# Timing "I": An Investigation of the Autofictional "I" in Gail Scott's *Heroine*

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> [T]o say that narrative is the production of Oedipus is to say that each reader—male or female—is constrained and defined within the two positions of a sexual difference thus conceived: male-hero-human, on the side of the subject; and female-obstacle-boundary-space, on the other.
>
> ***Teresa de Lauretis***

Nicole brossard opens a short piece entitled "Autobiography" with the following statement: "I have just finished writing this short autobiography and now I feel like starting all over again, in the present tense this time, because the present tense is the only time-space where I have the impression of existing" (*FA* 117). Where does the writer of the autobiography exist, once it is written? The eponymous heroine of Gail Scott's novel, G. S., spends the duration of the narrative in her bathtub. She is suspended in time and space, a skipping record, a stutter unable to break memory's stranglehold. Her life is a fiction waiting to be written. Not surprisingly, perhaps, at its inception psychoanalysis was conceived of as "talk therapy." The hope was that if the patient could narrativize her heretofore-unspeakable ailments, then she could create a fictional self, a fiction of her self, and through that story she could heal. Psychoanalysis, then, may be considered a productive means of interrogating the subject

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and her psychical construction. For Peggy Phelan, "psychoanalysis is the performance in which the doctor and the patient interpret a symptom that gives the body temporal coherence. Part of the burden of establishing temporal order for the body … often falls to narrative since one of the things that narrative generates is temporal order" (55). However, as Lynette Hunter notes, deciphering the unconscious is not an easy task; rather, it requires "a kind of training" that is specific to each distinct reader-writer relationship (in Forsyth 209). If, as Barbara Godard puts forth, "writing and memory become irrevocably intertwined, creating an archive of texts and affects," then I agreed with her when she evinces that recognizing the past, recognizing memory is a "visceral sensation" that occurs in the continual movement of becomings (in Forsyth 192). In other words, writing and memory—autobiography—not only requires a body ("visceral sensation") but is also partially planted in the present stretching toward the future. What to do, then, with a heroine stuck in the past?

In this article I will take up both autobiographical writing and psychoanalytic critiques in an attempt to posit that Gail Scott, a creative writer who engages in semi-autobiographical writing, writes in a particularly performative way that gestures toward a new literary language for theorizing the formation of the female self and subjectivity.[1] In her article, "Love in a Cold Climate: Queer Belongings in Quebec," Elspeth Probyn notes that in Quebec "identity is an institutional project," where "constant appeals to belong" continue to be unavoidable (27). Following this, I would agree with Bina Toledo Friewald, who posits that Scott's subject-in-process in *Heroine* is not merely G. S. but also the Canadian nation itself ("Nation and self-narration" *passim*). Further, Scott herself has noted that, "The more we grasp that in a sense all of us have a double, perhaps multiple relationship towards the culture that surrounds us, the more we will be able to acknowledge differences, oppressions, hierarchies" (54). Psychoanalysis, itself predicated on the concept of a split or fractured primordial self, becomes a particularly useful metaphoric methodology for deciphering Scott's text.

Freud can be credited with the "corollary discovery" that "all autobiography is fictional" (Flieger ix). Reading Freud's postulation from a slightly different angle, I would suggest that autobiography enacts a fictionalization of the self on the part of the author as an attempt to capture on the page—

1 I am taking up Peggy Phelan's notion of performative writing, which she describes as being "different from the personal criticism or autobiographical essay, although it owes a lot to both genres. Performative writing is an attempt to find a form for "what philosophy wishes all the same to say" (11).

