

**FROM ALIENATION TO SIGNIFICATION: CROSSING
DISCURSIVE BOUNDARIES IN A RE-VISITING OF
WORKING-CLASS WRITING:
THE CASE OF DAVID STOREY.**

Maria Margaroni

Working-class writing in Britain in the decades of the '60s and '70s has mostly been perceived in the light of a humanist discourse, one which either severed the texts from the specific sociopolitical context that gave birth to them (thus, rendering them into "harmless" statements about the human condition) or – when it chose to illuminate the specific context – it was only to project it in terms of a transcendental battle of essences (e.g. "Us" vs "Them," "working-classness" vs "middle-classness," etc.). By demonstrating how this discourse functions in the more consciously written works of David Storey (one of the most important working-class writers at the time) I intend to question its "innocence" or, indeed, "naturalness," underlining its connection with the materialistic patriarchal society of the time. What is more, by throwing light upon the loci where the discourse is forced to confront its paradoxes, my aim is to draw attention to "the pleasures and perils" of signification, thus crossing the discursive/critical boundaries imposed on the interpretation of working-class literature and violating the "sacredness" of textual as well as authorial intention.



The 1960s was admittedly a remarkable period for Britain. An air of unrest, discontentment and change was blowing in both the social as well as the literary scene and an angry army of youth emerged eager to carry out raids on what was seen as enemy territory: i.e. the areas of economy, politics, education, literature.

In the area of literature many were the young men and women (all products of grammar-school education) who felt the need – what is more, the obligation – to use what once was a distinctly enemy weapon, in other words, language. A large number of writers appeared who – coming from a working-class background – sought to give voice to a group of people which was until then seen as dumb or incoherent. Alienation became the keyword; the word-key, indeed, not only to the social problems of the time but also to the texts written about them. Discourse of "Us and Them" dominated and a great confusion ensued concerning the rigidity of the boundaries between them.

With the "Glorious '80s" and the Thatcherite cult of individuality – a transplantation of the American dream in Britain – things changed considerably.

Alienation just was not relevant anymore and the discourse of "Us" seemed to stink of homeliness and camphor. Within this new context, working-class writing was pushed to the margins and firmly allocated to the sphere of Literary History. In the '90s the few remaining working-class writers (in their 50s now) still have to struggle to get something published and continue to stumble over a critical eagerness to dismiss their works as demonstrating the signs of senility. Clearly, for the majority of critics nowadays the picture of working-class writing resembles that of Dorian Gray: i.e. the signs of age and tiredness on it are interpreted as revealing the exhaustion of the issues with which it dealt.

Curiously enough, the critics who adopt this attitude towards working-class writing fail to perceive the exhaustion of their own medium, the tiredness of the discourse they use to approach, interpret and dismiss these works. Like Dorian Gray they are unable to see behind their own youthful appearance and continue to base their criticism of working-class authors upon the notions used to interpret them thirty years ago!

It is my firm belief that the time has come when we could at last cross the discursive/critical boundaries imposed in the area of working-class literature. Indeed, it is about time to start questioning and challenging all discursive/critical boundaries which force us to talk about workers and alienation in working-class writing, women and feminism in women's writing, black people and slavery in black people's writing. The aim behind this crossing of discursive boundaries is not to "discover" other themes and preoccupations in texts seen only in terms of a dominant meaning but to demonstrate how this dominant meaning is "staged" in the texts and in what ways it excludes, combats and is combated by other meanings.

In the present article I intend to demonstrate the necessity for and importance of crossing discursive/critical boundaries in working-class literature by attempting a re-reading of what has largely been seen as the main issue in the works of David Storey, a writer of working-class origins who met with considerable acclaim during the decades of the '60s and '70s in England.

Storey emerged as a writer with *This Sporting Life* (February 1960) and *Flight into Camden* (October 1960). His working-class origins, the realistic surface of these novels and their working-class subjects made the classification of the young author an easy matter. As a result, he was confidently placed beside the well-known documentary realists of the '60s, John Braine and Alan Sillitoe. In the two decades that followed Storey published six novels, staged eleven plays and received ten literary awards for both his fiction and drama. The 1980s marked a decline in his literary career (as in the career of most working-class writers), a decline which did not stop even after the staging in the last two decades of three plays (*Phoenix*, 1984; *The March on Russia*, 1989; *Stages*, 1992) and the publication of two novels (*A Prodigal Child*, 1982; *Present Times*, 1984) as well as a collection of poetry (*Storey's Lives: Poems 1951-1991*, 1992).

