Fleshed Out: Bodies of Language in Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story* and *Dark Places*

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Abstract:

People, bodies, and histories are written. But the question of who gets to author these histories and who gets to tell the stories of these people and bodies is not an easy question to be answered. In novels such as Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story* and *Dark Places* the power dynamics that control the way characters live and that determine who gets to write their histories are particularly complex. Grenville takes a narrative about the patriarchal oppression of women from the Victorian era and skillfully weaves it throughout a narrative closely resembling those of postcolonial oppression, exemplifying many struggles deemed that of the settler and/or the postcolonial subject. In these particular novels Kate Greenville uses the bodies of her characters, primarily her two protagonists Lilian and Albion, and their relationship to facts and food in order to show how they are able to unsettle these complex power dynamics in much the same ways that the colonized other is able to find their way out of the oppressive structures imposed on them; Grenville ultimately shows how the journey to a true and authentic self in the physically othered character is almost always a case of appropriating the dominant language and finding a balance, unable to escape the ways in which their bodies are inscribed from the patriarchy or colonizer they must find alternate methods of performing a "whole" self.

1 Histories and bodies are written. But the question of who gets to author these histories and who gets to tell the stories is not an easy question to be answered. There are power dynamics to be considered, dynamics that change circumstances and control them, dynamics that are determined by any number of different factors. In novels such as Kate Grenville's *Lilian's Story* (1985) and *Dark Places* (1994) the power dynamics that control the way characters live and that determine who gets to write their histories are particularly complex. Grenville takes a narrative about the patriarchal oppression of women from the Victorian era and skillfully weaves it throughout a narrative closely resembling those of postcolonial oppression, exemplifying many struggles deemed that of the settler and/or the postcolonial subject. *Lilian's Story* tells the tale of Lilian, daughter of Albion; whereas, *Dark Places* gives voice to Albion. Both stories are essentially the same, but from alternative perspectives. In *Lilian's Story* Lilian narrates what life was like growing up in Victorian Australia with a stereotypically masculine father. *Dark Places*, on the other hand, belongs to Albion and acts as a prequel to *Lilian's Story*; it answers the question of how a seemingly normal man can become so cruel, and so tarnished by the pressure to be masculine. In these particular novels Grenville uses the bodies of her characters, primarily her two protagonists Lilian and Albion, and their relationship to facts and food in order to show

how they are able to unsettle these complex power dynamics in much the same ways that the colonized other is able to find their way out of the oppressive structures imposed on them. Grenville ultimately shows how the journey to a true and authentic self in the physically othered character is almost always a case of appropriating the dominant language and finding a balance, unable to escape the ways in which their bodies are inscribed from the patriarchy or colonizer they must find alternate methods of performing a 'whole' self.

2 When past scholars – for example Chantal Greff-Kwast in "Fat vs. Fate" and Delys Bird in "Bodily Desires and Narrative Pleasures" – have written about *Lilian's Story* they have most often focused on the protagonist of the story, Lilian, and her relationship to food. This is not surprising, as she is a very memorable and emotionally abrasive character with a unique relationship to food; these complexities make her perfect to write about. She is also a significantly liminal character, belonging both within the center and outside the center, in and out of the margins; both belonging and not belonging to a given time and society. These are not, however, characteristics unique to just Lilian. Her father, brother, mother, and other various 'minor' characters all contribute something significant to the story and how the story maps out connections between food, language, the body, and other significant ambiguities. Previous researchers of *Lilian's Story* such as Chantal Kwast-Graff and Delys Bird have written about the feminine relationship to food and body in the novel, and have dealt moderately with the problematic patriarchal power structures at play, but as was stated previously these scholars focus solely on Lilian (with, in one case, a single brief mention of her mother). All mention of Albion, her father, is merely to drive home his role as patriarchal oppressor, but fails to delve deeper into his personal narrative and psyche. In this paper I seek to fill the spaces that have been left unexplored by other scholars. I will, of course, also discuss Lilian but in order to develop a complete picture of the kinds of complex issues of these novels it is important to also discuss Lilian's mother, Norah, her brother, John, and her father Albion as complex characters in their own right.

