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Cadaverized Girls: The Writing of Anna Kavan

Keywords: Anna Kavan; post-war British fiction; expressionist modernism; Julia Kristeva; melancholia; the 'dead' mother; matricide.

Even as modernist studies have adopted the more historicizing approach of the longer *durée*, Anna Kavan's work continues to be overlooked as an example of later modernist writing. Beginning her career as Helen Ferguson, she published six realist novels before changing her name in 1939-40 when she began to write in a more expressionistic style, regarded as a direct consequence of her long-term heroin addiction. Providing an introduction to her work as well as a more detailed reading, this article suggests that Kavan's writing is more complex than a simple reflection of narcotic dependency. Using Julia Kristeva's idea of depression and melancholia, the drive to lifelessness in Kavan's work is read here as the internalisation of the 'dead' mother. For the deadened 'girls' in Kavan's fiction, the damaged relationship to the maternal chora is carried around as the unnamed Thing rendering the child guilty, disconsolate and in constant retreat from the symbolic order

Introduction

‘The apparent choices of art are nothing but addictions, predispositions’,  
Elizabeth Bowen

With the exception of *Ice* (1967), her best-known and final work often regarded as slipstream fiction,<sup>1</sup> Anna Kavan's writing has suffered from longstanding critical neglect. Her novels have been considered at length in only two critical works, *Among Those Left: The British Experimental Novel 1940-1980* (2012), and *Urban Gothic of the Second World War* (2010).<sup>2</sup> The first examines Kavan's work in the context of post-war experimentalism alongside Christine Brooke-Rose, Rayner Heppenstall and B.S. Johnson, while the latter situates her novels, particularly *I Am Lazarus* (1945), along with those of Henry Green and Elizabeth Bowen as part of a 'dark' literary London voicing a bombed out city grieving for its maimed and dead.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the scarcity of scholarly work on Kavan, it is striking that no fewer than three biographies exist, each broadly repeating the same details of what is known of her life, and each accentuating the particulars of her long-term heroin addiction which is offered, often unequivocally, as an explanation for the 'strangeness' of her 'exquisite, lapidary prose'<sup>4</sup>. Unhappily for her three biographers though, Kavan very deliberately destroyed all of her diaries with the exception of a 16-month period from July 1926 to November 1927, therefore a degree of speculation is required in order to compile a fully coherent biographical narrative.. Given the dearth of verifiable facts, it is no surprise then that each biography contains more than a little conjecture as well as some questionable assumptions around the connection between her life and her art.<sup>5</sup> Such a preponderance of biographical material has disproportionately highlighted the effects of long-term heroin addiction on Kavan's writing, encouraging a reductive and partial understanding of her work. Focussing on her drug addiction, all the

more sensational because she is a woman, as an explanation of her writing, Kavan's talent is reduced to little more than an accidental side effect of narcosis and her prose becomes simply a linguistic extension of a troubled life. Jacqueline Rose has pointed up the particularly restrictive function of biography for women writers: '...don't think that this life, for all your efforts, will ever be anything other than the thing you truly are'.<sup>6</sup> Rather than reading off life from art, Rose urges biographers '... to move obstinately in the opposite direction from their page – between writing and its source. They have to wrestle with the fact that for the writer, the lived life was the point of departure rather than, as it is for the biographer, the place at which there is a desperate need to arrive'.<sup>7</sup> Keenly aware then, of the hazards of reductive biographical interpretation, I am not proposing here an uncomplicated equivalence between life and writing and concur with Jane Garrity's caution about reading Kavan's writing as *only* biographical, a critical impulse, she says, 'driven by a raving solipsism', an approach applied more frequently and definitively to women writers allocated their pathologised place in literary history as mad, tragic, or suicidal, their talent regarded as a mere accident or by-product of their disturbed psyches. Such a reading devalues, Garrity says, Kavan's complex writing to 'autobiographical evidence of her mental illness and drug-addiction; within this context her disjointed narratives, otherworldly settings and fixated characters are assumed to result from her unstable psyche, rather than from any literary aptitude.'<sup>8</sup>

For her part, Kavan regarded her work as more than simply reporting her own, often unhappy, life and considered her writing style as experimental. In correspondence with George Bullock, she writes: 'An experimental book always needs a certain build up . . . not only booksellers but critics have to be given a lead, otherwise they feel confused and antagonized by something they can't fit into a convenient pigeonhole'.<sup>9</sup> Similarly beset by unenthusiastic critical reception, Christine Brooke-Rose identified a particular difficulty for women 'experimenters' who attempt 'any experiment with the language or the conventions of the novel'. Such innovation is at first 'automatically overlooked', or seen as a fluke, a critical reception, notes Brooke-Rose, that applies

... much more consistently and durably to a woman experimenter than to a man. A man experimenter, once he does attract attention, is innovative, bold, original, and so on, in articles that show a knowledge of development from precedents; a woman experimenter is just, well, an experimenter, the term often slightly pejorative, without further exploration. Indeed, any noticed or imagined development from precedents is mentioned only for dismissal as imitation.<sup>10</sup>

By the 1940s and 50s, a period described by Kavan as 'unconducive to creative work'<sup>11</sup>, literary modernism in England had just about had its day, and it was to European, particularly French literature, that Natalie Saurraute's 'baton' of aesthetic experimentalism was passed. In a review of Kavan's work, Leo Lerman notes the distinctive aspects of her writing, placing it in the wider context of European literature rather than the parochial stamping ground that English literature had become: 'I hesitate to classify her pieces as stories, for she is less concerned with formal story structure—plot, characterization, time, place, personality-- than she is with communicating the integral essence of mental upheaval'.<sup>12</sup> As one of her biographers, David Callard, says of *Ice* 'The most distinguishable literary influence on the book is Robbe-Grillet and his theories of the *nouveau roman*'

but he insists that the ‘fragmented sparseness’ of Kavan’s writing was her own innovation as ‘her enthusiasm for this school, the only group of writers with whom she ever expressed a partiality, was almost certainly because they moved in areas she had already explored’.<sup>13</sup> While not as systematically conceived as the *nouveau roman* and certainly not part of any literary movement, Kavan’s work is often as aesthetically inventive as many of the *nouveau romanciers*, most readily comparable the work of Marguerite Duras and Michel Butor. Her work departs in certain essential aspects, however, from Robbe-Grillet’s stringent manifesto for the new novel; ‘To believe that the novelist has something to say; and that he then tries to discover how to say it, is the gravest misconception. For it is precisely this ‘how’, this way of seeing things, that constitutes the whole, obscure project of the writer, and that later becomes the dubious content of his book.’<sup>14</sup> Kavan’s writing is not shaped, then, by any adherence to any aesthetic agenda but rather by an obsessive return to what Valentine Cunningham, in a less than positive review of her work, calls her work’s fundamental ‘unconsolation’ and its ‘enclosingly anguished world of mirrors and fish-bowls.’<sup>15</sup> This nightmarishly enclosed world is strongly reminiscent of expressionistic modernism with subjective states projected onto an external world that becomes a phantasmagoria of structuring metaphors that externalize the protagonist’s delusional state of mind, such as post-apocalyptic frozen landscape across which the girl is relentlessly pursued in *Ice*.

