

# Writing differences: Bodies and Modes of Relationality in Works by

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‘I take madness and the monstrous with words / I take them at their word’.<sup>1</sup>

This statement suggests that Anne Duden defines her literary practice as a writing of modes or experiences which are excluded from speech, especially those which are deemed excessive or beyond conceptualisation. It also points towards the paradoxes and difficulties at the centre of her work which attempt to speak from a space which has been traditionally excluded or silenced. In her prose and poetry, lectures on aesthetics and theoretical essays there is an abiding concern to attempt to speak against silencing as a woman writer, as someone who has experienced trauma as a result of a violent attack and the trauma associated with being a ‘Weiterlebende im Postfaschismus’ (someone who continues to live in post-fascist world).<sup>2</sup> Her work, which is at times extremely resistant to interpretation, poses the question of how a speaking or writing of unarticulated realms is possible. There needs to be a way of speaking/writing these silences, she suggests, in ways that the silences and gaps keep their own properties and different qualities without merely translating them into dominant discourse. This paradox points to the precarious process of speaking from the point of view of the excluded without simply fitting it into existing frameworks. In this paper I will first outline two philosophical models which I consider useful for thinking difference in this radical way. Then in

the light of these ideas I will examine the different sorts of selves and bodies which emerge in Duden's first book *Übergang* (1982). With different relations to their environment and re-configured boundaries, they are positioned as 'other' to culture, and it is from this 'oblique perspective' that this writing is able to look at culture's blind spots, at differences which have been excluded.

### **Models of 'difference'.**

Duden has read widely in philosophy and aesthetics and has stated that the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and Luce Irigaray have been influential on her thinking. The issues that these philosophers raise regarding the question of difference illuminate important aspects of her work. In Nietzsche's critique of anthropocentric hubris and of a culture which privileges 'Reason', and in Irigaray's criticism of the oppositional subject/object, mind/body relations dominant in Western culture, spaces left unmapped or unthought are illuminated. Thus, by bringing the two philosophers' works together, useful models of thinking difference emerge which will be discussed in the following section.

In his essay 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-moral Sense'<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche is critical of human Reason and its centrality in Western culture. He suggests that the claims made for human intellect are exaggerated, suggesting that we know little, if anything at all, about two realms: nature and the body. Man's claims to self-knowledge are flawed, he argues, as his knowledge of himself is limited. 'Does not nature keep much from him', he writes, 'even about his body, to spellbind and confine him in a proud, deceptive consciousness, far from the coils of the

intestines, the quick current of the blood stream, and the involved tremors of the fibres?"<sup>4</sup> The 'body', then, not as concept but as flesh, the turns of the intestines and movement of fluids is something which slips through the net of consciousness; indeed, consciousness is based in the forgetting of the body and nature which, Nietzsche suggests, would overwhelm the subject with the chaos of multiple ungraspable movements if he does not forget them.

Forgetting is a crucial constituent in the production of concepts too. When Nietzsche turns to language he states:

Every word immediately becomes a concept, inasmuch as it is not intended to serve as a reminder of the unique and wholly individualized original experience to which it owes its birth, but must at the same time fit innumerable, more or less similar cases—which means, strictly speaking, never equal—in other words, a lot of unequal cases. Every concept originates through our equating what is unequal. [...] We obtain the concept, as we do the form, by overlooking what is individual and actual; whereas nature is acquainted with no forms and no concepts, and likewise with no species, but only with an X which remains inaccessible and undefinable for us.<sup>5</sup>

The definitions of difference which emerge here in Nietzsche's thought are important and it is these definitions I will work with in my interpretations of Duden's texts. So 'Differences' are what are forgotten when the concept or word is used to describe unequal cases. Difference is that which is excluded when abstract concepts are produced, the completely unique

experiences, qualities and characteristics, individual specificities which are overlooked by the concept which replaces them. There is also what Nietzsche calls the 'indefinable X' as a radical difference which remains outside the concepts humans use to categorise reality. Thinking with concepts or categories thus threatens to turn the natural world into something it is not - into man, and this leads to the human subject subsuming the natural or objective world. Nietzsche's problem with Reason is that it is anthropomorphic ('man treats himself as the measure of all things'); it continually translates the world into its own categories, reducing everything to the same 'analogous to man'. Words and concepts, then, are generally used to translate the objective world into human categories with the human acting as the centre and yard stick. If man is the measure of all things, 'difference' would primarily be defined as that which is different 'from' man which would set up a hierarchy with man as the defining standard. For Nietzsche, however, a more honest mode of relating to the world would be to recognise that concepts and words are not universally valid labels but 'metaphors' and approximate translations of the chaos of specificities. Man generally must forget that the concepts he uses are metaphors in order to live in 'repose, security and consistency'. Remembering that concepts might not be universally valid, then, would open up areas which man cannot categorise and 'differences' which may not be different 'from' a human reasonable standard but different in their own right.