3 These two novels, *Dark Places* and *Lilian's Story*, are so intricately woven together that a disservice is done when one is discussed without the other, so for that reason both texts will be included in this paper. This examination will cover three main issues in relation to relevant scenes within the novels: first, the significance of the language/body connection seen through a postcolonial and feminist lens; second, how language and the body are used to gain power in the

novel, as well as how these tools are taken and power is lost; third, how Grenville manages to envision a possible middle ground where characters are able to possess agency over their own histories. In looking at both novels together readers are able to witness these processes from both sides; the side of the oppressor and the side of the oppressed. In *Lilian's Story* readers are given a painful account of Lilian's downfall from her own perspective, but in *Dark Places* readers are shown that forces that seek to dominate do not always possess malevolent intentions and are not always as wholly cruel as their actions do often imply.[1]

4 When a group of people of a certain race or gender impose their language on another group of people that they have deemed different their intentions are not always simply to just make the other like them, but also to give them what they deem to be better opportunities. It is a misplaced attempt to incorporate them into the culture that they have been raised and trained to regard as superior. The problem, however, is that the group of people dominated and colonized have no reason to believe that their culture or way of being is any less valid.[2] This raises the question of whether or not intentions actually change the way that these actions are read or whether the dynamics remain the same. In the novels, Grenville situates the postcolonial situation in terms of a parental relationship, which allows the reader to understand the relationships between colonizer and colonized in a language that transcends any class distinctive barriers.[3] As other scholars such as Alice Healy in "'Impossible Speech' and the Burden of Translation: Lilian's Story from Page to Screen" argue, Albion is undoubtedly given this name intentionally, in order to draw a parallel between his character and England. The book "therefore reflects the shifting cultural spaces of Australian society, when political structures were starting to break off from direct parental relationship with England and the people were beginning to acknowledge difference and independence" (Healy 63). This positioning within the novel makes it possible to see how characters have been written through a lens of (post)colonialism. Albion represents the colonizing force; he imposes his 'masculine' language on his daughter Lilian (who

[1] The question of whether or not this changes the power dynamics and makes them any less foreboding is left withstanding.

[2] Rightfully so, because the idea that western culture is superior hinges on the belief that there is a significant difference between each of these cultures, and that this difference means the other is less civilized than the western. Their difference does not initially represent a state of non-civility, but as stereotypes are perpetuated they do become seen as such, interpolating the other in such a way that it makes it nearly impossible to escape this naming.

[3] By this I mean it can be assumed that everyone from every culture has some concept of parental relationships, regardless of how those relationships may differ from culture to culture.

in this case represents the other in search of an authentic self)[4], his fear of the other (woman), different from himself, is made explicit. Albion discusses women in terms of exploration and understanding and ultimately seeks authenticity through invading or penetrating the secret spaces of women.

5 Albion's penetrating journey begins first with language, but he is initially unsuccessful at draining the feminine/other identity from his daughter Lilian. This forces the reader to acknowledge the question of whether or not imposing language on another actually splits the character, and displaces them. According to postcolonial discourse, when one dominant race or gender imposes a language on another they essentially erase the legitimacy of the original language of the person dominated; they make it impossible for the oppressed person to return to the life that they once lived, unaware of this new language and culture, a language and culture that they are being told and shown is the better language. As Frantz Fanon states in *Black Skin, White Masks,* "for it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" and "to speak […] means to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (8). But further, "[a] man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes remarkably plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power" (Fanon 9). This is the enigma, not only of a postcolonial oppression, but of a feminine oppression. The oppressed, whether that is as a result of sex or race, is expected to learn the language of the oppressor. If these oppressed figures do this well, then they also consequently adopt a part of their culture. The problem, however, occurs in learning the language too well, because as Fanon states "Mastery of language affords remarkable power" (9). This remarkable power is not afforded to the oppressed, because in the moment that it is realized that they have surpassed an acceptable limit of similarity they become a threat to the dominating force, but it is the "almost the same, but not quite" mentioned in *The Location of Culture* that in the end allows these characters to assert their own voices (Bhabha 86). Grenville writes many strong and unconventional characters in a unique colonial position in order to show how these unique power dynamics play out in situations where the oppressed refuses to submit to the role in which they

[4] Authentic self in this instance means a completed sense of identity. In *Dark Places* Albion mentions numerous times that he does not feel whole (25, 40). For Albion, to become who he believes he must be – a man that ascribes to traditional notions of masculinity – he must penetrate women, physically and with facts. Like the colonizer, he must colonize their minds and bodies.

are being cast. These characters show how it becomes possible to create their own roles in the performance of being, but the performance must begin and end with language.