I suggest here that the ‘lived life’ of Anna Kavan is not the source of her writing in any straightforward sense but neither is it an irrelevance—quite the contrary in some respects as I refer to significant aspects of Kavan’s life in the arguments that follow here. The focus of my reading is not, however, on breakdown and drug addiction, something that her biographers treat as explanatory ‘arrival’ events in the way indicated by Rose, but to more submerged episodes. Specifically, I draw upon what we know of serious emotional neglect in Kavan’s early childhood and the ways in which this slowly works through her work; first in a rather oblique, even subterranean, manner only to emerge more fully after 1940, when, as Garrity notes, Kavan’s writing ‘abandons narrative, chronology, and characterization intrinsic to realist texts, and substitutes instead alliteration, wordplay, ambiguity, an emphasis on sound and rhythm’.<sup>16</sup> My reading here turns around the knowledge, limited as it is, of maternal abandonment in Kavan’s infancy, a knowledge that must be read *back* from her writing rather than, as Rose suggests, as a fixed point of departure. I will argue that the pervasive atmosphere of lifelessness in her writing is not reducible to narcotic daydreaming but is rather a delayed, complex register of maternal loss that compels the subject into an unproductive sublimation that never reaches catharsis. The Kavan ‘girl’ is imprisoned on the boundaries between life and death in the aura of what Julia Kristeva calls the black sun of melancholia.<sup>17</sup> Condemned to a devitalized existence, the inert girls in Kavan’s writing are always ready ‘for a plunge into death’. The enervating rays of this black sun fills all of Kavan’s later writing with a succession of deadened, entombed ‘girls’ who are progressively excluded from intelligible representational order which points to, I will argue, a severely damaged bond with the maternal figure and a problematic relationship with the symbolic order. Kristeva has argued that in order to successfully take up a position in the symbolic ‘matricide is our vital necessity, the *sine qua non* of individuation’ (p.27). This metaphorical killing of the mother is an imperative act for the subject who must, in order to achieve healthy psychological incorporation, move away from the chaos of the maternal semiotic. But the killing of the mother is not realized in Kavan’s writing, and is further complicated by the fact that there never was any meaningful attachment to the maternal chora in the first

place. Early and ongoing detachment between mother and child leads to the child's disturbed relationship to the semiotic chora that subsequently hinders, or prevents, the child's entry into the symbolic. In what follows, I read Kristeva's ideas on female depression and melancholia in *Black Sun* alongside André Green's concept of the 'dead' mother—one physically present but emotionally absent from her child. In its presentation of bodily inertia and catastrophic loss of affect, the melancholia of Kavan's writing, then, is the 'unsymbolizable' loss of the dead mother. In repetitive scenarios of stultification and detachment, rejection and punishment, Kavan's writing works over a failure to mourn this loss of a mother who has *always* been dead to the child. Like a dummy or a marionette, this figure possesses the outward appearance of a human presence but is devoid of any animation and affect, thus unable to provide any vital embodiment for the child for whom 'it becomes forbidden...to be'.<sup>18</sup> Melancholia, the failure to mourn the loss of the mother, turns in on the child and 'cadaverizes' the subject in whom all life is gradually 'slowed down or interrupted ... absorbed into sorrow' (*Black Sun*, p.4). As I will show here, in her attempt to kill the dead mother, the Kavan girl is overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and sadness and progressively excludes herself from the intelligible world.

Kavan's novels are set on the boundaries of some identifiably 'real' world, but one distorted, often disturbingly so, by a loss of subject-object distinction as emotions and passions are projected externally onto objects, landscapes and climatic conditions. The internal world defines the external in a chronic attenuation of symbolism and recurring configurations of rejection, accusation and immobilisation by a series of persecutors—doctors, guards, benefactors, lovers, husbands, or parents turned jailers—who tyrannize the girl. Whatever their actual biological age, the protagonist in Kavan's fiction is always coded a girl rather than a woman; her body, 'slight as a child's', 'fragile' and thin, and lacking any of the fleshed out roundness of sexual maturity, is always on the very edge of a vanishing corporeality as the paranoid mind is cut off from all physicality.<sup>19</sup> The focus of an indeterminate peril, this girl is tormented, pursued and imprisoned and finally cut off from any networks of belonging or intimacy. Treated like baggage to be dutifully carted around the world, the girls in Kavan's fiction are all unwanted and unloved, and subject to the often inexplicably cruel whims of others in increasingly incomprehensible surroundings. An impassive and blank figure, the Kavan 'girl' finds herself adrift in indecipherable wastelands, by turn, the post-apocalyptic topography of *Ice* (1967) the grotesquely weird dreamscape of *Sleep Has His House* (1948) or the stifling heat of 'Southern climes' in *A Scarcity of Love* (1956) spaces where all physical vitality is slowly extinguished and along with it meaning. With their lurid settings and pervasive sense of psychological claustrophobia and physical isolation, Kavan's narratives turn around a small number of repeated scenes: the sudden and cataclysmic loss of signification and affect, a withdrawal from vitality, and the estrangement of a vulnerable 'girl' in menacing anthropomorphised settings. Brian Aldiss described Kavan's fiction as one that 'remains at arm's length from the facts of life' and what emerges from her novels 'is part of an elaborate game of hide-and-seek which a writer plays, perhaps unconsciously, not necessarily with the reader but with himself or herself'.<sup>20</sup> With 'no sun, no shadows, no life, a dead cold', the world in Kavan's writing is in every respect, a lifeless one made up of repeated movements and events of dispossession and maltreatment.<sup>21</sup>

Described by J.G. Ballard as positioned somewhere 'between poetry and madness', Kavan's novelistic 'night-time language', an incantatory repetition of scenarios of desolation and persecution, are replete with what

Kristeva calls 'symbolical abdication' in which the subject can only conceive of death or suicide as a solution to the 'void of the lost object',<sup>22</sup> This void comes in many forms in Kavan's narratives as the girls move around a constricted circuit of traumatic events and held in thrall to unnamed devitalising, sapping forces under which language is experienced as an estranged and nullifying 'alien skin' (*Black Sun*, p. 53), what Kavan calls a plasmatic 'dream screen'.<sup>23</sup> With its numbed dialogue, psychologised landscapes and glacial maternal figures, the disposition of Kavan's writing exhibits a melancholia in which the subject turns away from a rich symbolism and vitality, gradually succumbing to a life in death. Inhabiting worlds characterized by affective coldness and loss of signification, Kavan's cadaverized girls always return to the site of this impossible mourning; they cannot help but look back at the 'nursery windows' in order to relive 'life's fear and pain'.<sup>24</sup>

