself in the land of fairy tale, and Schulzian fairy tale is ruled by the same laws as mythology. Like any scientific theory or religious system, it reflects a coherence to which even the most peculiar events and metamorphoses in *Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* conform. As a whole, Schulz's stories are really reconstructions of a mythic 'book of childhood,' and he terms its symbolic prototypes the Book and the Authentic." (Ficowski, 73)]

4. Childhood and the task of reconstituting the Book:

"The books which we read in childhood don't exist anywhere; they fluttered away--bare skeletons remain. Whoever would still have in himself the marrow of childhood--ought to write them anew as they were then." (Ficowski, 27) "Were it possible to turn back

development, achieve a second childhood by some circuitous road, once again have its fullness and immensity--that would be the incarnation of an "age of genius," "messianic times" which are promised and pledged to us by all mythologies. My ideal goal is to "mature" into childhood. This would really be a true maturity." (Ficowski, 72)

5. The persistence of myth:

"All poetry is mythologizing and strives to reconstitute myths about the world. The mythologizing of the world is not over yet; the process was only halted by the development of knowledge, diverted into a side channel where it exists on without comprehending its own meaning. But knowledge is nothing more than the construction of a myth about the world, since myth lies in the very elements themselves, and there is no way of going beyond myth. Poetry reaches the meaning of the world intuitively, deductively, with large, daring shortcuts and approximations. Knowledge seeks the same meaning inductively, methodically, taking into account all the materials of experience. Fundamentally, one and the other are bound for the same goal." (Ficowski, 76) [In this passage [Ficowski takes] it that Schulz's term *knowledge* is roughly synonymous with *science*. And I would say that the term *poetry* here could be replaced by the word *literature*. Though I believe he would, I cannot say for certain however that Schulz himself would agree. In any event he himself was not strictly speaking "a poet."] As we manipulate everyday words, we forget that they are fragments of ancient and eternal stories that we are building our houses with broken pieces of sculptures and ruined statues of gods as the barbarians did. (Ficowski,88)

Just as the ancients traced their ancestors back to mythological unions with the gods, so I have attempted to establish for myself a mythic generation of forebears, a

fictional family from which I derive my real origins. In some such sense such "histories" are real; they represent my way of life, my particular fate. (Ficowski, 92)

The whole notion of mythologizing is at the core of Schulz's poetics. Not unlike García Márquez integrating his daily life into Macondo, Schulz integrates the daily life of Drohobycz into his mythologies. To deal with his poetics and the poetics of mythologizing, and how his acceptance of being something "other" as both a human and a writer, one can look at the story "August" since it is only in *August* does the narrator attempt to establish a sense of continuity through time through some kind of familial lineage, but even those tend to become discontinued and he becomes marginalized.

August

Clearly, the first paragraph delineates the relationship between the fictional autobiographer and his father. "In July my father went to take the waters and left me, with my mother and elder brother, a prey to the blinding white heat of the summer days" (Schulz, 25). What also is established is the relationship between father and mother, between the patriarch who chooses to leave the family "to take the waters" and the mother who has no choice but to oversee the children. In that sense there is a clear differentiation between what the father can do on an extra-mundane level and what the mother must do on a mundane level. The allusions to Oedipus are apparent, but it also introduces the readaer to the first significant woman in the piece.

By the second paragraph, Adela is introduced. She is the maid, but not merely a maid, because she is akin to Pomona, the Roman nymph who cared for fruits and orchards only. She spent all her time with her trees avoided men and was only won over by Vertumnus--the Roman divinity of seasons, changes and ripening of plant life. He is the

patron of gardens and fruit trees. He has the power to change himself into various forms, and used this to gain the favor of the goddess Pomona who, dressed as an old woman in order to spend time with her, finally reveals himself as himself.

So, Adela, “like Pomona emerging from the flames of day, spilling from her basket the colorful beauty of the sun—the shiny pink cherries full of juice under their transparent skins” (Schulz, 25) also brings apricots, meat, vegetables, etc. The passage directly follows the son’s complaint pertaining to the departure of the father. Later in the sectin, Adela, is presented as the omnipotent ruler of the house who takes on the previous position of the father and subordinates everyone to her own stern decisions upon the whole household. But in this opening scene she looks "like Pomona" while bringing from the market the basket full of fruits, meat and vegetables. It implies that all the fruits and the meat that Adela brings from the market are at the same time the attributes (or extensions) of her inner self since, like the Roman goddess of fruit, she also impersonates the earth and its fertility.

One notices how much all the foodstuffs brought by her from the market have conspicuous phallic/vaginal attributes: "pink cherries full of juice", "apricots in whose golden pulp lay the core of long afternoons", "sides of meat with their keyboard of ribs swollen with energy and strength", "and seaweeds of vegetables like dead octopuses and squids" (Schulz, 25). From that point of view, Adela appears as the almighty woman bursting with vital energy and strength, whose abundant oval shapes point at her consummate and self-sufficient nature. She is the real phallic woman "without a lack" (phallic deficiency) whose powerful image fascinates and overwhelms the narrator-son.

