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**Dynamism between Symbolic and Semiotic in Judith Thompson's *The Crackwalker***

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## Dynamism between Symbolic and Semiotic in Judith Thompson's *The Crackwalker*

### Abstract

*This thesis tries to explore the dynamic between the semiotic and the symbolic in Judith Thompson's play The Crackwalker. The semiotic language used by the subject creates a flow and fluidity that is all the time mobile and dynamic. The play uses unusual signifying systems which lend themselves to the study of the fluid psychology of the characters in the play. This kind of psychology operates through unusual signifying codes based on disease, sexuality and body functions. The elements like alliterations, ellipsis and distorted syntax make the language poetic which helps to vocalize the fears, instincts and desires of the characters. This kind of language is appropriate to express the subjectivity that is constantly in movement. It helps to destabilize the notion of fixed and stable identity and subjectivity. At the same time symbolic language is necessary for order, discipline and meaningful communication. Julia Kristeva's concept of semiotic and the symbolic language is used as a tool for analysing the fluid subjectivity of Theresa, the central character in the play as well as the rational language of Sandy and others. It is however, the interaction between the language of the father (symbolic) which imposes rules and regulations on the free flow of the semiotic that helps create a subjectivity that can function meaningfully in the public arena.*

Key words: semiotic, symbolic, signifying system, instinctual drives, fluidity, dynamism, rules of the father,

This thesis analyses Judith Thompson's play *The Crackwalker* with insights from Julia Kristeva's essay "Revolution in Poetic Language". This type of semiotic language is appropriate to study both the subjectivity of a child before 18 months and the identity of a woman whose bodily energies and instinctual drives can justly be

analyzed through the poetic language of the semiotic chora. This kind of language is marked by ambivalence, heterogeneity and fluidity. This theory of language helps to question the notion of stable, unified subject. These drives don't make sense on their own and it is their negotiation with the symbolic that it can make itself understood to the public. This oscillating subject is Kristeva's subject on trail. The following lines from the play reveal how society peeps into the behaviour of Theresa who simply enjoys life without any awareness of what society may think of it.

So, last night, eh, I'm up their with a friend of mine, Danny, he a taxi driver – we're just talking, eh, we weren't doing nothin, and so she come up and knock on the door and she say, "Trese, I know you got someone in there," and I go, "No, Mrs. Beddison, ains nobody in here." (14)

Theresa spent time with a taxi driver because she had no sense of social propriety. However, to exist in society as a member she cannot just turn her back on it. Without internalizing these rules and regulations, she has difficulty surviving in that society. Thus, she may move from not caring to know to having to listen to the voice of social authority. In this way, subjectivity becomes a process in constant movement between the semiotic and the symbolic. "All poetic 'distortions' of the signifying chain and the structure of signification may be considered in this light: they yield under the attack of the 'residues of first symbolizations' (Lacan) ... by linking them into signifier and signified" (Moi 103). This testifies to the fact that when the semiotic runs wild and has difficulty in operating, it has to yield to the pressure of the symbolic which plays an important role in maintaining order and discipline. The connotative fluidity of the semiotic has to be tamed and made socially operative by the denotative rationality of the symbolic. Too much emphasis on either of these is dangerous. If we depend too much on the semiotic, it leads to chaos and delirium as the Indian man in the play.

Too much of emphasis on the symbolic leads one to a discourse that is shallow and empty. The alliterations, the powerful images and the monologues of the characters help to create a kind of fluid music and it reveals the semiotic core of characters' subjectivity, "... A heterogenous functioning is the instinctual semiotic, preceding meaning and signification, mobile, amorphous but already regulated" (Moi 102). The amorphous speech of such characters is already mediated by the symbolic system otherwise it would not be understood at all. The Indian man's "SHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhhhhhhh (with no motion, just the sound)" (134) doesn't simply work in the world of communication. On the other hand, much of the language used by Sandy and Joe symbolizes the logic and coherence of the public discourse that represents the symbolic order of the father's language.

Sandy's "I didn't know at first either, then I figured it out. Cutting him with the heel was the smartest thing I done. Ya see, he wasn't gonna kill me 'cause he don't want to do time, eh" (23) is a very good example of rationalization. She had a fight with her husband and she felt like striking him with her sandals in full knowledge that her husband would not kill her because he would not want to end up in prison with the charge of killing his own wife. This is symbolic language pure and simple. It has to be in a dynamic relation with the semiotic to work properly. It is through a blending of these two signifying systems that characters in the play negotiate their subjectivity which is a subject on the trail.

