practice of eidetic reduction, the classical phenomenological method of deliberately excluding "whatever is peculiar to only one phenomenon among a set of phenomena".[26] Even though the primary aim of this typology was to establish a critical tool for reading and mapping a large body of poetry (about twenty poets are examined in *Revolution in Poetic Consciousness*), the following examination of Bowes Lyon's poem "Helen Meditates Before Her Portrait as a Woman" is to illustrate how the categories *ethos*-mode-voice may be applied to the interpretation of a single poem.

Helen Meditates Before Her Portrait as a Woman

They still woo me there, and none miss me;
  In their eyes, that were my prison, dead I live.
Foolish are men, that in a fleeting image would embrace me.
  My bright Ghost to whom shall I give? (Collected Poems 64)

Put into the mouth of Helen, this short meditation is twice removed from what might constitute an act of self-representation under normal conditions. In the context of our cultural background the reader is inclined to associate Helen with Helen of Troy. Helen is a mythical figure and portrayed dead. Yet her death, we learn, is her life. Antithesis is the governing principle of her monologue. Each line is based on the contrast between presence and absence: courtship versus oblivion, vision versus death, evanescence versus possession, ghost versus giving. The self is crucial, but appears wholly dispossessed – a mere voice statically suspended "before her Portrait". For the portrait is not the locus of speech: "In their eyes", "in a fleeting image" suggest a surrogate existence which, however, lacks the properties of a world (space, time, objects), and the deictic "there" does not help to specify the spatial position of the voice either. The self is both grammatical subject and object, represented by possessive and personal pronouns, twice in the nominative, three times in the accusative. Rather than denoting a form of belonging, the possessive case merely strengthens the undifferentiated status of the speaker: "my prison" – she is nothing but a visual projection of her suitors; "[m]y bright Ghost" – she has no body. Even the "image", which has replaced Helen's physical appearance, is "fleeting". The ghostly presence of her voice disrupts both the images of enclosure (prison, embrace) and the sensory experience (vision, touch) ascribed to an anonymous group of male viewers ("they"). Helen's otherworldly vantage point runs counter to the authority with which she speaks and the deictic sub-worlds (past and future) she creates. The proleptic and analeptic leaps which her consciousness effects are suggestive of temporal and emotional continuity ("still"; the closing question points to the future), but how can such continuity be accounted for? We lack a point of reference. How can her consciousness persist without a body? Helen's situation is one of extreme existential solitude. Trapped in a view from nowhere, her soundless meditation reaches us through a fantastic displacement of speech which the poem alone can achieve and which, self-consciously, highlights the textual constitution of the voice.

26 On the implications of eidetic reduction see Kerrane on phenomenology in Preminger, *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (961); Merlau-Ponty, "Preface" to *The Phenomenology of Perception*, in Spanos, ed. *Existentialism 2* (316-20).

Bowes Lyon's poem is a prime example of the fantastic *ethos*, projecting a perspective of self that contradicts our sense of possibility in both a cognitive and an affective meaning. All mental acts constituting consciousness are subverted (sensation, thinking, feeling, memory, concern about the future), and the speaker's scope of action is limited to an abortive gesture of offering her bright Ghost. The final question marks the zero-point of fantasy, a state of complete nothingness and ineffectualness. The fantastic *ethos* is characterised by instances of transgression, which in this poem operate at the cultural level (the relationship between a dead woman and her suitors) and at the level of discourse. As the men woo nothing but an image, patriarchal speech codes of domination (eyes, embrace) become vain. Moreover, the discourse of subjectivity is displaced into a non-referential environment, where the self has neither meaning nor consequence. By having the portrait of a dead woman speak, Bowes Lyon draws on and subverts one of the most powerful myths of womanhood in Western culture: woman as object of beauty and art. Helen's ghost eludes the desires and controlling gaze of the living. Yet, asserting her identity by paradoxically denying her body, she confirms her ambivalent role in patriarchal society: she lacks autonomy, she is a myth or artefact, a catalyst that prompts affection in the beholder whilst herself remaining passive and intact.