### **Woods, Ferguson, Kavan**

Aside from the facts of her birth as Helen Emily Woods in Cannes in 1901, her travels from New Zealand to America via Burma, and her death face down in a pile of heroin in a well-appointed Kensington flat in 1968, what *is* clear from each of her biographies is that Kavan's life and work fell into two very distinct parts, punctuated by the decisive year 1939-40 when, after repeated breakdowns and several suicide attempts, the young realist writer, Helen Ferguson (née Wood) emerged from a Swiss sanatorium with her brown hair dyed platinum blonde hair and calling herself Anna Kavan. She was also an entirely different kind of writer. This split *oeuvre*, before and after the Second World War, has its correlative in the two different personae of Ferguson/Kavan. From 1929 to 1937, Helen Ferguson wrote six so-called 'home county' realist novels and after 1939-40, as Anna Kavan, produced more recognisably modernist fiction with a noticeable emphasis on psychological interiorisation, described by Jennifer Sturm as connected by a 'disturbing motif of unreality'.<sup>25</sup>

Anna Kavan is a name of a character taken from two of the early Helen Ferguson novels, *Let Me Alone* (1930) and *A Stranger Still* (1935) the former in which the character Anna Kavan, an introverted and fretful orphan, is based on her first year of a disastrous marriage to Donald Ferguson and their time spent in Burma.<sup>26</sup> Forced into this marriage by her guardian, a domineering aunt, one of the recurring monstrous female figures that are central to much of her later work, the character 'Anna Kavan' feels imprisoned in the marriage, and deeply repelled by any attempt at sexual activity, another recurring aspect of Kavan's writing. Echoing very explicitly events in Helen Ferguson's own life, the heroine in *Let Me Alone* is forced to relinquish a scholarship to Oxford and to enter into an emotionally and sexually stunted union with a new husband (in reality rumoured to be one of her own mother's sexual cast-offs). The marriage quickly sours and in this novel we encounter for the first time the struggle between the sadistic gaoler /accuser figure and the hunted young female; an antagonistic pairing reaching its apotheosis in the post-apocalyptic topography of *Ice* in which a nameless, spectral, white-haired girl is pursued, and violated imprisoned by anonymous and menacing figures.

The pre-1940 works written as Helen Ferguson exhibit some of the intense psychosexual preoccupations that will become familiar in Kavan's later writing, in particular the brutal sexual struggle between man and woman and a deadened sense of bodily and emotional experience. Broadly realist, these earlier novels have neat, if rather unsophisticated, plots, linear narrative structures and partially 'rounded' characterisation, but already in

the descriptions of tree-lined suburbs, country houses, interwar manufacturing towns and bourgeois domestic interiors, there is a sense of indeterminate menace that shadows these stories. Grim faced and cheerless, Kavan's characters struggle to express any emotion and there is a constant threat of abandonment of the central protagonist, one that goes well beyond any romantic or sexual rejection. Described by Doris Lessing on the cover of *A Charmed Circle* (1929) as 'short, bleak and shocking', this novel, and the others like it, are inhabited by anxious women with 'dark, secret faces' who are often described as expressionless, like 'dull, dejected ghosts' women caught in a world where all choices seem to be negative ones: persecution over attachment and connection; abortion (still an extremely taboo subject) over reproduction; victimhood rather than mutuality; destructive obsession over empathy; betrayal over trust.<sup>27</sup> Although they do, over the years, become noticeably more psychologically claustrophobic in tone, the Helen Ferguson novels are, on the surface at least, rather similar to many middlebrow potboilers of the time with a veneer of realism and verisimilitude holding together the tales of romantic disappointment and bitter family rivalries. After 1939, however, this writing style changes dramatically. Gone are the niceties of the country house settings with their rituals of afternoon tennis, brittle drawing room decorum and gin at six. In their place are inscrutable fable-like narratives set in isolated castles surrounded by dense foliage and impenetrable woods or abandoned houses inexplicably encircled by flotillas of ice and snow or, the exact opposite, houses in the tropics oppressed by an unbearable suffocating heat. Any identifiable external reality or physical world disappears as the landscape assumes a lurid anthropomorphism in which events appear like scenarios out of a 'grotesque nightmare film'. This nightmarish tone in Kavan's writing is echoed in her paintings that are strongly reminiscent of Edvard Munch's solitary screaming figure standing in a dissolving landscape.<sup>28</sup> This second period of Kavan's work consists of psychological , described by Anaïs Nin as nocturnal worlds full of 'waking dreamers' who exist 'in solitude with their shadows, hallucinations, prophecies' that speak of 'fantasies, imagination and non-reason'. Many of them are structured around narratives in which a malevolent figure is consumed by hatred for a weak girl who is cast out, sometimes literally, but more often, figuratively by subjection to an excruciating emotional coldness.<sup>29</sup>

Kavan's writing changes, then, from realist narratives set in small manufacturing towns in semi-suburban houses and structured around petty travails around inheritance or romance to quasi-hallucinatory settings described in quasi-incantatory prose and uncanny imagery, using what she called a 'night-time language' that allows her to 'dive with extraordinary accuracy' into the 'night-plasma' of the psyche: 'Into the ephemeral image I dive, one after the other: sometimes one crystallizes into a brief sharpness—never to permanence'.<sup>30</sup> In a letter to Nin, Elizabeth Moore notes the unsettling atmosphere in Kavan's writing, noting that writers such as Kavan 'show their wounds' in a prose that seems to possess 'an extra dimensional perception' with 'the night's tangling images, half-thoughts, wheeling worlds'.<sup>31</sup> Poised on the border between dreams and reality, the 'wheeling worlds' of Kavan's fiction are those of disconnection, isolation and disconsolation originating from, I suggest, serious and sustained childhood neglect that inflicted such serious psychic wounds that only a complete change of identity would offer sufficient distance from her subject and one demanding a different kind of language and imagery and protagonist whose presentation of external reality is wrought from this distortion, producing what might be called a 'weird' version of anti-mimetic modernism.