to textualize—the self-in-process. In this formulation the "thematization of memory" and the construction of an ever-present present tense "I" work to fix the author's self-in-progress within the space and time of the page. Nancy Miller forwards that autobiography functions as a blurred snapshot insofar as the autobiography presents a fractured, discontinuous self (165). Miller posits that autobiography's "thematization of memory, of a memory figured in *space* not chronology" operates by means of substitution (165). So-called real memories are reformatted to fit into the narrative the author wishes to construct. For Miller, the "self-portrayer constructs the 'I'" of the autobiography in the present tense, regardless of the fact that any writing of an actual event must, necessarily, take place after the event has occurred (166). Jerry Aline Flieger, also writing on the subject of autobiography, notes that in "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," Freud "maintains that all works of fiction are veiled acts of wish fulfillment, spawned by the writer's desire and somehow reflecting the writer's past history, the return of the repressed" (Introduction i). Meanwhile, Peggy Phelan proposes, in her psychoanalytic text on memory and mourning, that "performative writing enacts the death of the 'we' that we think we are before we begin to write. A statement of allegiance to the radicality of unknowing who we are becoming, this writing pushes against the normative ideology that insists that we die once in an expository, teleologically driven future" (17). I suggest that autobiographical writing is performative at its root.

This article takes up a work of autobiografiction, Gail Scott's *Heroine*, in an attempt to tease out the wish fulfilment which, Freud suggests, is at work in all autobiography.[2] Moreover, drawing from Susannah Radstone's work on memory and repetition, as well as Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, this paper will suggest that *Heroine* repetitively revisits the trauma experienced by a female subject during what Freud has figured as the Oedipal process, and Lacan has refigured with a mirror, in an attempt to write a new narrative for the female subject-in-process. I will suggest that Scott's stylistics work to (re)figure memory in both space and chronology as she simultaneously refigures both through the performative act of writing. That the text may be construed as potentially autobiographical only serves to enhance the complexity of our reading.

2 "Autobiografiction" will be used to mean fiction that self-consciously draws the reader's attention to the possibility that it is, perhaps, autobiographical. For example, in *Heroine* the narrator's name and initials ("Gail" and "G. S.") are identical to those of the author's (Gail Scott). Moreover, biographical details of the narrator are, seemingly, drawn from Scott's own life (namely her childhood town of Lively, Ontario, and the narrator's Anglophone roots).

In his work on narcissism, Freud suggests that the libido withdraws from the outside world and directs its energies upon the ego (67). Freud uses examples of sleep and sickness to depict the ways in which a libido pulls into itself in order to survive a threat (75–76). Narcissism, then, is an act of self-preservation. Scott's text, *Heroine*, is a tale told by the narrator to herself while she sits in the bathtub in her rented room at the Wakiki tourist hotel in Montreal.[3] It is important, as Nicole Markotic points out, to resist the inclination to situate the novel *in medias res*:

> [B]ecause in a sense the entire novel is *in medias res*, but post-coitus in that the narrator is already sunk into the "enamel embrace" (9) of the bathtub, already masturbating, continuing a series of orgasms whose origins trace back to before the first page. And the dénouement changes into a second ending; a second coming. (in Moyes 40–41)

Neither transient, nor tourist, G. S. has withdrawn from the outside world as a means of self-preservation. Further, already submerged as she is in the warm water of the bath, one cannot avoid making an association with both a body of writing waiting to be written, its narrative suspended in an inkwell, as well as the dual images of birth and blood. Here is a subject already engaged in the process of birthing herself. Significantly, G. S.'s ironic choice of lodgings indicates her unconscious need for exploration: just as a tourist traverses strange places in hopes of discovery and adventure, G. S. has readied herself for a (re)tour of her self.[4] As the *whole* of novel is situated *in medias res,* the reader is left to decipher what time might mean within, as well as outside, the frame of the text.

To further complicate the time and space of the text, G. S. first focuses not on her own body but on the figure of an outsider: a tourist is being berated by a French guard for his lack of familiarity with the terrain of Montreal. Moreover, the tourist is described only as "The Black tourist" (9). With neither a name nor a face, I suggest that the Black tourist functions as an uneasy frame for the text:

> Sir. You can on-ly put ca-na-dian monee in that machine. No sir. No foreign objects nor foreign monee in that macheen. The guard's finger runs tight under the small print. The wooden

3 The narrator is alternately referred to as "G. S." and "Gail." I will refer to her simply as G. S.

4 Scott defines *un retour éternal* as "the way we go back to the old knots, the old wounds, but also to the sites of pleasure, desire. This *retour* is profoundly human" (Daurio 160).

