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This Body which Is not M(in)e
Figuring the Pregnant Body

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Abstract

Il saggio prende avvio dalla riflessione di Christine Battersby sulla natura fenomenale della relazione tra Sé nell'incontro con e in opposizione al corpo dell'Altro che ha tempo e luogo durante la gravidanza. Il saggio disegna un percorso che intreccia queste riflessioni teoriche con alcune forme letterarie che la relazione prenatale è andata prendendo nel mondo anglofono, in una linea che attraversa luoghi, tempi e generi diversi, passando dai *mothers' legacies* della prima età moderna ad alcuni testi poetici a cavallo tra Settecento e Ottocento, per giungere alla scrittura poetica della scrittrice australiana Judith Wright e al romanzo contemporaneo, con *Nutshell* (2016) di Ian McEwan. Questi testi esemplificativi danno prova di un atteggiamento controverso rispetto alla gestazione e al venire-alla-luce, per cui il corpo ospitale è il campo di battaglia su cui si sono giocate l'appropriazione ed espropriazione dei corpi delle donne e delle loro rappresentazioni. Nei testi poetici di Wright, invece, si articola una versione più complessa della gravidanza come fenomenalità duplice, che mette in atto l'ospitalità chiasmatica proposta da Maurice Merleau-Ponty e Rosalyn Diprose in connessione con l'esperienza incarnata del dare e venire alla vita.

Parole chiave: corporeità fenomenale, gestazione, ospitalità chiasmatica, Ian McEwan, Judith Wright, *mothers' legacies*

Abstract

This study takes its cue from Christine Battersby's inquiry into the «phenomenality» of the self-and/but other-than-self body during gestation. Its contention is that a proprietorial, controversial attitude has often been taken in Anglophone literary texts as varied as early modern mothers' legacies and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pregnancy poems written by women, and that even a recent novel by Ian McEwan, *Nutshell* (2016) portrays coming-to-life as an occasion for appropriating and disappropriating the bodies of women. The work on pregnancy and birth by the Australian poet Judith Wright, by contrast, provides a different and more nuanced version of

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pregnancy as double phenomenality, most especially where she seems to enact the intense chiasmatic hospitality that phenomenological thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Rosalyn Diprose associate to the embodied experience of giving and coming to life.

Keywords: Phenomenal Embodiment, Pregnancy, Chiasmatic Hospitality, Ian McEwan, Judith Wright, Mothers' Legacies

§

1. The Matter of Bearing

In 1998, British philosopher Christine Battersby published a book dedicated to investigating «woman» as «phenomenal», in the doubly intricate sense of being «astonishing and peculiar» and also non-noumenal, and thus inherently a *less* real and objective form of being (Battersby 1998, 1). Battersby daringly argued that

> the dominant *metaphysics* of the West have been developed from the point of view of an identity which cannot give birth, so that birthing is a deviation of the "normal" models of identity – not integral to thinking identity itself (Battersby 1998, 4, my italics).

Potential pregnancy and natality are in her view an abstract category which is absolutely needed to rediscuss and refigure identity, but she often insists that in no way must giving birth be thought of as a *natural* condition or prescription for women or parents or as a necessary step in their formation and self-realization. I wish to widen the scope of Battersby's philosophical argument to include a rhetoric and a possible aesthetics of phenomenality which may help at least partially in surveying some of the literary and cultural forms that "represented" pregnancy has taken in the Anglophone world from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries. In doing so, and well aware of the possible objections to connecting such

different times and locations, I will delve into a few twentieth-century critical and political debates on pregnancy, which has often been seen, I argue, as a powerful patriarchal means for depriving women of their bodies and time, at least by thinkers as pivotal to global feminism as Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva and Iris Marion Young.[1] I am certainly aware that many other critical thinkers (feminist and queer in particular) have worked to disambiguate and dismantle the traditional patriarchal, often binary, expectations related to pregnancy. Yet, it is beyond the scope of this short article to give a general overview of such disputed terrains: the voices I have chosen seem to me to offer fruitful reflections on pregnant phenomenality, namely in its specific connection with hospitality.