Thompson was born in Montreal but lived in Kingston Ontario. She always focused on the people of the margins of society and is a keen observer of human nature and behaviour. She had worked for different governmental organizations that look after downtrodden classes of people. The play is semi-fictional, meaning the characters in the play were in many ways similar to the different real life characters

she encountered while discharging her duties. She has produced work that is elusive and cryptic. Her dramatic works are full of stark images and dreamlike situations. She uses haunting symbols and her work is full of brutality and emotional intensity. However she can brilliantly link these stark realities with the everyday and the commonplace. For her, catharsis is artificial and she doesn't want to lessen the intensity of her character's emotions through artificial methods

So far as her method of writing is concerned she never believes in easy and simple expositions but would like her audience or readers to plunge into eddy of the middle of the action of the play. She manipulates her writing in such a way that we as readers are led directly into the turbulent life of the characters suddenly. If we look at the central character Theresa we find her living a kind of tumultuous life full of nagging adversities and out of this she tries to achieve a normal live from within the imperfect social system. She is retarded and the social workers threaten to tie her tubes if she decides to beget children. She still behaves like an immature baby or an innocent angel from heaven.

Her friend Sandy also faces problems of her own, especially in her relationship with her volatile husband Joe. Alan is Theresa's husband who is also grappling with the meaning of manhood. He is faced with the problem of providing his wife with food and shelter and at the same time is supposed to help his wife experience motherhood for which his wife's health and the attitude of the social system is a great barrier.

Judith Thompson uses the monologues of the characters in order to bring out the stream of their unconscious and so that the revelation of the emotional life of the characters can take us inside their inner personality and the psychological turmoil they are suffering from. Dialogues can only reveal the public side of a character's life as it

brings them face to face with other characters in conversation with each other. These public conversations cannot do full justice to the psychological aspect of a character that is hidden from public life. With this understanding the playwright gives monologues to her characters in order to bring out the private side of a character's life. This kind of dramatic method serves to lay bare the enormity of social and psychological pressures the characters may be undergoing.

Thompson also reveals the complex relationship of characters to religion and the state. In her desperation Theresa at one point in the play says that she wants to read no fucking bible. This may possibly mean that for people like her, reading the bible and respecting the holy Christian institutions does not have much meaning since they are languishing miserably on the brink of urban life. So far as their relation to state is concerned, they are getting some pension from it but the state finally sees them unwanted and as burden. How the state discriminates against them is exemplified by the fact that their pension will be cut off if they beget children. If they are to continue to draw pension they are to agree not to have children because their unhealthy children will make the population as a whole unhealthy.

The playwright creates subtle parallels between the conventions of femininity which Sandy represents and the world of petty crimes and male bravado which her husband Joe stands for. His notion of masculinity is shared by Alan but he is all the time trying to prove that he has realized the ideals of nuclear family by taking care of his wife and promising her that together they will have a baby. But there is a contradiction between his vision of participating in the dominant culture and the difficulty of achieving those visions in a culture that is hostile to their aspirations, to say the least. When the baby of Alan and Theresa dies in the end we can interpret it as the abortion of the long cherished dreams of these marginalized characters. The death



symbolizes the end of aspiration and hopes for people of margins. Joe and Sandy fight most of the time which is not only an evidence of how wretched their lives are but also a proof that the abandoned community live in misery and deprivation without the state paying adequate attention to it. The Indian man who moves around shouting and hollering in the street is another glaring example of the abysmal lives of the people living on the margins of society.

Judith Thompson is a remarkable voice in modern Canadian theatre and her works have been critically acclaimed. Commenting on the dramaturgy of Thompson critic Jeffrey Gagnon remarks:

Even the most radical guerrilla theatre must contain some element of a playing space and must involve, to some extent, the experience of witness.

Thus, within the theatre, we are not simply experiencing a single social space, but a multiplicity of spaces that exist simultaneously, each produced by and producing a series of social relationships and hierarchies of power. (16)

This comment highlights the role that space plays in the dramaturgy of Judith Thompson. Instead of relying on single space she experiments with multiple spaces that lend a kind of theatrical richness to her plays. Toying with spaces allows her the possibilities of creating multiple identities and also makes it possible to look at the same thing from multiple perspectives.

