

THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

By: Ethelwyn Rebelo

TITLE: Professor Julius Brenzaida

SECTION I: FORMAL CONSIDERATIONS

When weary with the long day's care,
And earthly change from pain to pain.
And lost and ready to despair,
Thy kind voice calls me back again:
Oh, my true friend! I am not lone,
Whilst thou canst speak with such a tone.

(From: 'To Imagination' By Emily Brontë)

The plot of my story is as follows: Frances, a psychotherapist, who works in a large state hospital, meets a psychiatry academic, Professor Julius Brenzaida. He offers to collaborate with her on research. Charmed, she develops an infatuation with him which she initially cannot express openly and which she sustains through her fantasy life. She becomes jealous when she learns of a mutual admiration between one of her colleagues and the professor and tries to get rid of this colleague by organizing her transfer. She is unsuccessful and her emotions intensify so that she decides to confess her love to him. He sidesteps the issue in what is probably an attempt to protect her from an out-and-out rejection. Her investment in the fantasy, however, prohibits her from reading his behavior accurately and she becomes psychotic. The story ends with her being hospitalized, her professional life damaged, but still indulging in her fantasies of the professor.

The first point to consider, in writing the story, was what genre would best suit such a drama? As Tolstoy has argued, the meaning of events is to be sought through selection and interpretation (1996). Artists should not subordinate technique to sincerity, meaning

rules technique and writers have to find or create meaning and then to organize their techniques accordingly. Matter, therefore, has to dictate form.

I had initially envisaged writing an epistolary novella. However my intention to focus on a particular fantasized love relationship and to deconstruct certain of its elements psychodynamically, led my supervisor to suggest that I turn to the long short story as my vehicle. In distinction to the requirements of the longer genres of novella or novel, this would require less exposition and complication. As it was also a story about the inner life of a woman, it would suit a first-person narrator.

Little happens in terms of external action, so the internal action had to be interesting and gripping. Drawn straight into Frances' consciousness through this first-person narrative, the reader would be able to access the internal motivations behind her behavior, her cognitions and her internal life. A sense of her nature would be obtained also by learning about her actions; by interpreting what she said and did not say about herself; by her choice of words; by how she related to others and how she believed that others related to her. I decided to further elaborate on my protagonist's interiority by means of memories, fantasies, dreams and lament. The minor characters were to be few and undeveloped. These could then be presented through the, at times, unreliable perspective of my first-person narrator. Some variation in time and place would occur, but these too would not be dramatic. The result would be a text which, I hoped, submitted largely to the Aristotelian criterion of unity of action, place and time.

Then there was the matter of voice. Alvarez (2005), in his book: *The Writer's Voice*, makes the point that real literature is fundamentally about listening to a voice. In a short story or a novel, the voice tells one a story. It also expresses feelings. However, voice is neither about medium nor message.

“The point is that the voice is unlike any other voice you have heard and it is speaking directly to you, communicating with you in private, right in your ear, and in its own distinctive way.” (p 15)

In order to feel that one is hearing a voice one has to obtain a sense of psychological coherence and authenticity in the text that one is concerned with.

I decided to adopt a fairly formal tone and voice. The ordered, formal texture of my tone would hopefully express something of the nature of the social mask my protagonist, Frances, needed to present to the world. Her instinctual life and possibly certain of its unconscious aspects would then be glimpsed through her dreams, fantasies and reminiscences.

Where she speaks of her need to improve her physical appearance, she goes through a list of things that need to be done in a rather matter-of-fact tone, much as one might make a list of renovations required by a house, for example (see Section 9). She thus objectifies herself by turning her body into some sort of broken commodity that needs to be fixed. In Section 10 she makes use of the same matter-of-fact tone to talk about the magic she needs to work on herself in order to ensure that a middle-aged old bat is turned into a young woman. In each instance the tone downplays the difficulty and enormity of what she is seeking to achieve and objectifies her, thereby critiquing her exaggerated concern with her physical appearance.

