

Inside and Outside Language – Body and Language as Borders of Identity in Contemporary Philosophy and Literature

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1 Introduction

In A.S. Byatt's Booker-Prize winning novel *Possession: A Romance*, the male protagonist Roland Michell reflects on the power of language in the following manner:

Do you never have the sense that our metaphors *eat up* our world? I mean of course everything connects and connects – all the time – and I suppose one studies – I study – literature because all these connections seem both endlessly exciting and then in some sense dangerously powerful – as though we held a clue to the true nature of things?¹

And later he adds:

Everything relates to *us* and so we're imprisoned in ourselves – we can't see *things*. And we paint everything with this metaphor.²

In this passage the problem language poses for individuality, identity and bodily experience is put in a nutshell: On the one hand, language seems to be the key to the true nature of things, a window on the world, and the linguistic sign is seen as a 'clue' to something outside language. On the other hand, that same sign is the main obstruction to epistemological success and access to the world. Signs do not illuminate, they eat up the world, they vanish the outside and the inside with it. The result is language as a self-referential system that needs neither a producer nor a recipient, there are only 'connections' and language becomes a prisonhouse.

The main thesis of this paper concerning theory as well as the novel here explored, A.S. Byatt's text *Babel Tower*,³ is that body and language are both dissolving units of difference and borders of identity; that they establish a border between inside and outside, that they *do* refer, and that at the same time, these borders are always already broken down using that same instances that helped building them up, body and language. This dialectic movement is seen as a key to a more differentiated view of linguistic problems that cannot be decided choosing between either language as transparent medium or language as prisonhouse and self-

¹ A.S. Byatt, *Possession. A Romance* (London: Vintage, 1991), 253.

² Ibid., 253f. For an interpretation of the role of theory and the protagonists' postmodern condition in *Possession* cf. Sarah Heinz, "Die Romance als Ausweg aus der *postmodern condition*: Liebe und Identität in A.S. Byatts *Possession: A Romance*," *Beyond Extremes: Repräsentation und Reflexion von Modernisierungsprozessen im britischen Gegenwartsroman*, eds. Stefan Horlacher and Stefan Glomb (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2004), 53-77.

³ A.S. Byatt, *Babel Tower* (London: Vintage, 1996). In the following, the text is referred to as *BT* plus page in the text.

referential discourse. The problem of the body as either authentic truth or inscribed instrument of discourse is treated in the same dialectic way as it is closely connected to linguistic issues.

It is the purpose of this paper to explore this not at all new problem by means of two philosophic theories, Derrida's concepts of *différance*⁴ and Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth's "Individuality in the Discursive Condition",⁵ and then to connect these with the problem of the human body, which can be either seen as the last bulwark against dangerous discourse, the speaking body, or as incorporated into language as the inscribed body.⁶ The question of whether the body can be or ever has been the representative of the individual,⁷ a kind of outside of a mental inside, will then be, if not answered, then at least illustrated by *Babel Tower*. It will be shown that the linguistic turn and its questioning of language as mere medium is a central problematic in the novel and that it is tightly interwoven with the body as experienced connection and disconnection to the world and other human beings.

2 Language

In his famous collection of essays, *The Linguistic Turn*, Richard Rorty describes the new kind of questions posed by language philosophy in contrast to the old view of language, the so-called "spectatorial account of knowledge", as

the beginning of a thoroughgoing rethinking of certain epistemological difficulties which have troubled philosophers since Plato and Aristotle. These difficulties exist only if one holds that the acquisition of knowledge presupposes the presentation of something 'immediately given' to the mind, where the mind is conceived of as a sort of 'immaterial eye', and where 'immediately' means, at a minimum, 'without the mediation of language'.⁸

This view, that philosophy has to stop asking questions about epistemology as if there was no mediating presence making it possible in the first place, culminated in the Ayer-Carnap-thesis: "All philosophic questions are questions of language."⁹

⁴ The paper uses various writings of Jacques Derrida, including *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore and London: Hopkins UP, 1976), *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) and *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982).

⁵ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, "Beyond 'The Subject': Individuality in the Discursive Condition," *New Literary History* 31.3 (2000): 405-19.