Nietzsche's thought is also useful when considering 'difference' because he suggests that when the mind 'forgets' individual particularities in the formation of the concept of the leaf, those other individual differences are not simply negated.<sup>6</sup> There is an *active forgetting* at work; difference has to be forgotten so that we are not overwhelmed by the chaos of individual

specificities which we have to forget in order to be able to label the world effectively. But there cannot be sameness, there would be no concept, without the differences that are obscured.

In her early work Luce Irigaray, like Nietzsche, is critical of abstract universals, especially the notion of the universal subject and how this subject has been represented in the Western philosophical tradition. She is interested in what has been excluded in the theories of the subject and culture generally. In trying to sum up her book *Speculum* in a phrase it could be said that for Irigaray the whole of our culture is based upon the exclusion of women. This is not just a privileging of the male or masculine position - it is also necessary to the whole functioning and maintenance of the system. In the final note of the book she expresses it thus: 'In relation to the working of theory, the /a woman fulfils a twofold function - as the mute outside that sustains all systematicity; as maternal and still silent ground that nourishes all foundations'.<sup>7</sup> As well as critiquing theoretical constructs and erections on this 'silent ground' that are made possible by excluding some voices, Irigaray questions the type of subject dominant in our culture. Her analysis of the universal subject suggests that it is gendered and it is only able to set itself up as a standard if it has an appropriate and compliant object to reflect its self-image. In a way which is useful for our discussion of difference, she suggests that this abstract standard can only exist because the compliant object acts as a 'benchmark' so that 'the subject [...] can sustain himself [...] by bouncing back off some objectiveness, some objective'.<sup>8</sup> i.e. the subject needs to posit objects in order to establish a self and yet a deliberate misconception of the 'objective' goes on; man measures himself against his own conception of the object and he presumes the natural world and matter to be passive or even dead so that they can only be shaped through the

activity of the subject and Reason. The standard and norm thus only comes about as a result of the suppression of different voices, of not hearing differences or acknowledging that the objective world may have meanings of its own.

Irigaray also expresses concerns about the formation of the transcendental subject through these structures. The problem with the subject, for Irigaray, is that it is an abstraction as it denies and transcends its connections with the material world: 'Rising to a perspective that would dominate the totality, to the vantage point of the greatest power, he thus cuts himself off from the bedrock, from his empirical relationship with the matrix that he claims to survey'.<sup>9</sup> Irigaray is playing with the multiple meanings of matrix which encompasses *mater* matter, (m)other and earth and bodily tissue. For her, the constitutive split between subject and object is created by the subject's distancing himself from body/earth/mother/woman/object which he 'masters' and supposes to be inert, flat, static. Irigaray's thought is useful because she again opens up a space for thinking difference as she constantly suggests that the silenced 'object' of culture - woman, the earth, matter - is not fixed by the subject's view of it and retains an element of 'excess' as it is not subsumed or adequately expressed in the subject's thought. Indeed, Irigaray also argues that the space of the object or matter is a *gap* in the thinking of the West and therefore a radical space of difference. This opens the way for the realisation that there could be (or already are) different realities with different relations to, and conceptions of, matter and nature but which are generally overlooked. Furthermore Irigaray does not want a notion of difference that is allied to the sense that it is still just one term or pole of a binary opposition. The oppositional structure works by positing an antithetical term in order to

safeguard one term's propriety and integrity to differentiate it from that which is not. She does not want 'difference from the universal subject' but subjects and cultures which are not compared to a norm. She thus raises the point that to talk of being 'different' suggests that you are different from something and thus still operating within a comparative structure. Difference understood as opposition for Irigaray can never speak truly differently because if one term is opposite to and different from an other it is still determined by a *logic of the same*. Her thought therefore proposes a breakdown of the oppositional dualities mind/body, culture/nature (or a recognition of now marginal areas where dualisms already do not function) in order to usher in a new culture.

