

**FROM GOYA TO THE WRITING OF MADNESS:
THEN AGAIN BY JENNY DISKI**

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RÉSUMÉ

L'intrigue de *Then Again*, de Jenny Diski, s'organise sur un double niveau, invitant le lecteur à voyager du XIV^{ème} siècle au XX^{ème} siècle, de l'Allemagne à l'Angleterre. Les épisodes du rêve, situés au Moyen Âge, tirent une grande partie de leur force évocatrice d'une série de tableaux de Goya. La mise en place des images de la peur s'opère à travers une transposition verbale de *La procession des flagellants* (1816). Le tableau se dessine peu à peu aux yeux du lecteur. L'effet de perception sur les personnages donne forme aux chapitres sur la contagion de la peur, véritable mise en mouvement des images. Le tableau unique cède alors la place à une véritable galerie de tableaux, dont les fragments reconnaissables constituent notre mémoire collective. Avec une grande économie de descriptions, le texte combine des réminiscences qui transgressent les limites temporelles et donnent à voir un héritage visuel. La filiation entre des peintres tels que Bruegel, Bosch, Goya, Munch ou Picasso, offre une nouvelle définition de la peur où causes et effets se superposent. La peur, ainsi intériorisée comme un réservoir d'images, se retourne contre les bourreaux, déjà ridiculisés par Goya dans *Le tribunal de l'Inquisition* (1816). Perçue en focalisation interne, elle donne à la victime le statut de héros/héroïne unique. Le texte, comme l'œuvre de Goya, s'éloigne du tableau panoramique pour présenter un dessin, une sorte de gravure en profondeur où l'humanité martyrisée prend la place du sacré à jamais détrôné.

Structured on a double plot-line, *Then Again* opens on a scene set in fourteenth-century Germany. At the beginning of chapter two, the reader realises that what he took for the story itself was but a nightmare dreamt by the heroine Esther, a contemporary artist. The initial dream will be followed by further episodes, each framed within a dedicated chapter so as to represent a tableau of sorts, until the last chapter where limits vanish and a new form of perception imposes itself. The reader has to wait for chapter eight to see what happens to the two little girls whose progress he has witnessed in chapter one. By then, contemporary Britain has been set as the background for the main plot, which stages Esther's difficulties in facing the disappearance of her daughter, a teenager suffering from acute hysteria. Punctuating the present, the dreams express a fear born out of some unconscious past that haunts the heroine as it comes to haunt the narrative. They include a very intimate form of experience in a larger cultural sensibility shared with the reader. The structure of the novel enhances the role they

play in shaping the artist's work: the fragmented pattern painted by Esther on her plate evokes the fragmentation of the mind and corresponds to the fragmentation of the plot (Terrien 163).

Focusing on the dream episodes, we will see how Diski's narrative is — although never explicitly — anchored in Goya's representation of the Inquisition and of madness, that is to say how it relies on a narrative form of painting that corresponds in the text to a very traditional style of narration. The omniscient point of view adopted in this initial scene echoes Goya's choice of lights to stage events and expresses, more than it describes or represents, the events that generate fear.

When the dream recurs, the style has changed to become even more expressionistic, mixing references to Goya with allusions to much more modern paintings such as Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) or Munch's *The Cry* (1893), turning terror into a physical experience. A violent disruption of perception leads to the expression of sounds through images and silence becomes an image of its own.

Once the traumatic experience has become part of the shared experience of the reader and the dreamer, fear images become self-evident and no longer require a global form of painting. Just as Goya multiplies the sketches in between paintings, the narrative voice no longer stages scenes but focuses on feelings, making fear less spectacular but all the more powerful. The outsider's point of view is replaced by a new form of inner dialogue, typical of schizophrenia.

In the end, the writing intertwines several voices and shows that the tormentors are submitted to fear while the fear of the victims is redeemed as a form of new-found freedom to think.

1. The setting of fear images: Goya's *Procession of the Flagellants* (1816) and *The Madhouse* (1793-94)

“When Esther first heard it, she thought the angels had come” (3). The opening sentence of the novel evokes the impact of sounds on the uneducated conscience of a four-year-old girl. Effect precedes the presentation of its cause. Paradoxically this reference to sounds rather than to images is to be read as the first link between the text and the painting *Procession of the Flagellants*. Most of Goya's great paintings were produced after he fell ill and remained deaf, as a consequence, they transpose visually the inner voices that troubled him.