⁶ The paper refers to the concept of Kamper and Wulf proposed in Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, "Zwischen Archäologie und Pathographie: Körper-Subjekt, Körper-Objekt," *Der andere Körper*, eds. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, vol. 1 (Berlin: Verlag Mensch und Leben, 1984), 3-10.

⁷ Cf. the title of an article by Joachim Küchenhoff, "Der Leib als Statthalter des Individuums?," *Individualität*, eds. Manfred Frank and Anselm Haverkamp (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1988), 167-202.

⁸ Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy," *The Linguistic Turn. Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, ed. Richard Rorty (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1-39, 39.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12. Cf. Stuart Hampshire, "Are All Philosophical Questions Questions of Language?," *The Linguistic Turn*, 284-93.

Poststructuralism takes a much more radical stance than language philosophy which saw the linguistic turn more as a means of reforming philosophical methodology. It goes right to the core of language: reference. In all theories and assumptions thinking language as referring to extra-linguistic contexts, reference is the key concept by which knowledge about the world can be achieved: “The centrality of the notion of reference is due to its being perceived as the point at which language makes contact with extra-linguistic reality.”¹⁰ Where reference is exterminated, all questions concerning the truth-value of an utterance must remain unanswerable, even unaskable. Whether language is used correctly or not or whether language correctly represents extra-linguistic reality are all problems that heavily rely on the possibility of a comparison between inside and outside, between signified and signifier. This duality is dissolved by Jacques Derrida’s notion of *différance*, stating the power of the signifier over the signified and the impossibility of presence due to an incessant deferral of meaning:

The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. [...] no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.¹¹

Here, the above mentioned self-referring system of language evolves. But what happens to the instance, who formerly spoke the language that has now become self-sufficient and independent? Derrida makes this clear by referring to Saussure:

Of what does Saussure, in particular, remind us? That “language (which only consists of differences) is not a function of the speaking subject.” This implies that the subject [...] is inscribed in language, is a ‘function’ of language, becomes a *speaking* subject only by making its speech conform – even in so-called ‘creation’, or in so-called ‘transgression’ – to the system of the rules of language as a system of differences, or at very least by conforming to the general law of *différance*...¹²

The speaking subject is a function of language, not vice versa. It is inscribed in language and it could even be said that it is not a speaking subject but a spoken subject.¹³ This view culminates in Derrida’s famous dictum “*There is nothing outside of the text.*”¹⁴ This deconstruction of presence and meaning therefore dissolves not only language as a referential system making knowledge of the world possible, but also dissolves subjectivity as founding place of „identity, autonomy, agency, moral freedom, and collective responsibility“.¹⁵ The

¹⁰ M. Dummett, “Sense and Reference,” *Sprachphilosophie. Ein internationales Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung*, eds. Marcelo Dascal, D. Gerhardus, K. Lorenz and G. Meggle (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 1197.

¹¹ Derrida, “Semiology and Grammatology. Interview with Julia Kristeva,” *Positions*, 15-36, 26f.

¹² Ibid., “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, 1-27, 15.

¹³ Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1960), 439.

¹⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158. Italics in the original.

¹⁵ Ermarth, 405.

poststructuralist death-warrant to the Cartesian *cogito* is at the same time reason and consequence of language as self-referring difference.¹⁶ Without trying to track the vast discussion of subjectivity in postmodern and deconstructivist discourse, this paper wants to make use of a current proposal for a third way ‘beyond the subject’ towards a new individuality in the discursive condition. This suggestion made by Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth deals with language as originator, medium and source for individuality and identity without falling back on pre-postmodern theory and a regaining of reference and presence. She argues for „the definition of a new kind of subjectivity which might refigure our sense of liberality.“¹⁷ By using Saussure’s notions of *langue* as unspoken and unspeakable potential of a language and *parole* as finite practices in speech or writing she at the same time acknowledges the power of language over the subject while leaving open the possibility of a new horizon exactly opened up by the medium that created a prison: language.¹⁸

Her suggestion posits a „complex, multilaminated subjectivity“¹⁹ which is at the same time a function of language in the form of *langue* and individual possession of language as *parole*. It is both an unstoppable process of difference and an unrepeatable moment of individuality:

Such a subjectivity is individual in its sequence, not in some irreducible core. Its uniqueness lies in its trajectory: the lifelong sequence, impossible to anticipate, within which an unpredictable series of specifications are made from among the languages available. The volatility of language – its resonance, its power of poetic, associative linkage – provides precisely the varied opportunities for selective specification that constitute the unique and unrepeatable poetry of a life.²⁰

Language frees and imprisons at the same time, it provides the means for individual expression as well as for prescribed practices. This same movement will be leading in the following considerations concerning the role of the body as physical border and outward manifestation of the individual.