### **Different bodies and relations in Anne Duden's *Übergang***

I will now turn to two of Duden's short stories from her first book *Übergang* (1982) and the question of how bodies are written. Part of the difficulty and fascination of Duden's work is the complex articulation and treatment of the body as a site of extreme sensitivity and locus for difference. The images which occur in her prose and poetry place the body in a realm of radical fragmentation, dissolution, memory and opacity of meaning which has difficult access to representation. The texts thus articulate notions of difference similar to the theories examined above while being literary rather than theoretical. I will argue that the selves depicted in these texts with their fluid relations with the environment cannot be understood according to the model of the transcendental subject or categorising Reason which Irigaray and Nietzsche critique. The way the narrator relates to the surrounding world is very different from the transcendental subject Irigaray described which abstracted and separated himself from the material and natural

world. Nor do the narrators conform to Nietzsche's human subject which forgets the bodily and imposes concepts on the world by exercising a categorising Reason. The recurring descriptions in the texts of disintegrations of bodies and selves as the boundary between self and other breaks down is what the author means in the opening quotation by writing 'madness' and 'chaos'. In Duden's texts the writing comes from *inside* these states so that we encounter selves and bodies in flux, not translated into categories from a position outside.

Duden's first book *Übergang* (1982) comprising eight different texts means 'crossing over'<sup>10</sup> and alludes to the multiple crossing of boundaries in the different texts. For instance, the writing frequently dwells on the borders between states such as waking and sleeping, day and night, inside and outside or focuses on experiences when borders (for instance a room or a house in which the narrator is located) are crossed by sounds or sights of nature or of the city. In the first text ('The Country House') the narrator's breakdown comes from an excessive attention to sounds and colours, the movements immanent to the countryside outside her house until the division between house and nature collapses. The eight texts which make up the book 'Übergang' are arranged in two sections around a central text also called 'Übergang' (so the central story 'Übergang' is literally the cross-over point of the book.) I will firstly comment on aspects of this text before going on to look at a second text which comes towards the end of the collection ('The Mission and the Love').

### **'Übergang'**

In the central text, 'Übergang', the narration begins with a brief account of an attack on a group of friends in a Berlin nightclub told in the third person. During an attempt to flee, a woman in the group is injured by a brick thrown through the car windscreen. The vast part of the story takes place in the hospital where the woman undergoes plastic surgery to re-build her smashed face and where the narration switches from third to first person and thus into the disintegrated head of the victim - an uncomfortable move as the detail of suffering and bodily processes is almost unbearable. The overwhelming image of this text is the narrator's destroyed face which is smashed by the brick but which cannot be completely visualised despite the precise descriptions of the mucus and pain. The image of the shattered mouth immediately evokes notions of a body, state and subjectivity which has difficult and obstructed access to language. The narration, however, originates from the space of the smashed mouth, therefore the narration comes from a narrator who literally cannot speak. Thus a 'silent different speech' of the body is evoked which is nevertheless conveyed by the writing but not in a way which translates the body into the categories of human reason.

In the hospital scenes descriptions of mutating flesh and uncontrollable bodily movements are conveyed by the text without the narrator being able to make sense of them. The reader too, denied a 'gaze from outside', a stable place from which to view this body, is located in a bewildering 'in-between' space following the movements of the writing which trace the processes of the changing, mutating body. For example internal, fluid bodily processes sound undefinable as they burst into the narrative, apparently beyond the control of the narrating consciousness: 'It pressed itself, squashily stretching, up my throat, tore open the bandaged

jaws of hell ... with savage strength and violence so that a stabbing, pulling, jerking and cutting dashed through the furthest corners of the brain, and then rolled, as a slimy black-red substance like red wine with egg beaten in it, into a bath'.<sup>11</sup> Such sentences intrude into the internal monologue and in their vagueness initially sound suspended from concrete points of reference. It is only in the following paragraphs when her visitor, Till, enters her intermittent consciousness, holds the kidney dish and explains the occurrence, that the events start to fall into a shape and become recognisable to her and to the reader. He grants a partial perspective from outside: 'Then someone held me tightly and held the kidney dish so that the whole occurrence was recognisable as something final and closed and said clearly and distinctly: It's OK, it's nearly over, it's the blood in your stomach that needs to get out'.<sup>12</sup> We then realise that what we have just read is the experience of being sick from *inside* the body. Although the internal movements are described in detail, the body as a whole is sensed and not directly represented by the sight of another. We do not see a clear picture of 'it' but sense what it must be like to inhabit this body. Although there are partial descriptions by the 'I' from different perspectives, we never clearly 'see' the narrator's body from outside. We do not get a description of the broken face from the doctor's point of view, for example. At one point the narrator looks at herself in a mirror (and thus sees herself as an objectified image) but the reader is not given a clear idea of what she sees. We read only that 'I have never met anyone who looked like that or looked similar in any way'<sup>13</sup>, as if she cannot make sense of what she sees. Thus this type of writing suggests a different mode of signification and a refusal to equate naming and writing the body with fixing it within a static mode of representation.

