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Anna Chliewska and Sheena Wilson, November 2006

Writing After The Gaze: The Rupture Of The Historical

Introduction

Anna Chlewska and Sheena Wilson

“History is written by the victors,” said Sir Winston Churchill. That has, historically, been the case. However, the victors, the forefathers of the patriarchal historical representation of the world have been called into question over the last several decades. The articles in this collection give attention to authors who write from the margins, whether those margins are defined geographically, politically, linguistically, culturally, or as a matter of gender. Each author in this collection undoes, or is trying to undo the dominant perspective – the gaze – which is perceived as monolithic. The gaze, in film and literary theory, generally refers to the projection of male desires onto the female image. In non-gendered terms, it is the projection of placing identities onto less powerful subjects. The articles herein draw attention to those non-dominant voices and scripts that rupture the historical without destroying it, through their interactions with the gaze: the dominant.

A rupture of the gaze suggests a fragmentation and multiplicity of perspectives; the successful dissemination of these diverse positions requires an interdisciplinary approach. The issues discussed in this collection can only be understood in relationship to their historical contexts: social, political, and economic. To understand the rupture of the historical it is first necessary to understand the historical, and to consider the influence of attitudes, experiences, readerships, and scholarships involved in shaping the contemporary global context.

Globalization, Diaspora, mosaics and melting pots, multiculturalism, and feminism are all popularly invoked academic terms and phrases most often associated with the historical eras following Western expansionism, leading into the contemporary; however, this compilation is an interdisciplinary project that draws attention to the fact that these phenomenon are not purely the product of a post-colonial and post-Second World War era. Rather,

they are all part of the historical global experience, and to disregard the history of these phenomena falsely imbues the colonial and post-colonial with an aura of diversity and metamorphosis. While the world today is a mosaic of peoples and cultures that coexist and often influence one another through almost instantaneous exchange, it is true that as we encounter the first half of the twenty-first century, those instantaneous exchanges of information take place predominantly in and between economically powerful nations and their elites. This exchange makes for a hierarchy based predominantly on economic viability, and therefore plays a significant role in the viable survival of minor linguistic and cultural communities. The longevity of minor/non-dominant cultures, languages, and literatures is jeopardized because minor communities are perceived as less functional (i.e. economically useful).

The articles in this collection are bound together by their interest in the relationship between the periphery and the center, and are predominantly concerned with impacts of the center on the periphery. The issues related to identities, memberships to cultural, literal, economic or political systems addressed by the articles in this collection, span the feminist undertakings of women writers from the eleventh and twelfth centuries Japan all the way to scholarly attempts of language revitalization in twenty-first century Russia.

I Penning the Politics of Gender Identities

The first block of readings in this compilation, **Penning the Politics of Gender Identities**, addresses the issue of women’s status within patriarchal circumstances, over time and across nations: Valerie Henitiuk, Janice Brown, Anne Malena, and Theresa Green, discuss texts from spatial and temporal locals as diverse as Heian Japan and twelfth century France, to pre-modern and modern Japan, to twentieth century Morocco, and twentieth century Canada. What is common to these critical texts is their examination of women’s positions within socio-political paradigms that limit the power of women. The articles in **Penning the Politics of Gender Identities** assess the successes and failures of the primary texts, in their attempts to resist and subvert the status-quo for women from within their historical contexts.

Valerie Henriuk, in “The Innovation of Rape? The Motif of Bodily Integrity Functioning as a Feminine Discourse System,” explores two women’s texts; one is a classical Japanese text from the late-Heian period of Japan (the eleventh and twelfth centuries), *Genji monogatari* by Murasaki Shikibu, and the other is a French text from twelfth century Europe, *Elihu* by Marie de France. Henriuk’s is a comparative project that transcends spatial and national boundaries; she explores the motif of violation of corporeal and other boundaries in the *Genji monogatari* and *Elihu*, illustrating how these culturally disparate texts use similar strategies to protest the socially constructed vulnerability of female bodies.

Janice Brown, in “Belching Fire, Dancing Naked, Spitting Blood: Hayashi Fumiko and the Japanese Poetic Tradition,” discusses the writings of Hayashi Fumiko, a woman writer from the Taisho (1912-1925) and mid-Showa (1925-1951) eras of Japan. In this article Brown explores the relationship of pre-modern and modern Japanese women poets and writers within the contexts of literary history, criticism, and translation. She suggests that a greater understanding of the marginalized relationship of women’s poetry and literature to the Japanese literary canon can shed light on the canon as a construct from which women writers are often prohibited access.

Anne Malena, in “Tahar Ben Jalloun’s Female Images” discusses the renowned afore-named twentieth century Moroccan male author’s failed attempts to subvert the stereotypical images of Moroccan women. Malena analyses Jalloun’s representation of Moroccan women, their struggles, and their identities, which have been curbed by the fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic laws, but asserts that the author’s representation of female characters, remains (pre)scribed by his male gaze; therefore, the female characters in his novels do not disrupt existing stereotypes.

