

‘Dream(e)scapes’: a Poetic Experiment in Writing a Self

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Feminist poststructuralist approaches to research can authorize different ways of working with different types of texts in search of insight into the discursive constitution of subjects, including the (sexed) self. Such texts draw attention to their own construction and analysis of them tends to multiply the ‘meanings’ that might be on offer. In this paper I perform a risky in(ter)vention into autobiographical writing in order to trouble realist conventions of self-writing, particularly in feminist autobiographical textual practice. An autobiographical self is constructed and put under erasure, in the form of a poem. The data that I represent here in poetic form were collected from recorded fragments of dreams. Privileging dream data leads me to explore how feminist poststructural theory, informed particularly by the work of Hélène Cixous, engages differently with psychoanalytic and discursive approaches to writing the self and about writing itself.

INTRODUCTION

This paper engages in transgressive ways with usual approaches to auto/biographical writing in academia. My work is underpinned by a poststructural hypervigilance to the politics and practices of language, particularly to language that purports to represent the self, and to the possibilities that feminist poststructuralist theories bring to research and writing practices (e.g., Davies and Gannon, in press; St Pierre and Pillow, 2000). This paper is intended as an oblique and messy entry in the field on several levels. It messes with the conventions of much feminist work in autobiography by turning the analytical I/eye onto the production of my ‘own’ textual self, rather than on some other woman’s autobiographical or personal narrative. It dislodges sociology as the pre-eminent frame for understanding

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feminist autobiography, taking up the feminist poststructuralist textual practice of Hélène Cixous as a frame that permits the composition and decomposition of a fragmented and tenuous self. Data is generated through a textual experiment, a poem written from dreams recorded in personal journals. Thus the paper poses, and practises, a poetic politics of resistance as – and simultaneously against – feminist autobiographical research practices. The poem herein and my analyses of it are intended as textual interventions, as 'sorties: in and out: attacks/ways out/forays' (Cixous, 1986) into the field.

FEMINIST AUTO/BIOGRAPHY

Feminist theoretical and political practices have been influential in authorizing 'the self' as represented in autobiographical texts as a legitimate subject/object of research (e.g., Miller, 1991; Smith, 1987; Stanley, 1992). At the same time, poststructural critiques of self writing (e.g., Barthes, 1977; Bennington and Derrida, 1993; Foucault, 1997a; 1997b; 1998; Gannon, in press) have radically destabilised autobiographical practices. Indeed, Probyn argues that poststructuralism's legacy is an 'evacuation of any ground upon which one could speak the self' (1993: 14). Yet, autobiographical studies, even within feminist epistemologies, remain erratic in the extent to which they problematize the author as a source of truth and attend to writing itself as constitutive textual practice. The theorist who analyses autobiography and its (dis)contents remains more likely to fix her analytical eye on another woman's autobiography than on her own. The recent interdisciplinary anthology *Feminism and autobiography: texts, theories, methods* (Cosslett *et al.*, 2000), for instance, provides a representative snapshot of the field. The editors trace the (inter)disciplinary history of feminist scholarship to the current moment where, they suggest, most scholars agree 'that textuality should be at the heart of the study of autobiography' and, furthermore, that 'the dissolution of the distinctions between self-life-writing' should also be an objective in feminist autobiography (Cosslett *et al.*, 2000: 5). Poststructural theorizing about subjectivity is foregrounded, as contemporary feminist autobiography is positioned as being interested in exploring shifting subjectivities and in the intersubjective and dialogical qualities of (women's) lived experience. The preface to the collection describes the seminar series from which the anthology emerged as being highly personal, intersubjective and embodied – as 'a prism through which I looked inside myself to see how bits of theory, odd empirical data, ideas from differing disciplines could tell my research story' (Humm, 2000: xv). Yet, in the anthology itself, the

