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*Kisses and a Love Letter :*  
Reading Sexed Subjectivity in Anglophone Literature and Film  
After Lacan's Seminar XX *Encore*

Abstracts of conference papers

**1. Joan Copjec, "The Sexual Compact"**

Joan Copjec is distinguished Professor of English, Comparative Literature and Media Study,  
and Director of the Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Culture at the  
University of Buffalo

"The Sexual Compact" is a strong defense of the psychoanalytic concept of sexual difference and a strong critique of feminist attempts to replace it with the concept of gender. The argument of the paper is both historical (I will detail the various historical quarrels with Freud and Lacan on this matter) and theoretical (I will demonstrate the way in which Lacan's *Encore* seminar refutes, point by point, Foucault's argument that the psychoanalytic theory of sexuality paved the way for capitalism and its instantiation of biopower).

**2. Annie Ramel, Professor Emeritus, University of Lumière Lyon II, Présidente de FATHOM**  
(French Association for THOMAS Hardy Studies, <http://www.fathomhardy.fr/>)

**"Thomas Hardy's 'Adulterous' Heroines"**

Thomas Hardy's heroines are often reviled for their supposed improper or adulterous behaviour : Tess (in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*) is rejected by her husband because of her previous affair with Alec d'Urberville; in *The Return of the Native*, rumour has it that Eustacia Vye is a witch and that she is attempting to elope with a former lover of hers, Wildeve; Elfride Swancourt, in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, is cast out by her fiancé when he discovers she had an affair previous to her engagement to him; in "An Imaginative Woman" (one of Hardy's short-stories), Ella Marchmill, a would-be poetess unhappily married to a prosperous gunmaker, falls in love with a young poet, and after her death her husband is left in the belief that her fourth child is not his own but the poet's.

Yet in all these stories the heroine is unduly accused : Ella has never even seen the poet believed to have fathered her child; Elfride Swancourt elopes with a man she intends to

marry, but she changes her mind and returns unmarried, in all propriety; Eustacia never commits any form of adultery, for all the gossip about her being "a voluptuous idle woman", for all the suspicions entertained by her husband; Tess is asleep when she is raped/seduced, she is simply not there, she is elsewhere. Each story is a typical case of the *diffamation* that Lacan says is the lot of woman: "On la dit-femme, on la diffâme".

The reason for such *diffamation* lies in the *jouissance* "beyond the phallus" which these women have access to: Ella, like Eustacia, Tess or Elfride, or like Janine, the heroine in Camus's short story "La Femme adultère", are structurally adulterous because they seek a form of enjoyment which is *in excess* of what the conjugal bed may have to offer them. The representation of woman as "tainted" in Hardy's fiction, as a "spot" or a "stain" loaded with enigmatic enjoyment, must be re-assessed in the light of Lacan's *Seminar XX*, in terms that are very far from the traditional stereotype of the Victorian fallen woman. Preferring poetry to gunmaking is a "feminine" position occupied by those who are "non-all", i.e. not wholly "phallic": Ella Marchmill, Robert Trewe (the young poet with whom Ella feels a strange kinship), but also Thomas Hardy the writer, whose poetic use of *lalangue* is his own singular mode of containing/constraining an unspeakable substance of enjoyment/*jouissance* in the *letter* of his texts.

### 3. Josiane Paccaud-Huguet, Professor, University of Lumière- Lyon II

#### “This is not what we want’: Virginia Woolf’s Women”

Virginia Woolf’s gallery of female characters is a good case of the barring of the universal woman. The recurrent Woolfian motto that “This is not what we want” – whether in terms of desire or lack – is declined in many ways in her novels. The mother figure fantasized as a tower of strength but who knows about the hollowness within (Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*), the bourgeois wife whose reverie takes her along the paths of a woman’s radical solitude (Isabella Giles in *Between the Acts*), the elderly lady with her gaze lost in mystic depths (Mrs Swithin): they are “not all”, figures of a mode of *jouissance* that does not fit in the frame. As to the artist figure, she is a response to the patriarchal dictum that “Women can’t paint, women can’t write” when she acknowledges the necessity of letting herself go down in the hollow of the wave (Lily Briscoe) or of dipping her feet in the fertile mud (Miss La Trobe) for the creative act to take place.