Likewise, talking about the idea of abyss which the play significantly represents and the rationalization that Sandy makes in most of the situations in the play, critic Marlene Moser asserts:

The abyss is a place where a different kind of repetition is possible. At the end of the play, when Alan kills Danny, his and Theresa's baby, Sandy puts the horror into perspective by taking care of business. She calls the police,

arranges the funeral; she makes sure that justice is done. But her ordering and rationalizing are not able to account for everything. (49)

For Moser the abyss is a place of repetition by which she means that it is a place where similar kinds of things may repeatedly happen. For her the character Sandy is a person who rationalizes in situations that demand a kind logical explanation and clarification. Since she represents the symbolic it falls upon her shoulders to make sense of different baffling situations whenever the other characters in the play fail to do so.

For the critic Lisa Stowe the play *The Crackwalker* is a text that deals with family values in an urban setting. The play is anti-Aristotelian in the sense that it follows the principle of anti-narrative and defies the chronology of conventional drama.

Rather than presenting her family drama as Neil Simon does – in a realistic, middle class urban American way, which follows the Aristotelian rules of logical drama – Thompson presents a surrealistic, convoluted, anti-narrative view of the urban family. She distorts that narrative linearity so indicative of conventional playwrights . . . (51)

Stowe may be trying to talk about the collapse of nuclear family unit and the values it represents because those values don't hold together in modern urban situations. In a way, she is commenting on the collapse of traditional family values. In addition, she also highlights the logic of the illogicality the playwright adopts for the purpose of giving expression to the unconscious of the characters.

In view of these reviews of the play, the present thesis aims to study the play in relation to how it tries to maintain a balance between the semiotic and the symbolic with theoretical insights from Julia Kristeva and other critics. Judith Thompson's

characters in *The Crackwalker* are good examples of the subject on trial as they are all the time trying to strike a balance between the semiotic and the symbolic languages. In order to operate successfully in society, these characters balance the flow of semiotic energy with the logic and coherence of the symbolic. According to Toril Moi, there is always a co-presence of both the semiotic and the symbolic in the signifying process. What we call language is an inseparable combination of these two modalities and they operate simultaneously in the system of language. In what relation they stand to each other determines the kind of writing that will be there as a result of the combination. This determination happens on the basis of which of the two modalities is dominant and which is dominated. In poetic discourse the semiotic is dominant and the symbolic is less so but both are present because no communication would be possible otherwise:

We shall call the first ‘the semiotic’ and the second ‘the symbolic’. These two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the types of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved; in other words, so called ‘natural languages’ allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic. (Moi 92)

No character is fully separated from the influence of the semiotic chore and no one has necessarily a unified identity as per the expectations of society. Likewise, no character is fully free from the constraints imposed by the symbolic. The characters who are immersed in the world of the semiotic have to maintain a balanced contact with the characters whose mode of communication is predominantly symbolic. The semiotic is the language of the mother and a child and it can capture the constant flow of instinctual drives and bodily energies that challenge the order and coherence which

the symbolic tries to impose on it. The following monologue by the main character Theresa is an evidence of how the mainstream society can't hear and understand the inner voice of an individual living on the margins of society. That she is speaking into a dead phone clearly shows how she lacks the ability to communicate to the public or how her language doesn't help in it.

Hi Janus won't be doing reading writing today. Something happen. Just something. The baby die. The baby die. Up at Sanny's. Okay Okay I waitin . . . Ron Harton still living up at shuter's? [hangs up the phone, and picks it up immediately] C', speak to Ron Please? Hi Ron its Trese s'okay if start going together. I love ya. Okay see ya Tuesday. (Moi 1190)

In fact, she is talking to herself because it is a dead phone and nobody will hear hear. In many places the language is highly rhythmic and musical and helps to capture the fluidity of her feelings and emotions which the language of the father can't express. However, it is the very symbolic language which is necessary to give clarity to the chaos and ambivalence represented by the semiotic. This kind of language helps create the music of the unconscious. Thompson's characters are in subjective turmoil because the identity they assume is opposed to what is socially acceptable.

In order to be understood and accepted by the society, the semiotic has to make way for the symbolic to take over. It is when the symbolic takes over that the socially viable subject becomes a possibility because "The discovery of castration, however, detaches the subject from his dependence on the mother, and the perception of this lack [manque] makes the phallic function a symbolic function – the symbolic function" (Moi 101). Actually, detachment from the mother means that the semiotic has to come to a halt for some period of time so that the symbolic can function and give shape and voice to what is shapeless and without an audible voice. The discovery

of castration means that the semiotic has to be controlled and put in an order so that meaningful communication can become a possibility.