Certainly colors are significant especially yellows/sun-like colors; bright colors, brilliant colors. One reads a wide variety of metaphors as well: “naked heat of summer”;

silence of the shimmering streaks of air"; "squares of brightness dreaming" (Schulz, 26). But the lightness is not really associated with women since after tidying up, Adela would "plunge the rooms into semidarkness"; as colors fell "an octave lower"; and the room filled with shadows (Schulz, 26).

On Saturdays, the narrator would take a walk with his mother...out of the apartment, to Market Square, where it was oppressively hot and abandoned; down Stryjska Street past a chemist's shop; a few more houses and out of the city to the margins of the town. As they walk, the narrator becomes less and less ensconced in light than he is in darkness. As with Baudelaire, there is beauty in ugliness: "The suburban houses were sinking, windows and all, into the exuberant tange of blossom in their little gardens. Overlooked by the light of day, weeds and wild flowers of all kinds luxuriated quietly, glad of the interval for dreams beyond the margin of time on the borders of an endess day. An enormous sunflower, lifted on a powerful stem and suffering from hypertrophy, clad in the yellow mourning of the last sorrowful days of its life bent under the weight of its monstrous girth. But the naïve, suburban bluebells and unpretentious dimity flowers stood helpless in their starched pink and white shifts indifferent to the sunflower's tragedy" (Schulz, 28).

In many respects, the cacophony of images that Schulz presents to a reader almost becomes a burden to bear since it is often difficult to try to analyze what Schulz is writing about since the writing itself intrudes on the storyline.

2 The narrator continues to talk about the suburbs and the grasses, weeds and thickets. He writes, "There the untidy, feminine ripeness of August had expanded into enormous, impenetrable clumps of burdocks spreading their sheets of leafy tin, their luxuriant tongues of fleshy greenery. There, those protuberant bur clumps spread themselves, like resting

peasant women, half-enveloped in their own swirling skirts. There, the garden offered free of charge the cheapest fruits of wild lilac, the heady aquavit of mint and all kinds of August trash" (Schulz, 29).

What Schulz establishes with these very provocative images is a relationship between August and femininity. It is not coincidental that the narrator's father left in July and August is not associated with him, with the masculine, but with the feminine. And a particular kind of feminine. Not necessarily the matronly feminine, but the erotically feminine something that is replete in much of Schulz's drawings in which he, diminutive, as subject, subjugates himself to she, tall, the feminine.

But what is equally engaging is that on one side of the fence one discovers the narrator and his mother. On the opposite side of the fence is the third woman, Touya, the half-witted girl who is diametrically opposed to Adela, the erotic girl. In terms of vegetation, in terms of fecundity, there is a distinct difference. On the side of the fence with the narrator and his mother, there is verdancy. On the other side of the fence there is a rubbish heap with Touya and her bed. Touya is the madwoman of Drohobycz and the fence is a clear demarcation between the good and the damned.

Schulz writes, "The air over that midden, wild with the heat, cut through by the lightning of shiny horseflies, driven mad by the sun, crackled, as if filled with invisible rattles, exciting one to frenzy" (Schulz, 29). The overtly sexual.

Of Touya's appearance, Schulz goes into extreme imagistic details:

hunched up among yellow bedding and odd rags
large head, a mop of tangled black hair
face works like the bellows of an accordion
sorrowful grimace
chinks of small eyes
damp gums with yellow teeth

snoutlike, fleshy lips
she chatters in a monotone, dozes, mumbles, coughs
she's covered in flies
she moves "as if stirred by the scratching of a litter of newborn rats"; rags slip to the ground "like frightened rats"
dark, half-naked idiot girl
short childish legs
necks swells with anger
face of arabesques of bulging veins
hoarse animal scream
half-animal/half-divine breast
Thistles (weed, purple flowers, prickly) shout
Plantains (weed, broad leaves and spike of small greenish flowers) swell and "boast their shameless flesh"
"Weeds salivate with glistening poison" (Schulz, 29-30).

A half-wit, Touya "presses her fleshy belly in an access of lust against the trunk of an elder (tree with white flowers and red or blackish berries) which groans under the insistent pressure of that libidinous passion, incited by the whole ghastly chorus to hideous unnatural fertility" (Schulz, 30).

The narrative then shifts to the 4th woman, Maria, Touya's mother, who's also a maid. Adela (our first maid) once took the narrator to her house. "Maria's time—the time imprisoned in her soul—had left her and—terribly real—filled the room, vociferous and hellish in the bright silence of the morning, rising from the noisy mill of the clock like a cloud of bad flour, powdery flour, the stupid flour of madmen" (Schulz, 31).

3 In one of those cottages (presumably the time has shifted once again back to the suburbs and his walk with his mother) Aunt Agatha, our 5th woman (from Gk. Αγάθη for *good*), lives in lush green surroundings, "In these pink, green, and violet balls were enclosed bright shiny worlds, like the ideally happy pictures contained in the peerless perfection of soap bubbles" [which are ephemeral] (Schulz, 31). Juxtaposed with this fecund garden and surroundings on the outside one

reads the paragraph “In the gloom of the hall, with its old lithographs, rotten with mildew and blind with age, we rediscovered a well-known smell. In that familiar smell was contained a marvelously simple synthesis of life of those people, the distillation of their race, the quality of their blood, and the secret of their fate, imperceptibly mixed day by day with the passage of their own, private time” (Schulz, 31).