Both the texts I briefly encounter and the theoretical framework which sustains my discourse seem to universalize "woman" as a concept and obliterate an innumerable array of other theoretical and political positions as well as embodied experiences of pregnancy. Battersby, for instance, has the clear intent of refiguring the "metaphysics" of giving birth, with all the possible dangers this word and philosophical theorisation entail. Even de Beauvoir and Kristeva, to mention two of the most relevant voices in the twentieth century, assume as pivotal embodied centre of their discussions a universalised female body, which was indeed already transgressive enough and in sore need of coming to critical life at their time. While acknowledging a profound debt towards them, in this article I argue in favour of more recent phenomenological reflections on these controversial issues: namely, reflections on the chiasmatic and reciprocal – truly intercorporeal – relation between the mother-to-be and the foetus, which have triggered fascinating debates on intercorporeal generosity (Diprose

[1] For other essential interventions on this debate, see Haraway 1997, Duden 1993.

2002) and immunity (Esposito 2011). I will use these key terms and reflections to read a recent novel by Ian McEwan, *Nutshell* (2016), before concluding with one poem on pregnancy written by the Australian poet Judith Wright in the 1940s. In my view, while these last texts offer a textual perspective on the interrelational matter of bearing life (and being *born* to life), it is only in Wright's work that one finds an instance of a truly and intimately reciprocal gift/given of life.

2. Entombed Life

A few decades ago, Elaine Beilin helped focus scholarly attention on previously forgotten early-modern maternal advice books, which had been common and popular in Britain especially in the early seventeenth century (Beilin 1987). Among them, one finds epistles, meditations and spiritual legacies triggered by the dangerous state of pregnancy, at a time when dying in child-birth or due to puerperal fever was all but exceptional. Indeed, many of these texts seem to entitle otherwise unbearable entries of women into the public sphere; yet, these could only be allowed by paternal or otherwise patriarchal "generosity" and often by the most austere authority offered by an impending and literal *rigor mortis* (see Leigh 1616; Parlati 2001). In Wendy Wall's words:

> These public/private declarations, eased into print through the authority of death implicit in the drafting of wills, made legacies an important means through which women could offer their words to the public (Wall 1991, 41).

In the case of one of the most famous maternal advice books, Elizabeth Jocelin's *The Mothers Legacie, to Her Unborne Childe* (1624), the mother-child relation is generally checked by the author herself, while her intimate relation with the unborn is translated into a universal lesson in the recognisable form of a sermon, with the text devised as a «twinne-like sister, issuing from the same Parent, and seeing the light about the same time»

(Jocelin 1624, A10r-v). Yet, this text – like many others of the kind – can be no more than a metaphorical «looking-glasse» for a woman «heartily desiring to be religiously prepared to die» (Jocelin 1624, B8r-v).

In the mid-eighteenth century pregnancy became growingly medicalised, and men *accoucheurs* began to substitute the traditional figure of the female midwife and took professional control over designing and patrolling women's perilous journeys towards delivery. Thus, an eminently male gaze started to intrude into an area of traditional female expertise and millennial practice, with *scientifically-minded*[2] men purporting to be the only enlightened actors on the scene of gestation and birth (see Moscucci 1990, Hanson 2004 and Hanson 2015). Many texts – strictly medical as well as literary and autobiographical – register this cultural revolution, somehow re-mediating the already culturally-fraught connection between mother and foetus that maternal advice books had portrayed and made publicly possible. Like the women writers of conduct materials of the previous century, many eighteenth-century women recorded in writing the fears and hopes they connected to that *exceptional* state. Among them, as Elizabeth Raisanen makes clear, some mostly forgotten women poets stand out in their attempt at making physical, conceptual and affective space for the unborn while simultaneously finding space for themselves, albeit as (obliquely) active agents in the parturition itinerary (Raisanen 2016).