### **Not tunnelling but drowning**

Writing for Cyril Connolly's monthly arts review, *Horizon* in 1944, Kavan expresses her interest in what she calls, perhaps rather inexpertly, the 'subconscious', expressing a quasi-Woolfian belief in why the relationship between the 'psychological reactions of human beings to their environment' is finally of more 'vital interest than the environment itself: 'Even in stories of action employing a realist technique, the source of genuine interest springs from an understanding of the fundamentals of human personality. It is the interpretation of complexes, together with their sequence of inevitable events, which gives to any book the truly satisfactory rhythmic progression of music'.<sup>32</sup> In this second stage of her career, Kavan's writing, draws away from realism, what Virginia Woolf calls the 'narrative business' of 'getting from lunch to dinner'<sup>33</sup> to show the existence of what she calls 'a sub-life, contemporaneous with but completely independent of the main current of one's existence'.<sup>34</sup> With their sublimated psychological states and interiorised narratives Kavan's novels are, in some ways at least, a continuation of the concerns of literary modernism which, in Britain after 1945, was on the way to becoming ever less important as an aesthetic or literary influence. Kavan's attitude to character and narrative is, in some ways, reminiscent of Woolf's interest in creating 'characters without any features at all [...] We go down into them as we descend into some enormous cavern. Lights swing about; we hear the bottom of the sea; it is all dark, terrible, and uncharted'.<sup>35</sup> We must be, Woolf says, tolerant of the chaos that might come from this descent: 'the 'truth itself is bound to reach us in rather an exhausted and chaotic condition' and therefore the writer (and reader) of such 'truth' must 'tolerate the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure'.<sup>36</sup> For Woolf, writing was invigorating and recuperative, her prose a vivacious inquiry into the multiple possibilities of language. For Kavan, language moves in the opposite direction; it closes down and retracts, standing in opposition to any kind of vivacity. There is a deep-seated disconnection of the internal psyche from the external, lucid, daytime world in which the subject can no longer negotiate any meaningful relationship between language and meaning. Situations of both psychological and physical disembodiment characterise Kavan's writing. Any sense of sustained signification, of logical meaning becomes radically dissociated from experience, feeling and sensation until all that remains is a narrow range of automated responses that renders the subject a mechanical rather than human figure. Character in Kavan's writing is located not in the actions or speech of human figures, or in a conventional sense of consciousness, but in the characterisation given to the landscape, and often the weather that assumes a menacing, personified presence in many of her short stories and novels. Human figures are generic figures on whom events are inflicted rather than experienced with any real sense of agency.

In what exists of the diaries in the period before the metamorphosis of Helen Ferguson into Anna Kavan, we read that the young Helen regarded 'real life as a hateful and tiresome dream'. The tedium of life was alleviated, she wrote, only by her secretive faculty for self-analysis one that would manifest itself in writing as a kind of abstracted dream language, the sort that Kavan praises in a review of Woolf's *A Haunted House* whose stories possess, she notes, the 'prosaic substance of everyday woven into the lovely, fragile mysteriousness of a dream'.<sup>37</sup> It is such a transfiguration of the commonplace into the strange and the fantastic upon which Kavan's writing turns but for her the dream world is not 'lovely', more a nightmarish shrinking back of symbolism that creates an inscrutable and deadened world. As she herself observed, the dissolution of borders between interior



and exterior, and a hazy zone of consciousness positioned somewhere between sleeping and waking are the zones of her writing: 'I wanted to abandon realistic writing insofar as it describes exclusively events in the physical environment, and to make the reader aware of the existence of the different, though just as real, "reality" which lies just beyond the surface of ordinary life ... free the reader from the actual written word ...'.<sup>38</sup>

Such interiorisation is, of course, a familiar mode of modernist writing that moves towards a Woolfian tunnelling and 'digging out of beautiful caves' from language. But in Kavan's work, this movement to interiority is shaped by a powerful decathexis; that is, the removal of affective or libidinal attachment, attributable, as I will argue, to a disruption of maternal affect. An exhausting process, says Freud, decathexis is undertaken at '...great expense of time and cathectic energy, while all the time the existence of the object is continued in the mind. Each single one of the memories and hopes which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and the detachment of the libido from it is accomplished...'.<sup>39</sup> In Kavan's writing, the process of decathexis alters the presentation of reality, resulting in the emptying out of recognisable human forms into dummies and mannequins, the transmogrification of the natural world into expressionist dreamscapes with 'huge lurid sunsets' and menacing light that threatens to drown the world with its garish intensity, then finally the separation of the protagonists from the rituals of any 'real', external world.<sup>40</sup> The fable-like tales depict the separation, mostly forced but occasionally voluntary, of the subject from a warm, embodied attachment to the world, often rendered in apocalyptic scenarios, as in *Ice* declared by a critic to be 'One of the most terrifying postulations of the end of the world'.<sup>41</sup> Both *Asylum Piece* (1940), described by Joyce Carol Oates as replete with 'passages of startling poignancy and radiance'<sup>42</sup> and the half-memoir, semi-dream chronicle, *Sleep Has its House* (1948), are marked by decathecting and devitalising energies that push the 'girls' further and further away from any lucid meaning or symbolism. All human affect is progressively reduced to a frozen, un-vital inwardness, congestion of language becomes jammed and unproductive, the result, I will argue presently, of an 'impossible mourning' for the mother.

### **Kafka's sister?**

Inhabited by emaciated, virtually translucent, girls who move through increasingly oppressive landscapes distinguished either by bitter coldness or stultifying heat, Kavan's' fiction is as one reviewer puts it rich with a 'fresh kind of peril'.<sup>43</sup> The peril in Kavan's fiction is omnipresent but inscrutable, forcing the characters, into nightmarish physical spaces devoid of life and intelligibility, often reminiscent of the dreamlike topography of surrealism where events occurs in a 'murky inferno' of 'blind and mad armour-plated monsters', roaming through a remote, 'semi-demolished wilderness' of 'chaos and despair'.<sup>44</sup> Pursued and imprisoned by nameless gaolers, oppressed by heat or cold, a pervasive sense of enmity and antagonism permeates all of Kavan's writing: 'Somewhere in the world', she writes, 'I have an implacable enemy although I do not know his name.'<sup>45</sup> The stories are shot through with a sense of persecution and anticipation of punishment of the childlike girl who has been in various ways abandoned and aggressed, estranged from the lucid, rational world of the everyday. These frail, nervy girls are compelled to live in nameless dread and to watch the disappearance of the

rational exterior world as they are progressively immobilised. The repetition of these scenarios in Kavan's writing is striking and is 'like hearing the same story repeated again and again, recasting familiar situations and characters in tones that grow more nightmarish as the years pass.'<sup>46</sup> Not for nothing, perhaps, has Kavan been called Kafka's sister.<sup>47</sup> Like Kafka, she places her characters in spaces defined solely by their distorted perspective where the sense of an outside is accessible only through their highly unreliable consciousness.

The nightmarish quality of Kavan's expressionistic writing centres on the paralysis of both body and mind, followed by some kind of incarceration where the girl passively awaits her fate with a mixture of terror and guilt. As in Kafka, the knock on the door in Kavan's fiction is expected and dreaded in equal measures, heralding imminent persecution and subsequent imprisonment in a world that is at once unreadable and frightening. Nin describes Kavan's *Asylum Piece* (1940) as Kafkaesque stories in which the 'nonrational human being caught in a web of unreality, still struggles to maintain a dialogue with those who cannot understand him [in fact, most of the characters are women]'.<sup>48</sup> Persecution is not a minor chord in Kavan's writing, rather, as she herself noted, it 'is the book'.<sup>49</sup> In Kafka, it is the shadow of the censorious father who looms large, while in Kavan it is the hard-hearted mother who is the threatening presence. This mother figure takes many forms. She might be a partial absence in a house, radiating remoteness and disapproval from a distance or she is more obliquely represented as a jailor or even as a sexually brutish husband. In *Asylum Piece*, the girl has Patrons who are displeased with her behaviour and send her back to her room down on the gloom and the fog where she must remain sad and alone.<sup>50</sup> Again, the girl craves 'sunshine and warmth', even if the sunshine is entirely artificial and, at times, stifling, it is preferable to the freezing fog below. A spectral presence, the girl lives in the shadow of these intimidating figures, 'always moving in her own little circle of dissociation ... as if her real self were elsewhere'.<sup>51</sup> A collection of enigmatic, imploded fables suffused with a sense of indeterminate and sadistic menace, *Asylum Piece* was the first work published under the name Anna Kavan. Each piece in the collection leads inexorably to the eponymous asylum; they can hardly be called 'stories' in any conventional sense, but possess, nevertheless, a sense of belonging to a cycle of narratives rather than a miscellany of prose fragments. Running through them all is the sense of punishment that is meted out on the girl; she knows that it is coming but does not know when or how it will happen. The punishment is arbitrary and inexplicable; possibly for some for some unspecified rebellion or betrayal in the past, possibly for nothing at all.