final outcome of the workshop series, only four out of the 16 chapters foreground aspects of the researcher/author's life and the problematics of writing this self/text. Other chapters remain more interested in unpacking 'autobiography' in terms of (other) women's lives constructed in (other) autobiographical texts. There is a lingering trace of autobiography as – more or less – authentic, realist self-narrative; albeit marked by the discontinuities and relationality of female subjectivity that are of interest to the feminist scholar. In this paper, in contrast, I am interested in both exploring the textual strategies that might be taken up for writing autobiographically and in critiquing this practice at the same time and through the same text(s). In the aforementioned anthology, Miller (2000) rereads her(younger/other)self situated in a particular place at a different moment in time; Scott and Scott (2000) reread themselves as sisters in relation to their mother in order to critique normalized discourses within the family that positioned the sisters as other to one another; Rivera-Fuentes (2000) writes what she calls a 'sym/bio/graphy' as an intertext alongside her friend Yasna's letters about her lesbian life history; whilst McElroy (2000) resituates herself as Welsh and academic in the social spaces of academic conferences. In these four chapters, the authors both catch hold of and lose themselves in their deconstructive autobiographical texts. They take themselves up as poststructurally inflected subjects, perpetually in process inside competing discourses around what is to be daughter, mother, lover, friend. Their chapters emphasize subjectivity through 'verbs not nouns – writing, not texts' (Cosslett *et al.*, 2000: 7). They enact distinct and different textual practices determined by their topics and context. They make their language problematic through intensification, excess, multiplicity. With few explicit references to poststructural theories or theorists, these authors take up writing (the self/itself) as though it provides 'precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought' (Cixous, 1981: 249). In this paper, my writing also takes an 'autobiographical turn' with the intention of 'not "just doing it" but [simultaneously] using it as data for analysis' (Cosslett *et al.*, 2000: 12).

WRITING

My strategy in writing autobiographically has been to sidestep issues about the transparency of language by adopting highly constructed textual genres and using these data to generate multiple readings of 'real' events within complex discursive contexts (Gannon, 2001; 2002; 2004a; 2004b). In this paper, my risky in(ter)vention

into autobiographical writing aims to trouble any remnant realist conventions in writing the self. The data are represented in poetic form and were collected from fragments of my own dreams. I take up poetic practice in particular, influenced by the work of Laurel Richardson (1997), to argue that poetry creates another sort of knowledge, other sets of truths, located in multiplicity and ambiguity, to those more singular truths created in other types of text. Dream data disrupt assumptions about the knowable, or rational, in the recording of the self. I take my textual and analytical practice also from the work of French feminist poststructuralist Hélène Cixous. Specifically, in this paper, I attend her 'school of dreams'. This is the second of the stages that Cixous outlines in *Three steps on the ladder of writing* (1993): the 'school of the dead', the 'school of dreams' and the 'school of roots'. Altogether they make up 'a type of shamanistic journey towards the experience of writing' (Bray, 2004: 68), towards a Cixousian writing that might be found in 'zones in(terre)-conscious' (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 88).

I mine my notebooks for source material, looking to events and details far from the present. The poem in this paper 'Dream(e)scape', distils one thread from many dreams over several years, the thread of husband/lover. I follow the practice of 'crystallizing' longer texts into poetic form that Richardson pioneered in her work with 'Louisa May' (1997). Phrases, words and images relating to my theme are extracted and threaded into a new text, in the order in which they were recorded and in the language in which they were written. In contrast to other collective (con)texts that I have written about (2001; 2004a; 2004b), where I have constructed poetic and theatrical texts from collective biography workshops, the dream poem does not have the social context for writing of those crowded spaces. The crowds in this poem are interior, the multiple voices come from somewhere 'inside' the poet (inside her body, inside her mind), somewhere unconscious, beyond consciousness, beyond reason.

DREAMING

Language such as 'dreams' and 'unconscious' necessarily suggest psychoanalytic discourse. In this paper, I trek into the valley of the unconscious and writing. In particular, interested in taking Cixous more literally than she ever intended, I follow her into dreamscapes. I set myself the task of shaping dreams into poetry in order to interrogate her claim that: 'Dreams teach us. They teach us how to write' (Cixous, 1993: 79). Ultimately, Cixous suggests that dreams teach us to go beyond the limits of our lives 'towards foreign lands,

toward the foreigner in ourselves ... in the unconscious, that inner foreign country, foreign home, country of lost countries' (1993: 69-70).