Ever since his emergence as a writer, the interpretation of Storey's novels and plays has been conducted within a broadly humanist discourse, one

introduced and put forward by Storey himself in his interviews, reviews and articles. At the heart of this discourse lies alienation, a term seen mostly in relation to the self and defined as a state or, rather, a plight of the self. Clearly then, the discourse put forward by the writer and imposed on his novels and plays is one built around and held together by a conception of the self as alienated. Considering its significance, it would be interesting to trace the origins and development of this conception; that is, delineate the circumstances that brought the alienated self into being, lay bare the parameters that defined it, follow its course through Storey's work and the critics' interpretation of it.

However, rather than reproduce Storey's account of genesis (as this unfolds in his autobiographical essays and interviews) I will venture to re-read and, by translating it into a different (Michel Foucault's post-structuralist) discourse, re-write it. As a result, my narrative of the alienated selfhood genesis will not be a history of cause and effect, a chronicle of events based on continuity and narrated in linear order. On the contrary, I will seek to transgress the limits of history itself (or, at least, the traditional conception of it) towards the domain of genealogy, as Foucault has defined the term.¹

Thus, instead of focusing on its continuities (continuities which create a false impression of it as unified and consistent) I will attempt to throw light on the discontinuities, inconsistencies, contradictions that characterize the concept of alienated self in Storey. My aim in doing so is to expose the artificiality, precariousness of it, emphasize its dependence upon the cultural context that shaped it and, at the same time, lay bare the interests served by it, illuminate its function within the particular discursive environment.

In accordance with this aim, I intend to abandon any universal and class/gender or race-blind terms used so far (by both Storey and critics)² to refer to the alienated self. Rather than Man or a generalized notion of human being, the object (and indeed subject) of this genealogy will be no other but "the subject" – the term used in its post-structuralist, Foucauldian sense. Cleansed of any universal connotations, "the subject" acknowledges its own temporal, unstable existence. What is more, by exposing the intimate relationship between subjectivity and subjection, "the subject" draws attention to the powers exercised by its identity and through the process of its identification. As a result, in founding my genealogy on the alienated subject (as opposed to one based on the alienated human being or Man) I am hoping to put forward a new conception of Storey's alienated self: a conception according to which the plight of the alienated self might not after all be alienation but its classification, its discursive construction as such.

As Storey has confided to Martha Duffy in "An Ethic of Work and Play" (66-82) the birth of the first of the line of alienated subjects found in his works took place on a train journey between London (where Storey enjoyed the independent and creative life of an art-student at the Slade) and Leeds (the city he felt oppressively tied to because of a contractual obligation to play football there at the weekends). The unusual circumstances of the birth can hardly be

neglected as they were taken (by both Storey and critics)³ to reveal the “nature” of the subject itself: the fluidity – almost perilousness – of its position and identity, its inability to connect with either the northern or southern termini of the journey, its inhabitation of a vacuum-world beyond time and place, suspended in the void between the two different poles and what these came to stand for.

Apparently, the subject that emerges from Storey’s “journey through a tunnel” (both the actual journey and Storey’s narration of it – we could hardly distinguish the one from the other) is a divided subject, one oscillating between two different spatial as well as existential locations. Indeed, according to Storey, division seems to be an integral part of the alienated subject, its essence or, in fact, its point of origin, the womb within which the alienated selfhood was first conceived. As the author emphasizes in his influential talk to *The Listener*, the series of alienated subjects populating his works were born out of his wish to make sense of, give expression to and rationalize “the situation to which, not undramatically, I [he] felt I [he] had been condemned.” That is, the condition of being “continually torn between” what he thought were “the two extremes of his experience”: on the one hand, “a self-absorbed, intuitive kind of creature,” on the other “a hard, physical, extroverted character” (160).

In the absence of a more relevant discourse (one that could help him make sense of his dichotomies as conflicting cultural and discursive subject-positions), Storey resorted to the divisions of Western dualism. Thus, he adopted its universal categories (“body” vs “soul”) and saw the conflict within himself as part of the eternal battle between them, a battle believed to take place in an equally timeless, immutable area: i.e. the self of Western Man. By talking himself into the ideology of Western dualism, Storey could not help but appropriate the universal, essentialist, humanist discourse coexisting with it. As a result, he came to share the humanist view of Man implied by this ideology; that is, a view which perceives Man as eternal, universal, a kind of ideal being whose “real” essence and, as Leonard in *Radcliffe* asserts, his “only salvation” is “wholeness ... completeness” (267) or, using C. G. Jung’s term, “individuation.”⁴

It was this view of Eternal, integrated Man that the divided self of Storey’s experience was compared to and eventually differentiated from. The differences separating them were considered very important and played a significant part in the genesis of Storey’s alienated subject, as this was shaped in the writer’s literary and non-literary works and as it has developed after its appropriation by critics. In fact, it appears that it was because (and in terms) of these differences that the alienated subject in Storey was constructed, its characteristics determined by those of the humanist subject, its “nature” isolated for (and defined as) being at odds with it.