One of the early stories in *Asylum Piece*, 'The Birthmark', begins with a nameless girl in a state of parental abandonment as her mother has decided to go abroad for reason of the father's ill health. Not quite making friends with H, (like Kafka, Kavan is fond of giving only initials for characters' names) another pupil in the boarding school to where she is sent, the narrator notes the 'strange sense of nullification' about this other girl who reacts to events with 'resignation combined with dread'.<sup>52</sup> H possesses a rather extraordinary birthmark on her upper arm, a mark that is a peculiar combination of the organic and the machine, reminiscent perhaps of the inscriptions of the punishment machine in *In The Penal Colony*. The birthmark depicts a combination of deadly sharp angles, a 'toothed' circle with sharp points in which is contained a more recognisably organically structure; perhaps a rose, a 'tiny shape very soft and tender' (p. 13). A relationship fails to develop out of a peculiar encounter in which H shows the mark to the narrator and the piece jumps forward a number of years later to an unstipulated time and place to a town with a castle in a nameless 'foreign country. In the castle there

is a prison where as the narrator, already ‘unaccountably depressed’, learns on the tour, houses ‘offenders of a certain type’ (p. 15). Peering through the weeds and cracks in the flagstones, she sees an underground cell in which a ‘shrouded form’ appears to be lying on a bier, the mark on her ‘almost transparent flesh’ surely the same spike-encircled rose (p. 17). Why H is imprisoned here is never explained. The narrator is challenged to produce her papers by the prison guards brandishing their truncheons and revolvers. This time, she escapes imprisonment, but the narrator in ‘The Enemy’ will not be so fortunate and we are told that eventually she will be carried away by ‘three men in uniform, or white jackets, one of them carrying a syringe. All will be done in a ‘quiet and orderly manner’ (pp. 33-34). A generalized feeling of ‘not-knowing’ is the leitmotif in *Asylum Piece*: ‘If only one knew of what and by whom one were accused, when, where, and by what laws one were to be judged [...] but as it is one hears nothing but conflicting rumours, everything is hidden and uncertain, liable to change at a moments notice or without any notice at all’ (p. 44). Hearing nothing that might shed light on her imminent fate, the perilous world of the Kavan girl is an unfathomable space of existence in which life, death, or happiness depends wholly upon the whim and decree of others. While interesting enough, the Kafka comparison is not a fully satisfactory reading of Kavan’s work, implying imitation rather than innovation on her part.

#### Glass girls and ‘dead’ mothers

The wounds of childhood neglect mark Kavan’s writing with an atmosphere of paralysis and emotional fixation consistent with the narcissistic melancholia that develops around the hatred for the child’s lost love object expressed by Kristeva as an ‘*impossible mourning for the maternal object*’.<sup>53</sup> As noted, the separation from the mother is a necessary stage in the child’s entry into the signifying world: ‘the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the *sine qua non* condition of our individuation, provided that it takes place under optimal circumstances and can be eroticized’ (pp. 27-28). In order to enter into language and accept the Law of the Father, the child *must* dissolve the bond with the mother in a crucial act of matricide. If this negation is not achieved the child cannot learn to repress the trauma of this memory of negation--a process that is painful but, when well-executed, liberating, allowing the child to achieve a healthy separation from the mother--and becomes trapped in the semiotic chora, destined to work over repeatedly the same imagery and symbols of that failure of negation and its traumatic content. This negation, according to Kristeva, necessitates a period of mourning for the loss of the mother, the ‘indispensable object’ and this is absolutely crucial for the child who must learn to separate from the maternal. Thus, emotions formerly associated with and addressed to the mother have to find alternative expression in the ‘imaginary or symbolic level’ (p. 40). In other words, if all goes well with this process one can easily and happily recover the lost mother in language, in signs that negate the loss and allow meaning to function. Those who do not achieve this negation become overwhelmed by melancholia, as they cannot ‘cancel it out, suspend it, and nostalgically fall back on the real object (the Thing) of their loss, which is just what they do not manage to lose, to which they remain painfully riveted’ (p. 43). Any ongoing enthrallment to the maternal produces a deep asymbolia as the ‘weight of the primal Thing prevails, and all translatability become impossible’ and emotional paralysis is the result (p. 42).

The writer calling herself Anna Kavan who emerges from the sanatorium in 1940 is no longer interested in realism; her prose style turns inwards and away from the readable external world into inescapable circles of persecution, guilt and disconsolation. What materialises from this turn to interiority is a compulsion to work over the experience of an absent or 'dead' mother. The necessary act of matricide that allows the child to be a healthy, separate subject has not been achieved and the narratives become stuck or congested around this point. For men, the inverse of this matricidal impulse is expressed as misogyny but for women it is fundamentally more self-destructive; directed inwards against the self rather than outwards towards the world, it is not so much a hatred, says Kristeva, but 'an implosive mood that walls itself and in and kills me secretly, very slowly, through permanent bitterness, bouts of sadness' (p.29). A woman's feelings are directed inwards and against the body of the reviled, motherless self, forcing the subject either into the semantic emptiness of asymbolia where nothing can be properly attached to meaning or is over-invested in the cognitive excesses of a chaotic universe. Either way, the maternal figure always assumes 'a sinister sort of significance' in Kavan's narratives.<sup>54</sup>

Failure to pull away from the chora of the mother, then, blocks the development of normative signification in language as unfinished mourning results in language that is stuck, blocked, 'ambiguous, repetitive or simply alliterative, musical or sometimes nonsensical' producing 'strange concatenations, idiolects, poetics' (p. 42). In short, a failure to negate and to repress leads to a situation where signs become, as it were, stuck on repeat, endlessly introjected and repeated as the Kavan 'girls' all gradually disappear in spirals of self-annihilation, what Kristeva calls the 'putting to death of the self that follows, instead of matricide' (p. 28). Many of the girls desire to turn to stone, to petrify themselves with the horror of living, or else to fall into the spaces between the clouds. At other times, they want to become like the disembodied summits' of mountains with their 'terrible great ghost-shapes of luminous pallor floating on the dark sky 'to sink into 'black gaps of shadow' to be at one with the 'fearful cold otherness of the 'non-human world'.<sup>55</sup> The withdrawal from the world is nowhere more apparent than in *Asylum Piece*, where the nameless girl lives in a permanent condition of isolation and affective deprivation: 'I am alone forever in this room where the light burns all night long and the professional faces of strangers, without warmth or pity, glance at me through the half open door.' Immobile and deathly in appearance, she is in 'a state of complete quiescence' with 'unfocused eyes wide open' like those of a 'lost person'.<sup>56</sup>