Cixous appropriates aspects of psychoanalytic discourse to elaborate her practice of *écriture féminine*, writing that practises a feminine libidinal economy that is as diffuse and polymorphous as woman's sexuality (e.g., 1981; 1986; 1991). Cixous claims *jouissance* as a feature of poetic writing – 'total access, total participation, total ecstasy ... extra, abundance' (Cixous and Clement, 1986: 167). Her writing challenges 'the rules of binary logic, objective meanings and the single, self-referential reference point decreed by masculine law' (Sellers, 1996: 15). Part of her strategy is to explore what she calls the 'jewellery box' of the unconscious for 'pearls ... diamonds ... signifiers that flash with a thousand meanings' (Cixous, 1991: 46). Operating as a (t)he(o)retical outlaw, Cixous steals 'past Freud's blind spots to take up his instruments to do [her] work' (Cixous and Clement, 1986: 166). She steals the language of psychoanalysis and turns it to her own purposes in her theory/practice of embodied women's writing. She takes up what in psychoanalysis is 'not-the-subject' – woman (Grosz, 1990) – as her subject, and she writes woman writing. Dreams in psychoanalysis are 'composites of various unconscious memories or wishes, usually of an oedipal or pre-oedipal kind' (Grosz, 1990: 90). They are texts for dream work where the analyst maps the 'chains of associations, overlapping memories, linkage between elements, repetitions and nodal points' (Grosz, 1990: 91). However, for Cixous, poetic writing is an aesthetic (and theoretical) practice, rather than an analytical or interpretive practice. Cixous speaks in her own language of the relationship between the unconscious and dreams in writing:

At night, tongues are loosened, books open and reveal themselves; what I can't do, my dreams do for me. For a long time I felt guilty: for having an unconscious. I used to imagine Writing as the result of the work of a scholar, of a master of Lights and measures.

(Cixous, 1991: 45)

Dreams operate on a semiotic level where pretensions of unity or of symmetry between signified and signifier fall away. The endless displacement of *différance* (Derrida, 1978), of constant substitution of meanings, plays through the language of dreams in ways that subvert the logic of the scholar of reason. Dreams operate outside the phallogocentric economy of 'lights and measures' and attending to dreams is entry into a space that allows for *écriture féminine*, for

poetic feminine writing. Cixous links dreams and the unconscious repeatedly when she talks of her own practice of writing:

I began to write in the regions of the unconscious. I had tremendous and clandestine relations with dreams; my dreams were so much stronger than I was I couldn't but obey them. But I had a disturbing sense of imposture. I kept thinking: what I have just written didn't come from me. I could write a thesis, but the texts I wrote were never mine.

They think it is me, but I only copy the other, it is dictated; and I don't know who the other is.

(Cixous, 1993: 102-103)

Dreams give access to the other within, the other that is not coded and bound by the apparent unitary subjectivity of the everyday. Dreams spill out all the others of our lives in different combinations and fragments, known and unknown, in surprise and in shock. The body is also there in dreams, always at the centre of the dream, and always there when we wake: running, falling, sweating, heart pumping, or smiling at the soft touch that we still feel on our skin.

THE BODY

In the dream poem in this paper, and in Cixous's enigmatic writing, the body is present and the body is the source of writing but this writing comes from another realm of the body where the author is not in control. Strange slippages occur and new combinations of images and thoughts emerge. These texts emerge from zones of 'in(terre)conscious' (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 88). This is how Cixous describes Derrida's writing, where he brings together 'structures or logics that have never before been thought' (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 88). Dreams do this too. But Cixous characterizes her own thinking and writing, as distinct from his, as the pursuit of the fragment, of the small detail, the sign, the haunting. She is an 'astrophysicist of miniscule stars' (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 89). In another reading of 'in(terre)conscious', Davies locates the site of writing as 'between earth and consciousness' and traces its practice in fiction that locates bodies in landscapes (Davies, 2000: 235). For Cixous, the zone of writing, her own 'in(terre)conscious' is not located in the 'physical' landscapes of the world (rivers, forests, oceans, earth), but in 'subconscious, interconscious . . . if not buried conscious zones' (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 115). Her role (as a writer) is at the '*scene* of the body. . . Not the head. The body. The entrails. . . the soul' (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 89-90). Memories are stored in flesh and writing unfurls from the

body. The body is a (physical) landscape that turns the outside to the inside, and dreams are one of the strategies the body uses to turn the inside to the outside. Cixous writes constantly of the necessity to go deep (into the body) to encounter the source of writing:

[Writing] is deep in my body, further down, behind thought. Thought comes in front of it and it closes like a door. That does not mean that it does not think, but it thinks differently from our thinking and our speech. Somewhere in the depths of my heart, which is deeper than I think. Somewhere in my stomach, somewhere in my womb.

(Cixous, 1993: 118).

What we know in the body is not retrievable in any simple or straightforward manner. Nor is the body erasable through the abstractions of high theory. Memories, sounds, images, smells, feelings, fleeting sensations and other fragments are folded into the body, stored deep down but also on the surface, always ready to erupt into language, always already language. Dreams erupt from within the body, from beyond reason and consciousness, and dreaming is another mode of thought that is taken up by the body.

WRITING 'DREAM(E)SCAPES'

So I turn to my dreams. I trace them through my notebooks, searching. My practice has been, over the years, to write down dreams that wake me with a shock, to 'get them out' and on paper, out of 'my head' so that I can go back to sleep or start the day. So now I can look through these scribbled traces here and there in my journals and ask: what does *my* body give me when I dream? What are my 'signifiers that flash with a thousand meanings' (Cixous, 1991: 46)? I find that the fragments that the body throws up that wake me with a fright strong enough to have to write them down are fragments of banal and ordinary events. They are people, places, moments, emotions that (perhaps) I know already and that keep replaying in infinite upsetting combinations. Nightmares of work, of relationship breakdowns, bizarre versions of ordinary events. My jewellery box is packed with paste. But I set myself the task of writing poems from dreams, in this experiment in poetic writing. One of the problems of catching dreams is that already, by the time you have pen in hand and notebook open, the dream is gone and the details that remain are already under the control of the rational mind and its desires to pin down, record, make sense, construct some sort of narrative. Nevertheless, the poem that follows was shaped from dreams recorded on waking. It is not meant to be a text for psychoanalysis of

submerged, repressed emotions or desires. I do not write poetically with hermeneutic intent. The subject of this poem, the 'I' who speaks, is continually reconstructed and reconfigured as she slips and slides through the dream/poem. Though it is this body that woke in panic or surprise, the poem writes from a subject position that seems strangely disembodied in the detail that the poet/dreamer (me) records but that is very mobile in space and time and social context. Sticking to the rules that I set myself in this task meant that I did not add any details to these fragments and I did not reorder them. Nor did I produce current material. I took old texts scrawled in the dark of the night and cut, cut, cut and what remained was this poem. It is not offered as an exemplary poetic text but merely as one of my attempts to find 'a virgin way of listening' (to myself, to my body, to language) and to make the 'always newold language speak' (Cixous, 1994: xxi). I take up a strand of research mentioned by Cixous and I follow it into my writing:

[F]or a long time I have permitted myself to use the writing of dreams to conduct a certain research in writing. I assume, in saying this, that the dream does not cheat with metaphor. That is impossible by definition.

(Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 27)

Nevertheless, working at a text like this, shaping it into this poem, is a conscious, careful practice. Research poets endeavour to focus and polish up some details in the text as they discard other aspects of the text. At the same time they aim to 'open' the text so that 'the questions the poem raises for readers . . . reflect their own particular subtexts, not universal texts' (Richardson, 1997: 141). The textual strategies that shape a poem are not generalisable to other projects, they vary according to each (con)text, but reflexive attention to writing is also part of a poststructuralist research ethic. This poem takes up one thread from the journals that I have written about elsewhere – the end of the wedding (Gannon, 2002) – and traces that through occasional dreams of husbands and lovers that I recorded over several years of journal writing. The dream lover/husband is the fragment, the haunting, that I follow through these dreams and this poem.