6 At the beginning of Lilian's life she is an already inscribed body; except for the "cleft" that is "swollen, pink, and pursey" Albion struggles to see that Lilian is a female, and that she belongs to that mysterious gender that he longs to know more about, longs to conquer (Grenville, *Dark Places* 56). But Lilian is "a chip off the old block" and "had seemed to have been born with unbreakable will: it was not something she needed to learn" (Grenville, *Dark* 241). It is not just her will that makes her less suitable as a woman in Albion's eyes, but also her large stature (which mimicks her father's), her disregard for proper posture and modesty, etc. Despite her mother's constant coaxing and nagging Lilian refuses to fill the role assigned to her. Albion declares that

> [n]ature had dealt Lilian a nasty blow in making her a female, but I was not going to be cheated of her. She was a chip off the old block in every respect but one, and I was going to make sure that one flaw did not spoil the rest of her. (Grenville, *Dark* 236)

Because Albion judges Lilian as having been born at a disadvantage, he vows that, though her body could never be that of a man, she would possess the brain of a man. It is not, however, this fact alone. It is the sameness, more than anything, which causes Albion to treat Lilian as he would a deserving son. Albion states that, "[w]omen had always been the mysterious other, but Lilian was no other. Embedded within that gross casing of flesh, blurred but unmistakable, were my own features" (Grenville, *Dark* 227). He sees himself in her, and because he does not get the boy that he had hoped for he decides to make Lilian as much a boy as he possibly can. This is not to say that Albion does not have a male heir, because he does, but he does not see his son John as being worthy in the way that he sees Lilian as worthy of language. He states that:

> From the beginning, John was a puling plaintive creature. Could this really be a son, I wondered, this spindly mauve baby lying in the cot, bulbous of head, blotched of face? Was this hairless head bobbing on its puny stalk of neck the head of a son? As if guessing my doubt, they unwrapped it, and held it out so I could not miss that purple bundle between its legs, so unlike Lilian's fat cleft at birth, but also so unlike my own appendage. (Grenville, *Dark* 162)

So, Albion teaches Lilian, but he does not deem this to be in her overall benefit. As a child he is impressed by her, but he later discovers that in teaching her the language of men he has done her

a disservice, because she no longer fits anywhere. The fact remains, however, his intentions are not initially (though selfish and narcissistic) entirely negative.[5]

7 Albion begins to feed Lilian facts, like Alma feeds her food. She becomes gorged on words, but only a certain kind of words. Lilian was to have no dolls; "she could read *Mackie's Primer*" and Albion believes his "rule had paid off" because she "had been a precociously early reader" (Grenville, *Dark* 236). Albion is diligent about her linguistic intake, he states that in the place of pink and white books filled with "pap":

> I supplied the things that were worthy of her mind, the same things that had equipped my own: the sum of man's knowledge lay at her fingertips on the shelves of her room. There was the Encyclopedia, there was the Dictionary, there was even the Bible, for although I discouraged God, I felt that an educated person should know who Noah was. There were *Great Men of History, Man the Masterpiece, Men of Science*: there were the books on birds, insects, mammals, steam engines, levers, the circulation of the blood, the countries of the world, their principal exports, their mean annual rainfall; and, of course, the matched sets of classics: Milton, Dickens, and Byron. (Grenville, *Dark* 236-37)

Lilian has gained a crash course from childhood in the greatness of man, but despite this her strength of will has allowed her to hold onto the beautiful aspects of her femininity. In the beginning she relates to males, stating that her and her "mates" are "Sir Walter Raleigh and his men," but this association is merely an attempt to assert herself as a hero in her own story; she is not attempting to be a man, just someone that has agency (Grenville, *Lilian* 26). Thanks to her father's diligent instruction Lilian believes initially that men were the only people previously afforded agency. The women that have agency are considered mad, witches, deviant. It takes Lilian some time to work through the patriarchal discourse fed to her by her father, but eventually she realizes that girls can be heroes as well (Grenville, *Lilian* 28). Lilian begins to idealize strong females; in school she inquires about Joan of Arc and Queen Elizabeth, who Lilian cunningly regards in terms of familiarity as just "Elizabeth" (Grenville, *Lilian* 30).[6] Even in these instances the women she sees as possible examples of feminine agency are still seen by

[5] I cannot say for certain, but there seems to be a possibility that in creating this ambiguous relationship between oppressor and oppressed Grenville may actually have been attempting to call into question assumptions about postcolonial discourse. Surely, the relationship has been discussed in terms of parentage before—comparing the intentions of the colonizing country toward the colonized with those of a parent toward their child—but Grenville does so in such a pointed and direct way, as if daring readers to consider that there may be another way of seeing things.

[6] This same familiarity can be seen when she regards Shakespeare as William. This suggests that Lilian never lets go of the idea that she is someone special, with power, someone worthy of a history woven through the histories of others.

her teachers as being mad, and so Lilian realizes, "I could not be a hero myself except in my mind, but I knew what to admire" (Grenville, *Lilian* 26). All of the information that Albion gives Lilian becomes crucial to the narrative, as they shape Lilian in the various stages of her life, and eventually help her escape the histories imposed by her father. In the beginning they act as a means of giving her the patriarchal language, but as shown through her changing interests and beliefs that women can be heroes too, she learns the language of man too well.