What we know of Aunt Agatha is the following:

> She is tall and ample
> With round white flesh, blotchy with rust of freckles
> She complains
> She has white and fertile flesh

Of her presumed attributes, the narrator speaks that “It was an almost self-propagating fertility, a femininity without rein, morbidly expansive” (Schulz, 32) and juxtaposes that with the introduction of Uncle Mark (the 2nd male figure after the father) “It seemed as if the very whiff of masculinity, the smell of tobacco smoke, or a bachelor’s joke would spark off this feverish femininity and entice it to a lascivious virgin birth” (Schulz, 32).

Uncle Mark is described as:

> Small and hunched
> With a face fallow of sex
> Gray bankruptcy
> Fate: in the shadow of a limitless contempt
> Gray eyes

At times, among the women, “he tried with a feeble gesture to raise an objection, to resist, but the wave of self-sufficient femininity hurled aside that unimportant gesture, triumphantly passed him by, and drowned feeble stirrings of male assertiveness under its broad flood” (Schulz, 33).

The narrator then speaks of things such as:

> Incompletely satisfied fertility
> Immoderate fertility
> Womanhood triumphing by fertility over the shortcomings of nature over the insufficiency of the male

Lucy, the 6th woman to be introduce, is described as having:

> Head overdeveloped
> Plump body
> White delicate flesh
> Doll-like hand
> Whose blushes revealed "secrets of menstruation"

Emil, the 3rd male to be introduced and the eldest of the cousins, is described as having:

> A fair moustache
> An expressionless face
> Bald
> Wearing elegant, expensive clothes
> A pale, flabby face
> A master of card tricks
> Who smoked long pipes
> Told curious stories

But it is Emil who "enchants" the narrator. "From the mist of his face, the protruding white of a pale eye protruding with difficulty, enticing me with a wink. I felt an irresistible sympathy for Emil. He took me between his knees and, shuffling some photographs in front of my eyes as if they were a pack of cards, he showed me naked women and boys in strange positions. I stood leaning against him looking at those delicate human bodies with distant, unseeing eyes, when all of a sudden the fluid of an obscure excitement with which the air seemed charged, reached me and pierced me with a shiver of uneasiness, a wave of sudden comprehension" (Schulz, 35). Clearly, Emil is a pederast and a child pornographer and his original intent of having the narrator sit "between his

knees" is obvious. That aside, it is Emil, who introduces the narrator not only to his sexual awakening (seemingly his first orgasm), but also to the possible homosexual yearnings.

By the end of story, the reader has been introduced to six images of women that follow in a kind of descendent order. The mother is merely alluded to, but we get the first images of the goddess-like woman, Adela and her antithesis, Touya, which in a way, complement each other. "Adela symbolizes the feminine super-ego, she is the woman who rules the world; Touya, on the contrary, seems to impersonate the feminine id which bursts with libidinal energies and reunites the forces of life and death. They are followed by the two images of 'castrated' women of whom the first, Maria, is wholly resigned to her lack, whereas the second, Aunt Agatha, desperately tries to deny it). And, in the end, the charming image of the young Lucy not yet 'mature; enough to take refuge to the sophisticated imaginary strategies to disguise her 'lack'" (http://brunoschulz.eu/en/archiwa/342/6).

Therefore, Lucy actually not only betrays her mother's desperate craving but also - indirectly - unmasks the "totalitarian" claims lying behind the all-powerful phallic images of Adela and Touya. Lucy in her naïvete unwittingly reveals what womanhood actually is: the permanent painful confrontation with the lack experienced already on the level of the Real and not in the imaginary refuge to the mythological fantasies of the Mother-earth (or alike) in which this experience becomes negated and repressed (http://info-poland.buffalo.edu/classroom/schulz/schulzA.html).

Of the male figures in the story…this really ties into the notion of pornography which is, of course, a male fetishized version of reality. As has been said about Kafka's vision of women, that what one doesn't see is the woman herself, only a portion of the body. In pornography, the image of the body is detached from the woman herself and she

then becomes superfluous. The utilitarian use of women is expressed quite effectively in pornography one of the most vivid examples of such is in the character of Clegg in John Fowles', *The Collector*. We see this in August in which Aunt Agatha suppresses the uncle's masculinity and in which Cousin Emil entices the narrator with inappropriate pictures. One also reads of pornography playing a significant role in the selection *The Street of Crocodiles* which, for the father, reinforces that sexuality resides in the servant girls who become dominating superiors while for the son sexual pleasure is taken through pornographic photos.