Thus, seen in the light of the integrated humanist individual, Storey’s divided subject was perceived as “torn-apart”⁵ and “incomplete” (Harris 58), lacking a part of its own nature. Being incomplete, the subject was also seen as

having failed to develop what according to Judith Dotson Harris is its “full potential as a human being” (34), in other words, having failed to achieve its natural state of wholeness. Consequently, (indeed, inevitably, if one shares Harris’ confidence when affirming that “an incomplete human being is doomed to alienation”[58]) the subject in Storey became an “alienated subject” – the term implying a self estranged from what is essentially “human nature,” a dehumanized self, or (better still) “un-natural.”

From what we have said so far, it is apparent that a mythology with the alienated subject at its centre has developed out of Storey’s encounter with the humanist ideology of Western dualism. As the writer’s interviews and criticism of his works reveal, this mythology has played a significant part in the construction and interpretation of his novels and plays. Coming to be a powerful discourse within that of the texts, it has imposed itself upon both creator and creatures, on the one hand determining the author’s intentions and artistic identity, on the other shaping his characters’ subjectivity and fictional existence.

Born out of his wish to articulate his dichotomies, characters in Storey (especially those in his earlier works which even the author thinks are “too explicit ... terribly anxious about the material”)⁶ are intentionally created and shaped to fit in to his humanist-given categories. Arthur Machin, the narrator and protagonist of *This Sporting Life*, is a case in point. According to the writer’s essay in *The Listener*, the character was consciously created to embody “all the alien, physical forces of this life” (160). As a result, he is constructed as a physical dynamo, violent and destructive, vulgar and insensitive. Being a first-person narration, the style of the novel is adjusted to suit the narrator’s temperament and convey a matching picture of his world. Thus, emphasis is given to external rather than internal detail, while the imagery is intensely physical and immediate, dependent to a great extent on strong, sensory verbs.

The strikingly different “reality” portrayed in Storey’s second novel (*Flight into Camden*) was intended to reflect an equally different sensibility; in the author’s words, that “which ... the character in the first novel had set out to destroy” (*The Listener* 161). Thus, in contrast to *This Sporting Life*, *Flight into Camden* is not concerned with external, sensory detail. Rather than focusing on outer action, it evolves around the narrator’s (an educated, female narrator) personal relationships, recreating her thoughts and the intensity of her emotions. The physical world – if present – is always kept in perspective, always related to people and to the narrator’s feelings for them.

The influence of Storey’s dualistic categories on the process of characterization in his works can hardly be missed in his third novel (*Radcliffe*) where the two protagonists (Leonard Radcliffe and Victor Tolson) have consciously been shaped in a way that would make them function as the eternal symbols of “Man’s two extremes.” It can also be detected – though not as easily – in most of Storey’s later novels (*Pasmore*, *A Temporary Life*, *Saville*, *A Prodigal Child*) and even in a few of his plays, despite the fact that these “are certainly less anxious, less turgid in their use of the material” (Ansorge 33).

From our discussion so far it appears that, with their conception, Storey's characters receive an identity which is larger than themselves, beyond their feelings and desires, – what is more – beyond their very existence. In receiving it, characters are condemned to a life in the service of this identity, a service which, in the most consciously written of his works, they are given almost no freedom to reject.

Once they have been pinned down to one or the other category of western dualism, characters are automatically perceived in the light – or, rather, in the shadow – of the humanist integrated individual and projected as one-dimensional, incomplete, and unnatural. Hence the imagery of dehumanization that seems to dominate the author's portrayal of them. Indeed, both physical and spiritual characters are depicted as lacking in life or humanity. Physical characters, in particular, are extensively associated with machines or likened to animals.⁷ Spiritual characters, on the other hand, appear deprived of any trace of life (even a fake, mechanical one) and are portrayed as "absent" or "dead."⁸

To complete this picture of alienation, the setting against which these characters move, come together and, eventually, separate is that of a waste land. There is emptiness and decay everywhere. The North, full of ruins of castles and great houses, seems utterly taken over by the inhuman, gigantic bodies of mines or factories. The South, squalid and degenerate below the surface, looks pretentious in its appearance of glamour and luxury.⁹