Dream(e)scape

Inside a huge old house
 (a façade, another house floats inside it),
 My husband, his lover, another not-me, lover,
 line up against me.

(He's confused, he says,
he loves them both)
My room is blue,
the walls are false;
Below two children write
their misdemeanours
in a book.

(Why won't he?)
My only escape
is down the stairs
into the sea;
and ...

I'm at a dance,
an old man
is leaving,
if he had a knife, he says,
he'd slice off my breast
as a mark of courtesy,
and ...

I'm in a house
with a dead man,
I slit his throat
when he attacked me.
I should burn the evidence
But I have a pocketful of letters and
no time to read them,
I'm too busy writing,
and ...

My husband says he'll get someone else
to fuck me,
to give me a baby,
then he'll be
free to leave.

My husband's lover
takes him shopping
for watercolour yellow shoes.
I know the colour will wash out with the first rain
but he won't listen
and ...
It's our last night,
in a double bed,
on a train going
nowhere.
They shunt our carriage
off the track,
BANG,

the door swings open and there she is,
 eating cereal and smiling,
 and ...

I'm in a recruitment hall,
 looking at her photo,
 on the wall,
 long hair across her eyes,
 and she's there,
 in front of me, sitting
 on a row of seats against a wall,
 and I'm in front of her
 an ashtray in my hand,
 I smash it
 at her feet.
 I run after
 so sorry
 for my temper,
 sorry that I'm still
 so upset after
 so long.
 (She didn't know, she said,
 how much I cared.
 Nor did I)

In a kitchen,
 a woman washes dishes
 while my friend feeds her baby,
 she introduces us and the woman
 becomes a young man,
 who becomes my lover,
 I ask him what his name means in English
 Prostitute, he says,
 and ...

I'm in a hostel in a rainforest,
 preparing for my wedding
 but I don't want to marry him again
 and I have nothing to wear,
 and ...

I'm at the ATM and
 Straightaway I hit the jackpot
 one million dollars, more,
 it just keeps coming,
 and ...

There's someone in the house
 who knocks me down and
 runs out, arms piled high with things
 and ...

I'm on a jetty at dawn,
My husband's in a dinghy
He looks good,
he tells me he's leaving her,
(He's sorry, he says, and
we hug each other and cry).
I was pregnant
but my baby was kidnapped.

My lover leaves me
when my back is turned,
lingers with another woman,
disappears onto a balcony,
(I still love you, he says)
and ...
A man sells me a lucky charm,
an amulet,
I buy it with my last coin
certain that my luck has turned.

My lover returns with a woman,
He says he's leaving
I swim outside into the backyard pool
green and cool
watch them throw water
over each other and laugh,
I know that that they are lovers,
and ...

I'm waiting for my husband
on the verandah of a small hotel,
The car is loaded with all our things,
I have to wait for him but
I know he's forgotten, yet
Still I can't leave
and ...

I'm living in a shack
on an island,
I come from the ferry to find
dead fish strewn across my beach,
I take my shovel down, and
A man stands beside me, watching,
with his little dog under his arm,
Pat my dog, he says,
the dog grinning its piano key teeth,
or I'll split your back open with my axe.

I'm in my yard
at midnight

pruning roses,
 when someone comes,
 Who's there? I call,
 Your loving husband.
 His face bristles
 with hatred,
 I've come for my things, he says,
 with his dog beside him, growling
 Are you alone?
 He says he's seen a lawyer
 and my father,
 But I have my rose clippers
 and my own dog
 and my car and
 (even without any keys)
 I start it and drive up the slope and away