The conversation between Alan and Theresa sheds light on the idea that even when one of the characters is not able to make sense of the realities in the outside world another character has to have some sense of what the outside world is upto.

Alan: Arsewife! Don't you know nothing? Don't you know them doctors make money off sick babies? That's why they like to keep em sick with all them medicines! So they make more fuckin money! Theresa: I don't believe ya. Doctors are nice, they wouldn't go makin babies sick! (117)

This conversation clarifies that Alan represents the symbolic here and has good knowledge of what the doctors are like. For him they are cheaters who are there to make money out of the sickness of children. It is this knowledge of the hospitals and the medical staffs that prevent him from trusting them easily though not taking the baby to the hospital is not the solution. Theresa on the other hand, has no knowledge of the outside world and is so gullible that she can't even imagine that the doctors could do such a thing as making money out of sick babies. Her gullibility is the outcome of her innocence resulting from her semiotic naivety and needs to be handled with her husband's symbolic awareness.

Thompson presents the subject in crisis through unusual signifying codes. Alan and Theresa use language codes based on disease, body, sexuality, mental disorder. It is a code that reflects the energy and ambiguity of Kristeva's semiotic. Alan's remark, "Jeez y' know I don't know what goes on inside that girl but it ain't what's goin on inside the rest of us" (1179) clearly indicates that the mainstream society cannot understand what goes on inside the mind of a character like Theresa. What takes place in that mind is different from what goes on inside the mind of other

so called normal people of the mainstream society because it represents a kind of plurality and heterogeneity that poses a challenge to the monolithic signifying system:

The notion of heterogeneity is indispensable, for though articulate, precise, organized, and complying with constraints and rules . . . This signifying disposition is not that of meaning or signification: no sign, no predication, no signified object and therefore no operation consciousness of a transcendental ego. (147)

Since it represents heterogeneity, the semiotic signifying code of Theresa's speech ruptures the coherence of the symbolic and she speaks to herself to find relief from the pain resulting from a lack of ability to express herself. The possibility of plurality suggested by the semiotic is richer and more fertile in terms of signification and it provides a wonderful experience in comparison to the suffocating precision of the symbolic. We can oppose this language to the more socially acceptable language of Joe and Sandy. However, we also need Sandy's language like, "You tell me where ya been or you are out on your ear. I said where were ya the last three nights?" (31). This is the language of reasoning and explanation because when her husband is missing for a few days she asks him where he had been. She asks him this question the way a judge questions a criminal for clarification.

At many points in the play Sandy plays the role of a character who rationalizes, asks for answer and gives answer thereby working to maintain the power and efficacy of the symbolic. Her , "I said you could get in a lot of trouble rapin a retard" (36) comes both as rationalization and warning to her husband that if he rapes a retard like Theresa his chances of landing into trouble are doubly increased one for raping and on top of that raping a retard. This is one of the finest examples of logical thinking in the play which works as a balancing factor against the crude semiotic of

the a character like Theresa. Her language of reasoning is again supported by her statement like, “You don’t bring in money, we don’t get no supper” (35). She says this to her husband and the logic of it is so very clear and simple as there is light during daytime. The logic is bluntly put but it must cut sharply as there will be no food if her husband fails to bring in money as the breadwinner of the family.

Theresa has no sense of social propriety and does not seem to know or care about what kind of dress is socially appropriate or not. She simply behaves like a child and wears any kind of dress that catches her fancy. She just enjoys wearing dresses at whims and the rules of society don’t affect her much. This becomes clear when she is wearing an ugly dress which does not fit her socially. Sandy reprimands her for wearing this kind of clothes that are both vulgar and unsuitable. Sandy shouts to Theresa “Lying whore, look at you, make me sick. Wearing that ugly dress, thinking its sexy ‘cause it shows off your fat tits and those shoes are fucking stupid, you can’t even walk in them” (20). Sandy here represents the symbolic order that constantly reminds Theresa of the fact that whatever she is doing is against the rules of social decency. Theresa fails to demarcate between what looks sexy and what is socially acceptable. Thus, she needs to be checked and there occurs a mediation between the semiotic and the symbolic.

That Theresa lacks a sense of social decency and is at times incapable of making logical connections is clear from the following conversation in which she speaks out of context and her husband Alan has to bring her back to the point of normal reasoning and rationalize the whole thing

Alan: Theresa, don’t you understand I am trying to improve my family.