As both the narrator and the subject of the story, Frances offers the reader a view of both external and internal or intrapsychic events. In terms of Russian Formalism, these events are then presented in a mostly chronological order so that 'fabula' (the neutral story material) and 'sjuzet' (the artistic arrangement of the material) coincide. An exception to this structure is to be found in Section 21 where there is a fast forward to her hospitalization. She then informs the reader of an incident which occurred some time back, resulting in her present predicament. There are also flashbacks in which events of the past are recalled.

The reader is thus presented with the character-focaliser's unashamedly subjective view of people and events. It is accepted that, with this form, one is not presented with an unprejudiced view of character and events. Rather they are presented from a particular perspective which may have to be dissected and analyzed by the reader in order to determine what the most accurate interpretation possibly is.

The text is divided into sections which function as mini chapters and assist in the structuring of ideas, emotions and events.

Sections 1 – 5 form the introduction in which we are presented with the protagonist, her physical and emotional context, her meeting with Brenzaida and the roots of her present emotional predicament.

In Sections 6 – 16 we have the development of the story in which we are treated to a past sexual encounter, her interactions with her love object antagonist and an initial minor crisis.

Sections 17 – 19 deal with the protagonist's account of her attempt to nullify the threat posed by the crisis, her internet flirtation, need for romantic male attention and an intensification of tension leading to the second crisis. Her infatuation assumes delusional proportions leading up to the denouement in Section 21.

The remainder of the story in Section 22 deals, anticlimactically, with the protagonist's hospitalization and dim future prospects.

My projected audience consists of the sort of person who enjoys what I hope is thought-provoking fiction and who is interested in exploring emotions and relationships. Although my protagonist is female and linked to what might be described by some as women's literature, I would like the text to be of interest to men also. The gynocritics have taken the view that there is a profound difference between the writing of women and men and that the latter are unable to properly understand or identify with women's texts.

Although one would prefer to ascribe the relative neglect of women's writing and absence of enough female writers to broader economic and social obstacles, rather than to serious differences in the minds of the sexes, their viewpoint may be of relevance to my text. It is the story of an older woman's infatuation with a man, it alludes to the work of other women writers and it engages with traditional women's issues relating to body image and so on. Although women are admittedly not alone in suffering love obsessions; both men and women struggle with growing old, and the "metrosexual" men of our culture are as preoccupied with their physical appearance as women, it is also true that male readers are less interested in reading about these matters.

SECTION II: THEORETICAL REFLECTION ON THE WRITING

Julius Brenzaida was the emperor who ruled over Gondal, the imaginary country about which Anne and Emily Brontë wrote so profusely, well into adulthood. The title of my work should alert the reader acquainted with the Brontës' life that the text before them is, to some extent, about fantasy. It is, however, also about lust, infatuation and emptiness.

Although the character, Brenzaida, was Emily and Anne's creation, I refer, on a couple of occasions, also to Charlotte's texts. Her frustrated passion for her Belgian schoolmaster, Constantin Heger, which inspired her first novel *The Professor* and her final work, *Villette*, mirrors, to some extent, the unrequited love of my protagonist.

Like Frances, I too am a psychotherapist working for a State hospital. This has made the writing of this story easy on the one hand in that I have intimate knowledge of her work context. On the other hand, it has made it more difficult for me to adopt an uncensoring position as a writer. My biggest problem has related to my sense of allegiance to my profession and its preferred masks. I have drawn some strength from the writing of Iris Murdoch in this regard. In her essay on art as the imitation of nature (1997), she refers to Keats' statement that art is truth. She then asks what makes art important and what makes it good? Imitation alone cannot be the answer. Rather art is often viewed as good when it tells us something about the world. Some criticism of art is formal, she says, but a

good deal of it implies a morality of sorts with words such as ‘sentimental’, ‘pretentious’, ‘vulgar’, ‘banal’, ‘trivial’ and so on being used. As Murdoch indicates, such words impute a kind of falsehood to the work under consideration. She goes on to discuss various approaches to art from Plato’s hostility to it, through the Romantics including Freud and utilitarian approaches such as those of the Marxists, and others. Murdoch then makes the important point that art serves an important social function in telling society a great many truths and drawing attention to a whole lot of things which might otherwise not be noticed.