Given the precise descriptions of pain, it is perhaps surprising that the narrator has a fleeting feeling of freedom when she first arrives in hospital before the face is patched up. The sense of freedom comes from the opening up of the face to its environment with which it now shares fluid boundaries. The images constantly suggest an explosion of the fixity of static form revealing instead movements and differences, interchanges between inside and outside. The connections between face and environment are graphically captured in sentences such as ‘thick unending strings of mucus combined face and kidney dish into a loose entity’<sup>14</sup> where the unending bands of mucus continually connect with the environment and re-configure the boundaries of the body. The ‘face’, she thinks, now becomes a powerful image of a radical breakdown of boundaries and of the ‘limitless chaos of the world’.<sup>15</sup> The narrator states that this is a relief because the apparent wholeness of the body has now been replaced with an image of flux which more accurately reflects the sense of living in a body which has moving relations with its environment. The smashed face is suddenly an image of ‘chaos’ suggesting fluid boundaries between self and other.

The sense of freedom also comes from a loosening of the bonds between words and reality as the face, it is suggested, cannot be subsumed by words or categories. The narrator thinks that the doctor’s diagnostic statement, ‘ah, you’ve been attacked’, does not convey the full horror of the bodily experience - it leaves too much unsaid. With the explosion of fixed boundaries comes the rupture of the seemingly immutable bond between word and thing as the narrative stresses in places that the face is beyond form. The narrator suggests she is a state beyond fixed concepts and identity as her body and subjectivity literally do not fit prescribed

patterns. She feels freed from a gaze which turns her into an objectified image, so when her visitors try to locate the 'old self' in the messy chaos of the face she perceives this as a threat: 'They wanted something from me, to know me or to recognise me, and wanted to prove it to me too. But I wasn't something knowable or identifiable, [I was] this foggy capsule, suspended, dim existence, a condition which did not coincide with their picture of me'.<sup>16</sup>

The threat comes from the friends' attempts to recognise, with recognition implying a return and repetition of the same ('wiedererkennen') rather than the radical rupture and suspension of 'normal' relations which the explosion of form implies. The fact that this face is *not* legible is experienced as a relief by the narrator. She does not want to emerge into a whole, recognisable identity. The friends, on the other hand, want to 'know' her which appears synonymous with fitting what they see into a fixed concept. The narrator cannot, and does not want to be, conceived as a fixed image; rather, she wants the freedom of non-identity. Thus we can see how Nietzsche's thinking of concepts would illuminate the text as the narrator does not want to be an abstract generalisation.

The text thus presents us with a paradox: it both suggests that the body and subjectivity of the narrator is beyond form, yet the intensity of the descriptions seemingly contradict the impression that the body is beyond form and therefore language. The paradox surrounding this writing is that it appears to narrate experiences, such as vomiting, which are non-verbal, without transposing them into a rational framework. The effect of such passages is not that language is imposed on the movements of the body but that language and the uncontrollable movements of

the body become simultaneous. Normally when we vomit the body takes over and we do not verbalise the processes to ourselves while they are occurring. But the descriptions in the text have precisely this effect. Language continues at times we would normally expect it to cease and ‘writes’ pain and the body.<sup>17</sup> In places the narrative suggests that conceptual thought and images cannot be employed to describe the pain.<sup>18</sup> At other times, however, language inappropriately continues as the fractured consciousness splinters to ‘think’ pain and the rioting of the intestines. For instance, when the doctor inserts a pole into her face:

I have never experienced something so terrible, a satellite-thought repeated [...] I watched from another point, once from below, as though I were hung up by my legs, upwards over my body, once as though from above. The pole towered through me like a stake, increasing in volume [...] pushing lumps away [...] thrust into something hard. From there it made its way via my throat into my intestines. The soft tissue began to revolt.<sup>19</sup>

The way the text is narrated suggests that this is not so much a writing of the body (with the body as object) but the body itself ‘speaking’ in all its specificities, including movements of entrails, which Nietzsche states we must forget to achieve consciousness.