Theresa: (coyly) Al.

Alan: What.

Theresa: (delighted) You shoulda seen the poo I done today, it was hardly long!

Alan: Theresa, married ladies with babies ain't supposed to say things like that!

Alan is talking to his wife about something very serious because he says that he has plans to improve his family. This is definitely a grave topic of discussion so far as family problems are concerned but Theresa's lighthearted comment and reaction in a way shocks us because her remark is so irrelevant and more than meaningless. It shows she does not have a fully grown sense of logical faculty and is just a shapeless lump of emotions and raw bodily functions. She mentions the length of her stool when her husband is talking about serious family matter and her husband tries to shake her into awareness of the irresponsibility and the stupidity of the whole thing. She represents the meaningless semiotic and her husband acts as the agent of symbolic order trying to maintain rules of decency and appropriateness that make the functioning of social communication possible.

Though what Theresa says may sound superfluous, it represents the vitality and the powerful energy of a woman's body that for Helen Cixous only a woman writer is capable of giving expression to. She views that, "Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule - immense area of their bodies . . . (Cixous 543). For Cixous it is the power of the female body that needs to be celebrated through writing and only women are capable of accomplishing this feat. Female sexuality is something to be celebrated and it need to be eroticized as much as possible because there is no reason to be ashamed of it. This body is complex and infinite and only a woman can fathom and justly represent



it through writing. Though it may sound one-sided it rings with a truth of its own as far as understanding the complexity of female body is concerned. However, in order to be audible socially it needs to be moderated by the regulative mechanism of the symbolic order. Theresa's "Beebeebabee . . . How come you not drinkin tea beebie? You got a bad cold? Poor beebie . . ." (115) may allow her to give an outlet to the repressed motherly love that she feels deeply for her baby but its not always adequate. It is clear when she asks Sandy for her confirmation about her not being retarded.

Theresa: I not really retarded, am I, Sanny?

Sandy: Just a little slow.

Theresa: Not like that guy walking down the street looking at the side walk?

(28)

Though it need to be moderated by the language of the father it has its meaning because it is the most valid way of bringing out the reservoir of unconscious love that is welling up inside a mother's heart. The semiotic flow may even include the silence . Therese had such a intense desire for motherhood that a baby means a lot for her . Her joy is so intense that she expresses it with the natural wildness that has a music and rhapsody of its own. In the words of Helen Cixous, this very sentiment and the unconscious has a unique character and cannot be easily classified.

. . . you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform homogeneous, classifiable into codes – any more than you can talk about one consciousness resembling another. Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music painting writing: their stream of phantasmas is incredible.

(Cixous 541)

The central idea of this quote is that every woman or a mother has her own private world of feelings and sentiments and it may not resemble with those of another

woman. As it stands to show, these individual emotions cannot be easily codified into something that can be unproblematically deciphered by the public. A woman is well of various rhythms and fantasies, a well that is not easily emptied and managed. This unconscious is similar to music and painting and has to be seen and taken in its own right. It however stands in need of being made decipherable for the others to make sense of it. Without getting connected with the clarity and meaningfulness of the symbolic it will be lost or remain locked within itself.

This idea that when the semiotic erupts it momentarily destroys the symbolic order on which the meaning making of the signifying system rests. When the emotional babbling of the mother explodes it distorts the reference to the intended object and it also weakens the meaning generative power of the syntax. This kind of rhythmic and musical lava of emotions comes from the deepest emotional being of a mother and it sweeps away every kind of logic and rationalization. However, as the moment of intensity passes away and a lull is restored the mother too has to realize the need for embracing the regulatory reigns of the symbolic. The dismantling power of the semiotic is best captured by Moi's view "But when this subject re-emerges, when the semiotic chora disturbs thethetic position by redistributing the signifying order, we note that the denoted object and the syntactic relation are disturbed as well" (Moi 108). Theresa's emotional outburst disturbs the law of the grammar and syntax and displays its own power as wellspring of emotions.

That this kind of emotional outpouring does not always work is made clear by Theresa's relatively rational reaction when her husband declares his intention to have sex with her no matter what the situation may be like.

Theresa: We can't do it Al.

Alan: Don't matter if you're bleedin.