What the artist has in mind is the effect produced on the receptor of his work of art. Imagination is at work, unreasonably combining cultural elements: “She could see nothing out of the ordinary, but the sound was so faint and seemed to come from so far away that she supposed they were still beyond the clouds; the thick mysterious substance muffling what would be a glorious cacophony when the

angels broke through, at any moment, into her world” (3). The little girl interprets the new experience with the only tools in her possession, the religious stories told by her Jewish family. The reader cannot believe in prophecies coming true, so their association of ideas differ even before the show has actually started; history takes precedence over stories. The choice of vocabulary establishes the religious context as well as the atmosphere of mystery that blends the glory of divine apparition with the horror of reality. Muffled sounds and thick substance, that evoke the texture of a traditional religious painting, are to be severed by the “cacophony” of brutality disrupting ideal harmony. The atmosphere thus created is close to Goya’s picture of the market place in *Procession of the Flagellants*. The colours are soft and blurred, the figures appear as silhouettes hardly detached from the thick substance of the background. The breaking through corresponds to the contrast between the right-hand side of the picture left in relative darkness and the right-hand side relatively enlightened by an ambiguous light, emerging from a sky obscured by reddish clouds, evoking smoke rather than light. The figure of the Virgin Mary ominously sheds no light in spite of its halo in comparison with the theatrical spotlights drawing the spectator’s attention to the flagellants.

Similar theatrical staging plays a major part in the text when :

[t]he tall figure who had headed the procession drew a paper from his sleeve and raised his head so that his bleak, angular face peered out from the draped hood. [...] Esther almost as curious as she was scared, opened her eyes just as he pulled the yellow parchment from his sleeve and began to read it in a threatening monotone. (7)

The spectators’ and the girl’s fear are included in the picture, just as the crowd is included in the painting. All the other faces remain anonymous, increasing the atmosphere of nightmare and the gothic effect. The focalisation on the girl’s reactions, both physical and mental, corresponds to the choice of the painter to erase all human characteristics from his crowd. The adults who should be able to reason and condemn the scene as a sting are left in the dark, as ready to venerate a faceless deity as a group of fakes. The organisation of the flagellants in a sort of magical circle reinforces the notion of theatricality: the show has been well rehearsed.

The final effect is deconstructed by the progressive presentation in the text. What the painting can render in one image has to be gradually introduced by words:

The figures materialised. [...] But none of them had faces. They wore dark rough robes that fell to their bare dusty feet, with sleeves that hung down below their hands. Their downcast heads were covered with wide black hoods that fell over their faces. Esther noticed a curious

flickering that ran, like a shiver, along the length of the procession. When she focused more carefully she saw that they held something in their hands and raised up the arm that held it every few steps so that it lay for a moment across the opposite shoulder. The flickering was the movement repeated up and down the line. (6-7).

The term “materialised” suggests transubstantiation, thereby underlining the very process of art as a form of alchemy. What was diffuse is now condensed, what was unexpressible is now expressed. The focus on the absence of faces partakes to the gothic effect by dehumanising the actors and works as a condemnation of this lack of humanity. Hands and faces have been hidden so as to deny responsibility for the crimes that are to be committed. Goya stresses the movement by picturing the bodies of the flagellants along contrasted broken lines, accentuated by the length of their hoods; Diski focuses on the whipping lines. In both cases, lines emerge to suggest violence, submission to some unreasonable power, in a well-ordered scenario. There is no place for a true feeling of contrition in so well rehearsed a show. The blowing of trumpets, heard by Esther and pictured by Goya, emphasises the public announcement of a self-indulgent parody of the Apocalypse. This form of religious practice only entails useless suffering as the picture shows in the facing of the flagellants with the pilgrims in the position of crushed pallbearers. The heavy mass of what must be a church in the background reinforces the overbearing effect of doom. In the text the girl shuts her eyes but inner darkness is not impervious to sounds. Although the leader is staged in his pompous act of drawing the parchment out of his sleeve, the reader cannot hear what he says. Inner focalisation on the little girl serves a double purpose in the creation of fear: the fanatic speech is left out of the narrative. Its destructive effect, perceived through disconnected snatches, is emphasised by the reception of an innocent witness with whom the reader automatically sides. The bursting out of the original circle enacts the explosion of madness engendered by the accusations:

Suddenly, one of the men fell to the ground, spreadeagled in the mud, and called out, “Punish me, punish me, Master. For my sins, for the endless sins of the world. Beat the flesh into obedience to the Lord.” The man in the middle of the now static circle took the scourge from his hand and beat him again and again until his back was criss-crossed with the streams of blood that ran down his sides and trickled into the mud. (9)

The play on movement and stasis, the focus on details that suggest colour and texture (blood and mud) correspond to the texture of the painting in which the thinness of the materials enhances the nudity of the flagellants. Flesh and blood anchor the two scenes in humanity, while brute violence and the incapacity to stand up seem to deny it. Two paintings by Goya seem to melt into one scene at that point:

beyond *The Procession of the Flagellants*, one can recognize *The Madhouse*, in which clothes are shed, and nudity expresses a form of animality. The position of bodies on the floor evokes the incapacity to stand up as a man. The chromatic scheme is very similar, hence the feeling of familiarity reinforced by the figure of the circle. Bodies melt into the background, making one with it, light is hardly enough to distinguish figures, there is no expression of humanity. The religious show turns into a scene of sado-masochistic madness with heavy sexual connotations. The leader of the group, as the figure wearing a wig in the painting, embodies the condemnation of such scenes by the authorities who take advantage of this madness to impose their rules over stupid crowds. One figure emerges erect in the middle of the mass-effect, this figure remains anonymous in spite of a few well delineated features.

The paintings by Goya and the episode in the novel make sense by themselves. They express the artists' fear of collective madness used for political purposes. They engender a similar effect on the audience who cannot escape the feeling of oppression created by the blending of colours, lights, textures. The words in the narrative sound as a commentary on the picture. As Malraux wrote: "Qui le tiendrait pour un illustrateur? C'est la littérature qui l'illustrera... Il dessine comme en rêve, et il affirmera, dans les *Visions d'une Nuit*, dessiner ses rêves" (24).

2. The moving pictures of fear

When the dream resumes in chapter eight, the story has moved on and presents itself as a narrative to be followed, not just as a tableau. Movement has spread beyond the mere staging of elements. The fear instilled in the first episode, through the nightmare atmosphere, created by images and words that the children cannot fully understand, has gained momentum because when they reach home, they needn't tell all to be instinctively understood by their parents. The whole exchange takes place in visual terms: "He had pictured the terror on his children's faces [...]. His dark eyes peered at her, searching her face for the source of the fear" (55). Fear is materialised as an image to be read, as an image that contains the cause of its very existence. Words are not needed, the experience belongs to a deeper level of existence, a shared human experience. Just as the eyes of the parents meet to agree on keeping their fear silent, so does their cultural knowledge of evil meet the reader's. Fear is here amplified by the capacity to visualise what is coming as it is by the girl's quick observation of its effect on her parents, as if it was worse than the danger itself:

A look between husband and wife agreed that it was best the children didn't know. Whatever was to happen, the children could at least be spared the fear beforehand. Rebekah was old enough to be alarmed by her parents' reaction, but she didn't yet have the ancient fear, the

terrible knowledge that dwelt, deep and dark, within her parents, ready to spring alive on the instant, as it did now (56).

The shattering of familiar comfort, the restricted power of the parents to protect their children, the allusion to ancestral fears, create a feeling of unease that cannot be escaped. Borrowing the phrase “ancient fear” used in psychological studies, the narrative voice turns the historical situation into an experience that belongs to the whole human race. Fear is characterised as some sort of monster, ready to break out from the deepest layers of the unconscious. In pictorial terms it evokes Fuseli’s *Nightmare* (1781), one of the pictures that inspired Goya as well as the gothic novelists of Britain.