### **‘Der Auftrag die Liebe’**

This final section focuses on a shorter text which comes towards the end of the *Übergang* collection - ‘Der Auftrag die Liebe’ (The Mission the Love), and will tie the

discussion back to the philosophical models of difference. This story engages with a critique of culture based on the exclusion or forgetting of the body or matter which came out of the discussion of the theoretical models. On a simple surface level the text is about being in love. It is narrated by someone madly in love with a nameless man who does not seem to notice her at all in public and is fairly nonchalant about the relationship in private. The dynamic of her passionate thoughts and his lack of attention towards her is especially clear in a scene when the man, the narrator and a group of people are eating in a restaurant. The others at the table laugh at his stories, while the narrator cannot even swallow, yet alone talk, as she is constantly trying to fight off attacks of passion or 'love'. Again the physical is central, as the narrator's state of infatuation is described through bodily images of sweating, the pounding of blood, the drying up of the mouth. 'Love' ('die Liebe' of the title) appears in the images as an invisible, parasitic body which threatens to overwhelm the narrator by invading every cell of her body. In striking and humorous (at times self-parodying) images the narrator address 'love' in the third person, which she tries to control in an attempt to maintain dignity. In the midst of the turmoil the narrator experiences she goes to a gallery and looks at a painting which is reproduced in the text - Piero della Francesca's *St Michael*<sup>20</sup>, which introduces a set of theoretical allusions.

It is formally unusual for a literary text to include within its boundaries a visible image of what the narrator sees. The 'object' of the narrator's gaze is brought inside the text and confronts the reader. The image is also startling because for the first time in the book on p.112 (about 15 pages from the end of the text), we suddenly come face to face with a visible representation of a type of body which is very different to those we have encountered in the

other texts. A common experience in all the texts has been a breakdown of the narrator's body, and the writing conveyed precise sensations, movements and illnesses of the lived-in, fluid body. It is odd therefore to see the apparent unity of the saint's body. It is through this sense of strangeness that the norms governing the understanding and representation of bodies in Western culture are questioned. Through the quotation of the painting the text places the experiences of obsession or love within a cultural and philosophical framework which raises awareness of the cultural significance of passion or 'losing one's head'. The serpent has literally lost its head and lost the battle with the saint who looks supremely in control. The painting could tell, then, a cautionary tale about the dangers of losing control while privileging the figure who has kept his head.

The text does not explicitly engage in theoretical arguments, nor does it directly state that the serpent in the painting stands for passion or madness and Michael for Reason. Instead there is a complex web of allusions between the painting and the narrator's experience through repetitions of phrases such as 'stamp out the worm'.<sup>21</sup> These silent thoughts may be attributed both to Michael and the narrator at different parts of the text. He has literally stamped out the worm (the serpent) while the narrator has been seen to struggle to eradicate her 'worm' - passion or love which has to be brought under control. At first it appears, then, that the narrator is aligned with Michael - just as we saw the narrator struggling to suppress 'love' earlier in the text, Michael has fought and overcome the serpent. However, here the similarities between Michael and the narrator end, as the narrator's attempts to control 'love' are ultimately unsuccessful. Increasingly we become aware through the fragmented interior monologue that the

narrator questions why her experiences with ‘the worm of passion or madness’ are different. Part of this questioning involves the implicit realisation that she is not the sort of self Michael appears to be and so cannot simply be aligned with him, despite her efforts to be like him in order to maintain dignity. At the same time a complex web of imagery which links this text with the other short texts in the book aligns the narrator’s body and experiences with the serpent’s .

The criticisms of Michael and his ‘Mission’ (of the title) which emerge through a series of narratorial reflections can be related to the theoretical models of difference outlined above. These criticisms and comments can be divided into three major areas: 1) Michael as a dominant sort of self and body in our culture to which the narrator does not have access; 2) the role of representation in privileging this dominant self and body; 3) what emerges as the violent domination of nature and the body and the eradication of different bodies, qualities and states in this culture.