> squirrels in the rafters are si-lent. The Black tourist descends the steps with an astonished stare towards the telescope aimed at the city skyscrapers.
>
> I'm lying with my legs up. (9)

Markotic has observed that the "staccato 'Sir' of the text's first word … signifies the power of the patriarchy, and the inherited imbalance of who addresses whom" (Moyes 38). It is significant, as Markotic notes, that the Black tourist does not respond verbally—his alterity, not unlike G. S.'s—suspends him in the limns of linguistic authority. The Black tourist, I would suggest, functions as what Teresa de Lauretis calls the "space-off": an ever-shifting destination whose function is to point the eye not toward the space visible in the frame but, rather, toward the space "inferable from what the frame makes visible" (26). The reader must, like an analyst, train both the eye and the ear toward that which is not explicit. G. S. positions herself as an afterthought, a liminal figure that, like the Black tourist, exists on the periphery. Not unlike the landscape of dreams, the chronology and temporality of autofiction operate on a different psychical plane. Cathy Caruth's translation of Freud on this point is clear:

> All dreams … serve the purpose of prolonging sleep instead of waking up. The dream is the *guardian* of sleep and not its disturber … Thus the wish to sleep (which the conscious ego is concentrated upon …) must in every case be reckoned as one of the motivations for the formation of dreams, and every successful dream is a fulfillment of that wish. (267–68)

G. S.'s personal narrative is littered with interludes that threaten to displace her centrality. However, I read these timeless, dislocated interludes—the Black tourist, disjointed memories, the grey woman—as serving both to guard G. S.'s ego and to reveal some latent content of her unconscious. The reader is positioned as both voyeur and witness. As a voyeur the reader cannot avoid watching G. S. lying in her bathtub, legs up, weaving through her memories and dreams as she pleasures herself. Laura Mulvey points to Freud's theory of the pleasure one gains from voyeurism:

> [Freud's] particular examples center on the voyeuristic activities of children, their desires to see and make sure of the private and forbidden … In this analysis scopophilia is essentially active. (Later, in "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," Freud developed his theory of scopophilia further, attaching initially to auto-eroticism, after which, by analogy, the pleasure of the look is transferred to others). There is a close working here

> of the relationship between the active instinct and its further development in a narcissistic form. (60)

The reader has no choice but to watch G. S. in her bathtub, to gaze upon the words she offers and, in doing so, bear witness to her narrativization of her psychic wounding which is juxtaposed with her gratifying series of self-induced orgasms.

Whereas in film, as Mulvey points out, the voyeuristic audience "focuses attention on the human form," the voyeuristic reader must necessarily focus on the language issued by the subject of his/her attention (61). Here, the reader is witness to G. S.'s attempts to re-identify her self; she recites a mantra "a feminist (I kept repeating to myself) cannot be impaled by a white prince" (12). For Mulvey, cinema offers the voyeuristic audience an expression of the Lacanian mirror phase:

> [I]t is an image that constitutes the matrix of the imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the I, of subjectivity. This is the moment when an older [self] collides with the initial inklings of self-awareness. Hence it is the birth of the long love affair/despair between image and self-image which has found such intensity of expression in film and such joyous recognition in the cinema audience. (61)

Figured outside the theatre of images, the voyeuristic reader collides with language. G. S. revisits the site of recognition/misrecognition with a degree of mastery over language that she did not originally have. Susannah Egan has written about what she terms "mirror talk" in which "interaction between people, among genres, and between writers and readers becomes a crucial factor in the creation of one's subjectivity (quoted in Friewald, "Nation" 40). Thus, the reader watches G. S.'s attempts to rearticulate her self, while suspended in time. Unlike the cinema, the time of the novel, of G. S.'s introspective narrative, refuses a linear trajectory: "Tis October," "in Figaro's Café ca 1977," "We're on Rue Notre Dame," "Out the March window," "I guess dream time is like train time. No line between night and day, yesterday and tomorrow" (13, 20, 24, 27, 29). Moreover, unlike cinematic time, the reader may pick up and abandon G. S.'s narrative without missing anything. The reader watches, and bears witness, outside normal chronology.