In Cixous's School of Dreams, there are four lessons to learn about writing. The first is the lesson of *Without transition* (Cixous, 1993: 79). We wake (still sleeping and dreaming) and we are already, instantly, in a foreign world, and in the country of writing. In this world, 'extreme familiarity' coexists with 'extreme strangeness' and our pure foreignness is a 'fantastic nationality' (1993: 80). In the dreams that make up the poem 'Dream(e)scape', real husbands and lovers (his, mine) are transposed into unfamiliar and unpredictable places and events. As is the way of other worlds, of dreamscapes, borders are unclear and landscape is unpredictable: houses float inside one another, solid walls are false. Although (some) people look familiar, they behave strangely: they come back (repeatedly); they leave or threaten to leave over and over again; they slide from one into the other (from woman to man to my lover whose name means prostitute, from a photo on a wall in a hall to a woman sitting on a bench in front of me); and they appear to be where they do not belong (in a dinghy, on a train). And strangers appear, benevolent and malevolent, and disappear. The second lesson in writing is *Speed* (Cixous, 1993: 80). Dream time operates at 'lightening speed ... no passage, no introduction, no entrance', frontiers are crossed 'at the stroke of a signifier' (1993: 81). In the poem, time unfolds sometimes at speed (going to bed and then BANG the train is shunted and it is time for breakfast), though at other times the woman waits, passive and immobilized by waiting for a man. There is no (time for) explanation or suspense (1993: 81). The third enigmatic lesson about writing in Cixous's School of Dreams is the *Taste of the secret* (1993: 82). Although we cannot know 'the main secret that life is made up of'

or it would no longer be a secret, Cixous suggests it is the ‘*feeling of secret* we become acquainted with as we dream’ (1993: 85). The impossible secret that will never be known, that can never be said, yet that is so close that it is like ‘a kind of heart beating’ is what provokes both dreaming and writing (1993: 85). Perhaps it is this fragile impossibility that fuels the desire for writing, the search for the (an?) elusive secret. Dreaming provides a ‘living illustration of those paradoxes, contradictions and difficulties in our relation to the other’ (1993: 85-86) that for me (and Cixous) seems to be the greatest of all secrets. In this context, the poem is a subterranean map of relations between the dreamer and the others in her life, fictional and factual, over several years. The final lesson on writing in the School of Dreams is the *Pure Element of Fear*, a phrase Cixous borrows from the poet Tsvetaeva (Cixous, 1993: 88). Cixous is explicit that she is ‘not speaking in Freudian terms’, but rather that the unconscious, exercised in dreams, is ‘the source of instincts that will be the motors of writing’ (1993: 88), including terror and joy. Such instincts are elemental, substantial: as if they are ‘something chemical, something concrete that you find, fear, taste, perceive in dreams’ (1993: 90). In heading for daylight – for clarity, purity and strength in our writing – we must traverse night, the land of dreaming. Thus we ‘pass through dreams in order to perceive the supernatural dimension of the natural’ (1993: 97). Tangled elements of grief, fear, abandonment, loss, anger and forgetting thread through this poem. Fuelled by dreams these elements (can) become the ‘motors’ of writing. Yet the relationship is not merely instrumental. The author does not merely choose at will to exploit emotions that are kept fresh and intense in her dreams. Writing is like dreaming where, despite our illusions, ‘[w]e are not having the dream, the dream has us, carries us, and, at a given moment, it drops us, even if the dream is in the author in the way the text is assumed to be’ (Cixous, 1993: 98). Cixous is most interested, she says, in texts that ‘escape’ their authors, in writing that gives in to itself, in books that are more like places than narratives, in the book ‘that writes itself and carries you on board’ (1993: 100). Yet – as Richardson emphasizes – poetic writing is also work (e.g., Richardson, 1997; 2001). In this case the work entails the struggle to ‘attain the same strength and intensity in reality as in dreams’ (Cixous, 1993: 103). The poem becomes a textual construction site for the representation of a discontinuous fragmentary narrative and a version (or versions) of a self.