8 In the postcolonial narrative mimicry plays an interesting and precarious role in the performance of both the colonizer and the colonized. Since at this point in the narrative Lilian has been interpolated by her sex (rather than her fatness, which plays a greater role later) it is useful to discuss mimicry in terms of the gendered body. In a moment of brief regression that will aid in the understanding of how mimicry and stereotypes are functioning in the novel, it is necessary to look again at Fanon. Fanon asserts that the black man, in his search for approval by the white man, is cast out of his former culture and simultaneously forbidden to fully enter into the powerful, dominant culture of the white man. In the case of *Lilian's Story* and *Dark Places,* Lilian stands in as the black man, whereas Albion is obviously the white man. She attempts to gain his approval through devouring facts and words (which are paralleled to the consumption of food, discussed at length in "Bodily Desires and Narrative Pleasures" by Delys Bird). But, this appropriation of the masculine language does not afford her a place in the masculine culture, yet she simultaneously becomes cast out, unable to maintain a position in the feminine as well. In the case of the black man it is his skin, though porous, that allows in some of the necessary attributes for acceptance, but it always exists as a barrier, a signifier, a constant reminder of his 'difference' and 'lack'. For Lilian it is her "swollen cleft" that casts her as misfit. Even the description that Albion accepts as fact in his youth, suggests that woman is always relegated to this realm of difference.

9 Albion's childhood friend describes female genitalia as "nothing there, only a lack, a gap, a hole where any proper normal person had a thing you could hold in your hand" (Grenville, *Dark* 35-6). Because Lilian, and every other woman in the novel possess this nothingness, this "hole" that begs to be filled they are consequently subjected to a role of inherent inferiority. As Penelope Ingram asserts in her book *The Signifying Body: Toward an Ethics of Sexual and Racial Difference*, there is a connection between material existence and ontological lack:

> Fanon makes a definite connection between the black man's material existence and his ontological lack. Fanon attempts to return to the black subject an ontology he has never had. Because 'blackness' is wholly Symbolic, the ontology for the racial subject is, like that of the female subject, as yet unknown; it resides elsewhere. (Ingram 20)

If the ontology of the racial and female subject resides elsewhere, where is that elsewhere for Lilian and Norah? The women in these novels are not seen as proper or normal in the eyes of Albion. The identification of the body in this way, as defined by lack, is what bridges the gap between the phenotype and language as described by Fanon; the other is destined to be judged not by his/her abilities to perform, but by the physical attribute that they are lacking, so in the black man this lack is white skin and in the woman it is the penis. This is meant to correlate directly to the black man or the woman's ability to appropriate the language of the superior culture. But, as we see with Lilian, there are problems with this assumption. The other is not in actuality lacking in terms of language and is perfectly capable of speaking the language of the perceived superior other. This brings us back then to the question of difference, if language does not solidify the colonizers position then they must establish something else more material that will satisfactorily serve this purpose.

10 If, as Homi Bhabha suggests in *The Location of Culture*, the skin is a sort of fetish object through which the colonizer may differentiate himself from the white man (or assert desire over that difference) then it stands to reason that language occupies a similar position for the colonizer.[7] Language holds the potential to raise the black man up to the assumed level of the white man; "[t]he colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (Fanon 9). The colonized must "renounce" his blackness, give up an integral part of his identity, his self (Fanon 9). Ironically, in terms of Lilian she does give up much of her femininity (as defined by stereotypes) in order to attain the language of the colonizer, but because of her position as a white woman something interesting happens with her that can be read as part of a racial commentary not necessarily related to her identity as a woman. In order for Lilian to come

[7] This assertion over difference is rather fascinating in these two novels. Albion fetishizes Lilian, because she is different from other women, but he is able to find his own authentic self through her because of his encounter with his self found in her. Albion states early in *Dark Places, "*the fact of myself – could be deduced only from my reflection in others" (25). He decided early in his life that he did not have a factual self separate from the self he could see in someone else. Later, after having Lilian, he learns to see himself reflected most in her. He believes that in order to make that reflection of self a reality he must have sex with her. He has learned that for woman a vagina is "lack" and it is a man's duty to fill that lack so that both may become whole (Grenville, *Dark Places* 35).

to terms with herself as a woman and a sexual being, she asserts her agency through mobility, and through going wild. She acknowledges that she can never be "native," but still she speculates:

> My feet hardened quickly. Father said no more about shoe bills, and although I could never be some slip and glossy black person, eyes alone shining in the moonlight, or my teeth gleaming in a grin, my feet could pad as silently as theirs over stones and spikes. My feet renewed themselves endlessly. Such hide was enviable. I wondered if it could be encouraged to form all over a body such as mine, that had such need of armour. (Grenville, *Lilian* 138)