Raisanen refers to Jane Cave, for instance, whose 1786 poem *Written a Few Hours before the Birth of a Child* is partly in tune with the funereal, meditative tone of seventeenth-century maternal advice books, as in the

[2] It is essential to remind readers that the word "scientist" was coined by William Whewell only in 1833, on the occasion of a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Cambridge. Whewell was responding to Samuel T. Coleridge's uneasiness with the term "philosophers" attached to men he saw as empirically experimenting on matter. On this issue, see Ross 1962.

stanzas in which she prays God to «prepare me for that hour, / When most thy aid I want» (Cave 1789a, 153 and Cave 1789b, 153). Yet, while allegedly ceding to the will of the mighty power, Cave also humbly dares a surprising conclusion:

> One wish to name I'd humbly dare,
> If death thy pleasure be;
> O may the harmless babe I bear
> Haply expire with me (Cave 1789a, 154 and Cave 1789b, 153).

In one of her six "birth poems", this poet and/as mother fulfils her role of protective figure and wishes to be united with her baby, even (if) in death. As is well known, the law of coverture (or *covert baron*) would for a long time still make it impossible for married women to claim any legal right over their offspring, property or wages (their legal status being subsumed within that of their husbands or male relatives). Therefore, this deathly wish bears all the resemblance of a transgressive appropriation on the part of a mother not keen on leaving her most priced value and care behind.

Another poet worth mentioning is Anna Letitia Barbauld, who was a well-known and highly-esteemed early nineteenth-century woman of letters whose name has recently been rediscovered. While never a biological mother herself, Barbauld also wrote a poem dedicated to «a little invisible being» (Barbauld 1825, 199). She imagines this «germ of new life» as endowed with «powers» and with a potential to «reap» his/her «rich inheritance of love». The poet refers to the infant bud of being by imagining it will be «saluted» (Barbauld 1825, 200) like a winner intent on a triumphal and much-awaited march.

As Raisanen clarifies in her analysis of works by Cave and Barbauld (among others), these poems are powerful, potentially transgressive tools which

> altered the focus […] from a concern for male figures and the fetus to a focus on women's agency in the processes of pregnancy, childbirth and child-rearing […] these Romantic poems […] drastically revised the "mother's legacy" genre by emphasizing not the child's future life and conduct, but rather the mother's concern for the preservation of her own legacy in her poetry. Finally […] they viewed as compatible their roles as both mothers and authors (Raisanen 2016, 102-103).

While I agree that these texts inaugurate a furtively innovative – though always fraught – relation between mothers-to-be and the not-yet-born, in my view these early modern and modern texts still enact a version of controversial hospitality which posits the woman's body as a «living tomb» – maybe also as a reminder of the many casualties of birth – and a «prison» from which «the stranger guest» who has «fed with her life» had better be «free» and in «haste», though at the cost of «nature's sharpest pangs» for the woman who must «lay her burden down» (Barbauld 1825, 200). In my view, these works give voice to a sense of pregnancy as imprisonment, a key term which has been the object of heated ideological controversy among twentieth-century thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva, in particular.

3. Possessions and Dispossessions

In his essay on the Uncanny, Sigmund Freud highlighted that «the most uncanny thing of all» can be the «idea of being buried alive» (Freud 1966, 14). More relevantly to my discourse, he also suggests that

> psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy which had originally nothing terrifying about it at all, but was qualified by […] the phantasy, I mean, of intrauterine existence (Freud 1966, 15).