“Imagination, as opposed to fantasy, is the ability to see the other thing, what one might call, to use those old-fashioned words, nature, reality, the world. This sense of distance and otherness belongs to the good artist as it belongs to the religious man, and it is in this way that one might understand Tolstoy’s view of art as something religious. Imagination is a kind of freedom, a renewed ability to perceive and express the truth.” (1999, p 255)

At the end of the day, therefore, as an artist or writer one has to strive to reflect a perceived experience as truthfully as possible in one’s work. There may be many truths and there may be many forms that one may use to reflect them. These may include fantasy, magic realism and so on. Whatever one uses, it is important that a work hold the possibility for certain readers to have an epiphany of sorts.

Such a response may be the consequence of standard prose, it may come about as the result of a creative and poetic use of words, as is the case, for example, with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Anyone who has read this novel will be impressed with how she utilizes language to reveal the experiences of her characters. They will testify also to the fact that the novel is probably not always easy for an unsophisticated reader to understand. The subject of the role of complicated and at times obscure writing became the focus of a public debate between the Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi and the writer and critic, Giorgio Manganelli. Manganelli accused Levi of welfare terrorism in his argument in favor of clear writing and his association of it with health. Levi’s position

was, however, closely related to his need to make people aware of the horrors of the concentration camps in as unequivocal a manner as possible. It was also connected to his own need to exorcise the demons deriving from his own imprisonment. As Myriam Anissimov (1998) indicates in her biography of the writer:

“(He) wanted to give the Italian language the power to talk about extermination. He thought that clarity and transparency of language had the paradoxical capacity to give expression to darkness.” (p 369)

Levi was clear that he wrote because he felt a compelling need to bring order out of a chaotic world through his stories (1998, p 409). As with Sylvia Plath, however, his writing was clearly not enough to keep the darkness at bay and on 11 April 1987, he threw himself down the stairwell of the building in which he lived and in which he had been born.

The mimicking of an inner turbulence in writing involves great skill. It may involve the presentation, for example, of an unusual association of words in a form that challenges the rules of grammar, whilst still managing to communicate clearly. I have not gone so far, rather I have chosen to convey Frances’ emotional disturbance by having her talk about them; I make use of her dreams, fantasies and reminiscences; in Section 14, I have her express her insecurities in relation to the professor in a long paragraph consisting of a stream of long sentences all expressing some sort of vulnerability in relation to her work and to her relationship with him; and in Section 20, as she is losing her grip on reality, her conversation with her boss is presented to the reader, interspersed with ruminations and an account of her auditory hallucinations.

Irrespective of whether a writer chooses to create a text whose meanings are clear or whether he or she wishes to make them enigmatic and open to multiple interpretations, the craft of writing determines that after the writer has entered into the emotional life of the characters being depicted, then, to some extent, he or she must withdraw. This is because a good writer must communicate by showing us the emotional state, motivations

and conflicts of a character rather than by telling us about it, a process which involves an intimate engagement with the characters of a text and then a holding back from telling too much. It is quite difficult at times to be aware of what is more or less necessary, what should be retained and what should be excised. In my case I have needed to read and reread after intervals. This concern of course relates directly to Tolstoy's (1996) emphasis on the use of selection and interpretation in the creation of meaning. I had intended, for example, to go into some detail regarding Frances' mother's reasons for divorcing her father, but then came to the conclusion that this added information made it less easy for the reader to project his or her fantasies onto the father-daughter relationship presented. More detail about Frances' family dynamics grounded her story even more as a specific case and weakened the link with more universal Electral conflicts.

Once one has done one's best to excise the irrelevant or detracting elements of a story and once one has tried to be as truthful as possible, the next challenge is to attempt to sound new and different. The Russian Formalists invented the term "defamiliarisation" to refer to a poet's ability to describe a familiar object or event in such a way that it would seem new to the reader. It is an important dimension of all types of writing if it is to come across as fresh. I have attempted to make use of original metaphors and similes: for example Professor Thabethe looks like she is eating a lizard whilst she speaks to Frances and the latter's enthusiasm drops like frothy, heated milk taken off the boil when she learns that the man on the internet that she is flirting with is married. My intertextual links with the Brontës also have a defamiliarising effect on the material in that they add a further level of understanding and comparison to one's experience of the characters.