1) Michael’s self is based on certainties which elude the narrator. Self assured, young and proud, she reflects, he is certain he has done the right thing by beheading the serpent; in carrying out the ‘Mission’ (following instructions without question), he has acted on divine orders which establish a frame of meaning for his actions. His certainty is conveyed through his sturdy body and the type of body the painter gives him is also questioned by the narrator. It is not a fleshy but a hard body whose sturdiness is emphasised through the comparison with the serpent’s: ‘Two bodies. One is living, the other dead. The living one is standing on the dead one which he has just killed. The dead body, soft, yielding, contorted and arched. Its end rises up

thinly in the air, a uselessly bristling end. Beside the sturdy legs of the living one'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it is indirectly implied that the victor needs the dead body of the victim in order to highlight his mastery and power. This can be seen as an illustration of Irigaray's point that the subject needs to stand on solid ground provided by an object conceived as passive or dead matter. The qualities of decisive action come to be associated with Michael through a comparison with inaction and death. The narrator also believes Michael's body to be linked to machine-like qualities - an idea she thinks the painting promotes through his armour and weapon which has obeyed his command, translated his will into action. There is a spatial comparison between the saint's sword and the serpent's mouth with which it attempted to defend itself. Thus the painting suggests that the saint's body like his sword can be used as an instrument and can be controlled by the mind. It is implied by the painting that the serpent's mouth was not effective as a weapon as it lost the battle, so did not control its body effectively. Its body stands for a lack of control or reason.

In the 'models of difference' section I set up Nietzsche and Irigaray as philosophers who productively think culture as based on forgetting, or abstraction from, the body and nature. But in this painting we are presented with a body which parades itself in front of our gaze, therefore how can these theorists claim this area is overlooked in culture? The narrator's thoughts suggest that the painting reveals a very odd type of body, for it privileges a body which is actually a body-less body. This is linked in her thoughts about the role of the aesthetic in constructing and defining bodies.

2) The narrator's observations on the painting's frames draws attention to the painting's own status as representation. Three frames are noted in the course of the interior monologue: the frame of the picture; the blue transparent material which clings like a second skin to the saint's chest. This is described by the narrator as a display window. Another frame is formed by the marble balustrades and Michael's horizontally held sword which showcases his body, this time the lower parts. Thus, the narrator remarks, 'the murderer stands - well displayed - in a spotless white frame'.<sup>23</sup> The effect of the frames is to direct our eyes towards the saint's body and the qualities it promotes - strength, certainty and power, while reiterating borders and division which place the dead body of the serpent outside the frame. The narrator highlights the striking separation between Michael's body and its environment (the clear dividing line between Michael and the sky) which underscores Michael's separation from the material and natural world. The narrator believes that another effect of the framing is to turn the body into an abstract idea: 'Buckled on, closely fitting refinement which sets the trunk in the right light, presents it as a display window for firm flesh and muscular strength: making the graspable, ungraspable'.<sup>24</sup> The fleshy reality of the body with all its specificities is forgotten, as a general concept is formed. The narrator's thoughts reveal that this mode of representation ultimately promotes the idea of the body as ethereal and distinct from matter/nature/earth (the serpent), not a 'real' body but an 'idea' and 'ideal' of a body or even the body as mind. This abstraction of the body from the tangible appears to be held responsible in the narrator's mind for the violent scenario depicted in the painting, because making the tangible body into a replaceable concept means that the pain felt by the victim's body does not have to be thought as the reality of flesh is blocked out. The narrator thinks that killing will be repeated again and again because

the victim's pain is not dwelt on: 'He [Michael] will do it again. The divided body from which blood is flowing is a finished unit. [...] He will just always win. For that he needs the living body. Again and again he will prove with a swift cut that every body is replaceable'.<sup>25</sup>

3) The serpent's broken body becomes a space where the suppressed knowledge of a fleshy body that is matter and nature is located. In Nietzsche's terms, then, the serpent embodies the differences which are forgotten in the formation of consciousness and concepts. In Irigaray's terms the violent scenario highlights the domination of nature and different bodies in Western culture which have to be eradicated to provide subjecthood for a few. The narrator draws our attention to Michael's standing place on the dead and marginal body - his sturdy certainty is based on the violent domination of the body of the other. The serpent, is also Michael's blindspot. However, even though he does not see the dead body of his victim, nor hear its truncated scream (the narrator points out that his ear is missing on the side of serpent's head) his very existence is based on it. Indeed, it seems that it is impossible for Michael to see the serpent - if he looked down and saw what he was standing on he would lose his balance and would cease to exist. The narrator's reading of the painting, on the other hand, allows for a different sight. Piero, through the frames and the dazzling presence of the saint, deliberately excludes the serpent which we are supposed to forget. The *narrator*, however, cannot forget and looks at cultural blindspots. We can see Nietzsche's active forgetting at work in the figure of Michael, but while repeating the story of culture's victory over chaotic forces, the painting reveals spaces of 'difference' which get left out of the main frame, but which are nevertheless present when concepts and norms are formed. Although Michael and his culture would like to