Lilian takes control over her mobility. She seeks to establish a sort of protective barrier on her body, because her previous barrier failed her. She becomes darker and happier in this state of wild obstinacy, just as her mom does on her cruise. Grenville draws a connection to a native state of being, or "jungle status" and a state of authenticity and acceptance of self (Fanon 9). When Lilian's flesh is no longer too much for her father, when he views her as becoming too perfectly hybridized she begins to seek an alternate route. She states that "I was running wild, but I was too much for him. *You are a slut, Lilian. And you are running wild, and I will not have it"* (Grenville, *Lilian* 141). Her father, her colonizer, seeks to always be in control of the kinds of stories or histories created about himself and his family; she is the "flesh of [his] flesh."[8]

11 In terms of the postcolonial, racial situation the colonizer seeks to never allow the black man to reach the *same* level or status as the white man, because that would serve to threaten the notion of difference (rather superiority) that allows the white man to feel secure in his position of power over the black man. Albion does not require that Lilian never reaches his level of sameness, but the very structures themselves forbid this. Her body will never let her be anything other than what she already is; however, it is this middle ground that Bhabha claims is a possible way out of the oppressive structure, though not necessarily something intentionally engaged with by the colonized. Lilian through her perfectly hybrid state, as both intelligent, active woman with sexual agency threatens the male notion of superiority. Albion first remarks on the perceived difference between men and women early on in his own tale:

> My trouble was females seemed a race apart: human, I imagined, but not human in the way I myself was human. It was the plumage of a different species, the way their hair looped, folded, curled and fell; I could not understand how there could be any room for their organs of digestion within their tiny stiff waists, and

[8] Albion on several occasions in *Dark Places* refers to his wife and his daughter as the "flesh of [his] flesh", though never John.

> although I had secretively studied various marble breasts, half-covered with marble drapery, on display in the Gardens, they had not been deeply informative. I could not imagine what bulges and ledges of flesh might be underneath the bodices of these sisters and friends of sisters. (Grenville, *Dark* 56)

From that point forward he seeks only to dominate women, to penetrate the unknown and find some understanding of their secrets. But despite the difference he perceives between himself and women, he sees no differences amongst women. He declares:

> It amused me to think that women saw themselves as different from each other, when I knew them to be nearly as interchangeable as the bricks in a wall. *Women, you fools*, I wanted to cry. *You are all the same, you are all just flesh, easier or harder to win, fatter or thinner, passionate or cool: but you are all just the same, just flesh, no ribbons and silks make any difference*. (Grenville, *Dark* 108)

Lilian is the exception to this and her very birth ruins this notion for Albion. In seeing so much of himself in her, this difference is blurred. She does not have a tiny stiff waist or perfect hair, or any other traditionally female attributes that have been pushed on her. She is perfectly other, because she has stumbled upon the usefulness of mimicry.

12 In Bhabha's chapter "Of Mimicry and Man" from *The Location of Culture* he asserts that, "mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge," which could be taken to mean for either/or the colonizer or the colonized (85). Mimicry is defined as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.* Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha 86). In order for an othered character to effectively utilize mimicry he/she must make evident, visible his difference, that place of "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 86). This reminds the colonizer who desires the colonized for their sameness that there is a real difference beyond their constructed differences, which then creates anxiety in the colonizer. With Lilian's lovely, fleshy body she makes visible her difference (and her sameness):

> I had to admit that, had I been unlucky enough to have been born a girl, I might have been as Lilian was. In that sense, I could understand Lilian's refusal to tuck her animal fleshiness away, and join the simpering hypocritical games: I could see that without realising it she was trying to tear at the tissue of lies going on around her. I should have been pleased that she had the wit to see through it, and that she was not simply another in the vast herd of human blanks. But the point was that I

> had not been born a woman, and what was proper in me was mortifying in my daughter. (Grenville, *Dark* 285)

Anxiety arises in Albion at this point, because he realizes that he does not have quite as much control over Lilian as he might have wished. The other shows the colonizer that the entire structure that has been forcing him/her into a position of inferiority is a false structure, that if the black man or the woman can perform whiteness or manhood as well as the colonizing oppressor, yet maintain his/her identity then the assumed position of superiority must then be without any solid foundation. Lilian takes this mimicry and colonization even further through taking control, in public and in private, of her own consumption. She becomes, by choice a "fleshy" woman, which marks the connection between fact and food (Grenville, *Lilian* 19). Her appetite for facts is just as hefty as her appetite for food.

13 The women in these novels all seem quite content with making superficial changes to their bodies and the bodies of others in hopes that these changes would be enough to evolve into a deeper change within them, something more substantial to protect them from the domination of man. Norah, Lilian's mother, "was content with the surface of her daughter – forever tweaking and pulling, the way Mother had done with Kristabel – as she was content with the surface of her husband" (Grenville, *Lilian's* 228). This fascination with surfaces is seen by Albion as a useless endeavor, simply another one of women's trivialities. But for the women in the novels these exterior changes are crucial to their evolution and protection throughout the novels. Albion underestimates their resolve.