3 Body

The body has always been viewed as truth or even as a kind of lie detector: a person could lie with his mouth, but his body would tell the truth. Apart from the controllable and easily

¹⁶ Cf. Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (1982): 777-95, *ibid.*, “What is an author?,” *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1989), 197-210, and Roland Barthes, “The death of the author,” *Modern Criticism and Theory*, 166-72.

¹⁷ Ermarth, 405.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 408.: “Reconceiving subjectivity in the discursive condition involves important reconsiderations of what language is and how it operates: a first step being the renunciation of any dualistic representations of linguistic function [...]. Either cling to embattled reason or lose it in the dissociated rattle of semiosis. The potential for both/and is rendered tenuous by the dualistic formulation.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 412.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

manipulated instrument of human speech, the body as speaking body is supposed to have a language of its own which cannot be denied. The body is seen as a pre-linguistic category in the sense of verbal language. Kamper and Wulf formulate this as following:

The *speaking body* [...] has an unresistable intensity. [...] The signs it is emitting are received like revelations. [...] The actual truth that the body emotionally transports cannot be doubted: the head and the other powers hostile to the body are wrong. There are infallible indications, starting with goose-flesh over the thrilled heart to the large pupils. That is why the body forms a hierartic core of experience, which is always helpful when the fixations and armourings of culture can be dissolved [...].²¹

In this connection reference comes to mind again as the point where language makes contact with extra-linguistic reality. The body is transformed into reference made flesh, the instance that, mainly by touch, connects the human inside to the worldly outside. The body is supposed to be able to fill the gap that a self-referential language has left by making possible that lost contact. The touched object can be understood by being touched or grasped (the German verb 'begreifen' joins the epistemological function touch has with the metaphorical dimension of the verb).²² Although this position is solidly grounded in human common sense, the body as speaking body has been reconsidered together with the notions of subjectivity and individuality. The contrary position states the body as a function of discourse, it is not speaking, it is always already inscribed:

The truth of the cells has the character of writing. [...] The naked body has therefore never existed. It has always served as memory foil for prehistoric, historic and biographic inscriptions. [...] The symbolic order works that way: it charges the yet uninscribed with old meanings and forces through a writing of the body, that the affected person cannot cast off. The so-called natural becomes more unlikely the further one follows the archaeology of the records.²³

If writing really dominates even the smallest cell in the body, if the genes are a kind of writing that can be read,²⁴ then the body can neither be truth, nor can it be the outward representative for the individual. Such an inscribed body is the biological material for discourse that can

²¹ Kamper and Wulf, 4f. (My translation).

²² Cf. Paul de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor," *Critical Inquiry* 5:1 (1978), 13-30, 24: "[...] things become 'truly real' only by being appropriated and seized upon with all the etymological strength implied in *Begriff*, the German word for concept. To understand is to seize (*begreifen*) and not to let go of what one has taken hold of."

²³ Kamper and Wulf, 5f. (My translation)

²⁴ Cf. chapter 22, "Der genetische Code und seine Leser" ("The genetic code and its readers") in Hans Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1981), 372-409. In *Babel Tower* the question of the genetic code as a text for us to read is picked up by the protagonist Luk Lysgaard-Peacock who is working on the genes of snails and how environmental changes can be read out of them. Cf. 464: "Frederica copies out part of an article lent by Luk Lysgaard-Peacock into her 'Laminations', partly because she likes the idea of the snails wearing their genetic code for all to read on the spiral of their shells."

easily be changed, manipulated or even dissolved but that has no pre-discursive form in itself.²⁵

Again, the paper wants to take up a position in between these two extremes. Neither only as speaking nor as inscribed instance does the body present itself in an individuality in the discursive condition. It is both: „Individuality is defined by this figure of intermediation between determination from outside and creative acquisition of the other.“²⁶ The body is formed and defined by powers that are there before the individual, in this sense it is inscribed into already existing discourse structures. But at the same time, the individual appropriates these pre-existing structures in an act of creative repetition, using the material that discourse holds in store.

