

fed person.” [...] “Of course we all hope to get slightly wounded so that we can receive the *croix de guerre* ...”

Malcolm Cowley believed that literature served a purpose, even more so in a chaotic world of wars, hot and cold. He was predominantly dedicated to the writers he believed in and would champion anyone he felt deserved to be read by a wide audience. One of the best examples of Cowley’s influence is, of course, *The Portable Faulkner* (1946) which helped (re-) establish Faulkner. Cowley’s son calls it “one of the most esteemed pieces of editing in history of American publishing” and Faulkner himself called the job “splendid.” Cowley’s role in getting Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) published should be highlighted as well. An entire section of the collection is dedicated to Kerouac and *On the Road*. Cowley was confident the novel would “stand for a long time as the honest record of another way of life.”

The first letter of the collection is to Cowley’s lifelong friend, Kenneth Burke. It ends: “I have run out of paper.” 70 years later, in another letter to Burke, Cowley states: “Nothing much remains except to put my papers in order.” Even if this collection only represents a fraction of Cowley’s output, it is more than enough to show why he is one of the most important figures of American literary history. Cowley was there; he saw it; he lived it; he helped shape it.

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Željka Švrljuga, *Hysteria and Melancholy as Literary Style in the Works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, Zelda Fitzgerald, and Djuna Barnes*, with a foreword by Patrizia Lombardo. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011. ISBN 9780773415171.

Hysteria and melancholy are depicted in countless literary works of fiction and elucidated and discussed in numerous academic texts—related to medicine and psychology as well as cultural history and literary studies. To some degree, the same may be said of the literary works “The Yellow Wallpaper” (Charlotte Perkins Gilman), *The Awakening* (Kate Chopin), *Save Me the Waltz* (Zelda Fitzgerald) and *Nightwood* (Djuna Barnes). They have all, with perhaps one exception, been favoured as subjects for literary analysis, not least among feminist-oriented researchers for whom hysteria in particular has been a central topic, and they have been linked with the oppressed

position of women in society and culture. It is natural to ask: What more can be said about hysteria and melancholy in fiction, and in the aforementioned texts? A great deal, of course, but how, and within which theoretical and thematic parameters the analysis is conducted is all the more important.

In the book *Hysteria and Melancholy as Literary Style*, Željka Švrljuga explores how hysteria and melancholy as mental structures are created and unfolded in a selection of American works of fiction by Gilman, Chopin, Fitzgerald and Barnes respectively. It is her PhD dissertation, *In strenuous tongue: Hysteria and melancholy as discursive practices* from 2000 that forms the basis of this new book and, let it be said at once, I think it is very gratifying that Švrljuga's thorough work with hysteria and melancholy in literature has now arrived in book form and been made available to a wider public.

A starting point for Švrljuga is that both hysteria and melancholy are not merely pathological conditions, but also afflictions that are given aesthetic expression in literature as a distinctive literary style. Hence the study (or at least parts of it) belongs to what medical historian Mark S. Micale describes in his comprehensive book on hysteria, *Approaching Hysteria. Disease and Its Interpretation* (1995), as "the new hysteria studies": that is to say, studies that have come in the wake of the dissolution of the diagnostic category (in this case *hysteria*, but it could also apply to *melancholia*). Švrljuga's readings are sound, incisive, perceptive and interesting. Her analyses will not only enable new knowledge to be added to literary studies, but also contribute to a wider understanding of the diagnoses and their role in culture.

In *Hysteria and Melancholy* Švrljuga investigates the relationship between gender, suffering, politics and aesthetics in four American classics. In it she demonstrates more specifically how literary language is particularly suited to capturing mental moods and subtleties, and how hysteria and melancholy can appear as a discursive form and a distinctive literary style in fiction. Gilman's and Chopin's texts were published in 1892 and 1899 respectively, while Fitzgerald's and Barnes' books were published in 1932 and 1936. The selection is perhaps not very original within a feminist literary horizon, but undoubtedly well chosen. These are particularly interesting, rich, modern texts, both in terms of content and form; they all sparked significant debate at the time, and still deserve to be read. The same may be said of the time in which the texts are set, and the pain and suffering that unfold in them. Both hysteria and melancholy are conditions and diagnoses that we can trace far back in history, to texts from Ancient Greece and even

earlier, but which are depicted in literature in new ways since the modern novel took shape in the 18th and 19th centuries.

While the last decades of the 1800s are presented as a period in which hysteria is especially relevant in literary fiction and art as well as in medicine and in the asylums, melancholy certainly spans a broader time horizon, both in art and medicine. However, the author does not make a strong point about this. Aspects that purely relate to medicine and history of ideas are not the main foci, but literary close readings and interpretations. At the same time, the readings of the texts are not divorced from their wider contexts; nor from the biographical contexts that are incorporated in a highly sympathetic and subtle manner. All four of the authors struggled for periods with mental problems and some were diagnosed with various conditions. In many ways, therefore, they lived unconventional lives by the standards of their day, and transcended the cultural norms of their time. There is no doubt that these experiences expressed themselves through their works of fiction. However, the biographical aspect is not central, as it has been in very many feminist interpretations. In other words, what we encounter is not a simple author-text, life-work approach, nor is it a symptomatic or a diagnostic reading. Švrljuga wishes to read the texts based on their own premises and reinstate their literary value (12).