Tailor's Dummies

From the previous story *Birds*, the reader is set up for this story. In the previous story one reads how the father is linked with birds as a caregiver and somewhat obsessed with trying to set himself free of this world, eventually comes downstairs after Adela dispatched the birds "a broken man, an exiled king who had lost his throne and his kingdom" (Schulz, 50). It is in this section the narrator speaks so eloquently about the women in his life, especially about his mother though he somewhat valorizes his father when he says, "The affair of the birds was the last colorful and counteroffensive fantasy which my father, that incorrigible improviser, that fencing master of imagination, had led against the trenches and defense works of a sterile and empty winter" (Schulz, 51) though one page, after the father has "immured himself in silence," the narrator says, "We forgot him" (Schulz, 52). The previous paragraph tends to subjugate the role of woman and elevate the role of men. There appear to be two distinct worlds in Schulz's view: the mundane and the super-mundane; to the former belong women, to the latter men.

Juxtaposed with this one sees the introduction of Adela again and in the first part of the story she is not rebuked for her thoughtless and brutal vandalism in relation to the birds. With the "voluntary exile" of his father, the setting becomes bleak once again and "In vain did Adela put colored candles in all the holders, they were a poor substitute for, a pale reflection of, those splendid illuminations which had so recently enlivened the hanging gardens" (Schulz, 52). This declaration continues to acknowledge the antithetical relationship between Adela and the father.

The setting becomes oppressive both inside and outside the house. Mother could not come to terms with her dressing or she was napping. The mother plays a rather insignificant role here. The real relationship is between Adela and the father since the former he appears to be the ruler of the house; she occupies it spatially (she appears to be ubiquitous) and she is in constant charge of the mundanity of the house as opposed to the fathers supra-mundanity.

Several pages later, the seamstresses, Polda and Pauline, show up with a mannequin. A silent, immobile lady, a lady of oak and canvas with a black wooden knob for head. "But when stood in the corner, between the door and the stove, that silent woman became the mistress of the situation. Standing motionless in her corner, she supervised the girls advances and wooings, as they knelt before her, fittings fragments of a dress marked with white basting thread. They waited with attention and patience on the silent idol, which was difficult to please" (Schulz, 55). In her silence was also her majesty and she was the one who ruled the girls to sew appropriately. By this point in the section, we have the following situation:

5 females have been introduced: 3 active; 1 inactive; 1 inanimate

2 males have been introduced: 1 on the margins; 1 narrating the account

The narrator refers to the mannequin as a moloch “who was as inexorable as only a female moloch (Hebrew god to whom children were sacrificed) can be” (Schulz, 55). In the meantime, Schulz describes the seamstresses as they continue their work almost in a kind of provocative, sexual childishness. He writes they were hot, opened a window, “They fanned their flushed cheeks with the winter night air in which the curtains billowed—they uncovered their burning décolletés full of hatred and rivalry they had for one another, ready to fight for any Pierrot (a stock male character in French pantomime, with a sad white-painted face, a loose white costume, and a pointed hat) whom the dark breezes of night might blow in through the window" (Schulz, 56). They are alluded to as “prodigal parrots” and the cluster of material is looked at as a possible “carnival.” These bird-like images of the girls relate to the bird-like image of the father and in a way prepare for his return.

The father is re-introduced to one of their sewing sessions “undertaken in Adela’s absence.“ "The draft from the open door lifted the curtains, the girls let themselves be admired, twisting their hips; the enamel of their eyes glinted like the shiny lather of their shoes and the buckles of their garters, showing from under their skirts lifted by the wind; the scraps began to scamper across the floor like rats toward the half-closed door of the dark room, and my father gazed attentively at the panting girls, whispering softly: ‘Genus avium…if I’m not mistaken, Scansores or Psittacus…very remarkable, very remarkable indeed” (Schulz, 57). There are certain things here that are very puzzling. For example, Avium is not a genus. Avium is a bacterium of the genus, Myobacterium. In humans, it’s an infection of the lungs often associated with tuberculosis.

Scansores is an order of birds having the toes two before and two behind and including the parrots, woodpeckers, cuckoos, trogons, and toucans and ***Psittacus*** is specifically a genus of African parrots in the subfamily ***Psittacinae*.** What exactly the father was looking at beneath the girls' skirts that would lead him to that conclusion one can only speculate, but a suggestive guess might be their vaginas. This passage is followed by, "In return for his [father's] witty and elegant conversation, which filled the emptiness of their evenings, the girls permitted the ardent ornithologist to study the structure of their thin and ordinary little bodies" (Schulz, 57). These corporeal observations continued until Adela enters and partakes.

The encounter is only the beginning of a number of encounters, which always begin with the father lecturing. However, the allusion here to the erotic, if not the softly pornographic, is clear. That the three maids have the collective ability to induce in the father the erotic component removes him from his higher aspirations. This taken on a greater level is yet another approach to the Virgin-Whore motif and the ability of the female demonic to lay waste to the male of the species. Only after he's had his nose bonked by Adela can the father continue with his reveries of imagination.