Against this apocalyptic setting – reflection of their alienated state and their failure to escape it – Storey's characters become images of "the fallen" and are, as a result, burdened with the fallen subject's sense of guilt and burning desire for salvation. Not surprisingly (given Storey's account of his own "journey through a tunnel") these feelings are most dramatically manifested in the characters' – literal or metaphorical – journey from one to the other side of the waste land. It is mainly for this reason that the motif of the journey has such a prominent place in Storey's writings. Indeed, its role is very important in *Flight into Camden*, *Pasmore*, *A Prodigal Child*, *The Farm*, *Saville* and *Cromwell*, while in works like *This Sporting Life*, *In Celebration*, *The Contractor* and *Sisters* its presence is more implicit, its function subtle. In all of these works, however, the movement to a new place (i.e. subjectivity) or back to an old one emphasizes the characters' inability to stand still and thus assume a fixed position at an ideal point in space. In so doing, it exposes the characters' unstable, divided nature and serves as a testimony to their fallen, alienated condition.

Yet, what functions as the ultimate sign of the characters' alienation is the strikingly recurring figure of "the other": a character, that is, who serves as the protagonist's *doppelgänger*, his/her opposite (and, therefore, complementary) element. Lover, brother or parent, "the other" embodies in his/her "otherness" the characters' incompleteness and inadequacy. She/he reflects their desolation, rouses their feelings of guilt and kindles their desire. Furthermore, in being separate and – for all that – somehow related to them (in love or kinship),

the figure of "the other" lays bare the severity (the irrevocability even) of the scission keeping them apart while pointing out, at the same time, the undesirability and the unnaturalness of the fact.

Apparently then, the figure of "the other" in Storey has served as a most powerful means through which his main characters experience their unnaturalness, their incompleteness. In experiencing it, they are forced into an awareness and acceptance of their situation, an acceptance which is particularly reflected in the characters' undying desire for "the other," their obsessive struggle towards a (re)union with him/her. Indeed, the very insistence on (and recurrence of) the struggle (despite its usually adverse outcome) suggests that characters have not merely accepted but appropriated the discourse imposed upon them, thus conforming to their "fictioned" rather than fictional identity.¹⁰

To summarize, in the first half of this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which Storey's humanist discourse on alienation has influenced the writing as well as the interpretation of his novels and plays. In my demonstration I have repeatedly emphasized that the conceptual basis of this discourse is the idea of an eternal, universal Man with a fixed, unchanging nature. As I have already pointed out, the idea has in many ways been consciously respected and reproduced by the texts. In other – more subtle – ways, however, it has been violated and challenged, forced to confront its own limitations and paradoxes.

It is to these areas of challenge that I intend to turn in the second half of this paper. Being "a stake through the heart of Eternal Man" (so Catherine Belsey would have put it [25]) these – so far, repressed – loci will expose the inadequacy of any reading of Storey on the basis of his favourite Grand Narrative, shaking the grounds of the ideology lying behind it.

The first stake is put through the heart of Eternal Man when the cluster of associations that the body/soul dichotomy accumulated is taken into consideration. In his autobiographical talk to *The Listener* (160) Storey narrates how the physical/spiritual dichotomy came to acquire another dimension for him, one very much influenced by the northern, working-class community in which he lived and its perception of its own identity and life. As the writer emphasizes, it was in terms of this society (a materialistic, puritan society where "physical work is good, and mental work is evil") that he came to associate "body" with the working-class North and "spirit" with whatever is scorned and distrusted there (i.e. the artistic, middle-class South).

In the same talk Storey reveals that even the North/South dichotomy was soon modified, becoming, in his own words, "a masculine-feminine one" (161). According to him, this transformation took place at the time he was writing his first novel, *This Sporting Life*. It was while "creating a ... character who represented all the alien, physical forces of this life," he confides, that ... "the northern terminus of that journey became associated with a masculine temperament." Consequently, when he "came to write about its southern

counterpart – the intuitive, poetic and perhaps precious world to which I [he] felt I [he] had escaped – ” he “immediately associated it with femininity, with a woman’s sensibility and responses” (161).

It appears therefore that the dichotomy on which most humanist criticism of Storey has been based is by no means a timeless, universal one, pre-existing and outliving characters. On the contrary, it seems to be deeply rooted in the particular age and culture within which his works were written, directly related to (in fact, determined by) the discourses on gender and class prevailing in them.

Considering their overt implications, it is indeed surprising that these associations have neither challenged nor even disturbed the humanist discourse imposed on Storey. This is mainly due to the fact that concepts of class and gender have never really been isolated from the dualistic categories to which they were attached and from the ideology lying behind them. As a result, they have always been perceived within a humanist context and in terms of a humanist discourse. In this way, not only has their subversive ability been blunted, but the concepts themselves have been adjusted (abstracted from culture and history, elevated into a transcendental sphere, universalized) to strengthen and promote a humanist interpretation of Storey.