Truly, *conceived* either as a reassuring vessel, a «living tomb» (Barbauld 1825, 200) or a Freudian uncanny mixture of both, the uterus has often

synecdochically signified the entire *woman's body*.[3] Western medical theories on gestation have obviously varied over time, from prescribing women's active participation in the sexual act to facilitate impregnation to eighteenth-century theories on the necessity for absolute passivity during delivery, to various nineteenth-century theories on the *uterine* dangers represented by women in practically every single phase of their sexual life, be it childhood, maturity, menopause and old age (see Mangham 2007). In most cases, as Shildrick suggests, the pregnant body has indeed been seen as «"leaky" and uncontainable, and it is for this very reason that it has been considered monstrous and threatening» (Shildrick 2002, 31). Shildrick also stresses the predicated nature of women's bodies, in general, and of pregnant women's bodies more in particular, and shows how they have often been perceived as both vulnerable and threatening, potentially contaminating and always to-be-contained vessels. In her words, the «pregnant body itself is always a trope of immense power in that it speaks to an inherent capacity to problematise the boundaries of self and other» (Shildrick 2002, 31).[4]

The playing out of this ineradicable tension has been articulated with great vigour by Simone de Beauvoir, whose non-traditional views on pregnancy have also been intensely disputed over time. In a famous and controversial passage of *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, she contends that «it no longer seems marvelous but rather horrible that a parasitic body

[3] It is far beyond the scope of this article to delve into the many complexities of a body which is, in the works mentioned here, conceived as normative, and whose colour line is obliterated by a generalising gesture.

[4] Shildrick has widely written on non-normative embodiment and vulnerability, claiming for necessary revisions of simplified ideas of bodily 'normality' and bodily perfection. See Shildrick 2002 and Shildrick 2019.

should proliferate within her body; the very idea of this monstrous swelling frightens her […] pictures of swelling, tearing, haemorrhage, will haunt her» (de Beauvoir 2009, 360). In this version, the boundary between the foetus and the mother's body is insecure for both actors, and mostly detrimental to the second. She famously affirms that the «species takes residence» (de Beauvoir 2009, 41) in the woman's body, and thus needs to take possession of *her* in a «drama playing itself out in the woman between her and herself» (de Beauvoir 2009, 612).

Thirty years later, Julia Kristeva would take a very different position on this series of issues, and on the power hierarchies which have been and remain at stake when pregnancy is concerned. In maternity de Beauvoir saw exploitation and imprisonment and tried to take women to the political task of refusing it. Kristeva instead wrote an indisputably lyrical celebration of women's gestational time:

> Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is another. And no-one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. «It happens, but I'm not there». «I cannot realize it, but it goes on». Motherhood's impossible syllogism (Kristeva 1980, 237).

Even in Kristeva's view, though, the woman's body remains predicated, caught between the indomitable alien invader who *occupies* her and the physiological transformations which pertain to her own embodiment. In another well-known text, Iris Marion Young also investigates the porous, allegedly *generous*, pregnant subject, who is

> decentered, split, or doubled in several ways. She experiences her body as herself and not herself. Its inner movements belong to another being, yet they are not other, because her body boundaries shift […] Pregnancy, I argue, reveals a paradigm of bodily experience in which the transparent unity of self dissolves (Young 1984, 46).

Notwithstanding their different standpoints, these thinkers all seem to support the view that pregnancy is a violent confrontation, in which the guest is *naturally* hostile when carving his/her space into a body which a century-old patriarchal framing has meant and made to be hospitable and ready to self-sacrifice.

I wish now to turn to a few literary texts from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to investigate how their competing representations of pregnancy and of the phenomenal plural embodiment it inaugurates may be connected to this hostile/hospitable binarism.

4. Contending Aesthetics of Pregnancy

In a novel he published in 2016, *Nutshell*, Ian McEwan reinvents the *Hamlet* plot by insinuating within the liquids and folds of Trudy's amniotic sac to record the perceptions and deductions of her not-yet-born foetus. Trudy is a domestic version of Gertrude, plotting with Claude (Claudius) for the murder of John, who owns a derelict house – rotting like the play's Denmark, indeed – yet worth £8million. In his attempt at addressing Shakespeare's most famous triangular plot, McEwan invents a pugnacious pre-natal witness and first-person narrator who indeed appropriates his mother's body as much as she wishes to appropriate John's real estate, each of them utterly and violently hostile to the other: «My limbs are folded hard across my chest, my head is wedged into my only exit. I wear my mother like a tight-fitting cap» (McEwan 2016, 156). As Wolfgang G. Müller suggests, this is not the first time in which a fictional narrator has expanded on *his* own begetting and birth – as the example of Lawrence Sterne's Tristram Shandy testifies to (Müller 2018, 374). Yet, McEwan proves his scientific expertise in endowing the foetus with a carefully-wrought net of complex sensory-motor activities, and a sophisticated outlook on both pregnant embodiment and foetal experience:

> So here I am upside down in a woman. Arms patiently crossed waiting, waiting and wondering who I'm in, what I'm for. My eyes close nostalgically when I remember how I once drifted in my translucent body bag, floated dreamily in the bubble all my thoughts through my private ocean […] colliding gently against the transparent bounds of my confinement, the confiding membrane that vibrated […] Long ago, many weeks ago, my neural groove closed upon itself to become my spine and my many million young neurons, busy as silkworms, spun and wove from their trailing axons the gorgeous golden fabric of my first idea […] my idea was *To be* (McEwan 2016, 1).

The accent here falls on the foetus, who remains unnamed but whose stance towards a very ungenerous and uncaring mother-to-be is nevertheless proprietorial. Though Trudy drinks wine, eats junk food, and is never concerned with even basic hygiene, to him she ensures and represents a «body bag» in which he can bask as though in a warm «private ocean» (McEwan 2016, 1). Tragedy and comedy intertwine as in the Shakespearean play, with the foetus intent on listening to voices and sounds, registering sensations, impeding the crime, saving his father's life (and property), and, shortly, beginning *to be*:

> I've come to a decision. Enough. My amniotic sac is the translucent silk purse, fine and strong that contains me. It also holds the fluid that protects me from the world and its bad dreams. No longer. Time to join in. To end the endings. Time to begin (McEwan 2016, 192).

The confrontation with Claude is highly competitive, since the decision to be, eventually, born to life literally takes the foetus through a vagina transmuted into a colonised Panama Canal:

> What was in his day a vagina, is now proudly a birth canal, my Panama, and I'm greater than he was, a stately ship of genes, dignified by unhurried progress, freighted with my cargo of ancient information […] A slippering moment of waxy, creaking emergence, and here I am, set naked on the Kingdom.[…] now I have it at last, I own it, and it possesses me (McEwan 2016, 197).

The metaphorical mercantile language is ironically adopted *in reverso*, with before and after typically represented as space (and time) which must be conquered inside out. And yet, the Kingdom also possesses the newly-born creature, although it remains unclear whether the term actually implies *life*, or more reductively, the outside of his mother's body. In either case, though, a hostile dispute over property boundaries remains at stake.

It is to a woman poet that I turn to find what I deem a more fertile mode of imagining and representing pregnancy, Judith Wright. She is one of the best-known twentieth-century Australian literary figures, a poet, novelist and Aboriginal rights activist who devoted a few texts to the phenomenal state and relation I am concerned with.[5] In her 1946 «Woman to Child», arguably the most pivotal among a series of short texts, she connects gestation to Aboriginal cosmic dreaming, positing the speaking persona as a pivotal centre of both the text and creation/gestation:

> You who were darkness warmed my flesh
> where out of darkness rose the seed.
> Then all a world you hear and see
> all the world you hear and see
> hung upon my dreaming blood.
>
> There moved the multitudinous stars,
> and coloured birds and fishes moved.

[5] *The Unborn*, *Woman to Child*, *Woman to Man*, *The World and the Child* were all published in 1946, and later collected in *Woman to Man* (Wright 1949). In this collection Wright published another beautiful poem on pregnancy and birth, *Conch Shell*. I owe my first discovery of Judith Wright's poems to Anne Elvey's essay on pregnant bodies and the «material given» in which she takes issue with Derrida's work on the gift and hospitality and draws instead on the French phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion. She thus manages to disturb any logic of appropriation and commodification that she reads in Derrida and chooses interconnectedness and relationality as fundamental tools for rethinking planetary space and life (see Elvey 2003).