The Night of the Great Season

One could make an argument for the relationship between the old way of living and a new capitalism (possibly due to the fact that oil was discovered in Drogobycz) in this section. But there's also an atmosphere of unmitigated fear shown in this section that seems to presage future events. The novel was originally published as the *Cinnamon Shops* in 1934 yet there are some uncanny relationships between this section and what will eventually transpire as Kristallnacht of November 9, 1938. "Adela leaned cautiously from

the window, her bright made-up face with fluttering eyes. She looked for the shop assistants in the dark courtyard, sensing an ambush. And then she saw them, advancing slowly and carefully toward her in single file, along the narrow ledge under the window which ran the length of the wall, now red from the glare of distant lights. My father shouted in anger and desperation, but at the very moment the hubbub of voices drew much nearer and the shop window became peopled with faces crooked with laughter, with chattering mouths, with noses flattened on the shiny panes. My father grew purple with anger and jumped on the counter. And while the crowd stormed his fortress and entered his shop in a noisy mass, Father, in one leap reached the shelves of fabrics and, hanging high above the crowd, began to blow with all his strength a large shofar, sounding the alert. But the ceiling did not resound with the rustle of angels' wings speeding to his rescue; instead, each plaint of the shofar was answered by the loud, sneering choir of the crowd" (Schulz, 132). The constant appeals to things like the shofar, the wand of Moses, allusions to the "fantastic Canaan", to Sinai and Baal fell on "deaf ears."

This scene is both reminiscent of Goya's painting, *The Burial of the Sardine,* and a precursor to the events that would unfold only four years later throughout Germany. What distinguishes Schulz's masterful prose from so many other masterful writers is the way he expresses his otherness on so many levels. His otherness as a Jew, his otherness as a diminutive man, his otherness as one who both adores and fears women, his otherness as a writer who also draws and as an artist who also writes, the ambivalence of, the burden of, otherness an otherness that would, in fact, end his days for effete and arbitrary reasons.

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MYSTERY, AUTHORITY AND THE PATRIARCHAL VOICE IN DACIA MARAINI'S, *VOICES*

Before addressing the notion of patriarchal voices and the subservience of the female voice to it one needs to situate Maraini's work in relation to other Italian writers who engage in the detective genre. In Tzvetan Todorov's, *The Poetics of Prose*, he argues that the classic detective story has a dual structure. It 'contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. In their purest form, these two stories have no point in common . . . . The first story that of the crime ends before the second begins. But what happens to the second? Not much. The characters of the second story, the story of the investigation, do not act, they learn. Nothing can happen to them: a rule of the genre postulates the detective's immunity. 'This second story, the story of the investigation, . . . is often told by a friend of the detective, who explicitly acknowledges that he is writing a book; the second story consists, in fact, in explaining how this very book came to be written . . . . The first [story] -- the story of the crime -- tells 'what really happened,' whereas the second -- the story of the investigation -- explains 'how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it. 'The first that of the crime is in fact the story of an absence: its [salient] characteristic is that it cannot be immediately present in the book. In other words, the narrator cannot transmit directly the conversations of the characters who are implicated, nor describe their actions: to do so, he must necessarily employ the intermediary of another (or the same) character who will report, in the second story, the words heard or the actions observed. The status of the second story . . . [consists in being] a story which has no importance in itself, which serves only as a mediator between the reader and the story of the crime . . . . We are concerned then in the whodunit with two stories of which one is absent but real, the other present but insignificant" (Todorov, xx)

Todorov's approach more or less corroborates what George Grella has written in "Murder and Manners: the Formal Detective Novel" when he writes: "It subscribes to a rigidly uniform, virtually changeless combination of characters, setting, and events familiar reader in the English speaking world. The typical detective story presents of people assembled at an isolated place-usually an English country house-discover that one of their number has been murdered. They summon the constabulary, who are completely baffled; they find either no clues or entirely many, everyone or no one has had the means, motive, and opportunity to the crime and nobody seems to be telling the truth. To the rescue comes an eccentric, intelligent, unofficial investigator who reviews the evidence, questions the suspects, constructs a fabric of proof, and in a dramatic final scene, names the culprit" (Grella, 30). Grella continues with, "It is one of the curiosities of literature that an endlessly reduplicated form, employing sterile formulas, stock characters, and innumerable clichés of method and construction, should prosper in the two decades between the World Wars and continue to amuse even in the present day" (Grella, 31).

And though detective fiction may have begun with Poe and become established with Christie, but it has taken significant stylistic turns before getting Maraini. In terms of Italian fiction alone, in Gadda's "*Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1957), he performs a calculated reversal of the rudimentary formula of the detective novel or *"giallo"* as the genre is termed in Italy because of the yellow jacket given to the first Italian series of detective novels launched in 1929 by the Mondadori publishing house. In thus reversing the investigative structure, Gadda transforms his *"giallo"* into a staging ground for an ethical tension between a regime of philosophical generality structured upon a system of resemblance or

equivalence and a competing sphere of vital singularity. This tension in turn reveals a strong ethical dimension at the base of Gadda's own characteristically elaborate baroque style, a style of irreplaceable terms that seeks to recreate the fluctuating proliferation of a very singular reality" (Amberson, 22-23).