4 Body and Language in *Babel Tower*

Babel Tower is the third novel in a series of four in which the youth, development and later years of the female protagonist, Frederica Potter, stand at the centre. As the title already implies, language is a major topic in this third novel, which is split up into three subplots, Frederica's life, a novel in the novel entitled *Babbletower* and the proceedings of the Steerforth Committee, a group of scientists, teachers and poets working out a plan for a new way of teaching the English language. The myth of the Tower of Babel and the ensuing confusion of languages functions as a simile of the central problems of modernity and the failure of teleology, closure and meta-language.²⁷

A passage from the later part of the novel will provide the starting point for the illustration of the above sketched theoretical enterprise of building up a 'third way' between language and body as discursive powers ruling the subject on the one hand and language and body as authentic means of free and pre-discursive expression and truth on the other. In a poetic experiment called 'Laminations', Frederica tries to appropriate the linguistic structures of her language by using the modern form of collage.²⁸ Cut-up pieces of newspapers, poems,

²⁵ The rise of Gender Studies and their analysis of the intersection between body, society, history and culture has made clear, that the simplistic statement of just *being* a man or a woman is symptomatic for a metaphysics of substance. Theorists like Judith Butler have thought sexual identity as radically independent of biological sex and have often taken up the idea of the inscribed body as a function of discourse. Cf. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and *ibid.*, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

²⁶ Küchenhoff, 169. (My translation)

²⁷ Cf. Stella Butter, "'Babbling voices': Einheit und Differenz, fremde und eigene Stimme(n) in A.S. Byatts *Babel Tower*," *Beyond Extremes*, 351-75.

²⁸ The idea of 'Laminations' comes up in the first book of the Frederica series, Byatt's *The Virgin in the Garden* (London: Vintage, 1978). Here, Frederica at seventeen reflects on the possibility of "keeping things

writings of her own, quotations and other fragments form the at once connected and disconnected body of texts. When starting this project, Frederica reflects: “*The point of words is that they have to have already been used, they have not to be new, they have to be only re-arrangements, in order to have meaning.*” (BT, 384, italics in the original) And before: “Language rustles around her with many voices, none of them hers, all of them hers.” (BT, 380).

The creative power of language that Frederica discovers by producing new and at the same time old text is neither the transparent medium permitting a referential view of reality nor the self-referential discourse of deconstructivism. What Frederica does is a re-deconstruction that acknowledges language as alien, half-own words that gain strength from the new contexts they are put into. Words that are used like this do not pretend to be present in the way a metaphysics of substance would maintain, they are understood as a repetition and reinterpretation by making these words Frederica’s own.²⁹ It could be said that she translates old words into new contexts and makes them new words by this procedure.³⁰ She is teaching old words new tricks.³¹ Language has a voice of its own which is at the same time Frederica’s voice. Concerning the question of the author as subject, one can say that Frederica is not the author in the sense of the autonomous first producer of the words and their meaning. Instead of language being the medium of self-expression for the individual, Frederica experiences

separate”: “One could let all these facts and things lie alongside each other like laminations, not like growing cells. This laminated knowledge produced a powerful sense of freedom, truthfulness and even selflessness, since the earlier organic and sexual linking by analogy was undoubtedly selfish. [...] She sensed that the idea of lamination could provide both a model of conduct and an aesthetic that might suite herself and prove fruitful.” 273, 274f.

²⁹ In this context, Derrida’s notion of *iterabilité* comes to mind. In order to have meaning a word has to have already been understood, it has to be a repetition. But this repetition, especially in writing, frees the sign from the author’s authority and is appropriated by the recipient. This aspect of ‘iter’ in Latin therefore has a second side in the Sanskrit word ‘itara’ meaning ‘other’. Cf. Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” *Margins of Philosophy*, 307-30.