It must also be ascertained that the question of the feminine does not overlap with the female in Woolf’s work. Anyone who has access to speech, Lacan insists, is free to position themselves on either side of the formulae of sexuation. In *The Waves*, Bernard who is “neither male nor female” – but not androgynous for all that – is also the persona of the writer tired of all semblances, looking for the pre-symbolic “little language” of love in which we may recognize a fictional version of Lacan’s *lalangue*. Ultimately, this essay will outline a few traits of the Woolfian “sinthome”, a mode of writing which constitutes “an intermediate spectral domain, a spiritual corporeality radiating *jouissance*” (Slavoj Žižek).

**4. Jennifer Murray**, Associate Professor, University of Franche-Comté

**“‘Not Entirely on His Side’ : The Assumption of Sexed Subjectivity in Alice Munro’s ‘Boys and Girls’”**

« L’être sexué ne s’autorise que de lui-même » (Lacan, S XXI, 9 avril 1974)

Alice Munro’s short story « Boys and Girls » (*Dance of the Happy Shades*, 1968) gives narrative form to the question of what it might mean to assume one’s subjective position on the masculine, or, in the specific context of this story’s protagonist, on the feminine side of the sexual divide. At the point in the narrative at which I begin my analysis, the child is in a phase of strong identification with the father as ego Ideal, that “agency whose gaze I try to impress with my ego image, the big Other who watches over me and propels me to give my best, the ideal I try to follow and actualize” (S. Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, 80). She has already had to confront the prevalent expectations and gendering discourses of family and community, in particular through her mother and grandmother’s injunctions to ‘act like a girl’. And yet, rather than resolving for the child the question of what might constitute her feminine identity, these pressures only compound her increasing puzzlement over what had previously seemed an entirely given, natural order of sexed being: whereas the “word girl had formerly seemed ... innocent and unburdened, like the word child, now it appeared that it was no such thing. A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was, it was what I had to become” (119). The problem remains, however: how does one become a girl? To the question of this conflict between imaginary identifications and symbolic imperatives, the Lacanian perspective turns to the real and, paradoxically, answers: by choice.

My reading of “Boys and Girls” will attempt to illuminate both the enigmatic scene in the story when the girl opens the gate to the galloping mare and Lacan’s difficult proposition that sexed identity is a choice, a choice that has to be understood as an unconscious, forced one. It is to this moment of ‘choice’ that Munro gives form when meaning drops out of the frame and the child assumes her sexed being in the unthinking moment of a pure act.

**5. Marie Jejcic**, Psychologist and Psychoanalyst, Assistant Professor, Paris XIII University, **Gérard Amiel**, Psychoanalyst and Psychiatrist, Former President (current Vice-president) of the Association Lacanienne Internationale Rhone-Alpes

**“What is the future of a woman? : An analysis of Barbara Loden’s film *Wanda*”**

Issues surrounding the theme of femininity have often prompted misunderstanding, both in literary studies and in psychoanalysis, a field which focuses on the singularity of the subject. Freud was the first to examine the specificity of femininity, essentially through the concept of hysteria. Yet that was not where the major issue lay. The question for analysts today is to try to understand what the fundamental difference between the masculine and feminine is based on.

Contemporary studies which focus on sex and gender issues are returning to this question, and approaching it from the viewpoint of Lacanian theory. The work of Judith Butler is one such example, which suggests to what extent Lacan’s work offers a truly revolutionary orientation in modern-day culture for approaching the question of women in a sober fashion, based on the logic of the phallus : the “all” and the “not all.” These concepts are

not just another form of imperative that women should be forced to conform to, but rather, they constitute a rich source of writing that can ensure recognition for every woman. In fact, the famous phrase "There is no such thing as Woman", is not a call to live up to some male fantasy, but rather an invitation to reveal oneself in one's most particular colours, showing what it means to be 'a woman'.

We will be focusing on the film *Wanda*, made in the 1970s, which is the only film directed by the American actress Barbara Loden. Here, our aim is to examine the cinematographic style at the core of her film work, and the way in which she tries to portray a sense of what it would be like for a woman to take on a radically different position of otherness. The film almost went unnoticed at the time of its release, but caused a sensation much later on, after Loden's death. If "there is no such thing as Woman" then the insight offered by this work takes us out of a merely trivial anatomical context, and leads us towards an understanding of the possible paths that a woman can choose to follow: the "all" (masculine position), the "not all" (feminine position) and the almost all "not all" (feminine wandering).

In addition, it lays out the subjective consequences of these choices in detail, as they are well-depicted in the literature of English-speaking countries, a body of work that has often paved the way for psychoanalytical theory. As Lacan said, art is always the precursor to psychoanalysis.... ("Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras", *Autres Ecrits*).