Thus, concepts of masculine/feminine, working-class/middle-class in his works have constantly been treated as eternal, universal entities rather than products of a specific culture. As such, their meaning was rigidly fixed, their “nature” constructed on the basis of unchanging, “innate” characteristics. Masculinity and physicality, for instance, were considered as essential elements of “working-classness,” while they in their turn were defined by qualities like assertiveness, power, vulgarity, inarticulateness. Femininity and art, on the other hand, were seen as parts of the “middle-class nature” and were pinned down to a different set of characteristics (i.e. passivity, sensitivity, eloquence, introspection).

Apparently then, a chain of equations (i.e. feminine = passive = art = middle-class, masculine = power = body = working-class) has come into being. These equations, for all their fragility, have been considered “natural” or “universal” and have easily been incorporated into Storey’s discourse of alienation. As a result, apart from a physical or spiritual identity, the alienated subject in Storey was also endowed with a gender, a class and a number of attributes which were thought “natural” for the specific gender or class.

Thus, working-class characters are always intensely – even repulsively – physical. Reg Thorpe, Margaret’s father in *Flight into Camden*, is a case in point. As James Gindin observes, he “responds physically to every emotion,” throwing up “his food when he is upset,” lashing out “when he violently disagrees” (100). Similarly, the two women in *Home* insist on talking about their physical ailments while the workers in *Radcliffe* and *The Contractor* are obsessively preoccupied with details of sex and excreta.

Middle-class characters, on the other hand, seem impaired by some kind of physical inadequacy, sometimes to the extent of physical deformity (e.g.

Slomer in *This Sporting Life*). Although it might look “natural” in middle-class women, this physical vulnerability appears to undermine the masculinity of middle-class men, making them look either “boyish”¹¹ or effeminate.¹²

Such portrayal of characters has sometimes resulted in the creation of familiar class stereotypes (or, as Storey would perhaps prefer to call them, class archetypes) which have led critics into observations such as the following: ... [I]n a Storey novel, a man who comes downstairs with his trousers off *is* a working-class man ... a physically deformed business tycoon *is* the image for a distorted upper-class (Fenby 94).

In implying that class is an almost “natural” quality, an “innate” attribute or deficiency like being tall or having a paralyzed body, these stereotypes contribute to the isolation of class issues in Storey from the cultural context that nourished and, for this reason, illuminates them. Furthermore, in reproducing traditional definitions of “working-classness”/“middle-classness” they encourage and promote these monolithic definitions, presenting the associations on which they are based as “natural” and, thus, unalterable.

The portrayal of masculine and feminine characters seems to have been conducted in terms of a similar pattern of associations which have rigidly determined what male or female “nature” is. In accordance with this pattern, masculinity in Storey is constructed and defined in relation to power. As a result, masculine characters are “big,” both in physique and stature. Powerful – sometimes even violent – they dominate and exercise control over feminine characters who are significantly depicted as “little.”¹³

Clearly, masculinity in the works of Storey becomes almost synonymous with domination. In both novels and plays it is the masculine characters who, being stronger than the feminine ones, prevail. In *This Sporting Life* poor, “little” Mrs Hammond dies; in *Flight into Camden* both Margaret and Howarth are defeated, the former by being forced to conform, the latter by actually “revert[ing] to the masculine system.”¹⁴ Similarly, in *Saville* all feminine characters (the two artists and the three main women figures) are victimized in various ways; in *Life Class* the model is raped by the all-too-masculine art-students. It is only in *Home* where women seem to dominate. But even in this case, Storey emphasizes, feminine power is just an illusion. He remarks to John Haffenden:

I found that the women were in fact the men, and the men were the women, *because the women completely dominated*. The women determine everything in the play, the direction of the dialogue, the intrusions upon sensitivity. They were much stronger characters. ... Emotional momentum comes from the women. (280; my emphasis)

With these words Storey unconsciously lays bare the extent to which he has remained imprisoned – thus imprisoning his characters as well – within a discourse whose preservation depends upon the acceptance of some universal

male and female “essence.” Within the rigid system of this discourse (a system in which domination can only make sense as a masculine experience), the author finds himself in the very awkward position of having to challenge the system for its own sake. Thus, in order to protect the signification (the essential meaning of “male”/“female” upheld by the system) he ends up dispensing with the signifiers (the actual men and women in the play).