The transition from Gadda's detection to Eco's detection is a transition from a kind of philosophical discourse to a postmodern one and in "*The Name of the Rose*, a novel that meticulously follows the narrative pattern of the classical detective story only to better emphasize its subsequent radical deviations from it, the ingenious amateur detective is completely deluded as to the nature of the pattern behind a series of murders and can in the end hardly escape form the trap set up by his own intellectual vanity" (Bényei, 89). And Bényei goes on to write: "*The Name of the Rose* , like most anti-detective stories, may be read as a traditional parody (although the metafictional dilemma of the inside/outside dichotomy is thematized in the novel in several ways; for instance, in its topography - much of the novel is concerned with the ambiguous relationship between the monastery and the outside world - or in the theme of the precarious status of the different heretical sects, characterized by various degrees of dissension and difference from the theological dogmas); it displays and parodies most well-known stereotypes of detective fiction" (Bényei, 92). But Eco is the penultimate postmodernist and one must make stylistic accommodations for that.

Before interrogating Maraini's *Voci,* one needs to return briefly to Gadda's "mess" and Todorov's "bipartite structure" in order to approach her novel since in their own ways they are very similar yet very different. There are some key similarities in terms of the investigative process and how the stories unravel. In his brilliant introduction to the English

translation of *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana,* Calvino writes that when Gadda began the novel in 1946 he intended to write both a murder mystery and a philosophical novel. "The murder story was inspired by a crime that had been recently committed in Rome. The philosophical inquiry was based on a concept announced at the novel's very outset: nothing can ever be explained if we confine ourselves to seeking one cause for every effect. Every effect is determined by multiple causes, each of which has still other, numerous causes behind it. Every event, a crime for example, is like a vortex where various streams converge, each moved by heterogeneous impulses, none of which can be overlooked in the search for the truth" (Gadda, v). So, too, does one find a vortex in Maraini's *Voci*, which begins with the journalist-cum-detective, Michela Canova's discovery of the murder of her neighbor, Angela Bari. In a way of linking Gadda's novel and Maraini's novel, Calvino continues with: "*And so it happens in this novel [Gadda's], where the murder story, little by little by little, is forgotten"* [My italics] (Gadda, vi). One of the key things one discovers in Maraini's novel that tends to sublimate the murder mystery is the notion of "voice." Not only does that apply to whether the voice is active or passive, but also to the multitude of voices, all spoken in present tense, that abound throughout the novel. One might think there would be significant research done on the novel relative to the notion of voice given the novel's title, but that would be a wrong assumption that will be addressed soon.

What Maraini's novel does to is exploit "the conventions of the classical *giallo* while departing from many of those conventions in interesting and significant ways. From the modus operandi of the two detectives, to the mode of narration, to the solution of the crime, the author plays with and upsets the norms of the typical *giallo*. Like Carlo Emilio Gadda, Umberto Eco, and Leonardo Sciascia, Dacia Maraini draws upon the most

conventional of genres, the detective novel, to produce an unconventional and highly original work of fiction"…And though "Maraini uses the detective genre to expose another pervasive and equally troubling scourge of contemporary society - the scandalous number of unsolved crimes against women in Italy and in Western society" (Cannon, 193). That leads us to the one other aspect that has seemingly gone unrecognized; namely, the voices themselves but specifically the overbearance of the "male voice."

The key question to think on is how does Maraini's novel fit into these defined aspects of detective fiction and how does the notion of the patriarchal voice situate itself? As Rosetta Di Pace-Jordan has written in her review of *Voci*, "Dacia Maraini has treated the problem of domestic violence before in her fiction. In *Voci* she uses the form of a murder mystery, a genre not generally cultivated by Italian fiction writers" (Di Pace-Jordan, 342). One can argue whether it is a genre "not generally cultivated by Italian fiction writers" especially when one considers the work of both Gadda and Eco, but Di Pace-Jordan has suggested something unique about Maraini's approach to domestic violence *vis-à-vis* the detective genre; however, Maraini diverges from Gadda and Eco in her approach to detective fiction through the notion of the patriarchal voice and how the patriarchal voice tends to subsume other voices which, more often than not, are feminine voices.

Whereas someone like Poirot deconstructs his murder mysteries through seemingly tangible "clues," Maraini's Canova becomes less absorbed with solving the murder than she is in the "sound of voices" and how those voices may or may not contribute to investigation. The novel is very clearly framed by the notion of voices and as early as page 2 of the novel, Maraini writes: "I can hear *voices* coming from the other end of the apartment and then suddenly I see Stefana's face in front of me with her sad, plaintiff eyes"

(Maraini, 2). Not coincidentally, the conclusion of the novel reads, "Should I get away from the fascination of the voices to enter into the logical geometry of written signs? Would this be wise action or only a way of escaping from the sharp-eyed and chattering bodies of the *voices*?" (Maraini, 248). So, those two passages seemingly act as a frame for the novel and a count of the number of times Maraini uses the word "voice "or "voices" or alludes to voice(s) or uses analogues of the word voice(s) runs into the hundreds; but stylistic things avail themselves at this point rather than an arbitrary word count.