Teresa Green’s article “Silent Mythologies: Oralism and Innovation in Nicole Markotic’s *Yellow Pages*” examines the 1995 novel’s representation of Graham Bell’s wife, Mabel Bell, and her displacement as an *incomplete* body; the novel emphasizes the restrictions on the notion of female identity when they are compounded by those issues associated with the Deaf body. Green’s article analyzes Markotic’s innovative representations of the silenced

voice of a disabled female, who is not allowed to exist within an alternatively constructed world: a world of the deaf, where they are permitted to communicate with sign language. *Yellow Pages*, according to Green, is a criticism of the mid-nineteenth century Bell-era expectations placed on the Deaf, who are forced to deny their disability, and are required to live their lives as an imitation of an all-hearing world.

II Constructed Spaces and Identities

Constructed Spaces and Identities addresses displacement from new paradigmatic perspectives ranging from the economy of literary production, to the cultural displacement that occurs when virtual and real worlds collide, to the displacement that occurs when the emigrant/immigrant is the site of contact between two cultures.

Clemens Ruthner in “Why Modern Literature is a Monster: Canon, Innovation, and Cultural Economy,” focuses on the relationship between the (post)modern canon and Western culture, a relationship he names *cultural economy*. Ruthner examines the relationship between the reception of literature, its classification as literary, and its canonization, discussing the complex role of literature as a socializing tool for the youth, paying specific attention to the manner in which canons organize and condense cultural texts in the cultural memory, which in itself plays a crucial role in the reception of texts (existing and potential).

Ursula Reber in “Radical Reconstruction of the European World: Narrating Interactive Cyber Cities in the German Author Alban Nicolai Herbst’s *Andersweit [Other World]* Series,” analyzes the conditions of displacement created when virtual worlds exist alongside the real world in Herbst’s series of four novels published in 1983, 1993, 1998, and 2001. Herbst’s novels are a discussion of the role of time and space, in relationship to the construction of identity, with a focus on the relationship between VR/cybernetics. For Herbst virtual reality is a process of substituting reality, and the Internet takes over living space and transforms it into something new and different. In the end virtual reality causes reality to collapse. Reber discusses the fictional worlds of Herbst’s novels, where time and space are mutable and she argues that Herbst’s writing resists

“globalization without being explicitly critical or dystopian, but never end(s) up with canonization of local cultures” p. 109.

Mykola Soroka's article “Towards a structure of an emigrant novel: Laura Goodman Salverson's *The Viking Heart* and Illa Kirriak's *Synn Zemli*,” is an examination of the emigrant experience from the perspective of two Canadian authors (Salverson as second generation Icelandic Canadian and Kirriak as first generation Ukrainian Canadian) writing in pre-Second World War Canada. Soroka provides a comparative study of the two novels and their representation of emigrant consciousness, which he argues emphasizes positive integration as opposed to notions of fragmentation and alienation common to émigré or exile writings during that era. *Synn Zemli* is a portrayal of everyday life in a Ukrainian community. It is concerned with documenting the lives of Ukrainian immigrants. *The Viking Heart*, on the other hand, is a story of Icelandic settlers written in a romantic-realist style that transplants Viking mythology into the Canadian landscape to create ideological root for the Icelandic identity in the Canadian landscape and myth of nation.

III

Transition and Preservation

Transition and Preservation contains two chapters that deal with the inherent power-struggle between competing cultures, within the contemporary culture-scape, where one culture, language, and literature thrive at the expense of another: i.e. transition and preservation.

Tomasz Kamusella's article “Poland in 1945-1999: The Transition from the Soviet-Dominated Ethnic Nation-State to Democratic Civic Nation-State” offers a concise history of Poland's emergence as a country in ninth century and its on-going struggle to maintain itself as a nation with its own language and identity. Kamusella identifies various events that have shaped Poland, concentrating mainly on the twentieth century, and the transformation from communism to democracy. He details the struggles of minorities in Poland, and the various bills and laws implemented to either hinder or protect the rights of minority groups.

He argues that minority groups were never able to define themselves in a way that allowed for a sustained resistance of the dominant discourse, and therefore, Polish ethnicity was recuperated as a tool for political mobilization, in order for Poland to establish itself as a mono-lingual, mono-ethnic culture.

Lenore A. Grenoble in “The state of the art: writing, technology and the world's languages” reports – drawing on two case studies: the Maori (Australasian, New Zealand), and Evenki (Tungus, Siberia) – on how information technology impedes the survival of minority languages and cultures, while simultaneously promoting “global languages” in a global world. While the potential detriments of globalization on local communities are often derided as insignificant in relationship to the potential economic benefits and rapid spread of IT (Internet Technology), Grenoble argues that IT does not fulfill the promise of strengthening traditional speech communities. Communities whose language are at greatest risk do not have access to the internet either because of logistic or economic reasons. She points out the polemics of globalization and IT. They create hierarchies of language, which are intrinsically bound to the economic and political contexts of different linguistic systems. These systems are necessary defined by their relationship to world politics and economics, wherein certain minor languages may thrive, but many are in jeopardy of vanishing in the face of the major languages used by a majority of the world's population for international trade and commerce.

By virtue of a comparative analysis – whether it be a linguistic investigation, a political analysis, or the relationship of those areas to literature and artistic production -- these articles take a critical look at the impossible projects of cultural equality, while still emphasising the necessity to struggle for greater balance of political power through socio-linguistic and literary means. To write after the gaze is to rupture – to call into question – the monolithic paradigms that have threatened and continue to threaten the possibility for the voices on the periphery, whose relationship to the center is what creates a richness of linguistic and cultural diversity: something not quantifiable.