This, in fact, seems to be a most familiar practice within the discursive context of the texts. Whenever a signifier (a male character, for example) transgresses by undermining or refusing the signification attached to it (virility, power, physicality), it is immediately disqualified and dispensed with as an independent signifier, intentionally confused with and assimilated to an-other (i.e. that of “woman”). In this way its transgressive behaviour is explained or accounted for in terms of the “other” and, as a result, it is “naturalized” thus, rendered harmless. If seen in this light the emasculation of middle-class men in Storey reflects the writer’s (and his society’s) wish to cope with these characters’ “problematic” behaviour without having to challenge the discourse that renders it “problematic.” For similar reasons, male artists in Storey “have to” be unmanned as an explanation of and excuse for their artistic talent. Leonard in *Radcliffe* and Michael in *Saville*, for example, are both portrayed as homosexuals. Interestingly enough, when the characters’ “aberration” in temperament cannot be attributed to a similar “aberration” in “nature,” their artistic tendency is accounted for by placing them under some strong female influence (usually that of a lover or mother):

... the major figure in Arnold’s life has been his mother; *little wonder* that Arnold, *although a man*, has developed a sensitive, passive, artistic nature ... (my emphasis)

These words (taken from Harris’ discussion of *The Restoration of Arnold Middleton* [148]) are very significant not only in revealing the extent to which traditional notions of masculinity/femininity have been taken for granted and respected in Storey’s works but also in demonstrating how readily humanist critics have adopted these stereotypes and contented themselves with reproducing them. Even on the occasions when, as in the example quoted above, the rigidity of categorisation is called into question, critics never really think of challenging it but (like Storey) hasten to explain away any inconsistencies, recover any flaws, re-place all deviant elements to the existing, acceptable order (hence Harris’ retreat to Arnold’s mother).

If, however, the relationship between femininity and art *is* an intrinsic one – as Harris would have us believe – how does one cope with such a striking paradox as the virtual absence of women artists in Storey, an absence justified (and, indeed, naturalized) by the following words of Leonard in *Radcliffe*

Politics, art, religion: these things are the products of men’s loving. And by that I mean their hatred, their antagonism, their affection as *men*, and

their curiosity in one another as men. It isn't that women have been deprived of these things, but simply that they can't love *in this way*. They have been given something more easily understood. Law, art, politics, religion: these are the creation of men as *men*. (345)

In serving as a means through which, as Mike Bygrave remarks (33), Storey attempts to "spell out word for word the book's intentions," the extract cited above offers a glimpse of the discourse that has, to a large extent, dictated the writing and interpretation of Storey's works. As the male-centredness of its language reveals, this discourse is the product of a patriarchal society, constructed to serve its ends and protect its interests. It is also a discourse with a "truth-function," in Foucauldian terms, that is, a discourse which is presented as the truth, "passes for the truth, and holds specific powers";¹⁵ in this case, the power to fashion and impose a notion of femininity does not endanger the preservation of a convenient status quo.

Yet, since it is voiced by Leonard, a character who "had to" be emasculated to serve as the prototype of the artist, the discourse entails paradoxically its own negation, challenges and undermines its own "truth-function." Thus, if it is "true" that women are excluded from art because of their "nature," why then is art defined in terms of this very "feminine nature"? The answer to this question is given by Storey himself in his interview to Haffenden:

I wrote *Flight into Camden* from a woman's point of view. It was something I felt I could identify with, writing as a woman and seeing society as an oppressive system which denied every kind of feeling and ambition she might have had. I felt it was my own experience, and it was true of what I felt. [This] was the feminine experience *at that time*. (273; my emphasis)

With these words, Storey literally blows up the universal foundations upon which the association between femininity and art was based. As he emphasises, the association is the product of a specific time. It relies not upon some intrinsic "nature" shared by femininity and art but upon the strength of their common experience, i.e. oppression. As a result, it conveys nothing about the "nature" of femininity or that of art. What it does convey, however, is the character of the society that gave birth to it and used it for its own ends, reinforcing or cancelling it out in accordance with its interests.

Thus, despite its patriarchal nature, this society does not hesitate to define femininity in relation to art if it means marginalizing anything that will not abide by its materialistic structure. On the other hand, whenever this definition endangers the existing position of women within it, threatening to give them more power than would be acceptable, then the definition is immediately abandoned and another, more "suitable" one is adopted (i.e. one based on domesticity).

The contradictory attitude of Storey's patriarchal society towards women is very effectively conveyed through the character of the model in *Life Class*.