Time is of no consequence to the narcissist, or, rather, external time is of no consequence; thus the fact that G. S. is reflecting on past crises, both personal and political, in a present that is somewhat detached from them is of no real import. To return to a psychoanalytic trope, the narcis-

sist removes herself from time the better to protect her ego, which has been wounded by its very formation. Says Freud: "We have discovered, especially clearly in people whose libidinal development has suffered some disturbance … that in their later choice of love-objects they have taken as a model not their mother but their own selves" (81). Freud speaks of a male subject here; however, as both girls and boys undergo Oedipalization I would suggest that this formulation works for a female subject, as well. As Freud notes, "we say that a human being has originally two sexual objects—himself and the woman who nurses him—and in doing so we are postulating a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in some cases manifest in a dominating fashion in his object choice" (81–82). Moreover, Freud suggests that the truest form of narcissism can be observed in women whose "certain self-containment … compensates them for the social restrictions placed upon them in their choice of object" (82). In short, the female narcissist may be conceived of being in self-preservation mode: her ego's wounding has been particularly violent. G. S. oscillates between analyzing her wounds and feeling restricted from doing so:

> Still, my love, I wonder do I look good because your arms keep me from bleeding all over town in search of love? Like I was before. Oh Mama why'd you put this hole in me? Stop. This is the city, 1980. A single raindrop squeezes out of the sky. Cut the melodrama, two lesbians told me back in 77. (31)

G. S. is unable to fix her attention on a single point of psychic wounding, on her re-assignment of her object choice, because at this point in her narrative the trauma continues to be too severe. Hence her repetition of the mantra "a feminist … cannot be impaled by a white knight" can be interpreted as a *retour éternal* whose purpose is to return her to both the site of trauma and point to a site of pleasure beyond that violence (12). Furthermore, her psychic trauma has been relegated to the realm of the unconscious.

G. S. is only able to access her wound through dreams, fractured memories, and free association. "Trauma's potency comes in part from how well it is contained," suggests Phelan, "when I say trauma is untouchable, I mean that it cannot be represented. The symbolic cannot carry it: trauma makes a tear in the symbolic network of the self" (5). Phelan goes on to question whether or not the specifically female psychic wounding during Oedipalization must be most traumatic in order to maintain the symbolic order:

> [I]s it the incestuous desire of the mother that is criminal, as Lacan argues, or is it that women's desire for anyone or anything always already (re)produces death within the masculine Imaginary? Insofar as the paternal metaphor is stabilizing, does it not arrest and freeze women's desire on the father and make her desire that which stabilizes the symbolic? Should her desire move from that rock, the whole edifice crumbles. (15)

To be interpolated into society (where heterosexual desire is upheld as the norm) is to undergo a process of re-identification.

Or, as G.S. muses, "maybe the unconscious isn't innocent" (76). Frank Davey has suggested that the lament, "Mama why'd you put this hole in me" (31) is addressed to an arbitrary linguistic signifier (Mama) and asks not only "'why did you let me be constructed as female?' But also 'why did you let me be human?'—why did you let me come to exist in language, hungering and desiring, split from certainty and wholeness, compelled to experience a linguistically mediated world as unfulfilling and unsatisfying?" (in Moyes 53). While Davey's reading is important, especially given the weight of language as it is conceived in Lacanian psychoanalysis, I am hesitant to utterly eschew the specificities and realities of the female body. Elsewhere, Scott has said that, "She'll [the heroine] never be Oedipus, or Hamlet. Her words will take her elsewhere. But where? Towards the mother?… [I]t's a double-sided journey, now towards her, now towards him (i.e. culture)" (*Spaces* 132). I would posit then, following Phelan's thinking, that the female subject is doubly wounded in her formation.