14 The initial surface change that Lilian actually takes upon herself to make happen is to become fat. As a young child Lilian is allowed to be as ambiguously male or female as she pleases, but as she gets older she is expected to fully ascribe to the stereotypical conventions of femininity. Lilian's mother acts as a diligent instructor in what Lilian can and cannot do as a woman; at the beginning of the novel her mother says, "A lady glides, Lilian" (Grenville, *Lilian's* 5). Right away, her body is being controlled and confined to a small space of being, but she does not accept this confinement. If she becomes all flesh then she can use her large stature to push out of this oppressive definition.[9] According to Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* "[t]he body is indeed the privileged object of power's operations:

[9] Lilian is taught that to be a woman is synonymous with taking up very little space. She pushes out of the oppressive definition of femininity by willfully taking up a great amount of space, both physically and with her vibrant personality.

power produces the body as a determinate type, with particular features, skills, and attributes" (240). This is one of Lilian's means of obtaining power. It is significant because, as Susan Bordo notes in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, "[t]he body is not only a *text* of culture. It is also, as anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and philosopher Michel Foucault have argued, a *practical*, direct locus of social control" (745). The body, though it is the source of oppression for women, is also their source of power.

16 Lilian does not initially find any need to control her own body though, not until a crucial moment of vulnerability in which she is forced to become visible. When Lilian is caught spying on her Mother and Father's private conversation she is forced to bend over, grab her ankles and submit to a beating. Lilian is protected by the outer barrier of her clothes, though, so Albion removes that protective outer layer by stripping her lower half down to just flesh. As Albion strikes those first blows he imposes upon the once brave and obstinate Lilian a new definition of herself to live by, he inscribes this new submissive identity on her flesh; however instead of accepting the submissive role given to her by her father, she begins to overeat, creating "too much flesh for father" (Grenville, *Lilian's* 19). Lilian understands the expectation that she, as a woman, is not to have a voracious appetite and that her appetite for food is somehow associated with the agency she has over her own body, because Lilian has this self-awareness that her choice to eat in public and in private suggests she is intentionally choosing to be deviant. Lilian is choosing to create her own identity. According to Chantal Kwast-Greff in "Fat vs Fate or Why a 'Woman of Destiny' Needs to be Fat," "Lil's fat is both a claim to a future and the sign of her refusal of a norm which makes her a prisoner" (49). In refusing this norm she makes a declaration, with her body she declares to create her own histories, and she does not care how others read her body. She is proud. She states that "I ate in private as well as in public, and Alma was on my side" (Grenville, *Lilian's* 18). It is no coincidence that Alma is her partner in crime, as Alma is another character stripped of dignity by Albion.

17 Alma is a woman that Albion assumes is longing for the 'pleasures' of his manhood. In *Lilian's Story* the reader is not allowed to know too much about Alma, just that she is always crying, but the reason for her tears is not properly attributed. Albion questions why Norah hires Alma; he thinks she is an ugly, unthinking woman. Albion ponders this until one day Alma shows up in his study and he sees her as something more. She begins to represent a threat, a way for his wife to best him, which he is adamant can never happen. He approaches Alma in the tub

one day, assuming that she was waiting for him and he rapes her, like he rapes Norah, and later Lilian. He says that she wants it, "[w]hat a woman of wantonness Alma turned out to be, in her smell of yellow soap! She was a secret artist of passion" (Grenville, *Dark* 212). It seems at first that perhaps Alma may have wanted his advances, but this is only because of the standpoint of the narrator. Albion believes that all women have an unquenchable thirst for man, to be filled with what women lack. He says that "Alma did not writhe or grasp as pale Norah did, inflaming me with protest. Alma did not lie under me arching in passion like a fish. 'Sir,' she said again and again. 'Oh sir, oh Mr Singer sir!' Her gratitude was touching" (Grenville, *Dark* 212). But, if Alma was grateful for his sexual advances, she would not have afterward been "leaned like a sack against the tub, staring at the floor" (Grenville, *Dark* 213). Alma is reduced to nothingness, a hollow state of being. The kind of hollowness that Mr. Singer so often finds himself falling prey to; therefore, this is the proper explanation for Alma's crying, the story that Albion would never have given to his daughter, thus why it does not show up in *Lilian's Story*. This is also the reason why Alma is Lilian's co-conspirator in her plot to gain protective flesh. Alma's position within the household does not afford her the ability to transcend this imposed hollowness, but Lilian can.