forget the violent suppression of difference, these spaces are retained and remembered in the work of art. Thus the narrator's reading of the painting suggests that there are spaces of difference *within* culture which have oblique perspectives on dominant cultural narratives.

## **Conclusion**

Duden's texts do not just question the dominant ideas of selves and bodies in Western culture, but also explore different re-configurations of selves and bodies with fluid boundaries with their environment, and she writes from this space of cultural difference. The narrator's experience of her body and boundaries would seem to align her with the serpent rather than with Michael for, as we have seen in the story 'Übergang', the narrator is associated with a material, fleshy, fluid bleeding body which cannot be controlled. In the final section of the story 'Der Auftrag die Liebe', the link between the serpent and the narrator is more direct. The story ends with an erotic encounter between the nameless man and the narrator as she gives in to passion. Here we read 'the victor seals his battlefield'<sup>26</sup>, where the man's kiss is aligned with Michael's gesture of mastery and the narrator the battlefield over which he holds sway. This creates a striking paradox as the texts are narrated from an impossible position - from the space of the severed head or truncated body of the serpent which also recalls the image of the narrator's smashed head and mouth in 'Übergang'. The alignment with the serpent suggests that the texts are writing with a different language from the gaps of culture, from excluded realms which are eradicated or forgotten in order for there to be rational thought and speech. This different writing articulates the intensities, senses and movements immanent to her particular body and thus explores the realm Michael cannot see. The texts thus intimate that the usual

dualisms, here symbolised by the ‘Michael v serpent, reason v passion’ dichotomies, do not operate. The narrator does not seem to fit into either category in the oppositional structure as she does not control her feelings and behead her passion, but is also not killed like the serpent. It is the revelation of the non-functioning of dualisms that makes Duden’s writing important in a discussion of ‘writing and difference’. It represents a radical way of thinking difference as the writing emerges from the gaps, from supposedly impossible spaces and blindspots, in a way which does not entail their becoming unintelligible. In the texts discussed above ‘speaking passion/madness’ or ‘speaking the fragmenting body’ does not descend into nonsense (the opposite of reason), but extends and changes writing itself. Rather than situate difference as absent or outside language, rather than locate difference beyond words, there is a using of language beyond itself.

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<sup>1</sup> My translation of Anne Duden’s statement, ‘Ich nehme den Wahnsinn, das Monströse beim Wort’ taken from an interview she gave with Sigrid Weigel. See Anne Duden and Sigrid Weigel, ‘Schrei und Körper - Zum Verhältnis von Bildern und Schrift. Ein Gespräch über *Das Judasschaf*’, in *Laokoon und kein Ende. Der Wettstreit der Künste*, ed. by Thomas Koebner (Munich, edition text + kritik, 1989), p.121.

<sup>2</sup> For further biographical information see the author’s lectures in Anne Duden, *Zungengewahrnsam* (Köln, Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1999), especially pp.11-32. For general

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background information on the author see Anne-Katrin Reulecke's entry in *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, 10/1.

<sup>3</sup> Translations from [www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel](http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel) (1/02/02). The German can be found as 'Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn', in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gesammelte Werke in Drei Bänden*, ed. by Karl Schlechta, vol. 3 (Munich, Carl Hanser Verlag), pp.309-322.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.310.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.311.

<sup>6</sup> See also Christine Battersby's discussion of Nietzsche and this essay in particular in *The Phenomenal Woman* (Oxford, Polity Press, 1998), pp.137-138.

<sup>7</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by G. Gill (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985), p.365.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.134.