Poststructuralists such as Barthes (1977) and Kristeva (1980) have understood intertextuality to be a feature of all texts. They have argued that all texts engage with other texts, weaving connections of plot, character and allusion. This relates to the understanding that meanings are not transferred directly from writer to reader but that they are rather mediated through codes originating in other texts. According to this view, the meaning of an artistic text resides, not in the text, but in the reader and his or her

experience of other writing. Such intertextuality therefore refers to the subtle links with other texts which alert the reader to the codes in use.

In this story, however, references to the Brontës and their work are made explicitly, inviting comparison between my main character and these writers and their characters' experiences which have to do with desire, love and a female sense of selfhood. At the same time my connection to the Brontës are more allusions than the sort of intertextual links to be found, for instance, in Cunningham's *The Hours*. In this novel he draws the delicately suggested theme of same-sex love evident in *Mrs Dalloway* and in Virginia Woolf's life into his text, foregrounds it and elaborates it in his characters. Clarissa Vaughan, a modern-day Mrs Dalloway, lives with Sally Seton, a character whom the Mrs Dalloway of Woolf's novel had loved quite passionately in her youth. Her friend, the poet, Richard Brown is a Septimus Warren figure and he is dying of AIDS.

The narrator of my story reveals herself to the world as a fully-functional psychologist. What is concealed is her loneliness, her quiet desperation at growing old, her grief at the loss of her father and a sense of a life wasted in parts. This emerges, as indicated, through the use of a first-person narrative which draws the reader straight into the interiority and sense of selfhood of the protagonist.

She meets the charismatic, Professor Julius Brenzaida and falls madly in love with him. This crush, based though it is in desire, functions also as an escape from sad and negative thoughts. In her eagerness to make real her fantasized attachment to Brenzaida, a widening takes place between her originally calm and contented inner sense of self and her awareness that her aging persona may act against the fulfillment of her dream.

The influential Victorian psychologist, J.E.D. Esquirol, posited that "the condition of selfhood is dependent on having something to conceal: it is the very disjunction between inner and outer form which creates the self" (Shuttleworth, 1996, p 38). The self is thus to be located in the space between what is hidden and what is revealed to the world.

This mismatch between the inner self and its external presentation is very prevalent in the work of the Brontës. Charlotte's heroines, for example, were often mousy, plain women who housed passionate souls. Such a painful disjunction is evident also between the inner youthful self and desires of my own character focaliser and her outer aging presentation. Her name is 'Frances', thus linking her also to Frances Henri the woman William Crimsworth is in love with in *The Professor*.

Another character who suffers a conflict between her inner life and external persona is Magda in Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*.

"I live, I suffer, I am here. With cunning and treachery, if necessary, I fight against becoming one of the forgotten ones of history. I am a spinster with a locked diary but I am more than that. I am an uneasy consciousness but I am more than that too. When all the lights are out I smile in the dark. My teeth glint, though no one would believe it."

(Section 10 from '*In the Heart of the Country*' by J.M. Coetzee.)

Something of her tone is reflected in my character, Frances, hopefully capturing a possibly weaker echo of her sense of frustration and uncertain sanity. This is in keeping with the thought of Freud (1991) who destroyed the traditional opposition between sanity and madness by locating normality on a continuum.

As with Coetzee's novel, *Professor Julius Brenzaida* is structured in numbered sections expressing my protagonist's emotions, thoughts and fantasies. This structures and paces the work in such a way that the mental associations of the first person narrator are foregrounded. It also emphasizes the fact that this is a story about a drama which is significantly located in the inner life of the protagonist.

The theme of emotional incest in childhood further links my text to Coetzee's:

“The land is full of melancholy spinsters like me, lost to history ... wooed when we were little by our masterful fathers, we are bitter vestals spoiled for life. The childhood rape: someone should study the kernel of truth in this fantasy.”