What little is known of Kavan's early upbringing reveals events that can only be regarded as damaging to the emotional development of a very young child. Obviously an unwanted, child, she was born in Cannes, to an inveterate socialite, Helen Bright, who flitted from one glittering event to another across Europe and America. The day after she was born, the baby Helen Woods was sent away to live with a wet nurse and her family. Her mother then retrieved her some time later, bringing her to live in a lavishly appointed house in West London. Although she was permitted only to see her mother for ten minutes each day, just before dinner, the young Helen, Kavan tells us, was on the whole relatively happy. This happiness, however confined, was short-lived. Her parents left for America leaving their young daughter to another nurse, Sammy, who took her to live with her family. During this period of separation from her parents and a new family structure to assimilate, Helen had an appendix operation, a frightening and lonely experience for a young child and one sure to have left its mark on her memory of isolation and rejection. Her father returned and took her and Sammy (the nurse) to live in

New York then to California. But at six years old Kavan writes that she was ‘betrayed’ again by her parents who simply seemed to ‘disappear’ after her arrival and she was sent to different boarding schools in America until she was thirteen. She was never to see her father, Claude Woods, again as he allegedly committed suicide by jumping over board on a ship on its way to South America. The isolation of the abandoned child is prevalent in many passages of *Sleep Has its House*: ‘At school and at home it was the same I was alone ... There was no place for me in the day world. My home was in darkness and my companions were shadows beckoning from a glass.’<sup>57</sup> This disruption of the mother-child dyad, in some ways not untypical for that generation of children raised by wealthy parents, inhibits the flow of warm, synergetic affect and libidinal energy causing the child to actively embrace her own exclusion and a ‘solitude which goes from being a state of anxiety and negativity to one positively desired and it ‘ ... changes sign. From negative it becomes positive. Having previously been shunned, it is now sought after. The subject nestles into it. He [sic] becomes his own mother’ and ‘remains prisoner to her economy of survival.’ These children, then, learn to regard solitude as their only destiny; ‘Arrested in their capacity to love, subjects who are under the empire of the dead mother can only aspire to autonomy. Sharing remains forbidden to them’.<sup>58</sup> Permeated by an atmosphere of ‘cold, loneliness’ and ‘eternal fog’ *Asylum Piece* expresses intensely painful isolation. In ‘Piece 11’, Kavan writes of the disappearance of love that leaves everything ‘the same but not the same’; ‘No hand enfolded mine in the clasp of love. My thoughts were again solitary, disintegrate, disharmonious—the music gone.’ (129).

Language struggles to find words to represent the maternal figure: ‘It is not easy to describe my mother. Remote and starry, her sad stranger’s grace did not concern the landscape of the day. Should I say that she was beautiful or did not love me?’. In *A Scarcity of Love*, we learn that the ice-queen mother, Regina has ‘cold eyes, a ‘narrow mouth’ that is thin with menace’, slender white snake-arm(s) (p.85) and is possessed of a venomous temperament, the sinister castle in the forest in which she dwells remote and impenetrable. She hates her child from conception and as soon as her baby, Gerda, is born she sends her away to a wet-nurse to live in the mountains for many years until she is summoned to join herself and her new husband in an itinerant, impersonal life of hotels and parties. Materially generous, Gerda is showered with gifts by her mother; ‘she’d been given the gold sandals, more beautiful than anything she’d possessed’ but is emotionally neglected—‘nobody in the world seemed to want her; there was no-one to whom she could speak to about herself’ (p.92). She grows increasingly wretched, an evanescent ‘moon girl’ who is lost to the world:

The sun disappeared. Instantly there was a chill in the air. With uncanny speed the world began to turn hostile and dark and cold. Between one stone and the next, all colour was expunged... She could feel the alien country, hostile and savage and huge, the endless lifeless hills crowding behind one another like the waves of some monstrous sea ... She was lost, utterly, hopelessly lost, out of her world. (p.175)

The sense of alienation and withdrawal that overtakes Gerda here is recognisable in one of Kavan’s diary entries. After visiting her mother in South Africa at her opulent but unwelcoming house in Monterey, a ‘dry plateau of semi-desert’, Kavan writes: ‘I’m really terrified in a childish way of getting stuck out here, unable to

move, and petrified forever in a repetition of my childhood isolation.’ She goes on ‘It must be bad for me to stay so long in the neighbourhood of my mother. All the old frustration paralysis feeling comes over me. I feel less and less able to work or have any independent existence – less and less like a real person.’<sup>59</sup> The words that stand out here are ‘petrified’, ‘repetition’, ‘terrified’, ‘paralysis’ and ‘isolation’ all of which she suggests were the motifs of her childhood and the presence of an emotionally remote and demanding mother who transmitted a fatally devitalising energy to her daughter.

The spurned Gerda is similarly alone. Desperate to please an indifferent mother, she is neglected, isolated from the world, ‘... deprived of the things that other children enjoyed –home, affection, companions; and that her mother tells her how very unwanted she was produces, not righteous anger, but a profound sense of guilt and feeling of being ‘subservient and inferior’, alone in her total ‘separateness’ from her family and the world.<sup>60</sup> Initially happy in her marriage, it soon goes inexplicably and catastrophically wrong after her stay in a fever hospital and she rapidly loses any vitality in a downward spiral leading to her madness and death. ‘Nobody in the world seemed to want her ... no place where she mattered, belonged’ (p. 84). Another rejected, desolate girl is at the centre of, ‘Annunciation’, a story taken from *A Bright Green Field*. Mary is confined to a room in the large house as a punishment for first, bed-wetting and, later, the onset of menstruation. Mary’s maturing body is stifled in a tight fitting dress and underwear to conceal her sexual development, her changing emotions denied by all around her. The only way Mary can experience any feelings is through the body of a wounded bird, a baby pigeon that has been pecked nearly to death after being put back in the wrong nest. For her, her body is denied, concealed and most of all made to feel alien and unreal. For Kristeva, it is the body that ‘... bears witness to the affect - of sadness as the mark of separation and the beginnings of the dimension of the symbol ...’ and any experience of reality must, then, be tied to the body (p. 8). The bodies of the girls are figured as on the side of death rather than life. Pale, exhausted, thin and preternaturally frail, they are always already victims, doomed to enact the repetition of melancholic depression and to struggle against ‘symbolic abdication’. (p.6)