Freud takes up the subject-formation of girls in "Femininity." In this version, the girl's object-cathexis, like the boy's, is first for her mother. The mother's position as object of love energy is, again, based primarily on her position as food source. Once more, the trouble begins at the point when the girl's love energy for her mother is no longer simply related to nourishment from her mother's breast. In order to progress "normally," the girl must transfer both her libidinal-cathexis and her object-cathexis from her mother to her father. She unconsciously justifies such an illogical and violent move by resenting her mother for her lack of a penis ("Femininity" 153–58). Moreover, her resentment for her mother and her rejection of her own body in favour of the phallus causes, I suggest, the girl's rejection of a primary self. Similar to her male counterpart, the female child represses a visceral and integral part of her earliest subjectivity. To be interpolated into society (where heterosexual desire is upheld as the norm) is to undergo a process of re-identification. I suggest that the narcissism exhibited by a female subject is a primary step in the process of re-identification, or what Scott has called the "double-sided journey." Moreover, I suggest that the impulse to story the self, to "temporalize memory," can be read as an

attempt to master the primary wound—the primary narrative—of Oedipalization. What I suggest we recognize in *Heroine* is an attempt to revisit this wounding through a storying of the self that tries to enact the psychic oscillation necessary to revisit severely traumatic events. Thus when G. S. re-members chiding a rival who looks like their boyfriend Jon's mother, saying "women get old … so they won't be attractive to their sons," she feels a twinge of regret, and thinks, "I shouldn't have said that" (26).

The impulse to integrate one's self into a narrative is a natural one. Self-narration indicates not only the subject's conscious and unconscious desires but also the process by which a subject formulates him/her self (Eakin 99).[5] Moreover, as I noted earlier, psychoanalysis is grounded in self-narration. The language G. S. uses to create her self-narrative enacts a compulsion to repeat that is present in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Linguistic repetition, for Phelan, indicates "a kind of madness, not a psychosis exactly, not quite a neurosis. A self-conscious language that is in danger of becoming ensnared by its own narcissism" (11). Furthermore, Phelan posits that the early psychoanalysis of Freud and Breuer, circa Anna O., "involved an acting out, the performative elaboration, of the symptom" (50). Thus, G. S.'s repetitious attempts to form her self-narrative may, in fact, be read as an attempt to create a new narrative for the female subject-in-process, a narrative that is neither static, nor complete. Thinking of her own constructed narrative, G. S. discerns, "the heroine's inner time is fractured between light and dark, so she seems to move in circles" (144). The new narrative of the female subject must write itself into being, and it must be willing to double back on itself, to exist in two places at once. As Friewald has offered, "The narrator's melancholia in *Heroine* can be seen as the malaise of being 'homesick with nowhere to go' (Martin and Mohanty 206), of always being 'on the outside edge' (Scott *Spaces* 87), haunted by the fear of becoming … homeless" (37). A new narrative of the female subject, then, must confront the fear of the *unheimlich* possibilities within itself.

Before this new narrative can occur, however, the female subject must stage a resistance to Freud's repetition compulsion. She must, as Phelan suggests, create a certain temporal order:

> Psychoanalysis is the performance in which the doctor and the patient interpret a symptom that gives the body temporal

5 For a comprehensive study of the role of self-narration in the formation of subjectivity, see Eakin *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* .

> coherence. Part of the burden of establishing temporal order for the body, for both dancing and psychoanalysis, often falls to narrative since one of the things that narrative generates is temporal order. (55)

Acting as both doctor and patient, both writer and written, G. S. constructs a self-narrative that refuses temporal order by constantly fracturing the narrative structure she creates. Thus, *Heroine* exists on the edge of time: a Janis Joplin refrain echoes in G. S.'s head ("*There's no tomorrow, baby, its all the same goddamned day. We learned that coming here on the train*") while the calendar changes from the 1970s to the 1980s (12). On the edge of time, G. S. admits nostalgia for the passing era, "people were freer then" (13). In the bathtub, she repeats the passing decade to herself, continually returning to the devastating moments in her life. In order to create a narrative of her experience, G. S. evokes specific sites of memory as means to jump-start her narrative: a lost love, her departure from her home town and her mother, her self-enforced estrangement from her mother tongue, all these points reference the original wounding of her ego. She remembers a conversation with chagrin, "'Mom, I'm scared.' She answered (without even looking) 'Then get down on your knees and pray to the Lord'" (35). In returning to this site of separation from her mother, G. S. refuses the legitimacy of the patriarchal (Christian) order. In short, she gives herself permission to speak.