In presenting the vantage point of a ghost, Bowes Lyon's poem resembles the form of an epitaph – words inscribed on a tombstone –, which is characteristic of the entropic *mode*. Helen's words are enshrined on the page and, since her position is close to, but not identical with, her portrait ("there"), her speech represents a variant of the voice speaking from the grave – a common position in women's poetry from Christina Rossetti to Sylvia Townsend Warner and particularly conspicuous in the poetry of the Second World War. The dead voice suggests a preoccupation with states of being that escape literal representation and obviate direct contact with the material world. Identity is treated in terms of a profound crisis, involving denial, transformation, and fragmentation rather than unity and coherence. Hence the first-person perspective in this poem inadequately compensates for what has been effectively rejected: male desire and domination. The speech situation is asymmetrical and precludes any form of interaction, which is strengthened by the impersonal: "They still woo me there" as well as by the closing rhetorical question.

The dead, decayed or buried body is not recognisable any more, just as Helen has been turned into an immobile icon which is not herself. The principle of *enchireisis naturae*, the transformation of dead matter into plant life, characteristic of Bowes Lyon's treatment of nature in her war poetry, ties in with this change from individuality to sameness, indicated by the indefinite article in the title ("her portrait as *a* woman", my italics). Preoccupied with death, with dying and decaying bodies often depicted against a hostile background, Bowes Lyon's *voice* frequently adopts the role of suffering mankind and undergoes extreme stages of isolation. Images of pain and tortured flesh, of man and soil becoming one, of helplessness and martyrdom were given poignancy by her own handicap and illness, which eventually rendered her immobile, as well as by her work for bombing victims in London during the War. Hers is an infernal voice, commonly speaking from enemy territory and concerned with creatures that hurt, maim and destroy one another. The self in Bowes Lyon's poetry is exposed in an anti-garden where nature is vindictive and man a victim waiting for his end.

In this respect, the portrait, too, is the locus where the speaker confronts her own annihilation. Surviving as an image, Helen is defeated as a woman.

Bowes Lyon's poem is of particular interest to my focus on the mental context of poetry, because it self-consciously raises questions of identity addressed by Hertzberg, Nagel, Humphrey, Dennett, and others. Presupposing the persistence of consciousness when the body has ceased to be, the fantastic position of self in "Helen Meditates Before Her Portrait as a Woman" may indeed appear like a thought experiment on the separation of mind and body – especially intriguing in connection with Dennett's idea that we might survive the death of our bodies "as intact as a program can survive the destruction of the computer on which it was created and first run" (Dennett 430). As a thought experiment it may not clarify our concept of identity, which is not a consciousness in a ghostly vacuum, but the voice from the grave builds on our everyday notions about who we are. Helen's irrational position of self does not prove but test our assumptions about contingency (what accounts for Helen's identity), about mental causation (her beliefs and sensations fail to trigger any physical processes), and about mortality (Helen's sense of self is the remnant of a life in the past). The persistence of her personhood is a fiction – at least with regard to theories of bodily continuity, but we do not question it. There is an agreement between voice and reader, a sharing of the mental context, of mental states, categories, and activities. We can make sense of Helen's speech, because we infer from her discourse an intentional stance, an agent capable of a single stream of I-thoughts, and because the reader's effort to see the world according to Helen involves a process of projecting the deictic centre of the voice,[27] which is required in every successful act of communication.

Poetic positions of self pinpoint an inexhaustible potential for exploring experiential horizons in ways peculiar to poetry, i.e. in ways not limited to social behaviour, cultural norms, moral standards, and sex roles. Yet if the poet's voice is not bound by such conventions, it is not free from them either. Even at its most fantastic, the voice is not a denial of, but an interaction with the *status quo* – with the language, with the historical, socio-political situation, and with aesthetic conventions. Helen's identity is literally the product of her words. She *is* a centre of narrative gravity, constituted by the discourses, cultural beliefs, and modal, aesthetic and rhetorical conventions available to her (graveyard poetry and the epitaph, feminist-dialogical writing, dramatic monologue, ekphrasis, antithesis) whilst inviting her audience to read her speech as an intentional act, an act of consciousness.

27 Cf. Stockwell's concept of "deictic projection" (43-4).

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