Vocabulary varies to convey the various levels of the experience, echoing the different shades that would be used in a painting to express depth. A perspective emerges that prolongs the first emotion endlessly. The past episode, because it echoes episodes that do not belong to the plot itself, already opens onto an unavoidable future. Linked with the notion of fear is the destruction of freedom, of the capacity of reaction. As soon as the parents know for certain what the children have witnessed, they start waiting for the unescapable. The family circle is not just a metaphor, it is recreated as an image of people actually holding hands so as to die together, it is repeated in each family and it mirrors the circles in Goya’s theatrical presentation of madness, be it the madness of the lunatics, the madness of the fanatics or the madness of the religious authorities. Fear is so powerful that nothing is done for protection or retaliation; submission prevails.

Fear can be encompassed in language, but what it is about, that is to say what happens next and is also fear according to the dictionary, escapes the limits of articulated expression, and for a while of visual representation:

There was a tone in all the voices, crying, ululating, that was strange; not just the pitch of fear, but a deeper resonance that Esther had never heard, but which, none the less, vibrated in a part of her that still lay dormant, and was recognized as despair, as horror. [...] [T]his noise was different, more terrible; not just the combined sound of individual voices mourning the dead, but a choir of desolation, of hopelessness. The massed voices, not only of the living, but of generations gone and yet to come, cried out to a God whom they knew was no longer there to hear them. Esther recognised it as the sound, rendered human, of the *shofar* that the rabbi blew in the synagogue on the Day of the Atonement. (57)

The reference to the religious ritual turned ineffectual is to be compared with Goya’s painting of the victim of *The Third of May* raising his arms as an image of Christ in a useless and meaningless

execution. The religion is not the same hence the use of a different symbol, but the effect is similar: man is left alone in an absurd world that started long ago. Using religious symbolism, both Goya and Diski manage to anchor the horror beyond the immediate historical context.

The meekness of this submission contrasts all the more with the fury of the outbreak when the mob destroys the door and invades the private space, emphasizing the absurd process of victimisation. Although the text insists on sounds first, the reader perceives images as the silence of trauma invades the consciousness of the heroine. The play on inner and outer focalisation communicates the full experience to the reader, as a painting would stage the show with wide swipes of the brush and insist on details with careful sketching. Beyond painting however it is the cinema that provides the best rendering of the trauma: action slows down, sounds are muffled, images are detached one from the other so as to underline the absurd. The voice of the father silences the actual din of the massacre, gently chanting his prayer as it would in the cinema. The voice surviving the body deepens the gothic atmosphere. Tradition and modernity meet to convey the feeling of horror that takes the place of fear. The reference to one painter is no longer enough to express the fury of destruction. The images that come to the reader's mind are a combination of several traditions, which amplifies the fear of the outcome and includes it in the frame of tragedy.

Devoting each paragraph to a separate victim, the text illustrates the cubist aesthetics of violence. The initial circle is for ever broken, modern art no longer includes it in its images. Instead the picturing of each victim stands out on its own, in what remains a general fresco of destruction, but no Christian apocalypse.

After the voice of the father, heard beyond death, the mouth of the mother becomes the focal point, and in contrast remains mum. The immediate image that springs to the mind of the reader is *The Cry* by Munch. The distortion of the mouth epitomises the distortion of the world. The ambiguity of Munch's painting is that the screaming figure in fact protects itself from the outside noise and the projections of the volcano. The anguish is both internal and external.

After the mother comes the grand-mother, Bubba. She belongs to an older tradition and is pictured as one of the tiny figures of Bosch's *Last Judgement* (1482), transformed in a floating creature, so light as to escape the laws of physics, no longer human.

Then the sister, Rebekah, is murdered by some anonymous butcher, in slow motion, like a doll deprived of humanity as well. The violence, expressed through the angularity of "the crook of the arm," "an arm that held a skinning knife," "until the arm jerked back," contrasts with the softness of the

victim who “crumpled, falling along an arm” and “folded like a doll of straw to the ground” (58-59), in the position of the foetus also seen in Picasso’s *Guernica*. The images stress the innocence of the victim who is butchered mercilessly. The play on sounds, harsh consonants versus long vowels, evokes the juxtaposition of sharp angles and curves in *Guernica*. The over-size of the eyes “staring unblinkly at the wall,” the distorted position of the body are borrowed from the painting, introducing death in life itself. This modern version of the *Massacre of the Innocents* (1566) is indeed to be read as such since it is viewed from the perspective of the younger victim.