The ‘abdication’ of which Kristeva speaks is also known as *asymbolia*--a catastrophic loss of meaning that inhabits so much of Kavan’s writing, originating from what Garrity calls a ‘subversive engagement with the maternal’<sup>61</sup> but what is in fact an ‘impossible mourning’ for the maternal that imprisons the melancholic subject in a world with a ‘morbid lining’.<sup>62</sup> The keynote tone of Kavan’s work, morbidity frequently involves the transformation of the maternal figure into what André Green calls the ‘dead’ mother’-- the absent or depressive mother who is an *imago* for the child: ‘a distant figure, toneless, practically inanimate.’ Kristeva’s notion of matricide and melancholia has some correspondences with Green’s ‘dead mother’ complex where the mother, due to depression or illness, is physically available but emotionally dead and thus inaccessible to the child. She exists only externally as a familiar figure but one lacking in any animation and tonicity in body, speech and emotions. This kind of zombie-like figure is un-dead, and thus cannot be ‘killed’ in the necessary act of matricide, so she lives on as the ‘necessary tyrannical judge’ on to accuse, punish and deaden her child. (*Black Sun*, p. 11). The child of an emotionally dead, depressive mother, says Green, is destined to seek a kind of death in life, which takes the form of emotional and bodily disavowal as well as a longing for intense solitude: ‘The mother’s blank mourning induces blank mourning in the infant, burying a part of his ego in the maternal necropolis’.<sup>63</sup> Following periods of depression (understood very broadly in Green) in which the mother, often

unconsciously, withdraws love for her child, the figure of the unreachable mother becomes ‘an imago [...] in the child’s mind, ‘brutally transforming a living object, which was a source of vitality for the child, into a distant figure, toneless, practically inanimate’ and this can deeply permeate ‘the cathexes of certain patients’ damaging their chances of a healthy ‘object-libidinal and narcissistic future’. Crucially, the dead mother ‘remains physically alive’ but becomes an emptied out figure, a mannequin or dummy, for the child who continues to see the unchanged exterior of the other, unable to understand behind this is the site of acute loss.<sup>64</sup> This loss of animation and bodily warmth is often represented by dummies, dolls; de-animated figures that are coded as maternal. In *Sleep Has Its House* this is nightmarishly played out in a ‘gruesome travesty of mother and child’ where a ‘brass-like’ woman, garishly made up with scarlet lipstick around ‘her raw red mouth’ suggestive of a fancified genital organ’ breastfeeds from a ‘long rubbery phallus-shaped nipple’ that she inserts into the waiting of a wooden manikin that grows monstrously; the bitter milk of the Kleinian bad breast can only nurture an inanimate object, the frozen, metallic mother unable to cathect with a living child. It is this failure of cathexis or, more precisely its sudden and unexpected withdrawal that creates the catastrophe for the child:<sup>65</sup>

In a series of brisk efficient motions she approaches the cot; lets down the side (with harsh buzz-saw rasp); bends stiff from the waist, her tightly sheathed hind parts sheathed in taut satin ... With her hard hands she reaches inside the wool-white, lambs-wool coverings (peeling them off as if they were part of a parcel or a cocoon) and grasps firmly, lifting out a manikin ... (*Sleep*, p. 149).

The wooden mannequin, the grotesque doll figure, stands for the loss of the love object, the mother, which, despite its obvious lifelessness, remains the only provider of sustenance.<sup>66</sup> Such nullified detachment and deanimation of the human is also discernible throughout *Julia and the Bazooka* (1970). The characteristically nameless protagonist is arrested by an inspector (of what, we are never told), detained in a ‘small, cold, brightly lit room’ and interrogated—the inspector gradually becoming like an inanimate dummy or a *papier mâché* mask.

Maternal depression and the attendant withdrawal of affection comes as shock to the child who experiences this loss of affective warmth as a cataclysmic event, one that forces a self-destructive movement away from the erotic towards Thanatos: ‘The transformation in the psychological life, at the moment of the mother’s sudden bereavement when she has become abruptly detached from her infant is experienced by the child as a catastrophe; because, without any warning signal, love has been lost at one blow’.<sup>67</sup> The child becomes, through no fault of its own, ‘the victim of an abrupt detachment’, and such rapid ‘loss of love’ carries in its wake a profound loss of meaning, as the child has no explanation for why her world has radically transformed, become cold and unlit by the mother’s warmth. Crucially, this mother appears to be alive but is effectively dead to the child. An emotionally blank figure for the child, she exhibits no signs of an inner life like Regina, the countess in *A Scarcity of Love*, who is ‘like a machine.’ (p. 105) Here, Kavan’s demonstrates what happens to the child’s affective schema when the mother has *never* been sufficiently present to represent the semiotic chora for the child—a mother who has always been dead for the child. The compulsion to write the ‘dead mother’ produces a fixation on scenarios of devastation and punishment and a loss of subject-object lucidity, one that slowly

immobilises the Kavan girls into states of affective deprivation in which any sense of an outside is reduced to virtually nothing. There is permanently a sense that ‘all seems to have ended’ --‘nothing is left but ruin’ and blankness. Green describes the blankness of the child of a dead mother as connected to the ‘problem of emptiness, the result, he says, of ‘massive decaethexis ... which leaves traces in the unconscious in the form of “psychical holes”.’<sup>68</sup> A passage in *Sleep Has it House* describes this:

What a fearful thing it can be to wake suddenly in the deepest hour of the night. Blackness all around; everything formless, the dark pressing against the eyeballs; the darkness a black thumb pressed to the staring eyeballs distended with dread [...] At first I don’t know what I am to become. I am like an embryo prematurely expelled from the womb. I remember nothing, know nothing I haven’t the least idea what is making me tremble all over like a person suffering the effect of shock.<sup>69</sup>

Agonizingly attached to both maternal loss and a failed matricide, the cadaverized girl at the centre of Kavan’s writing hovers between life and death in a limbo of loss and deprivation. Unlike men’s experience of maternal loss, women cannot find a substitute for the mother in heterosexual relations and are thus more deeply wounded by melancholia, often condemned to chase after ‘continuously disappointing adventures and loves’ or else to retreat from the world, ‘disconsolate and aphasic, alone with the unnamed Thing’. (p.13) The melancholic writing of Anna Kavan radiates ‘infectious ill-being’, at its core a signifying blankness that permanently points up ‘a disaster of words in the face of the unnameable affect’<sup>70</sup>. Caught up in the disaster of the (un)dead mother, her frail girls languish in the debilitating corona of the black sun of melancholia around which they continually orbit, vainly seeking either compensation or substitution. The failed mother-child dyad produces the distorted subjectivity of the unloved, solitary girl who, in turn, projects her ‘ill-being’ onto an external reality so intensely that the inside-outside distinction dissolves in an apocalypse of affect. All internal thought is dramatized as external event or metaphor, often directed towards a cataclysmic *dénouement*, thus at the end of *Ice* we read ‘[a] terrible cold world of ice and death had replaced the living world we had always known’ (p.158). Dissolving any distinction between the internal perceiving self and exterior reality with its evermore-repetitive ‘little circle[s] of dissociation’, Kavan’s fiction is a ‘disaster of words’ drifting unhappily around the edges of a melancholic expressionism.