As I have already outlined, the Freudian female subject is estranged from her own body. This bodily estrangement demands that the subject adapt her conception of her self, both physical and psychical. Phelan posits that this adaptation severs the (female) subject's inherent connection with her body:

> This psychic adaptation—there is nothing endemic to time itself that makes it impossible for the body to relive it. And there is nothing in the body itself that makes such a reliving impossible. The body, in short, does not share consciousness' faith in narrative order. The uneven join between the body and a conscious relation to time is filtered through the expansive force of the unconscious. (59)

G. S. suspends her body in time both by situating it in the transient space of a tourist hotel and by suspending it in the womb-like atmosphere of the warm bathtub. By (re)constructing her self-narrative in a doubly strange space and time, G. S. re(constitutes) her entrance into the world wherein the tourist hotel acts as mother's body and the bathtub as womb. The

narrative she constructs is a means by which to give birth to her self. In Phelan's words:

> Patriarchal culture's violent renunciation of femininity has helped to create a feminine body capable of renouncing that renunciation. The feminine body is, profoundly, an auto-reproductive body, one that continues to reproduce symptoms and movement phrases that dance across the slippery stage of the paternal order. (68)

Camille Norton cautions that "when the body is left behind, and when the structure of discourse remains unaltered by one's participation in it, the practice of theory fails as a political action" (Moyes 28). By making her body and its realities unavoidable, G. S.'s narrative is a decided alteration of the Freudian psychoanalytic discourse of the female subject.

Birth is painful, however. As Phelan notes, Lacan's reading of Freud's work on narcissism places emphasis on the connection between grief and narcissism: "There is something originally, inaugurally, profoundly wounded in the human relation to the world … that is what comes out of the theory of narcissism Freud gave us" (quoted in Phelan 129). Put another way, the subject's entrance into the Symbolic—the social—like birth, is painful.

Freud claims that "we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love" (*ON* 85). While G. S. has indeed fallen ill, fallen into her self, because she is unable to love her self as it has been constructed for her by the patriarchal discourse, she is, throughout the text, on a journey of self-discovery in an attempt to prevent her "little ego" from folding in on itself and disappearing (167). However, as I have outlined, G. S.'s journey is wrought with fissures and gaps in chronology. "I should pull the plug," says G. S., "make coffee, sit at my little table. Except that big black crack in the arborite really bugs me. Reminding me as it does my little novel has certain inconsistencies" (170). Liz Stanley suggests that, in women's autobiography, these gaps and fissures are not only unavoidable but may also tell the reader—even the author—something more:

> Many women already make use of the gaps, disjunctures and silences which exist between audit selves and actual lives, and this ads up to a pattern of disengagements from or rejections of organizational requirements, some of which are intended as resistant, others of which may not be intentionally resistant

> but constitute fissures, rifts and failures in organizational functioning nevertheless. (in Cosslett et al. 56)

I would suggest that G. S. unconsciously slips from English into French as a means by which to bridge the "disjunctures" between her conscious self and the traumatized, pre-linguistic self she attempts to locate. Friewald suggests, "Scott uses language as a speculum (to borrow Luce Irigaray's figure) that allows her to explore the interiority of a female subject" ("Uncanny Edge" 60). Not only do I agree with Friewald's postulation, I would take it further and suggest that we read the slippages between languages as the actions or *performance* of female interiority. By shifting seamlessly between the two dominant languages of Canada, Scott's female characters embody the internalized lingual movements that they as women must learn to manipulate. G. S.'s discomfort with her colonizing, patriarchal Anglo-ness (no "mother" tongue here) is juxtaposed with her desire for embodying the French culture almost entirely. She struggles, though, with the direct emotiveness of French each time she encounters her friend Marie: "Bonjour, qu'est-ce que tu deviens?… French people always say that. What are you becoming? And I don't know what to answer, the question is so precise. I shake my head, almost crying: 'Rien'" (101). Rather than becoming nothing, however, G. S. is still in the indefinable process of becoming. Until she engages her body—that is, until she gets out of the bath and moves into the world—she remains caught in the fault line between her traumatized self and her self-to-come. As one of her compatriots at a women's meeting interjects, "too bad for you … now when are we going to talk about our relationship to language?" (129).[6]