Common to the four texts is that they deal with illness and madness, with borderline conditions that are given aesthetic expression, with moods, feelings, pain, with pathology made visible and which is sensed through language before the illness becomes evident and the diagnosis clear. At the centre are women who in different ways attempt to deal with their identity and sexuality, women who oppose and transcend the traditional gender norms of their age. After a foreword and an introductory chapter on hysteria and melancholy there follow four chapters in which the different texts are analyzed.

The book's research question is linked to the pathological and linguistic, as well as to the gender-political and epistemological conditions, and deals with issues such as: how is suffering as a theme expressed in terms of literary moods, how are the various afflictions given their particular stylistic expression, and how can women's literature, with its interest in the oppressed, also challenge power structures that make demands on objective knowledge rather than the subjective truth that literature is in a position to formulate? Thus the feminist framework, the issues in the text, and the analyses are well and consistently suited to each other (perhaps almost too well). Hysteria is presented in the study as a type of narrative and discursive resistance

technique, while melancholy is regarded rather as a frame of mind that expresses the meaninglessness of existence and language. In other words we are dealing with two different structures that are associated with two different narrative strategies: hysteria as a subversive, political force of resistance and melancholy as withdrawal.

The theoretical framework is psychoanalytic. Švrljuga is especially inspired by Jacques Lacan and by Julia Kristeva, but also for example by Juliet Mitchell and Shoshana Felman. With their strong emphasis on the linguistic, especially literary language, Lacan and Kristeva themselves contributed to a renewal of Freudian psychoanalysis, a revitalisation that has also been beneficial to literary studies. The introduction to the book provides a relatively thorough description of the main concepts and premises that the author builds upon and activates in the different analyses, and also of how she positions herself in the theoretical landscape. This is a rather complicated and advanced theoretical framework, but seems nonetheless to be a sound and appropriate choice in this context. One of the ways in which hysteria is interpreted is as a resistance to the symbolic law, while melancholy represents a movement from the symbolic to the imaginary. In this way, the author shows the close associations between literature and psychoanalysis, and how meaningful and decisive the individual words of fiction and the narratives of real life are. The readings demonstrate the centrality of pain in the texts, and how the style of language can, in fact, anticipate illness. At the same time they show how the texts are about healing. As Švrljuga writes in her conclusion: “If the four texts that have been examined center on suffering, they are also texts about healing if we recall Kristeva’s postulate that the precondition of art is to overcome melancholy” (224).

Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” is about a young woman who suffers a nervous breakdown, or post-natal depression, after giving birth. She is confined to the second floor of a secluded summer cottage, in the room with the yellow wallpaper where her husband, a doctor, has prescribed quiet and bed rest as the sole treatment—in accordance with the American doctor Silas Weir Mitchell, who also treated Perkins Gilman. The text is read through the lens of hysteria, and in this first literary analysis, Švrljuga shows convincingly how the hysterical narrative and the literary style work together. We are dealing with a hysterical text in which, as the action proceeds, the main character crawls gradually into madness, so to speak.

The next analysis, entitled “An Awakening to Death”, deals with Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*. Here we move between hysteria and melancholy

as textual practice, in which melancholy is given precedence. The novel is considered one of the first American novels that does not treat the marginalised status of women in a patronising way. In the way it deals with the theme of liberation, it is simultaneously both typical of its time and almost universally relevant. Švrljuga in her reading elicits the particular discursively and thematically characteristic qualities of melancholy. And it is interesting that the author in her feminist-oriented reading has actually chosen to focus on melancholy. Through the course of history, melancholy has generally been connoted as masculine, and many of the feminist studies have accordingly been more concerned with hysteria.

Melancholy is also central to Švrljuga's reading of Zelda Fitzgerald's *Saving the Waltz*—which thematically has many parallels with Fitzgerald's own life and marriage to F. Scott Fitzgerald. Švrljuga here investigates more specifically the relationship between grief and melancholy, and between the more private and subjective, and the cultural expressions of melancholy that unfold in the novel. Incidentally, it is Zelda Fitzgerald's oil painting *Ballerinas* (1933)—which is also included and discussed in the text—that is chosen as the illustration for the book's frontispiece.

The book's final analysis is of Djuna Barnes' roman à clef, *Nightwood*. Here lesbian love is the central theme, and it is the melancholic moods and exchanges that stand out in particular. Once again, Švrljuga displays her ability to capture subtleties and interesting storylines, and how style and expressions of anguish are mutually influential. As she puts it: "I would argue that melancholy moods provide *discursive, narrative and thematic patterns* which validate *Nightwood's* paradigmatic status as a melancholy text" (169). It is also interesting how she draws on Robert Burton's classic work on melancholy of 1638, *The Anatomy of Melancholia*, which according to Švrljuga functions as one of three subtexts in Barnes' book.

It is beyond the scope of this review to examine in more detail the individual works and Švrljuga's at times brilliant analyses, but I would absolutely encourage that her book be read, preferably in parallel with the relevant literary texts. This is a finely tuned and ambitious book, in which the author's sensitivity to the psychological moods and variations, to mental and physical pain, to language's dimensions of meaning as well as its power, and to literature's advanced linguistic expression are clearly and convincingly associated and balanced with a political dimension to which the marginalised status and liberation of women are pivotal. At the same time, the author also demonstrates significant insight into the different au-

thorships as well as psychoanalytic theory. As Patrizia Lombardo writes in her excellent and informative foreword, Švrljuga illustrates how text and theory are mutually influential, and how psychoanalysis and literature can inform one another (iii). What we have here is a sound piece of academic work, but one which requires of the reader a certain amount of prior knowledge and a level of interest in psychoanalytic theory.

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