> There swam the sliding continents.
> All time lay rolled in me, and sense,
> And love that knew not its beloved (Wright 1946, 24).

Even though the «I» addresses the titular child as «node and focus of the world», and the voice posits herself as a «well / you shall escape and not escape», this body is not a prison but a continuing source of nurture for «crescent cells» (Wright 1946, 24). The repetitive use of the pronoun reinstates her/self as a *link*, in a fundamental ethical move which resonates with more contemporary philosophical positions on impregnated identity: «I am the earth, I am the root, / I am the stem that fed the fruit, / the *link* that joins you to the night» (Wright 1946, 24, my italics). Indeed, I argue that Wright anticipates the phenomenological concept of pregnant interconnectedness: «To be pregnant in ontological terms is to be in an intercorporeal relation with another entity that is not you» (Cahill 2015, 47).

5. Chiasmatic Hospitality

Jacques Derrida's prolonged reflections on the gift and its gratuitous nature also touch the issue of hospitality. Etymologically speaking, the words hospitality and hostility share common roots, with "hospes" and "hostis" both including the sense of enemy and stranger. It is in the Old Testament that Derrida finds many examples of the violent hierarchical powers which are mobilised by the arrival of the stranger, with the host construing and enacting his power exactly on the stranger and being hostile against them (see Derrida 2000). In the view of the French philosopher, like/as a radical gift, hospitality is always *à-venir* /*avenir*, yet to come, never truly encountered. In her work on hospitality and the pregnant body, Frances Gray maintains that Derrida has forgotten to account for pregnancy, and for the fleshy embodiment it is grounded upon. In her view

> the pregnant woman as host participates in a hospitality that potentially models a temporary abandonment of her self in pursuit of the interests of a dependent, immature being. Pregnancy can be seen as the original host-guest relationship: it is ethically primitive. Its ethical primitiveness consists not in the fact that a host offers hospitality to a pre-existing guest. Rather, pregnancy is an actualizing of being, an enabling of life that has not previously existed. In that sense, pregnancy does not follow the Derridean model of hospitality as gift (Gray 2012, 72).

That model pivots on a revision of Maussian theories on the gift as imbricated in an exchange systematic discourse: Derrida imagines the gift (and hospitality) instead as non-returning, as aneconomic in the sense of always foreign to that circular logic. Following Gray, I argue that a feminist and phenomenological perspective stretches Derrida's fascinating theories to articulate pregnancy as other than a gratuitous offer of an already existing *gift*. In this context, it might be useful to remember Christine Battersby's position on the necessity of «models to explain how identity might be retained whilst impregnated with otherness and whilst other selves are generated from within the embodied self» (Battersby 1998, 227).

Contemporary discourse (and research) in the biosciences has expanded our understanding of pregnant concorporeality, with its discoveries on the molecular revolutions that gestation brings about in the bodies it creates and recreates (see Shildrick 2019). Instead of imagining childbirth (and the woman's body) as an offer of life, in his outstanding work on immunity Roberto Esposito has tried to reinstate it as

> the effective site in which a life makes itself two, in which it opens itself to the difference with itself according to a movement that in essence contradicts the immunitary logic of self-preservation. Against every presupposed interiorization, it exposes the body to the split that always traverses it as an outside of its inside, the exterior of the interior, the common of the immune (Esposito 2008, 108).

In this intricate and different logic which not only intersects immunity and community but *entrains* them in the very process of bodily making

lies, I contend, the new model Battersby was claiming for. In a chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible,* Maurice Merleau-Ponty exposes his views on «the idea of chiasm, that is: every relation is simultaneously a taking and a being held, [in which] the hold is held, it is inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of. The chiasm demands recognition of interdependence and mutual becoming» (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 266). In my reading, therefore, pregnancy might be one of the most intense chiasmatic relationships Merleau-Ponty has been thinking of.