However, at this point in the narrative, G. S. is still submerged in her watery memories. Susannah Radstone suggests that "in remembrance, it is memory's relation to subjective coherence that comes under scrutiny. Instead of suturing the division between the writing 'I' and the 'I' that is written about, texts of remembrance tend rather to undermine the resilience of that suture, by emphasizing memory's tenuous relation to the 'past'" (205). G. S., like the heroine of her narrative, like the self she attempts to create for the future, operates on the edge of language; she operates on what Scott herself has called elsewhere "the *uncanny* edge of language" (quoted in Friewald 64, emphasis added). An Anglophone living in French-speaking Quebec, G. S. oscillates between her uncomfort-

6 It is notable that the woman who shouts this is identified as "another lesbian" (129). Wittig has written that lesbians are not women because they exist outside the social sphere; hence, it is especially poignant that it is a lesbian who demands to discuss women's relationship to language.

able (past) m/other tongue and the (present) Québécoise among whom she lives. The linguistic oscillation depicts G.S.'s frenetic state of mind: although she remains in a bathtub, her mind is literally unstable. She cannot, will not maintain a single linguistic identity:

> I said: "I think I've seen a ghost. A real-life scene from a nightmare I once had. Everything came back exactly how it was." "Trésor," dit-il, "La science dit que la repetition n'existe pas. Les choses changent imperceptiblement de fois en fois …" I didn't reply, concentrating as I was on how to be a modern woman living in the present while at the same time finding out who lied, my love, me or you? (15)

Furthermore, as her narrative continues, G.S. begins to suspect that a single linguistic existence is detrimental to the psychic well being of women:

> Leaning forward, very excited, I say women must have a different relationship to language BECAUSE OUR LIVES ARE DIFFERENT … Marie's head is cocked, listening carefully… She opens her pretty mouth, about, I think, to praise again … "C'est que tu ne sembles pas pouvoir faire coincider du tout qu'est ce que tu vois comme vie possible avec qu'est-ce que tu es, qu'est-que tu vis actuellement. You almost said it earlier: it's as if the words or maybe the syntax have to be invented to close the space between what you're living now and future possibilities. Your life is an illustration of this problem." (130)

G.S.'s ties to her linguistic and temporal memories restrict her from attempting a conscious reinvention of the words and the syntax that will allow her to move into the future. She is, at the moment of her conversation with Marie, unable to exceed the normalized structure of time. Further, as I have observed earlier, G.S. realizes that the heroine she is in the process of constructing is also fractured: "[T]he heroine's inner time is fractured between light and dark, so she seems to move in circles" (144). As Radstone observes, "[B]oth psychoanalysis and philosophy concur that it is the recognition of death—a recognition which comes from the other—which 'temporalizes' time" (207). G.S.'s inability to move forward is due to her nostalgia for the past she has left behind: the past of the mother, the past of a unified self prior to cognition. Significantly, this prior "unified" self is unified within the patriarchal English tongue, which has always-already predicated G.S.'s relationship with her mother on a primal loss. Speaking of this kind of self-reflexive nostalgia, Radstone suggests

Significantly, this prior "unified" self is unified within the patriarchal English tongue, which has always-already predicated G.S.'s relationship with her mother on a primal loss.

> [N]ostalgia is self-reflexive and critical. Its aim is to work through the fantasies of plenitude that subtend a nostalgia prompted by the loss of the motherland. This nostalgia arguably revises, however, not "all loss," but a specifically feminine loss: the little girl's Oedipal loss which, as I argued earlier, inaugurates not a temporality of future promise but one of nostalgic longing for the fantasized past. (216)

In order to work through her nostalgia, G. S. must pull in: her narcissism is both a means of self-preservation and a means of self-reflection. Barbara Godard, in an early review of *Heroine,* observed that the narrative operates as juxtaposition between the "interpellation of nostalgia and the distancing of disruption" (51). G. S. recognizes her repetition compulsions—her narcissistic withdrawal and fractured ego—in the narrative she is attempting to construct. "NO," she says, "I can't let her [the heroine] disintegrate like this" (170). This recognition of her compulsion to repeat and reiterate the site of her trauma is an indication that this time the female subject will have a different narrative.