Although she is *perceived* as the personification of art and spirit, a distant emblem of transcendental beauty (as her name indicates), Stella is actually *treated* as an inviting, intensely physical, sexual object. Her rape therefore is disturbing not merely because it is a violation of her spiritual identity but mainly because it constitutes a violation of her identity as an autonomous signifier. In fact, if I may stretch the point a bit further, the rape is nothing but a violation of *the* autonomous signifier. In demonstrating how different meanings get attached to – in this case violently imposed on – a signifier, the rape exposes the fragility of the (any) signifier, its instability, its dependence upon the cultural and discursive context in which it is found. What is more, by laying bare the technologies of power behind the game of signification, it most dramatically reveals that the peripeteias of signifiers are, in reality, peripeteias of power.

To summarize, it appears from what we have said so far that Storey's works narrate a tale very different from the one he has consciously and intentionally put forward. This is a tale fixed in time, rather than one aspiring to outdistance itself in the quest of some timeless moment. The relations between signified and signifier in it are not reproducing some kind of universal order according to which masculine is always the opposite pole of feminine, the latter infinitely corresponding to passivity and art. On the contrary, the signified never remains fixed to its signifier, a change in their relations being not a breach of natural law but a reflection of a similar mutation in power-structure.

Thus, in *Home*, what Storey saw as a "terrible reversal of roles" (Hayman, 49) is not the result of some carelessness on the part of the author (a carelessness which Storey hastens to acknowledge and correct). In this play, class rather than gender is the dominant element and main point of focus. The characters (with their distinct accents, preoccupations and attitudes) are obviously representative of their class, constructed in terms of the discourse developed within and about it. As a result, the predominance of women in the play can only be appreciated fully if seen in relation to (and as a consequence of) their working-class identity. It is because of the prevalence of working-class discourse in *Home* that the two women (being the carriers of it) find themselves in the apparently "unnatural" situation of becoming dominant. The "terrible reversal of roles" then, which Storey talked about is neither an "accident," nor an instance of negligence. This is, indeed, what makes it all the more "terrible" (shocking, frightening, ominous) for a humanist like Storey. Rather than merely upsetting some universal order, the reversal of roles between masculine/feminine in *Home* exposes how vulnerable this order is to the influence of a particular cultural context and the discourses prevalent in it. What is more, it lays bare the fact that the meaning of the signifier "woman" (or any signifier, if it comes to that) is neither fixed nor intrinsic but relational, dependent on the interests of the discourse that defines it.

University of Cyprus

NOTES

1. See Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977).
2. See, for example, Storey's use of "Man" in Robert Wahls, "The Broadway Jocks." Quoted by Judith Dotson Harris in her unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "An Unholy Encounter: The Early Works of David Storey," U. of Ohio, 1975, 249. See also Mike Bygrave, "David Storey: Novelist or Playwright?" *Theatre Quarterly* 2 (1971): 32.
3. See any of Storey's interviews and his autobiographical essay "Writers on Themselves: Journey through a Tunnel," *The Listener* 1 Aug. 1963: 159-61.
4. C. G. Yung, quoted by Laura H. Weaver, "Rugby and the Arts: The Divided Self in David Storey's Novels and Plays," *Fearful Symmetry: Doubles and Doubling in Literature and Film*, ed. Eugene J. Crook (Tallahassee: Florida UP, 1982) 4.
5. David Storey, quoted by Tom Prideaux, "Playwright for a Torn-Apart Time: The Art of David Storey," *Life* 12 Feb. 1971: 12.
6. David Storey to Peter Ansorge, "The Theatre of Life: David Storey in Interview," *Plays & Players* 20.12 (1973): 33.
7. See, for example, Arthur's relationship with his car (*This Sporting Life* 190-91) and Tolson's association with his motorbike (*Radcliffe* 61-62, 78, 166). As for the association of physical characters with animals the best example seems to be the portrayal of Arthur and the football-players in *This Sporting Life* (see pp. 8, 10, 94, 125, 184, 210, 253).
8. For instance, Mrs Hammond in *This Sporting Life* is perceived as "dead" even before her actual death (see pp. 68-69, 193, 214). Similarly, in *Radcliffe* the narrator stresses Leonard's lack of any appearance of external or internal life (10, 27, 187-88, 192).
9. See the portrayal of the Place and its surrounding area in *Radcliffe* (13, 22-3, 73, 107, 134). See also Margaret's impression of London in *Flight into Camden* (124, 127-8, 133).
10. As Catherine Belsey observes, Foucault "invents the verb 'to fiction' in order to determine his own use of the word 'truth'." According to him, one "fictions" a history (politics, identity, etc.) "starting from a political reality that renders it true." Quoted by Catherine Belsey, "Literature, History, Politics," *Literature and History* 9 (1983): 26.
11. An adjective attached to Slomer in *This Sporting Life* (108).
12. See the portrayal of Weaver in *This Sporting Life* (13, 117, 124, 140, 142).
13. For example, compare Arthur's portrayal with that of Mrs Hammond and Johnson in *This Sporting Life* (see pp. 18, 64, 91, 161, 184, 234, 235).