³⁰ Cf. the discussion of translation, language and truth in George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York & London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

³¹ This formulation by Goodman refers to the important influences of metaphors on thinking, metaphors here being the basic structure of language as well as cognition. In the original it says: “Metaphor, it seems, is a matter of teaching an old word new tricks - of applying an old label in a new way.”, and later Goodman points out that metaphor is “a term with an extension established by habit (which) is applied elsewhere under the influence of that habit; there is both departure from and deference to precedent”. Cf. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 69 and 71. The interaction theory of metaphor as well as hermeneutic approaches to metaphor have taken up this idea of recontextualisation as a possibility for creativity in spite of the power of the discursive. Cf. Max Black, “More About Metaphor,” *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 19-43, I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 89-101, 15-37, Paul Ricoeur, “Die Metapher und das Hauptproblem der Hermeneutik,” *Theorie der Metapher*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 356-75, Philip Wheelwright, “Semantics and Ontology,” *Metaphor and Symbol*, eds. Lionel C. Knights and Basil Cottle (London: Butterworth, 1960), 1-9.

being the medium for language, the point of interconnection for a large number of discourses. This is exactly what Ermarth calls “the volatility of language – its resonance, its power of poetic, associative linkage” which “provides precisely the varied opportunities for selective specification that constitute the unique and unrepeatable poetry of a life.”³² But these selective specifications made from given fragments of pre-existing discourse are not oriented around an imaginary centre, which would imply a secret presence creating a new orderly structure. What is so typical about ‘Laminations’ as collage is the random tangle of fragments creating their own structure, although Frederica has put them together: “It is a form that is made partly by cutting up, breaking up, rearranging things that already exist.” (*BT*, 384).³³ This new structure is not fixed, it is moving and the connections between textual fragments are meaningful, while this meaning can dissolve in the next moment.

The body and its role in this view of language as discursive and creative at the same time is a major topic in the novel and a centre for Frederica’s dealing with her own development. The following excerpt from the novel in the novel, *Babbletower*, will be a starting point for this discussion of the interconnection of body and language. In the novel, a group of people flee from the bloody events of the French Revolution to a far away place in order to start a new ideal society in which all passions and preferences can be lived in total freedom and individuality. The leader of this community, Culvert, presents his vision in a speech where he explains

how language might in the end need to be reforged and re-invented, for there were no words in the language for many of the pleasurable exercises and human relations he proposed, and such words as there were were pejorative and harsh, carrying with them associations from the old prohibitions [...] Language, cried Culvert, [...] language is a bodily product, a product of our earliest intimacies and desires [...]. We will remake language in our own image, cried Culvert, with our own kissings and sippings will we make new names for what we will do and be, for the relations between ourselves, and the relations between ourselves and the world. (*BT*, 64f.)

Here, body and language are closely connected, but in a manner which puts the body first: it is a product of the body. As the body is freed from the bonds of social and moral laws and rules, the socially prescribed language for the description of the body and its functions must be cast off to make the new community free in all aspects. It has to be remade. This seems to bear great similarity to Frederica’s concept of ‘Laminations’ where she remakes language by translating it into her own voice by recontextualizing. But where Frederica considers and accepts the forming power of language itself and does not believe to be the source and centre

³² Ermarth, 412.

³³ This lacking of a centre is a recurring theme in all the novel’s subplots, e.g. in the architecture of the ‘Tour Bruyarde’ where the novel in the novel takes place. Cf. *BT*, 28.

of the outward appearance of the text, Culvert wants to remake the language in his own image. He wants to be the author, the centre and the powerful owner of a new language that is the servant of the body and the freed passions that Culvert wants to promote in the community of *Babbletower*.³⁴ That such a connection between body and language does not entail freedom and happiness for all members of the community but rather empowers some to sadistic excesses while others are suppressed is made clear by the end of *Babbletower* that is implicitly presented in the novel. The community of La Tour Bruyarde ends in a regime of terror not unlike that of the revolution they have fled and leads to the absolute empowerment of Culvert as the new linguistic as well as bodily centre of the formerly decentred utopia. In one of the last fragments of the novel that are presented in *Babel Tower*, the Lady Roseace, the former lover of Culvert, is annihilated by a machine devised by Culvert himself that consists of “a myriad tiny mouths, from which will issue a myriad tiny tongues” (*BT*, 412). This ironically takes up the motive of the multiplicity of languages after the Tower of Babel. Culvert uses the tongues to destroy, not to create, to dominate, not to liberate. Additionally, the tongues are made from metal, they are part of a machine, the cynical projection of a body that is made to destroy a human body.³⁵