Heresa: No, I can't do it till I get my new IUD in. or I get pregnant again,  
 doctor say so! (35)

It is very surprising to notice that Theresa, a character who most of the time fails to make sense of the world around her, is talking very self-consciously here and is persuading her husband not to have sex when she is bleeding or when she has put no IUD inside her. It is one of the rare moments in the play that Theresa is speaking in full awareness of herself and the realistic situation of her life. It vividly portrays the need that even a single character has to maintain a balance between the semiotic and the symbolic and without this balance one cannot at all function or communicate meaningfully in society. It is one of the best examples of the dynamic relation between the symbolic and the semiotic. Sandy's warning to Theresa, "You touch my fucking husband again and I break every bone in your body!"(18). proves that the latter has no sense of what the consequences of teasing other's husband will be. Sandy has to remind her of the consequences of fondling with another person's husband. This kind of situation calls for a need to strike a balance between the semiotic and the symbolic.

The following quote demonstrates how naive Theresa is, "He did, I sleeping, I sleeping there having dreams, I seen this puppy and he come in and tie me up and push it in me down my hole" (20). The basic meaning of the quote is that Sandy's husband came and tied Theresa and had sex with her and she responded in such a naive way that she makes it appear as if a simple and harmless game was going to take place. The simple and childish way in which she describes penetration makes us feel that her very existence evokes divine presence. Her total lack of the awareness of the seriousness of what was happening to her is not really going to work in this life and she needs to be warned and made aware of it because for Toril Moi:

the semiotic, on the level of manifestation . . . is a hieroglyph, while on the latent level it is a dream thought. 'Dream-Work' becomes a theoretical concept that triggers off a new research, on that touches on pre-representative production, and the development of thinking before thought. In this new inquiry a radical break separates the dream work from the work of conscious thought . . . The dream work doesn't think, calculate or judge in any way at all . . . (83)

Theresa just flows with emotions while responding to something as grave as raping. We feel as if she is dreaming at the time of giving that kind of response. The way she responds suggests that she can't represent what is happening or is being done to her . For making her aware of the gravity of the situation we really need a character like Sandy who is much stricter and is a stand in for the symbolic that is the rule of the father and it is necessary for maintaining law and order both in life and society in general.

Furthermore, how Sandy makes sense of life and death is made clear from her dialogue with Alan:

Sandy: Anyways, bein dead ain't no different from living anyways.

Alan: How do you know?

Sandy: I just know. It's just like moving to Brockville or Shawa or something.

It ain't that different. (74)

This quote is significant because it shows Sandy's power at producing similes and metaphors to make people understand certain things. She expresses a very powerful view that there is no difference between dying and staying alive. In order to concertize it she provides the examples of going to physical locations to show the meaninglessness of living. In this way, she truly represents the symbolic in which

more and more clarity and illustration is sought in the signifying process. When language becomes too rational and symbolic it tends to be empty and thus hollowness of the symbolic can be contrasted or be leveled against with the more fluid but energetic language of the semiotic.

This type of relation makes it possible to specify the semiotic as a psychosomatic modality of the signifying process; in other words, not a symbolic modality but one articulating . . . (glottal, anal) . . . (rhythmic and intonational) vocal modulations . . . (Toril Moi 96)

For Moi the semiotic represents the psychosomatic modality in which not the language as such but the bodily functions with their own music and rhythm predominate. Though it may sound unintelligible to rational ears it is something inevitable and unavoidable for creating a dynamic balance between itself and the regulatory demands of the symbolic. This is evidenced by the gestures of the Indian man in his conversation with Alan:

Alan: What is it, buddy?

Man: Hey. (makes intercourse motion with fingers) lets tear off a piece . . .

Alan: Stupid cocksucker! . . .

Man: (lies on street, giggling) Pleeease. (giggles) (86)

The glottal, the anal and other intonations comprise this semiotic function. The symbolic peeps into the privacy of the semiotic and tries to put it in place like Sandy's, "Don't think nobody seen ya neither 'cause Bonnie Cain seen ya, right through the picture window" (18). Bonnie Cane here represents the voice of the symbolic as it keeps a watchful eye on any activity that seems to challenge and repudiate the authority of the father. It would be an encroachment if it stifles the

semiotic but a kind of a balance will be maintained if there is work in the direction of creating point of mediation.

The symbolic is the grammar and syntax of language and they are essential too for meaningful communication because only the gestures and the vocal emissions of the child makes no adequate sense. In *The Kristeva Reader*, Tori Moi asserts, "The child's first so called holophrastic enunciations include gesture, the object and vocal emission. Because they are perhaps not yet sentences (NP-VP), generative grammar is not readily equipped to account for them" (Moi 98).