18 In each instance when Lilian has been seen as taking the consumption of knowledge into her own hands she is punished in the same way, flesh exposed first and then the beatings. When she is a bit older Albion catches her reading a romance novel, and instead of using his usual method of punishment (with a belt), he strips her bottom half to nakedness and strikes the blows with his bare hand – flesh to flesh. In this moment Albion and the reader are able to see just how effective Lilian's protective flesh barrier has become.

> The plaster broke, but not my fat daughter, who lay under me, breathing loudly as I freed layer after layer: the pinafore, the skirt, the white bloomers, and there at last was her dimpled white buttock-flesh, quivering under my hands. (Grenville, *Dark* 242)

At the realization that Albion does not have control over his daughter's body he loses his grasp on the dominant, masculine identity he sought to craft for himself; he is returned to a state of hollowness (Grenville, *Dark* 25). When he sees Lilian again she is just as she always has been, like nothing ever transpired between them. Albion declares, "My daughter would never be hollow. Her fullness mocked me, her eyes full of herself mocked me, her echo" (Grenville, *Dark*

244). He is forced to acknowledge that she has surpassed him; her resolve is greater than his. Over and over again Albion is forced to come face to face with just how lacking he truly is.

19. Norah, his wife, responds to Albion's overt and oppressive advances by conspiring with Lilian, attempting to make her more stereotypically female, forcing Albion to see that he is really the outsider and not them.[10] When Lilian starts her period, Norah is sure to tell him that Lilian has become a woman. Albion states,

> [s]he was reminding me – and not for the first time – that no matter how many facts my daughter and I might share, and no matter how little my daughter respected her mother, they were united in their femaleness, which I could never penetrate. Grenville, *Dark* 266)

It is perhaps in this moment that Albion realizes the only way for him to find his authentic self is to penetrate the unknown space of Lilian. And it has to be Lilian, because he believes she is the other half of him:

> Only yesterday Lilian had been my own clean girl, who could make her father's blood warm with pride at what a brain she had, almost as good as a boy's. Only yesterday her mere flesh had not mattered: she had warmed me with her smile, had turned her face, the twin of my own, towards me, soaking in all that I had to share with her. Now she was one of theirs, sliding away into the foreign country of femaleness. At this very moment, even as I watched her, she was doing that secretive dirty thing of bleeding into rags. (Grenville, *Dark* 266)

In this moment Lilian needs her fleshy protection more than ever before, and it can be seen that this means of protection is directly correlated to her consumption of knowledge. Lilian becomes fat with flesh and plump with knowledge. She is constantly asking her teacher questions that no other student dare ask. This means of protection is effective for quite some time, but the seed has already been planted for Albion. Lilian is a woman. She is a part of the unknown. His anxiety becomes exacerbated when Lilian begins to attend university. She meets men who actually care about her, and by being a part of her life they illuminate this sexual being that she has become. Lilian never brought boys/men home which meant her sexuality could remain within the realm of the unknown. Albion believes that Lilian's large body makes men uninterested in her, this disinterest by other men means, in Albion's mind, that he still has complete control over Lilian. Albion can only understand a man having agency over a woman's body, not a woman having agency over herself; however, in college Lilian meets people that respect her for her agency and

[10] Norah attempts to craft Lilian as a woman by buying her dresses and "pink and white books" and dolls. All of these items, however, were banned by Albion (Grenville, *Dark* 236).

excess. She is adored for her knowledge and for her size; she learns that she has value beyond what has been given to her by men. As stated by Kwast-Greff, "[u]p to the moment of her rape, Lilian's body was her armour against fragmentation and the text on which she wrote the story of 'a woman of destiny'" (50). Lilian was finding her way. She had perfectly learned the language. But again, Albion finds a way to stifle her voice, and in the process he finds himself fuller than he had ever been before. By stealing Lilian's essence, Albion fills himself.

20 As Lilian sits in front of a mirror, taking in the wonder of her own naked flesh, Albion enters the room and then he enters her. Narratively, the rape must be considered from both Lilian's and Albion's perspective. Lilian is exploring her body, coming to know her own sexuality when Albion enters:

> I filled the room with sounds like a storm in treetops, like rivers, like horses galloping, and was preparing for the moment when flesh would be transformed. But Father could not let me achieve that, and filled the doorway before I could break apart and fly free of my body. All sound was drawn into the tiles and past the windows. (Grenville, *Lilian's* 125)

A terrifying stillness falls over the room and remains until the act is done. After Lilian has lost herself, disassociated so she did not have to acknowledge what had happened, that who she was had been stolen. She says:

> My mouth and tongue were someone else's now and even the words that rose into my mind had nothing to do with me. Whatever had happened – and I would not ask myself just what that had been – had happened to a mass of flesh called Lilian, not to me. I cowered in that flesh, my self shrunk to the size of a pea, but still I tried to speak to Mother. Perhaps she would release me from it all, or take me over, or save me. (Grenville, *Lilian's* 126)

The reason that Lilian has lost herself, from her own perspective, seems to stem from the sheer trauma of the event and the fact that the barrier which had always protected her from her father was no longer an appropriate means of protection. But, after reading Albion's narrative it becomes evident that there is more to this loss of self than just trauma. Albion has to reduce Lilian to only flesh in order to rape her:

> Lilian, the daughter I knew, who spoke to me, looked me in the eye, exchanged facts and requests for the salt-shaker, that cranky, obdurate, insolent thorn in my flesh, was withdrawing and leaving only her shell behind, the way a lizard leaves its tail in your hand. Now that there was nothing more complicated than an empty body in the room with me, I was enabled to motion my inner man to come close. (Grenville, *Dark* 375)

With Lilian gone and only a shell left, Albion finishes the act. After, when Lilian had lost her voice Albion declares, "Oh, epiphany of flesh!" and he experiences being "blissfully joined" with himself (Grenville, *Dark* 376). In the moment in which he is joined with himself "there was no voice judging, chiding, doubting, fearing: only this warm blank darkness like the inside of a soul, and the sounds of something laboring and panting" (Grenville, *Dark* 376). Albion gives birth to himself and states, "After I was made whole in my daughter there was silence in heaven" (Grenville, *Dark* 377). In various other postcolonial novels this moment of giving birth to oneself, or encountering the self in the other can be seen as a moment of grace. It is the moment in which the fetishizer, meets the fetishized, and finds the authentic self he had so long been searching for.

21 Now that Albion is whole and filled, Lilian is empty. She is forced to shed the frail flesh that no longer protects her; she must go in search of new flesh, as she states she is "going wild" (Greville, *Lilian* 141). She begins building a new protective barrier through her excessive and secret mobility. Her new skin is calloused and difficult to penetrate. Even this is seen as an act of deviance and promiscuity and in keeping with the theme of the novel Albion halts these behaviors as he had all of her progressive behaviors before. Albion sends Lilian to an institution, where mobility is limited and where she loses her calloused, protective barrier. When Lilian is finally freed by her 'crazy' aunt she slowly begins to find her voice again. It takes her some time to leave the room, but eventually she finds the best food and she begins to adjust. In her adjustment she learns to create stories of her own that protect her from the pain of reality. When she seeks love, she creates love. Eventually Lilian ends up living on the streets, reciting Shakespeare (or as she likes to call him, William), and spending nights with her former Beau F.J Stroud, wrapped in newspapers (words). In the course of Lilian's life she learns to use flesh and words in order to break out of the role assigned to her; she creates her own performance.

22 This brings us back, lastly, to the crucial connection between language and the body that has been carefully mapped out in these texts. It is the diet of facts that has nourished Lilian throughout her life that finally gives her the means to escape the oppressive patriarchal structures that resulted in her brutal rape. Albion notes that "[a]t thirteen, Lilian was a massive body of flesh: she had grown immense on a diet of facts" (Grenville, *Dark* 262). These references between facts and food, or words and warmth, and bodies as delicious permeate these two texts; they allude to the deep connection between language and nourishment. Lilian takes the

Shakespeare that she was given as a child and turns it into something great. She is able to assert her dignity, pick herself up, and recite the facts of language. It is through the assertion of dignity that the oppressed is able to find himself or herself, no longer in relation to the colonizer. In the introduction to the 2008 edition of *Black Skin, White Masks* Ziauddin Sardar posits this very notion:

> Dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization: it is not about assuming the attitudes of the master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table. It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing. (Sardar vi)

Fanon knows that the way to accomplish this, the way to shed the complexes imposed by the white man is by finding a self that is no longer shackled to the representations, the harmful stereotypes given to him by the white man. The oppressed is erased by these stereotypes.

23 The only way for Lilian to create her own stories is to realize the stereotypes that have been hindering her this whole time. It is only through that realization that she is able to (re)member herself, and create histories of her own. This, of course, in her case does not happen until after her father has died, but this does not always have to be the case for the postcolonial subject. Bhabha claims in "The Commitment to Theory" that once the stereotype is realized by the person it is being imposed/transcribed upon, they then have the power to turn upside down the very system/culture that created the discourse or stereotype:

> It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances and demonstrate their hybridity. (Bhabha 37)

This claim suggests that once an understanding of these cultural statements is attained it will call into question that which has allowed the colonizer to remain in a position of superiority. In essence, this then allows the struggling subjects to (re)member their bodies, to claim an identity that is their own, free from representation.

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