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Byrne, ‘Moving Towards Entropy’: Ann Kavan’s Science Fiction, *Extrapolation*, 23.1 (1982): 5-11; Victoria Nelson, Symmes Hole, or the South Polar Romance’, *Raritan*, 17.2, (1997): 136-66.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Booth, *Amongst Those Left: The British Experimental Novel 1940-1980* (self published); Sara Wasson, *Urban Gothic of The Second World War: Dark London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). See also Geoff Ward, ‘The Wibberlee Wobberlee Walk: Lowry, Hamilton, Kavan and the Addictions of 1940s Fiction’, in *The Fiction of the 1940s: Stories of Survival*, ed. Rod and Reeve Mengham, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) and Jennifer Sturm, ed. *Anna Kavan's New Zealand: A Pacific Interlude in a Turbulent Life* (Auckland: Vintage, Random House New Zealand, 2009).



<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, Kavan's work has been regarded as 'slipstream' fiction. Coined originally by science fiction writer Bruce Sterling in the 1980s, the label slipstream is a rather loosely defined category of genre fiction aligned both to science fiction and the fantastic. The term has been applied to a diverse group of writers including J.G. Ballard, Borges, Beckett, Sebald, Paul Auster and Angela Carter. See Gary K. Wolfe, *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature*, (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/anna-kavan/mercury/> [accessed January 30<sup>th</sup> 2015]

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Reed, *A Stranger On Earth: The Life and Work of Anna Kavan*, (London: Peter Owen, 2006); Francis Booth and David Callard, *The Case of Anna Kavan* (London: Peter Owen, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Rose, 'This is Not A Biography', *LRB* <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n16/jacqueline-rose/this-is-not-a-biography>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Garrity, p. 253.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Garrity from unpublished correspondence between Kavan and George Bullock, 1947-1948, the Kavan archive at the University of Tulsa.

<sup>10</sup> Christine Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, Ohio, 2003), p.4.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Kavan, 'A *Haunted House*, and Other Short Stories, by Virginia Woolf', *Horizon*, April (1944): 283-285 <http://www.unz.org/Pub/Horizon-1944apr-00283> [accessed January 26<sup>th</sup> 2015]

<sup>12</sup> Leo Lerman, *The Saturday Review*, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1946, 9-10. Also in quoted in Booth.

<sup>13</sup> Callard, p. 141.

<sup>14</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel* trans. Barbara Wright, (London: Calder and Boyars, 1965) p.141.

<sup>15</sup> Valentine Cunningham, *New Statesman*, 1975 March 28, 1975, p. 424.

<sup>16</sup> Jane Garrity, 'Nocturnal Transgressions in The House of Sleep: Anna Kavan's maternal Registers', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 40: 2, (1994): 253-277, p. 257.

<sup>17</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 4. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

<sup>18</sup> André Green, 'The Dead Mother Complex', *On Private Madness* (London: Hogarth Press, 1986), p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> *Ice*, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Brian Aldiss, 'Kafka's Sister', in *The Detached Retina: Aspects of SF and Fantasy* (Liverpool; Liverpool University Press, 1995), 1995, p.138.

<sup>21</sup> *Sleep Has His House*, (London: Peter Owen, 1973), p. 13. Hereafter, abbreviated to *Sleep*.

<sup>22</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'On The Melancholic Imaginary', *New Formations*, 3 1987, pp.5-14, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Sleep*, p. 76, 159.

<sup>24</sup> Callard, p.65.

<sup>25</sup> Introduction to *Guilty*, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> See Victoria Walker 'Ornithology and Ontology: The Existential Birdcall in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Anna Kavan's *Who Are You?*', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 23:4, (2012) pp. 490-509.

<sup>27</sup> *A Charmed Circle*, (London: Peter Owen, 1994), p. 113.

<sup>28</sup> *A Scarcity of Love*, (London: Peter Owen 1971), p. 42. Hereafter, abbreviated as *Scarcity*.

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- <sup>29</sup> Anaïs Nin, *The Novel of the Future*, (New York: Macmillan 1986), p.171.
- <sup>30</sup> *Sleep*, p. 8.
- <sup>31</sup> *The Diary of Anaïs Nin* Volume 6, 1955-1966: Vol. 183, (Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich: New York and London, 1976), p.183.
- <sup>32</sup> *Horizon*, November, 1944, 'Selected Notices', pp.359-361, p. 359.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Modern Fiction', p. 179.
- <sup>34</sup> *I am Lazarus*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945), p.8.
- <sup>35</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', *Writer's Diary* (New York: Harcourt, 1973), p. 386.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- <sup>37</sup> *Horizon*, (1944) p. 284,
- <sup>38</sup> Callard, p.122.
- <sup>48</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV* 1914-1916, (London: Hogarth press, 1917), p. 245.
- <sup>40</sup> *Scarcity*, p. 22.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ice* (London: Peter Owen, 1967) from a review in *The Times*.
- <sup>42</sup> Joyce Carol Oates, *The New York Times Book Review*, t <http://alanguillette.com/lit/kavan/writings>
- <sup>43</sup> Jill Robinson, *The New York Times Book Review*, May 11, 1975.
- <sup>44</sup> *Sleep*, p. 173.
- <sup>45</sup> 'The Enemy', p. 31.
- <sup>46</sup> Kate Zambreno, 'Anna Kavan Context No. 18', <http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/anna-kavan/> [accessed June 11th 2014]
- <sup>47</sup> Brian Aldiss, 'Kafka's Sister', in *The Detached Retina: Aspects of SF and Fantasy* (Liverpool; Liverpool University Press, 1995), pp. 137-44.
- <sup>48</sup> Nin, p.171.
- <sup>49</sup> Letter to Peter Owen in Callard, p. 138.
- <sup>50</sup> *Asylum Piece and Other Stories*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), p. 26.
- <sup>51</sup> *Scarcity*, p. 106.
- <sup>52</sup> 'The Birthmark', pp. 11-12. Most subsequent page references to primary texts will be given in parentheses.
- <sup>53</sup> Kristeva, *Black Sun*, p. 9.
- <sup>54</sup> *Scarcity*, p. 106.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.
- <sup>56</sup> *Asylum Piece*, p.131, p. 157.
- <sup>57</sup> *Sleep*, p. 101.
- <sup>58</sup> Green, p. 156.
- <sup>59</sup> Callard, p. 94.
- <sup>60</sup> *Scarcity*, p. 82.
- <sup>61</sup> Garrity, p. 258.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9 .

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<sup>63</sup> Green, p. 195.

<sup>64</sup> Green, p. 142.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.151-2.

<sup>66</sup> Julia Jordan examines the figure of the automata in late modernist writing in ‘Autonomous Automata: Opacity and the Fugitive Character in the Modernist Novel and After’ in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*, ed. David James, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011: 96—113. See also Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, & London: Harvard University Press, 2001)

<sup>67</sup> Green, p. 150.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14).

<sup>69</sup> *Sleep*, p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258)