Unlike Magda, Frances' life may be more meaningful, at least on the surface. However, she is somewhat disillusioned with regard to what can and cannot be achieved by her profession, both in the lives of her patients or clients and in her own life. She refers to existence as presenting people with “tsunamis” of difficulty.

Although her love for Professor Julius Brenzaida is primarily the result of her libidinal drives, it functions, as I have indicated, also as a defense against her feelings of sadness, anxiety and grief. Albeit unrequited, the sexual drama it creates in her life provides a scented whiff of connection to Magda's following statement:

“... lacking all external enemies and restraints, confined within an oppressive narrowness and regularity, man at last has no choice but to turn himself into an adventure.” (Section 248.)

Certain of my themes may be viewed as a commentary on the issues that preoccupied the Victorian women writers referred to in my text. These writers, like me, were interested in the position of women in society. In their case, however, they tended to emphasize women's vulnerability in both their social and personal contexts. Their stories expressed the need that individual women had for fulfillment and actualization in a society which did not provide them with the necessary conditions for this to occur. In *Villette*, by Charlotte Brontë, for example, Lucy Snowe has to travel to a foreign land in order to be able to make a living. In addition to experiencing a conflict between her Protestantism and the Catholicism of the country, she also experiences clashes between her feminine values and those of men. Charlotte's premises, furthermore, were that work was always useful and meaningful, women were entitled to intelligent occupation and the expression of their sexuality should be controlled, if not also sacrificing. My character-focaliser, in contrast, evinces a compelling, driven, aggressive sexuality which has much in common

with that of men. She too is engaged in a struggle to actualize herself, although she finds the value of her efforts questionable at times.

I have attempted to refer to her unconscious life by making use of a device I came across first in Robert Coover's *Spanking The Maid*, in which he has his character, the master, awaken from his dreams and as he tries to recall them, he becomes confused by words with similar sounds and linked images. Coover thus treats us to a very Freudian understanding of dreams as connected to the unconscious by means of associations. The character's confusion also serves to cue the reader into other possible layers of meaning. So, for example, in Section 10, I write:

“I wake from a dream in which I am wandering through numerous dark corridors edged with closed doors. One leads to the next, which leads to the next and the next and so on. I try to find the exit, without success. Eventually I come across a man dressed in a porter's uniform. I tell him I need to go home. He tells me to follow him and he leads me through a set of large wooden doors, out into a town square. I realize that the building I have just left is a museum and that the porter is Brenzaida.”

I initially planned to make use of repetition a good deal throughout the narration, a device inspired by the work of the Egyptian, feminist writer, Nawal El Saadawi, specifically to her *Woman at Point Zero*. In her work, it functions to transverse the boundary between prose and poetry and to connect the two, thus introducing an element of lyricism. Unfortunately, it did not work in my story. I think one reason for this may have had to do with the fact that there was nothing lyrical about the phrases and sentences I wished to repeat. Whatever the case, the repetitions came across as boring and unnecessary and so I removed them. A hint of them remains however in my repeated use of the phrase: “a woman who has grown old in the blink of an eyelid” (appearing in Sections 1 and 7). This I have retained to emphasize her anxiety and grief at fast-approaching, old age.

As I have indicated, the disjunction between the inner self and its outward presentation is highlighted in the text. Frances is a middle-aged woman who believes she looks old to others but who feels inwardly youthful. The story expresses the pain associated with the human condition of moving towards old age and death but continuing to feel young and alive.