14. David Storey in his interview with John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985) 273.
15. Michel Foucault, quoted by Barry Smart in Foucault, *Marxism and Critique* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) 92.

WORKS CITED

- Ansorge, Peter. "The Theatre of Life: David Storey in Interview." *Plays & Players* 20. 12 (1973): 32-36.
- Belsey, Catherine. "Literature, History, Politics." *Literature and History* 9 (1983): 17-27.
- Bouchard, Donald F., ed. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1977.
- Bygrave, Mike. "David Storey: Novelist or Playwright?" *Theatre Quarterly* 2 (1971): 31-36.
- Crook, Eugene J., ed. *Fearful Symmetry: Doubles and Doubling in Literature and Film*. Tallahassee: Florida UP, 1982.
- Duffy, Martha. "An Ethic of Work and Play." *Sports Illustrated* 33 (1973): 66-82.
- Fenby, George. "The Organic Self (Study of Selected Working-Class Fiction)." Diss. U of Connecticut, 1973.
- Gindin, James. *Postwar British Fiction: New Accents and Attitudes*. California: California UP, 1962.
- Haffenden, John. *Novelists in Interview*. London: Methuen, 1983.
- Harris, Dotson Judith. "An Unholy Encounter: The Early Works of David Storey." Diss. U of Ohio, 1975.
- Hayman, Ronald. "Conversation with David Storey." *Drama* 99 (1970): 49.
- Prideaux, Tom. "Playwright for a Torn-Apart Time: The Art of David Storey." *Life* 12 Feb. 1971: 12.
- Smart, Barry. *Foucault, Marxism and Critique*. London: Routledge, 1983.
- Storey, David. "Writers on Themselves: Journey through a Tunnel." *The Listener* 1 Aug. 1963: 159-61.
- . *This Sporting Life*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1962.
- . *Flight into Camden*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1960.
- . *Radcliffe*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1965.
- . *Pasmore*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1972.
- . *A Temporary Life*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1973.
- . *Saville*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1978.
- . *A Prodigal Child*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1982.,

- . *In Celebration*. London: Heinemann, 1973.
- . *In Celebration and The Contractor*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971.
- . *The Farm*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1973.
- . *Home, Sisters, Life Class*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1980.
- . *Cromwell*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1973.
- . *The Restoration of Arnold Middleton*. London: Samuel French, 1967.



Η πρόσληψη της λογοτεχνίας που παράγεται στη Βρετανία, από συγγραφείς που ανήκουν στην εργατική τάξη, κατά τις δεκαετίες του 1960 και 1970, υπαγορεύθηκε κυρίως από ένα ανθρωπιστικό λόγο, ο οποίος είτε απέκοψε τα κείμενα από τα συγκεκριμένα κοινωνικο-πολιτικά συμφραζόμενα που τα τροφοδότησαν (μετατρέποντας αυτά σε ανώδυνες διακηρύξεις για την ανθρωπίνη κατάσταση) ή – όταν γινόταν προσπάθεια να διευκρινισθούν αυτά τα συμφραζόμενα – αυτό γινόταν μόνον για να τα ανάγει σε μια υπερβατική σύγκρουση μεταξύ λ.χ. “ημών” και “αυτών,” “προλεταριακότητας” και “αστικότητας.” Δείχνοντας πώς λειτουργεί αυτός ο λόγος στο έργο του David Storey, ενός από τους πιο σημαντικούς συγγραφείς αυτού του είδους λογοτεχνίας εκείνη την εποχή, εξετάζω την “αθωότητα” ή τη “φυσικότητά” του, τονίζοντας τη σύνδεσή του με το υλιστικό, πατριαρχικό κοινωνικό περιβάλλον του. Επιπλέον, διαφωτίζοντας τα σημεία όπου ο λόγος αναγκάζεται να αντιμετωπίσει τα παράδοξά του, εστιάζομαι “στην ηδονή και στον κίνδυνο” της σημασιοδότησης, διαβαίνοντας έτσι τις οριοθετήσεις λόγου και κριτικής που επιβάλλονται πάνω σε αυτού του είδους τα κείμενα, και παραβιάζοντας την “ιερότητα” της κειμενικής και της συγγραφικής πρόθεσης.