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<sup>10</sup> Anne Duden, *Übergang* (Berlin, Rotbuch Verlag, 1982, second edition 1996). English translation: Anne Duden, *The Opening of the Mouth*, trans. by Della Couling (London, Pluto, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Duden, p.69. References to the German text are to the second edition (1996). Page numbers in parentheses follow the German original: 'Er preßte sich quallig ausdehnend die Kehle hoch - ich möchte tot sein -, riß den bandagierten Höllenrachen, der nichts als geschlossen und bewegungslos sein wollte, mit wüster Kraft und Gewalt auf, so daß ein Stechen, Ziehen, Ricken und Schneiden die hintersten Winkel des Gehirns durchfetzte, und wälzte sich dann als schleimig schwarzrote Substanz wie Rotwein mit darunter geschlagenem Ei in eine Wanne' (p.69).

<sup>12</sup> Duden, pp.69-70: 'Dann hielt mich jemand fest, [...] hielt die Nierenschale so, daß der ganze Vorgang als etwas Endliches erkennbar wurde und sagte klar und deutlich: Es ist gleich vorbei, es ist das Blut im Magen, das rausmuß' (pp.69-70).

<sup>13</sup> Duden, p.79: 'Mir ist jedenfalls noch nie jemand begegnet, der so oder ähnlich ausgesehen hätte' (p.79).

<sup>14</sup> Duden, p.61: 'dicke, nicht mehr endende Schleimfäden verbanden jetzt Gesicht und Nierenschale zu einer losen Einheit' (p.61).

<sup>15</sup> Duden, p.63: 'grenzenlosen Chaos der Welt' (p.63).

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<sup>16</sup> Duden, p.69: ‘Sie wollten etwas von mir, mich erkennen oder wiedererkennen, wollten es mir auch noch beweisen. Ich war aber nichts Erkenn- oder Identifizierbares [...] ein irgendwo schwebend verharrendes, dämmriges Dasein, ein Zustand, der mit ihrem Bild von mir nicht übereinstimmte’ (p.69).

<sup>17</sup> For further reading on the interrelation between language, writing and the body, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Duden, p.76: ‘Lop-sided and crooked, nothing but a grimace, I hung there in my harness. There was nothing, no thought, no feeling, no image, that could have led me out of this eternity.’  
‘Schief und krumm, eine einzige Grimasse, hing ich da in meiner Halterung. Es gab nichts, keinen Gedanken, kein Gefühl, kein Bild, das mich aus dieser Ewigkeit herausgeführt hätte’ (p.76).

<sup>19</sup> Duden, p.76 (translation modified by me): ‘Der Stab druchragte mich wie ein Pfahl [...] Er wuchs in mir, nahm beständig an Umfang zu und wurde länger. Ich spürte mich schon mit ihm anschwellen. Er drängte das Geklumpe fort; [...] stieß er auf etwas Hartes [...] Von dort machte er sich über meinen Hals auf den Weg in die Eingeweide. Das Weiche begann zu revoltieren’ (p.76).

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<sup>20</sup> The painting shows St. Michael in gauze and dazzling armour standing on the body of the serpent whose head he has just cut off and holds in his right hand. The painting, originally a side panel of a triptych, is located in The National Gallery, London. It can be seen at: <http://cgfa.sunsite.dk/francesc/p-france12.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Duden, p.111: 'wie einen Wurm zertreten.' (p.111).

<sup>22</sup> Duden, p.112: 'Zwei Körper. Der eine lebt, der andere ist tot. Der lebende steht auf dem toten, den er gerade erst getötet hat. Der tote Körper weich, nachgiebig, gewunden und gekrümmt. Sein Ende ragt dünn in die Luft, ein nutzlos aufbegehrendes Ende. Neben den stämmigen Beinen des lebenden' (p.111).

<sup>23</sup> Duden, p.116: 'So steht der Mörder - gut ausgerichtet - in einem reinlich weißen [...]Rahmen' (p.115).

<sup>24</sup> Duden, p.115: 'Angeschnallte, eng anliegende Veredelung, die den Rumpf ins rechte Licht rückt, ihn als Schaufenster für festes Fleisch und Muskelkraft präsentiert: das Faßbare unfaßbar machen' (p.114).

<sup>25</sup> Duden, p.117: 'Er wird es wieder tun. Der zweigeteilte Leib, aus dem Blut fließt, ist eine erledigte Einheit. [...] Er wird nur immer siegen. Dafür benötigt er den lebenden Leib. Immer wieder wird er schnellen Schnitts beweisen, daß jeder Körper zu ersetzen ist' (pp.115-116).

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<sup>26</sup> Duden, p.115: 'der Sieger versiegelt sein Schlachtfeld' (p.116).