Cathy Caruth describes the psychic effect of revisiting a traumatic event as indicative of "a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and that is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing" (89). Caruth's article focuses on Freud's case study of the father who, after standing by his child's deathbed, falls asleep and is awakened by his child in a dream. The child speaks to the father in the dream, and the dead child's words wake the father, who then rushes in to find that the child's body is being burned by a fallen candle (Caruth 94–95). For Caruth, what is important is that the awakening functions as a means of revisitation:

> To awaken is thus precisely to awaken only to one's repetition of a previous failure to see in time. The force of the trauma is not the death alone, that is, but the fact that, in his very attachment to the child, the father was unable to witness the child's dying as it occurred. *Awakening*, in Lacan's reading of the dream, *is itself the site of a trauma*, the trauma of the necessity and the impossibility of responding to another's death. (96)

In *Heroine*, as I have suggested, G. S.'s repetition functions as an attempt to respond to, to remember, to give language to her original psychic wounding. Lacan himself gestures toward this theory when he asks "[I]s it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should

have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it—in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin?" (quoted in Caruth 97). The unassimilable, for G. S., is her traumatic process of Oedipalization. While Caruth posits, citing Lacan, that the story of the father is a story of "a survival inherently and constitutively bound up with the address of a dead child. This story itself has a double dimension," I would suggest that G. S.'s auto-narration is "inherently and constitutively" twinned with her dead, pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal self (98). Thus, in response to Scott's assertion that "She'll [the heroine] never be Oedipus, or Hamlet. Her words will take her elsewhere," G. S.'s auto-narration cannot be content with uncovering this twinned subjectivity. Rather, she must take her words, her body, her narrative of a self-in-process, out of the tub, into the world, and off the page into the future.

G. S.'s narrative comes to a close only when it begins on the final page. Here, G. S. embraces her former self by way of re-inscribing her present self—and her self-to-come—into the narrative:

> Walking back down The Main, just past the staircase where the mother hugged her lost girl, she thinks: Yet I feel this terrible violence in me. In any story, it will break the smoothness of the surface … In the grey light, she's standing on the sidewalk (snowy of course), her pale red curls her one sign of beauty. Looking to the left, the right.
>
> She— (183)

Maurice Blanchot, a writer whose work is genuinely concerned with the oscillation between autobiography and writing the recognition of death suggests:

> The proof that a book of autobiography respects the center of truth around which it is composed may be that the center draws it toward silence … There is something to be said which one cannot say: it's not necessarily scandalous, it may be quite banal—a lacuna, a void, an area that shrinks from the light because its nature is the impossibility of being brought to light, a secret without secrecy whose broken seal is muteness itself. (151–52)

Or, as Friewald has suggested, that lacuna "whose broken seal is muteness" can be real through the series of language-less orgasms that begin before the text and continue beyond its end. G. S. refuses to fix her self in the present. Rather, by launching her narrative off the page, she regenerates herself through the writing of her own life. The "destruction of life," Derrida says,

"is only an appearance; it is the destruction of the appearance of life. One buries or burns what is already dead so that life, the living feminine, will be reborn and regenerated from the ashes" (26). *Heroine* structures itself beyond the boundaries of chronology. Through the integration of different languages, different temporalities, and different memories, Scott's G.S., who is and is not Scott, not only gestures to a multiplicitous subjectivity, one that can only be formulated on the edge of language and of consciousness, but finally enacts it, walking the body of the heroine off the page and into the yet-to-be-written future, *le futur* which, to paraphrase Brossard, certainly will be *la future*.

*Heroine* structures itself beyond the boundaries of chronology.

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