The dual-alien aporia of Kristeva's no-one-but-two, a visible chiasm in its own terms, could be re-opened to accommodate three, if one includes an even more phenomenal matter, the placenta. Indeed, even though the relation between the pregnant body and the foetus that McEwan addresses is not disentangled in *Nutshell*, the novelist nevertheless dramatizes the presence of this third party in gestation, a living organ which makes tangible how pregnancy may and must be taken as a source of different reasonings on identity and otherness-in/as-sameness. JaneMaree Maher dedicates a thoughtful study on placental being:

> The possibility of an organ that does not belong to one body, but rather is turned to multiple sites, reforms embodied subjectivity in terms that are much more fluid. Rather than seeking to reinstate the pregnant subject at the centre of the frame, the placenta allows for a new notion of subjectivity that does not depend on closed edges in order to construct itself. The identity of the pregnant subject, in this reading, is not threatened through the multiplication implicit in pregnancy, but is rather expanded and altered by the shifting corporeal terrain (Maher 2002, 97).

Corporeality – or better, flesh, to use a term dear to many phenomenological theorists – can be thought of as enriched by these chiasmatic shifts, in a reciprocal adaptation whose material outcomes and temporary limits are vaster and more prolonged than the mere months of gestation. The foetus certainly intervenes in the maternal immune system, thus

rewriting a simple logic of self-preservation with one of reciprocal accommodation – a making space for the other.[6] The mutual interchange may last for decades, according to the very different logic of microchimerism, due to which the *other* cells (the mother's and those of the foetus) can be detected and can keep on functioning within the body of the *other* (see Nelson 2012).

In this radical, molecular encounter with the other-in-you can be rooted a different and more malleable model of identity, as suggested also by Diprose when she argues for «intercorporeal generosity [which] maintains alterity and ambiguity in the possibilities it opens […] generosity is only possible if neither sameness nor unity is assumed as either the basis or the goal of an encounter with another» (Diprose 2002, 90-91).

To conclude, some of the literary texts which have been devoted to pregnant time have often testified more to the fears and dangers gestation has entailed for both women and children-to-be, and to the power regimes all were subjected to. More recent works have given fictional voice to the foetus (or the newborn), but often with a comic intent, as in the case of McEwan's *Nutshell*. I argue that in some poems by Judith Wright one encounters a different ethical approach, which makes space for the new, unknown, other who also reshapes the body of woman. And in her work I do see a lyrical version of what many contemporary phenomenologist thinkers and scientists have suggested on the issue of reformulating ideas

[6] Esposito clarifies this when he states that «what allows the child to be preserved by the mother is not their "resemblance", but rather their diversity transmitted hereditarily from the father. Only as a stranger can the child become "proper"». It is in this sense that the mother's immune response becomes «indistinguishable from its opposite, "community"» (Esposito 2011, 171). It does not reject the strange/r body, but adapts to it, often for the benefit of the mother, who might even recover from self-immune diseases either temporarily or on a steady base.

and practices of bodily integrity in non-belligerent, defensive ways. On the one hand, one might wish to welcome Luce Irigaray's contentions on a renewed sense of hospitality founded on pregnancy as a trope of potential coexistence:

> If a woman can give birth to a child, and even to a child of another gender, this is possible because, thanks to the two, a place in her is produced […] that does not belong to the one or to the other, but permits their coexistence: the placenta. Neither the woman nor the fetus could survive without this organ that secures both the existence of each and the relation between the two (Irigaray 2013, 44-45).

On the other, even more radically, I support what Lisa Guenther suggests in her reading of Lévinas on *giving as receiving*, mutually:

> Giving and being given intermingle […] to the point where it is difficult to say who is more profoundly receptive, the parent or the child. The child makes the woman a mother, even as the woman 'makes' the child within her own body. I receive from the Other even my own capacity to give (Guenther 2006, 3).

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