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* deals with certain issues that I too attempt to engage with. In Woolf's novel, as in my story, consciousness both connects and disconnects us to others. It allows us to relate empathically and to identify with people. At the same time our emotions, fears, prejudices, wishes and so on affect the accuracy of our perceptions. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the psychiatrist Bradshaw who appears to be well-meaning, has little compassion or empathy for his patients. He struggles to imagine what it might be like to be the shell-shocked, Septimus Warren Smith. Virginia Woolf's characters become attached to people and places and struggle to adapt to changes, in particular the losses that take place over the years. As with Frances in my story, they are lonely and trapped in both their bodies and in the relentless passage of time. People like Bradshaw who approach life sensibly and pragmatically with an apparent insensibility of the horrors that underlie existence, engage superficially with life. In Virginia Woolf's time, that horror was particularly represented by the First World War. In Michael Cunningham's book *The Hours* with its intertextual links to *Mrs Dalloway* it is to be found in the Second World War and in AIDS. But horror is always with us, lurking in old age, loss, disease and death. It lurks too in our fundamental aloneness and disconnection from others. Septimus Warren Smith is in touch with the real pain of living underlying the social structures that have been created to assist us to cope. He is supposedly mad, but his awareness of the shadows accompanying existence ensure that he is in better contact with reality than his supposedly sane doctor, Bradshaw. Similarly, Clarissa Dalloway is in touch with the loss that time inflicts on us and with the disconnections between people. She organizes parties in a futile attempt to connect to others and to summon back the past.

In my story too there is a sense of life as being accompanied by a dimension of overwhelming difficulty or horror. My character Frances may be likened to a female Bradshaw forced to confront the truth of her existence as fundamentally transient and meaningless. She then defends against her feelings of grief by fantasizing about Professor Julius Brenzaida.

Frances' infatuation with her professor eventually takes on the characteristics of a delusion in its rigidity and immunity to the feedback that her feelings are not returned. Delusions are interesting in that it is often difficult to distinguish them from false beliefs. Like false beliefs, delusions may be arational, in that they are held in the absence of information to support them, or they may be irrational in that they are held in spite of contradicting evidence. They are relativistic and as such, dependent on the time and culture of the person involved. One culture's truth may be another's false belief or delusion.

It has been suggested that the process of reasoning involved is of greater significance than content in distinguishing between a false belief and a delusion (Persaud, 2003). This too does not discriminate between the two satisfactorily. Faulty reasoning and irrationality are pervasive in the belief systems of those not identified as deluded.

Perhaps an important factor separating the two may be the level of investment the person places in the belief. According to this viewpoint, a functional rational structure may be defined as one that preserves truth-value enough of the time to allow the individual to survive and to communicate socially in his respective community. Delusions are then not merely beliefs that are unlikely to be accurate; the deluded person's investment in them is disproportionate to their truth probability, as is evident in Frances' case.

Evident too is the function of her erotic delusion as a defense mechanism against her feelings of grief at her father's death and her anxiety at growing older. She is a psychologist who does research whose value she doubts and who tries to assist people in

dealing with suffering in their lives, feeling at the same time, largely ineffectual in battling 'the tsunamis' of existence.

From a psychodynamic point of view, Frances' delusion is related to her failure to discriminate between internal and external events. In papers on neurosis and psychosis (1924a, 1924b,) Freud suggested that the difference between the two classes of disorder could be located in the relationship between reality, the id and the ego. In neurosis, the ego, at the service of the demands of reality, defends against unacceptable id impulses by repudiating them, whereas in psychosis, the ego repudiates the demands of reality which render the id impulses unacceptable. This defense, initially termed 'disavowal' and later 'denial' is a defense against perception and unlike all other defenses, is directed outwardly rather than inwardly. Hence, as a result of some serious frustration by reality of a wish, the ego creates a new external and internal world in accordance with its wishful impulses. This becomes evident in my story in that after Frances realizes that there is a connection between Brenzaida and Geraldine Almeda, her belief in the former's love for her becomes more fixed.

The other theme of emotional incest and its effect on future romantic attachments, reveals, to some extent, Freud's notion of the repetition compulsion and the ideas of transactional analysis which posit that we have three ego states: that of the parent, the child and the adult. We fall in love with those whom we hope will be able to heal a fundamental emotional lack. Often this lack derives from childhood and resides in our child ego state. On an adult level we search for those who share our values and interests. But our child simultaneously searches for its ideal parent in the other. It is my hypothesis that women's vulnerability in patriarchal contexts lies at times in their desire for the father in the other.