Esther witnesses all of it from down below, thus inverting the point of view adopted by Bruegel in *Massacre of the Innocents*. The confusion of “the forest of limbs” is however typical of Bruegel’s depiction of crowds, as is her being carried over a shoulder like some bag of grain. The deafening of the sounds by her numbed consciousness is the counterpart of Bruegel’s snow-effect in the Flemish background he has chosen to illustrate the biblical scene.

Each singular killing is linked to the others by the colour of blood suggested, but never mentioned. Munch’s scream is uttered against a red sky that has disappeared here, but is present in the reader’s memory. Bruegel’s massacre opposes the warm tints of human clothes and houses to the whiteness of the snow. Bosch plays on a similar colour scheme. Only Picasso chooses a monochrome palette which Diski adopts as well, although she plays on various levels of reminiscences to insist on the shedding of blood without actually describing it. After her sister Rebekah “folded like a straw doll,” “Esther stood alone in a pool of silence” (59). The equivalence between silence and blood is thus made by the reader himself and becomes all the more haunting. The auditory becomes a new form of image and expresses fear more powerfully than ever. The scene belongs to the perception of the absurd such as it developed in the twentieth century. Diski has managed to evoke the pogrom without anchoring it in the specific context of WWII. Although the collage technique that inspires her staging of the scene evokes the inter-war period, the time of rising threats, it enhances the complex heritage of forms constantly worked upon.

3. Sketches of internal fear: waking “not to a new day, but to a new death”

The final image of Esther, falling asleep while she is carried out, ensures that the story is not over. Just as she has made use of past treatment of similar scenes, Diski suggests that fear survives the actual destruction of the protagonists. Fear belongs to time and defies time. It encapsulates the individual in a spontaneity of perception informed by subconscious memory. The novel, as well as a painting, brings back to the surface the various levels of representation that determine our consciousness.

The trauma causes complete disruption, erases precise memory of the scene itself but survives as a feeling of unease, of displacement. The narrative cannot resume its pace, ignoring the rupture.

It must include it at its heart, that is why the heroine, little Esther becomes Elizabeth, a girl raised by a Christian family. The epigraph of the novel, quoting Norman Cohn, has prepared the reader to understand the shift straight away: “As for the children, some were killed, others taken away to be baptised and brought up as Christians.” (1) There is no need for an explanation within the story itself, it would break the unity of perception that is all important. The reader has feared what is happening since the very beginning. The possibility exists even before the circumstances are delineated. The illusion of reality works perfectly.

Esther becomes Elizabeth. “Every morning she woke to a new after-life.” (67) For a while the narrative, shaped by inner focalisation, borrows more from the tradition of literature than from paintings, verging on the stream of consciousness. But the smoothness cannot endure, it is mainly meant to enhance the darkness of the heroine in a world bathed in mist and northern light. This time, the rent comes from the inside, from the heroine herself through the repetition of an obsessive question:

[T]he question came into her head as though someone else were speaking it.

It was: *What for?* [...] It created a fissure in the day, or, as it might be, in Elizabeth’s life. A before and an after was brought into being that could not exist in her world. (80-81)

The schizophrenia embodied by the new name imposes itself as a new force challenging the illusion of harmony that has covered away the past: “But now a line was drawn, a crack opened, and *What for?* stretched itself languorously into the future, and changed everything by creating future itself.” (81) Once more Diski joins Goya: the question becomes a line, sketching and writing are one. It is madness also, a new monster willing to prosper. The future mentioned here is the future of art, the development of the plot; new openings for the narrative. The suspense thus triggered reactivates the old fears of the reader while inverting the position of power. The heroine certainly remains the potential victim, but she also threatens to denounce the lie. Characterised as schizoid, she belongs to the tradition of Goya’s new mad figures who turn into accusers in the “black paintings” with which he decorated his country house. Malraux writes : “Goya supprime le décor. Sur ses murs sinistres et nus, le fou n’est plus un déguisé, mais un accusateur.” (90)