As Frederica reflects on her marriage at the beginning of the novel, she has had a similar motive in the choice of her husband, the sexually attractive Nigel Reiver. The ideal of “only connect” taken from Forster’s *Howards End* which tricked her into this marriage is a wish to move beyond or, more precise, before language: “She thinks now [...] that she loves him because he takes her beyond words, effortless and with skill.” (*BT*, 40) This is also made clear when after a quarrel they have sex and Frederica reflects:

It is only that his body thinks. She chose him for that, she thinks, and everything else goes with it. It ought to be possible to connect, she thinks, it ought, only connect, she thinks, and has an image of herself like a mermaid combing not only her hair but the fibres of her brain into harmony and alignment with damp, rosy fingers. [...] She breathes in his scent, their two breaths mix on the pillow, he answers tentatively ‘hmn, hmn,’ and their feet and hands communicate. (*BT*, 41)

³⁴ Cf. Michael J. Noble, “A Tower of Tongues: *Babel Tower* and the Art of Memory,” *Essays on the Fiction of A.S. Byatt: Imagining the Real*, eds. Alexa Alfer and Michael J. Noble (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001), 61-74.

³⁵ In *Babel Tower* there is an explicit reference to Kafka’s story “The Penal Colony” and another instrument of torture “which has a bed, on which the condemned man lies, gagged, and a Harrow, which writes his sentence on his body with needles, in his own blood, and kills him with writing. It is worked by an official who loves it. He keeps telling the other man, the explorer, that the condemned man *can’t read* his sentence but *he can feel it in his body*.” (*BT*, 288) This machine bears a striking similarity to the machine Culvert has devised for Roseace. While the tongues that are killing her cannot talk to her, she can feel them in her body. This view alienates the human body from writing as well as from speech and at the same time amalgamates both into one. The destructive power of the mechanical tongue and pen is lethal, though. The language that Frederica discovers has a destructive *and* restructive power.

When her marriage catastrophically fails and the bodily presence of her husband becomes a violent threat instead of the physical connection or reference she has hoped for, Frederica realizes that not only her mind but also her body needs not connection but also disconnection, that she wants to keep things separate.³⁶ During her divorce Frederica gets to know John Ottokar and establishes a new kind of relation to him, physically as well as psychologically. By connecting to him without being required to totally merge with him (in marriage, by children, by living together etc.) Frederica gets back her sense of being an individual body. At the same time, language returns to her bodily experience, making clear that there is no realm beyond it but only an appropriation of the discursive space mind and body are born into. This is again clarified in a scene after John and Frederica have made love and her break-through bleeding has painted both their bodies overnight:

‘Signed in blood’, she says. ‘You can read me on you and you on me.’
‘Like savages. A rite of passage.’
‘Does it hurt?’
‘No. It’s lovely. It’s warm. A glow.’ [...]
‘I’ve marked you,’ he says. ‘We’ve marked each other.’ (BT, 433)

In this sense, Frederica’s and John’s bodies are inscribed, but what they can read on each other is not an alien text or the impersonal power of discourse, they can read themselves on the other. The body as medium for writing makes it possible to relate to oneself and the other. As she has discovered a new, creative language in her ‘Laminations’, Frederica discovers a new body in her disconnected and at the same time connected relation to John Ottokar, who touches her without wanting to take complete possession of her. The skin is like a sheet of paper marking the outward border of identity that is made real by touch, inscribing the other on the self. And language is the medium as well as an independent power making love and connection possible while demanding disconnection by separating speaker and world by referring to itself. Thus, Frederica can be inside and outside language, re-deconstructing her body creatively in a confrontation with herself in the other.

³⁶ That her husband Nigel patronizes her with his body becomes clear not only by physical violence but also by comments like “‘I said, don’t talk. You are a talkative silly bitch, Frederica. Talking *hurts*.’ He puts a hand, warm, hard, friendly, over the triangle between her legs. ‘Trust me. Go to sleep now.’” (BT, 94) Even before hurting Frederica physically, Nigel uses words mainly strategically to get what his body wants: “He has learned what a surprising number of men never learn, the strategic importance of those words [“I love you, I want you”].” (BT, 39f.)

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