Heilbrun (1988) identifies the namelessness of women in certain past and present social orders and the stories of most of these non-persons which have tended to end in marriage. The relationship of my protagonist to her professor will not end in marriage. Nevertheless she too is a victim both of her own definitions of herself as inherently old and

unattractive and of society's definitions. She feels forced to fit in also with the expectation that as a psychotherapist she should present a compassionate but controlled persona. She should not exhibit evidence of too much feeling. This Frances begins to do as she falls in love with Brenzaida. She becomes manifestly unwell and ends up suffering a psychotic episode. It is an event that will lead to destructive consequences for her career.

The dichotomizing split between sanity and madness imposed, by necessity, on clinical psychologists by their contexts mirrors other splits that have been imposed on women historically. Gilbert and Gubar (1980) in their *The Madwoman in the Attic* refer to Virginia Woolf's injunction that women must "kill" the "angel in the house" before they are able to write. She meant by this that we need to destroy the aesthetic idea through which women have been "killed" into art. The authors then go on to explore the dichotomy of angel versus monster that women have been placed in, in literary texts. Their angelic quality is often defined as a gentle passivity and self-less spirituality connecting men to death. They refer, for example, to Goethe's character, Makarie, in *Wilhelm Meister's Travels*, who is described as having no story of her own and as giving advice and consolation to others. Although my psychotherapist, Frances, is not story-less, she is expected to operate as a gentle, passive person, listening to the stories of others and attempting to heal and console. However, in her case, the forces of unruly nature are evidently within her from the start, ready to reveal her as a madwoman, if not in the attic, then tucked away in a hospital ward. She therefore transcends the above dichotomy in that we are aware of the various dimensions of her personality. This also undermines any split, one-dimensional view of her.

The angel in the house as a consoling, soothing figure is often found ministering to the dying in texts. Gilbert and Gubar (1980) make the point that she belongs to both the worlds of the living and the dead and as such is, to some extent, dead herself. This is true also of the angel part of Frances who is grieving the death of her father and the loss of her youth. She is disenchanted also with her work and may be interpreted as experiencing a sense of deadness which she attempts to enliven by fantasizing about Julius Brenzaida.

Furthermore, the aesthetic cult of fragility and delicate beauty to which we are still chained by the mass media so that eating disorders are proliferating (Szabo, 1996), also affects Frances. Like a typical angel female figure, she too concentrates on pleasing the object of her desire. This includes trying to lose weight and in improving her appearance generally. This is however the twenty-first century and the man she is in love with is no crass, patriarch. He is interested in her intellectual contributions. Frances uses this need in him too in her hopes of seducing him. The suggestion here is that although the roots of women's oppression may lie in social forces, a woman's desire may act also to sabotage her needs for independence and freedom. We all allow ourselves to be shackled in various ways by love.

Gilbert and Gubar (1980) refer to Thackeray's treatment of Becky Sharp as both a charmer and a monstrous sorceress. They make the point that the monster may not only stand behind the angel, she may be located within the angel, in her lower half. Relating to Patmore, Pope, Swift and others, they then explore the dread of women's flesh evident in these male authors. They term it a sexual nausea and use it to explain why real woman are often led to experience a fear and loathing of their bodies. This loathing is evident in Frances as she confronts her decaying body as a result of age.

It may not only be women who have been the victims of an imposed, false dichotomy. Men too, it may be argued, have been categorized as either "macho" or sensitive. I explore this to some extent in my characterization of Brenzaida, who can be terrifying and monstrous, according to hearsay, but who is experienced by his admirer, Frances, as boundaried but kind. Here a connection is also to be found with the work of E.M. Hull, who wrote the novel, *The Sheik*. My fantasized scenes with Sheik Brenzaida owe their genesis – partly – to scenes from this book. When it first came out, it scandalized people because it is about a young woman who is kidnapped and raped by a desert sheik who is later revealed to be a titled Englishman. However, it was later turned into the silent movie blockbuster of the early nineteenth century, starring Rudolph Valentino. Prior to Valentino, actors tended to present a clean-cut, all American, type of persona.

Valentino's characters, on the other hand, were he-men who took what they wanted but who were simultaneously charming, sensitive and who needed to be loved.

Finally, my engagement with the Brontës and their fantasy life hopefully foregrounds the role of fantasy in people's lives, both in motivating choice of love object and in inspiring creativity.

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