Whenever the question imposes itself the danger re-emerges for Elizabeth to be found out but also for the hypocrisy of society to be denounced. That is why the narrative now relies on a series of sketches, rather than on actual paintings. The challenge comes from the depth of her mind, bursts out in painful flashes. The reader, who understands more than the character, anticipates on the future events: fear has been efficiently transferred and displaced as the narrative voice underlines when it insists on

the dreamer's incapacity to get away from the atmosphere of the dream: "She was not asleep, but not yet herself, still in the wilderness that was called Esther, but was not her. [...] Esther got out of bed, her head still fogged, her body rocky; her biology, at least, not quite separated from the place between oblivion and now." (60) To the new future created in Elizabeth's life, corresponds a new place, that is the space of the novel in which the dreamer can meet the character from her dream, in which the reader can meet them both. Esther, the modern artist, now stands where young Esther stood in chapter one and eight, in the position of the witness, afraid of what is to come. She shares this position with the reader, thus reducing the distance between the two. The structure of the novel is to bear a trace of this infection by fear when the two Esthers are finally staged in one common chapter instead of being framed in distinct paintings.

The voice of the modern heroine reaches the soul of her counterpart, first as a voice in a dream, thus carefully inverting the initial relationship; then as a voice perceived by her consciousness just before death, thus transcending any expectation. The limits of time and of reason are totally disrupted, only the anguish survives. As in Goya's sketches, the victim has either no face or the face of the artist. A crescendo of horror leads to the final scene of the autodafe when the whole meaning of the images of fear is definitively upset. According to Malraux:

Pour un agnostique, une des définitions possibles du démon est: ce qui, en l'homme, aspire à le détruire. C'est ce démon là qui fascine Goya. Satan pour lui n'est pas le personnage assis sur le trône de Bosch, c'est un agonisant dont on a coupé les membres, et dont il demande: "Pourquoi" ? (115)

The question is, behind the visual representation, what matters really.

First it leads to the interview with the priest, a confession of the girl that makes the village priest confess the role he played as leader of the flagellants. In a few sentences, the past is resurrected, but the heroine remains exempt of fear, at least from a fear connected with him. The focus is on a characterisation that verges on the caricature, bringing to light the sharp features of the priest looking like a vulture. Light falls on a rapid and cruel smile, on the inquisitiveness of his harsh eyes, on the tension of the muscles above his jaw. "His lips tightened into a cruel line." (90) The narrative explicitly points at the similitude with sketches.

The priest takes up a new part, as an actor; as a perverse mentor he guides the heroine into formulating her interrogations. As in a Socratic dialogue, the interaction between the two speakers shapes a new form of reality: the definition of fear undergoes a transformation. The heavy silence of

the priest suggests he is affected, while Esther hesitates: “ But the terror did not reach every part of her, and could not prevent the Elizabeth curled up in the place of questions from speaking out, through the fearful mouth of the other one” (90). The focus on the mouth recalls the episode of the massacre and all the examples in the paintings underlying its representation of open mouths uttering anguish. The term, terror, suggests extreme violence but is straight away balanced by the girl’s capacity to master her impulse. She is presented as an equal to her tormentor, she is even able to make him lose control and bellow. A sketching of his physical attitude transfers the reader’s attention to his position as potential victim: “ He sat on the edge of the stool in front of Elizabeth and rested his head in his palm, rubbing his temples with his fingers” (91). The short, sharp alliterations assess the equivalence between a stroke of the pen and a line drawing, subtle enough to suggest pain as well as reflection; it serves as an introduction to the long dialogue that creates a transitory feeling of fear in Elizabeth. Words multiply to express the rapidity of the phases in her education: terror, anguish, coldness, trouble leading to the impossibility to find comfort, not just a repetition of the experience that preceded the pogrom, but a new form of maturity which would transform her way of being in the world and allow her to face fate without fear, or at least without the kind of fear a spectator imagines.