Cixous warns that the ‘dream’s enemy’ (and the dream’s enemy is also writing’s enemy) ‘is interpretation’ (1993: 107). Yet, if, despite Cixous’s warning against it, I was to venture into interpretation, it

is obvious that this poem is loaded with signifiers of domesticity. They are spatial, such as homes, houses, shacks, little cottages, kitchens, beds, fences, rose gardens; and relational, including friend, husband, lover, stranger. They are unreliable and capricious and the subject of the poem (if we (continue to) take her, as pronoun grammar dictates, to be one) is repeatedly let down by them. Many of them are more or less familiar to me. For Cixous, these hauntings, these 'apparitions' are characters from 'the theater that is my life during a certain period' (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 28); but in different (dis)guises, transmuted from the everyday. There were many other characters in these journal dreamscapes, but I extracted the husband/lover scenes from them to make this much more compact text. Cixous suggests that her dreams teach her secrets about herself, yet this is not necessarily a psychoanalytic reading. The secret the dreams of this poem reveal is an obsession with the end of a marriage. This was the thread I followed through the dreams into the poem. Not such a secret, perhaps, but in the everyday of the dreaming times, life went on and that was all in the past. But my body threw me each time into wakefulness.

The body is a curious anomaly in this poem. For Cixous, the 'body in metamorphosis' is 'the central interchange' in dreams and writing: 'What the dream shows us in its theatre is the translation, in the open, of what we cannot see, of what is not visible but can be sensed in reality' (1997: 28). The specificity of the body is the place of metamorphosis, of translation, of writing and of reading (our lives and our dreams). Yet, one striking feature of this poem is the relative absence of the body *in* the text. The body of the journal writer was thrown into wakefulness, yet what she has written, the fragments of text of the dreams that have come into the poem, do not foreground her own body except as a place from which movement and sight might emanate, a place from which she might articulate her desires (if she could only find the words). As her body disappears, her agency is limited. She is relatively passive in this poem, acted upon by others more often than acting herself. She is often static whilst others act – they threaten to slice off her breast, to fuck her, to give her a baby, to split her back open; they knock her down, they watch her, and they leave her. Leaving her becomes the metanarrative of this poem, of this particular dreamscape. Where she does act violently herself is in response to provocation ('I slit his throat/when he attacked me'), or it is immediately negated ('I smash it/at her feet./I run after/so sorry ...'). Most often she is the grammatical subject of the verb 'to be', which serves to place her in locations involuntarily, thrown there by the dream narrative within which she is constituted as passive

and not in control of her own destiny or destination, nor the movements of her body: 'I'm . . . at a dance/in a house/in a double bed/on a train/in a recruitment hall/in front of her/in a hostel/at the ATM/on a jetty/(waiting) on a verandah/(living) in a shack/in my yard'. Other verbs through which she takes up agency in this poem are relatively inactive. Most often they describe verbal or emotional processes, such as writing, knowing, looking, asking, preparing, hugging, crying, watching and waiting. Her (very feminine) passivity is coded into the grammar of the poem, into the grammar of the dreams she recorded in her journal. There are, however, moments where her body acts and where she takes up corporeal agency in more positive ways: she swims, buys an amulet, prunes roses, starts a car and drives away. These provide glimpses into other possibilities for being, away from husbands/lovers/men who are strangers who might hurt her.

The poem could be read as a fragment of story (or fragments of stories) of female escape from subjection to romance, or from the domestic as a safe and secure location for female subjectivity. If it is read as a narrative with some sort of linear logic, and a singular subject, the 'I', the woman, attempts to exercise agency through anger initially but this is destructive – she even kills a man. The poem could be read, from another feminist reading position, as a narrative of a woman learning to speak and to act for herself, to use an assertive force that is more controlled and effective than anger and that allows her to meet the threat of patriarchal violence ('Are you alone?', the husband, the lawyer, the father) with competence and confidence. She too has a dog and a weapon, and she can start a car without a key and drive up a steep road and take herself away from that place. The point where the poem drops me, the moment when the ending (this ending of many others that might have been possible) suggests itself, and the readings that I have outlined, give a narrative turn to the poem, which is itself one reading of other possible readings and writings. If the last section (the last dream), 'I'm in my yard . . .', had not been there, perhaps the poem might have been more resistant to closure. If I had not said earlier that the dreams (the poem) were chronological, perhaps a reader of the poem would be less inclined to seek in it a narrative logic. But the pull of narrative, of linearity, of modernist assumptions about texts (and autobiographies) and how they work, about time and the order of things, is very strong and difficult to resist. Notions of the humanist individual underpin the logic of narrative, where the individual is 'generally understood to be a conscious, stable, unified, rational, coherent, knowing, autonomous, and ahistoric individual', who exercises 'freedom, will and

intentionality' in the public sphere as they act in the world (St Pierre, 2000: 500). Although the humanist individual is gendered male, in another reading using a narrative logic, the woman of the poem becomes more 'male' (less hysterical, more powerful, more independent) as she moves towards a type of emancipation offered at the end. If indeed it is an end.