First, Maraini uses what I call "authorial plot queries" throughout the novel and second, the entire novel is written in first person, present tense so the narrator's voice constantly avails herself in the present. An Authorial Plot Query is a technique in which the author *vis-à-vis* the narrator asks questions that advance the storyline. Authorial plot queries begin as early as page 4 with "But why did my neighbor [Angela Bari, the victim] come back so late at night?" or "Why did she go out in the morning so silently, looking tired and dazed? "or "And why did she sometimes leave looking so furtive and carrying with her nothing but a rucksack?" (Maraini, 4). The use of authorial plot queries goes back at least to Balzac who, in his novel *Père Goriot*, uses them constantly as a reader-reminder that he is in control of his novelistic universe while at the same time contributing to both character and plot development. It is apparent at the very outset of his novel when Balzac virtually begins the novel with: "However discredited the 'drama' may be because of the way it has been overworked and strained and twisted in these days of doleful literature, it must be used here; not that this story is dramatic in the real sense of the word, but perhaps some tears will be shed over it in the reading—*intra muros et extra.* Will it be understood outside of Paris? One may doubt it" (Balzac, 27). The main difference between how Balzac

uses them and how Maraini uses them is that her plot queries are specifically focused on the murder, the murder victim and the solution to the murder yet the narrator is also obsessed with different types of voices: colourless voices, metallic voices, thunderous voices, raucous voices, mellow voices, persuasive voices, and seductive voices *ad astra.* But the notion of obsession with voices also comes very early in the novel. After returning home from a trip and hearing about the murder, the narrator says, "I look at the suitcase lying on the floor *asking* to be opened and unpacked. The glass from which I've hardly drunk any water *asks* to be put back with the other objects on the shelf above the sink; this morning they are all *talking* as if they are impelled by an urgent need to be sociable. Even the soap seems to have a *voice*, raucous and breathless like someone who has had a throat operation. How the objects are *chattering*! As a child I used to read again and again a Hans Andersen story about how might all the toys in a house begin to *talk* among themselves…" (Maraini, 5). Though the italics are mine, Canova has an obsession with voices, voices from the animate as well as the inanimate that culminates in the final page of the novel that alludes to Michela's fascination with voices. Of course, the fascination with the sound of voices is in direct contrast to Maraini's 1990 novel, *The Silent Duchess*, a narrative that revels in its voicelessness, but, the one voice that appears and reappears (even in the *Duchess*) most strongly is the male voice. As Calvino alluded to with Gadda's work, little by little the murder story is forgotten and what remains throughout the story is the sound of the male voice and the imposition of the male authority *vis-à-vis* that voice which, in its own way, transcends all the other voices.

In many of her novels, Maraini has never avoided controversial issues that deal with feminist issues and she has clearly been in the vanguard of feminist literature that

interrogates the nature of the patriarchy and patriarchal discourse. One need not list the panoply of literary works that address that issue. What makes *Voci* so compelling in that regard is how Maraini interweaves her approach to detective fiction with the notion of the patriarchal voice.

After Caneva returns from a trip, her radio "partner" Tirinnanzi leaves a rather condescending voice message: "Hullo Michela, it's Tirinnanzi. Are you still not back from your refresher course? Ring me as soon as you get back. Bye" (Maraini, 4). Several pages later, he leaves a note for her that reads, "The director is waiting to see you. Bye" (Maraini, 9). Just why he's compelled to assert himself when no assertion is needed tends to reclaim whatever "authority" he may feel he's losing.

At this point, the director, Cusumano, is only referred to by Michela in pronouns; however, the one whose male voice seems to sound "louder" than others is Caneva's boss who, at least in the beginning of the novel, goes nameless. The "namelessness" is important in that the boss becomes the generic boss, the one whose authority countervails any other voice. His "patriarchal sounding," if you will, happens as early as page 9 when her boss invites her into his office. Her description of him is not flattering: "The director is younger than any of us. Exceedingly tall, with the appearance of a figure in a comic strip; casually dressed, pink shirts, worn leather jackets, yellow English-style shoes unpolished. On his face there is always a crafty smile that is quite winning" (Maraini, 9). He is clearly not meant to be the dapper Italian. There is nothing Gucci or Brioni or Versace about him. He is, for most purposes, a seemingly marginal male figure. What ensues for the next four pages is a "dialogue" between them yet one is hard-pressed to call it a dialogue since Canova says little and listens a lot. He begins with what one could call a "peroration" in

that his discourse is highly rhetorical and pragmatizes the virtues of broadcast marketing while at the same time subjugating Canova's voice. His opening dialogue actually becomes a kind of point of departure upon which a majority of patriarchal dialogue continues through the remainder of the novel. He begins: "Through current market research we're finding that the number of women who listen to the radio is expanding day by day. It is growing by leaps and bounds, I could say 'disastrously'. I see you disagree with my use of that word, but now let me explain I'm not trying to discredit women, you know me. The fact is that where women are concerned, even if we're only talking about housewives, there are so many emotional needs, the family, jealousy, small talk…in short, the greater the number of women listeners, the more we shall have to lower our tone, do you follow me? We've got to be rather low-key, this is what is needed…so no politics, no sports commentaries—and you know what an effort we made to bring our cover of sporting events to a level that has both style and language…because it is we who are the creators of language—I've said this many times—we are the legitimate conscience of Italy, a small conscience no doubt, a small part of the whole, but we are it and the feminine public is pre-linguistic, uneducated in the use of language; it has to get hold of crude emotions, that's why I'm talking about catastrophe" (Maraini, 9-10).