Three more sketches mark out her itinerary towards her apotheosis, the climax of the novel. Once more these brief episodes remind the reader of Goya’s *Caprichios*. First, the rape by the priest, in the darkness of a cabin in the middle of the woods, at night. The gothic surroundings are just evoked by a few broad lines, while the acute pain of the victim echoing the exquisite sadism of the rapist is delicately drawn. Where the reader would expect physical disgust or mental terror, inner focalisation underlines a fear brought about by doubts as to the meaning of this violence. Without any complaisance with the tormentor, the narrative voice presents a victim not so much glorified by pain, as rendered human by it. The tension is sharp. To take up Malraux’s words about Goya: “ [L’artiste] plaint moins les victimes qu’il ne se sent des leurs. La condition humaine est une prison, et ceux qu’il hait d’abord, ce sont les trafiquants d’espoir” (127). There is no place for the sacred in such an art, fear is not the fear of God but the terror of humanity. Diski’s priest makes it clear through words, expressing the violence of his sexuality in words that remind us of Sade’s. His justification for carnal pleasure at the expense of his victim is indeed half way between eighteenth century excess and XXth century psychoanalytical explanation. Any notion of show or of beauty has been erased, what voyeurism is left turns against the aggressor. Violence denounces itself as self-destructive whatever harm has been done to the victim. In contrast with her despicable attacker, the victim finds the force to face the meaning of experience:

She told herself that fear was cowardice, disgust, small-mindedness, her horror and shame at her exposed breasts nothing more than the distortion of truth that her doubts had uncovered. She fought with herself against herself. (182)

Confusion withdraws the victim from the shame the attacker would make her feel. Physical or religious fear is nothing compared to doubt, to the human capacity to think.

The division between the visual arts of Goya and writing would seem to widen but for the choice to lead the heroine to a *Trial by the Inquisition* (1816). However the painting does not work as a model to be copied in words, but merely as a reference by which to assess the evolution. Unlike the episode of the massacre that mixed references, the trial reads as a simplification of the scene, keeping to a minimalist outline. Even more than in Goya's painting, the crowd of Inquisitors are left in darkness and only a murmur is heard to signify the priest's victory over their stupidity. The outcome of the trial has obviously been decided beforehand, justice is not the subject matter. Whereas Goya painted the harassed features of the accused and the stupid features of the judges in very similar tones and lines, Diski focuses on the individuality of the main prosecutor. It is as if the trial did not concern her anymore. "She did not have to be brave, she had only to exist in time" (189). Fear and courage have lost their meaning, she is beyond the reach of terror because her true identity has been asserted while she was in jail, dreaming. For the first time in the novel, chapter twenty-three allows the XIVth century heroine to hear the voice of her contemporary namesake.

The framing of a picture is no longer acceptable, inner focalisation sweeps over determination in time: Esther hears the fearful voice of the other Esther warning her about what is to come, but also the incantation of the prayer her father recited at the moment of his death. Past, present and future compose the moment of eternity in which the only thing that matters is the question. Focusing only on the victim, the artist robs the persecutors of their victory. A new fiction imposes itself to the former representation of the sacred, what emerges from the abyss is the ability for a question to survive any form of oppression. The opaque words of the Hebrew prayer now come to Esther's mind in English, gaining a meaning through pain, denying death: "That *something* should be passed on: what is known, what is understood; what is not understood and cannot be, but can be asked; the reaching out, the sense of future, of offering something essential to the future" (214).

4. Conclusion

The three paintings by Goya, along with the several etchings that serve as references in the organisation of the dream episodes of the novel, also insure a link between this level of the plot and the contemporary action that stages clinical madness rather than political fanaticism. Individual history and collective history are closely linked. The fear felt by the reader all along the story for the sake of the protagonists is meant to serve as a trial of his humanity. Picturing the victory of the victim over the persecutor, Diski sounds no more triumphant than Goya. The experience they offer forbids self-

indulging complacency; it is an invitation to ponder with the artist about the meaning of violence and persecution:

Try thinking about one person's pain. Try a single agony. Acknowledge it. Add it to the unfinished sum that would in the end, *at* the end, become a total of what had been understood. Only one individual's total, which was all there could ever be. (216)

Reaching back to Goya, Diski has managed to write about the unspeakable, to overcome the law of silence that threatens any generation of survivors. She has uprooted the story of persecution from too narrow an historical background.

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