The socially alienated Indian man communicates wholly through instinctual rhythms and movements of his semiotic chora. However, without the presence of the symbolic language; the semiotic cannot mean much. It is this man who in a way stands for the desperation and alienation of the other characters in the play:

The figure of the Crackwalker, the play's eponymous metaphor and the character who haunts its periphery, is intricably linked to the abyss.

Thompson based the Crackwalker, as she had Theresa, on a real person - a Kingstonian known for his excessive avoidance of sidewalk cracks. "That guy walking down street looking at sidewalk" gives Sandy "the creeps", but, significantly he is the individual with whom Alan may most likely identify, despite his feeling of revulsion. (Norton Anthology of Drama 1153-54)

The lonely figure of the Indian man echoes the story of the people whose lives have fallen into an abyss and who stroll the streets of Kingston producing sounds that not everyone can understand. By extension, the Indian man may represent the psychic chaos of the downtrodden people as well as the fear and danger that fills their lives and also the danger that is lurking in the corners of the streets and haunts them all the

time. The fluidity which the Indian man represents is similar to that of Theresa but it cannot have a meaningful existence until and unless tempered by rationalization like:

Alan: (grabs her back into the room) I am not nuts. I am not nuts, you understand? I just decided how I'm gonna quit smoking that's all. I got a flash in my head of my old man trying to take his breath, trying to find the fucking air and not getting it . . . (70)

Like Sandy, Alan also provides instances of logical thinking and explanation which is very essential for producing a dynamic balance between the symbolic represented by such thoughtful reasoning and the more fluid and random babbling and rambling represented by the speeches of the Indian man and Theresa.

The play presents the unstable and violent lives of Joe, Sandy, Alan and Theresa. All of these characters try to struggle for surviving on the margins of society. The better life of the mainstream society which they struggle to secure always eludes them. They make up what is called the underbelly of the civilized society. They are considered permanently unemployable by the rest of the society. They are silenced by mainstream society, and their oppression is a result of their inability to manipulate the existing language codes of the social system. They find it difficult to communicate with others. The characters of *The Crackwalker* use sign and codes that go beyond what is normally considered acceptable social language. Theresa's disgust, "I don't like reading no stupid Bible! Ya get a stomach ache doin that ya do!" (1150) is a rejection of the rule of the father which is made clear when she reacts with physical disgust towards reading bible which represents the law of the father and the epitome of patriarchal social codes.

Though the law of the father is restricting and it controls the free flow of energy in the body of a woman, without it the subject will not be in a position to

function in the society. The raw emotions and the unconscious of the feminine may have a power of their own which denotes vitality of a unique kind but it has no shape and order and it fails utterly when it comes to communicating publicly. Highlighting the need for balance between the semiotic and the symbolic Kristeva maintains:

First, narcissism crumbles and the superego says, “so much the better, there is one problem out of the way”. But the body seems to need an identity and it reacts- matures, tightens, like stone, ebony. Or else it cracks, bleeds, decays. All according to the symbolic reaction that is more or less likely. Then, the symbolic covering cracks, and something that I call instinctual drive rides up to destroy any guarantees, any beliefs, any protection . . . (176)

Femininity stands for love, affection, kindness, sympathy and other sentiments and feelings that are required to sustain life but without fatherly order and discipline it is of no use. For this very reason, there needs to be a kind of compromise between the semiotic and the symbolic. Though Theresa criticizes the bible, which stands for a kind of guidebook for Christian patriarchy, she cannot manage without it, because it helps guide and steer society and human life in a certain designated direction. Both the functions are necessary for creating a kind of balanced communication. When the semiotic runs wild it needs to be tamed and a balance has to be created. Similarly when the symbolic becomes too controlling and begins to suffocate it is challenged by the semiotic and again a point of balance results and the signifying system starts operating smoothly.

The fractured and expressive code mirrors the rupturing and chaotic language of the characters. The play presents a glaring example of the human condition on the brink of survival. The play juxtaposes shockingly realistic scenes with surreal and dreamlike episodes. The surrealistic scenes involving Alan and the Indian man, the



raw poetic language used by Alan serve to portray the fractured human psyche through the force of the semiotic.