One need not go into a major deconstruction of his discourse here since it is fairly obvious it firmly establishes where he situates women and that would include Canova. While she is somewhat absorbed by the mystery surrounding the murder of Angela Bari (murder being an act that, in effect, silences her "voice"), Canova's boss is more concerned with the notion of demographic marketing and audience appeal or at least what he perceives as such: "Women want stories, do you understand that, Signora Canova? Love stories

above all, and then stories about death, suffering, terrifying things, but they have a chronic hunger for stories" (Maraini, 10). To which Canova replies: "One can write stories without having to make them treacle," I comment just to say something." Not to be overridden by Canova, he responds with, "No one can't…for the simple reason that women listeners want love, they expect romance" (Maraini, 10). His voice subjugates Canova's voice and regardless of the manner in which she defends herself, he overwhelms her voice by being authoritarian. Given that implied authority (and one can associate notions of authority with a kind of abuse or violence that Arendt alludes to when she writes, "if violence fulfills the same function as authority - namely, makes people obey - then violence is authority" (Klusmeyer, 139). In other words, the boss feels it is within his right to do that.

Even when he attempts to be supportive, to appeal to her journalistic expertise and professionalism, he is condescending: "We need to work for women and you know how to do that. By the way, I've never told you how good your programme on free time was. We received hundreds of phone calls." To which she replies, "Thank you" (Maraini, 10-11). Conceding that women want to know about crimes against women (presumably because of his market research) he decides to "put on a series of forty programmes about crimes against women, particularly those that go unpunished" and he wants her to "take it on." To which Canova replies that she'll think about it to which he counters: "Dear Signora Canova, I am disappointed. I do not simply want your agreement, that is part of your work here, but I need your sensitive participation, I want your enthusiasm to be communicated to the listeners, since the future of broadcasting in the current state of need appears to belong them by right" (Maraini, 11). She is about to tell him about the murder of Angela Bari when he interrupts her with, "I can imagine it, Signora Canova, I can imagine it…I

know how good your work is…so are we ready to begin?" (Maraini, 12). That question begs yet another question about pay and he states, "This time we will also pay for your overtime, I promise," he generously informs me, "you can have all the time you ask for and a substantial budget as well" (Maraini, 12). The statement implies that he's never paid for any of her overtime in the past, a subtle (or not so subtle) reminder, a tacit reminder at least, that women do not get paid for the same work as men. The chapter concludes with Canova realizing that "he has already forgotten me. He rests from the effort of seduction by taking refuge behind a printed news-sheet. The phone rings, he answers it cheerfully, and I melt away, saying goodbye with a nod of my head" (Maraini, 12). In a manner, the chapter really encapsulates the notion of voice and specifically corroborates what Arendt is alluding to about authority as violence and in this particular case how authority subsumes the female voice and as such is a form of violence.

The mystery behind Angela Bari's murder becomes less significant as the novel unravels and the "catastrophe" at the end of the novel isn't as compelling as how voices are revealed. Recalling Calvino's approach to Gadda, "And so it happens in this novel [Gadda's], where the murder story, little by little by little, is forgotten." The violence against Angela Bari is really two-fold: the murder itself and what the murder signifies *vis-à-vis* the notion of voice and how her voice is stifled by virtue of her death. For Arendt, the exercise of authority "depends on a willingness *on the part of others* to grant respect and legitimacy, rather than on one's personal ability to persuade or coerce" (http://www.humanists.net/pdhutcheon/Papers%20and%20Presentations/arendt.htm).

Without going into a lengthy discourse on Arendt's notions of authority and violence, one can see the interrelationship between and among voice, authority, abuse and

violence in Maraini's novel. The solution to the murder of Angela Bari is not as important as the death of her voice and her death (executed by a man) decries the cessation of the female voice *in toto*. There is a plethora of ways to read *Voci* not the least of which is for the detective element which is stated at the outset. But what is exceedingly obvious throughout the novel is the subjugation and marginalization of the female voice not in relation to Maraini's narrator (whose voice is not constricted by a male voice) or in the relation between and among women, but in relation to the male authority figures in the narrative. In that sense, the novel transcends the classical *giallo* by focusing less on interrogating the mystery and more on the subtle issue of verbal abuse, of a kind of violence that is less physical than other forms of abuse, but, in its own way, more pernicious.

Perhaps not so ironically, between Cusumano's offer to Michela about the forty programs devoted to crimes against women, 236 pages go by before she's asked if she knew that "…Cusumano has given up on those forty programmes about crimes against women? The owners (presumably men) didn't like it. And Vox Populi is wavering…it seems the theme frightens people off" (Maraini, 247). Initially, the offer was made by Cusumano in direct discourse. By the penultimate page of the novel, the offer is rescinded in indirect discourse. That change in voice is telling in that the first instance it's Cusumano's authoritative voice that makes the decision and the offer. In the second instance, it is someone else who informs Caneva mitigated not by Cusumano, but by the "owners" of the radio station. Whether through direct or indirect discourse, the novel is quite clearly framed by the authority of the male voice whether that voice is heard by or heard from.

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