In terms of a poststructuralist reading – and writing – it is the subject herself who is called into question in the text. In poststructuralism, 'the subject does not exist ahead of or outside language but is a dynamic, unstable effect of language/discourse and cultural practice' (St Pierre, 2000: 502). In this experiment in writing, I have taken up dreaming as another discursive field of play. In a poststructuralist writing, the subject is 'opened up to the possibility of continual reconstruction and reconfiguration', she is 'presumed to be created in the ongoing effects of relations and in response to society's codes' (St Pierre, 2000: 502). This woman, the subject (if we read her as singular) of the poem, slides through a range of subject positions that open and close to her momentarily as her sex and her contexts enable some possibilities and close others. She is not me, not the me of that time, nor the me of daylight, of waking. She uses my voice (when she speaks as 'I') and she may have some similarity in appearance but she is a *doppelgänger*, she is not me at all. She is a wraith, an apparition, she is no one, she is many. The poststructural text and the poststructural reading of that text retain the strangeness of the subject, the subject surging forth, the subject in process. The strangeness of thought itself, of the production of the subject through thought, following the traces of discourses which underpin the text, their twists and turns, their allusive elusive patterns of signification – these are elements of a poststructuralist writing. The School of Dreams, with Cixous as the teacher, is the school without walls in which we can learn these writing practices. For feminist scholars of autobiography, this school is just one of many we might attend in order to make the familiar – even when it is ourselves – strange.

CONCLUSION

Dreams are for Cixous the place of the other inside, the place of disguises where: '[t]hey think it is me, but I only copy the other, it is dictated; and I don't know who the other is' (1993: 103). Within a poststructural theory of writing, the subject is multiplicity: self and other merge and diverge. Cixous' other is not the abstraction created in the Oedipal split and the mirror stage of psychoanalysis. Nor is it the (modernist) subject of 'stupid, egotistic, restrictive, exclusive

behaviour which excludes the other' (Cixous, 1994: xvii). St Pierre suggests that self/other is the 'master binary' of Cartesian rational thought (2000: 494). Mansfield characterizes 'the whole idea of a fixed, knowable, autonomous subjectivity' as 'an hallucination contrived by power in order to isolate and control us in the cage of individuality' (2000: 36). Poststructural writers refuse that cage, aspire to writing practices that disrupt binaries including not only self/other, but also inside/outside, conscious/unconscious, rational/irrational, past/present and memory/reality. Attending to dreams has been part of my strategy to disrupt these binaries. The other has been writing poetry. In this I follow Richardson who sees auto/biographical writing as the telling of 'local, partial, prismatic stories' (1997: 5) and poetry as a particularly productive deconstructive textual practice.

Autobiographies might be conceived of as annotations made on journeys through ourselves. In deconstructive autobiographies the writer catches hold of and loses her self at the same time, simultaneously composing and decomposing her 'self'. In this paper, I have produced an experimental 'autobiographical' text, a poem written from a journey through my dreams. I have turned my analytical eye on my own autobiographical text. I have disrupted realist conventions, and rational expectations in autobiography by turning to dreams as my data source. I have subjected the poem to multiple readings in order to displace humanist inclinations towards linearity or causality in terms of who 'I' am and why. Using the transgressive data of dreams as a point of departure for discursive analysis continues the theoretically productive and rigorous work of feminist poststructuralists who fold 'emotional data, dream data, and sensual data' into their research (St Pierre, 1997: 175). This paper provides no template for other researchers, no replicable experimental or generalizable data, rather it is an intervention, an irritant perhaps, into any remnant conventions of autobiographical writing. It is an invitation to experiment with data, with texts and with the 'selves' we bring to writing.

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