Alan and Theresa are the two main characters in the play. Theresa is a semi-retarded native woman who makes a living “blowing queers off down at the libido for five bucks” (1124). Her passion for sex and promiscuity lands her into trouble and she needs the help of other characters to help her find a socially acceptable lifestyle. To prevent the semiotic from collapsing into total disorder, it needs to embrace the symbolic to make itself understandable to the public. Theresa’s fluid psyche is temporarily arrested and finds meaning by the symbolic represented by saner characters like Joe and Sandy. Theresa, despite being heavily semiotic in nature, makes use of symbolic albeit limited to makes sense of the world and provides other characters a glimpse of looking at and knowing what she is thinking inside her head. Alan is a character who, unable to fit into the socially acceptable role of father and husband, strangles his own son in desperation. Alan also has bisexual tendencies. But he tries to hide those tendencies by flaunting hyper masculinity. In reality, he is a soft hearted person, but he tries to portray himself as someone who is very strong and is able enough to provide for his family. The monologues used by the characters in the play demonstrate the uncensored stream of consciousness which is poetry of the voiceless and the underprivileged. These monologues can be seen as representations of subjective fragmentation. The poetic language of the monologues provides a window on the character’s unconscious thoughts and desires. The reliance on bodily function suggested by Theresa’s, “who farted” (1163) and the giggles and the rhythmic language implied by the Indian man’s, “pleeeease” (1177) reflect Kristeva’s view that, “Drives involve pre-oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother” (2172). The semiotic language of the

Indian man and Theresa defies the tyranny of the symbolic and expresses itself through music of the drives and the giggles. Unfortunately, it is that very symbolic language which gives meaning and clarity to the chaos of the semiotic for the creation of socially functioning subjectivity.

The character's language in the play contains signifying systems which show the instincts and drives collected in the semiotic chora . Signs related to bodily functions, hunger and defecation help to rupture the socially acceptable language. The symbolic order tries to place constraints on the free flow of emotions and drives but the semiotic fractures the authority of the symbolic and forces itself on the audience. However, it is only by merging with the symbolic that the semiotic can be understood. The monologues of the characters contain secrets and desires but it can only be communicated through dialogue with the other characters. In this regard Kristeva observes, "In this way the drives, which are 'energy 'charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a chora " (Moi 93). The chora which is a storehouse of bodily energies and other instinctual drives is given expression by the semiotic language of the feminine. In the play the language used by Theresa and Alan closely resembles this kind of fluid language. The open-ended structure of the play highlights the uncertainty and ambivalence of subjectivity of the main characters. This kind of subjectivity is associated with a mother and a child before the age of eighteen months. Instinctual drives and energy flows of the body go into the making of this subjectivity. Helen Cixous's, "Infinite and mobile complexity" (543) of the semiotic defies the logic of public language and it responds through bodily functions and energy flows. The very fluidity of this language renders it immeasurable and infinitely complex. This is the signifying code of femininity as well. It can make itself understood only

when it relies on the symbolic which is the language of the father and represents logic and coherence.

The poetic language of the characters reveals their own inner selves whereas the hegemonic discourse of the mainstream society cannot fully reflect the inner desires or drives experienced by Thompson's characters. Iris Marion Young's view about, "observable and rather ordinary ways in which women in our society typically comfort themselves and move differently from the ways that men do" (164) refers to the flexibility of the women's body that has its own music and rhythm. It applies well to how Theresa's body moves and functions in the play. Society's language cannot give an expression to the fluctuating subject positions of these characters. This language lacks the flexibility required to accommodate the desires of their unconscious. It results in split subjectivity which is more of character's true self than a weakness. It is revelation of their reality through surrealistic and expressionistic dramatic techniques. These marginalized characters are outcasts who lack mental abilities to express themselves in the vocabulary of the dominant discourse. However, it is by resorting to the very same symbolic order now and then that they reveal the truth of their precarious existence.

The characters in Judith Thompson's *The Crackwalker* use both the semiotic and symbolic signifying systems to produce a negotiated subjectivity that results from a mutual blending of these two codes. The semiotic is the code that can give expression to the inner desires and dreams of the characters and helps to voice the cries of the fractured psyche. The semiotic cannot make itself publicly heard without relying on the logic and coherence of the symbolic which represents order, clarity and communicability. The language of Theresa, the Indian man and that of Alan is more predominantly inclined towards the semiotic and the language of Sandy and Joe is

more oriented towards the symbolic. We cannot easily understand the fluid language of Theresa because she tries to express herself through bodily functions of farting, urinating and defecation as well as through shrieks and screams. However, we can understand her as she converses with other characters whose language of logic and coherence gives meaning to the chaotic codes used by both Alan and Theresa.

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