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‘a separate world, a small and enclosed universe’: Phobic de/construction of space in Joan Barfoot’s *Dancing in the Dark* to circumscribe trauma

Abstract:

In his 1962 philosophical study *L’espace humain*, George Matoré claims that to overcome chaos, human beings control their lives by determining their position, others’ and that of objects around them; thus they escape the absurdity of life and secure an anchor for themselves by exploiting spatial language (Matoré 1962: 13-28). This certainly applies to the extreme in the case of Edna Cormick, the protagonist of Joan Barfoot’s *Dancing in the Dark*, whose childhood cumulative trauma and subsequent social trauma lead to a psychotic apprehension of life favouring spatial seclusion. The novel consists of the diary entries she writes in psychiatric internment after murdering her husband; in them she maps her past and present lives in spatially reductionist terms that prove her self-erasure and inability to function in a wide frame. Illustrating her psychopathological response to trauma, the imagery, diction, and style that capture Edna’s behaviour, attitudes and thoughts highlight psychoanalytical theories, such as those of Dana Amir (2014), Michael Balint (1968), Ester Bick (1968 and 1986), Wilfred R. Bion (1959) and Judith Mitrani. Eventually, the readers end up debating her ability to build a bridge for posttraumatic growth.

Biographical note:

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Introduction

When faced with traumatic experiences, human beings tend to lose their bearings and fight to recover a semblance of normalcy though at heart they feel dispossessed and often inscribe their life narratives in patterns underscoring their disconnection from others and themselves. Far from conducive to liberating them from their anxieties, the strategies they adopt to survive their inner turmoil often reinforces their withdrawal for fear of more suffering. Writers capturing the patterns adopted after a distressing event or episode set at a time when no one can contain the agony of the experience, when no one empathises or offers relief to the traumatised, inevitably reflect trauma and its disjunctive repercussions through stylistic/linguistic and poetic/ narratological patterns. Thus while capturing the insidious repercussions of cumulative trauma through specific literary patterns, Joan Barfoot highlights the psychopathology suffered by Edna Cormick, the suburban protagonist of *Dancing in the Dark*, whose diaries focusing on past and present realities constitute the whole text.[1] The novel recalls George Matoré's 1962 philosophical study *L'espace humain* [Human space], according to which to overcome chaos, human beings control their lives by determining their position, that of others and objects around them; by exploiting spatial language they escape the absurdity of life and secure an anchor for themselves (Matoré 1962: 13–28). This certainly applies to Edna Cormick, but it does so to extremes. Edna's notebook entries recording her life before and during psychiatric internment for murdering her husband evidence the need of a strikingly narrow frame to function and an obsession with mapping a limited territory. Disclosing a psychotic outlook resulting from cumulative and social trauma borne of childhood neglect, the protagonist's mental disposition involves spatial seclusion, not to say reductionism, manifest in the careful phrasing of her narrative that spirals down to a pinpoint. Laying bare the slow reduction of her physical and emotional space, leading to the obliteration of the self, the protagonist's scripting attempt to fathom the reason for the failure of her marriage conveys her inability to alleviate, let alone free herself from, her posttraumatic stress disorder. Thanks to the novel's imagery, diction, structure and style, Edna's behaviour, attitudes and thoughts as recorded in her notebooks clarify her psychopathological response to trauma, while illustrating different aspects of psychoanalytical theories, in particular those of Dana Amir (2014), Michael Balint (1968), Ester Bick (1968 and 1986), Wilfred R. Bion (1959) and Judith Mitrani (1994, 2001). The discussion of the novel, its reductive spatial language, and the psychoanalytical theories it exemplifies raises questions as to the ability of the protagonist to engage in posttraumatic growth after the betrayal of trust in the potentially restorative marital experience that counterbalances a debilitating childhood characterised by cumulative trauma.

A brief summary of the information supplied by the notebooks on Edna's life from childhood up to internment will clarify the traumatic context. The eldest in a working-class family, Edna grows up fearful of everything, including her own self, on account of the constant parental lack of emotional support, not to say parental destructive criticism. Neglected by her domineering mother who favours her younger sister, Stella, Edna internalises her worthlessness and witnesses her sister put in the limelight as her name clearly indicates. Rather than going out with friends like her peers, Edna hugs her pillow and dreams of Mr. Right freeing her at the age of twenty. Eventually, she goes to university where, at the age of twenty, on the day she plans to submit her poetry for a competition, she meets Harry Cormick, does not submit her work and sets out to live with, and by, him. Following the advice of women's magazines to the letter

on her mother's recommendation, Edna gives up on her own development, painstakingly catering for Harry's needs while erasing her own self. As he throws himself into his professional life, moving from promotion to promotion, she cleans her house obsessively in the fashion of a person suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder. Striving for perfection in cleaning, cooking, decorating, Edna shuns social interactions, somehow adopting the patterns of an adult with Asperger's syndrome. Her devotion to Harry fills her life for twenty-three years until she hears over the phone that her husband is having an affair with his secretary; instantly her life stops and she focuses on a point of the wallpaper for twelve hours. When Harry returns, rather than confronting him, she stabs him several times with one of the kitchen knives with which she ironically used to prepare perfect meals for his contentment. While interned in an asylum after the court hearing, she meticulously goes over the twenty-three years of married life in her diaries to spot the flaw that has led to her downfall, refusing contact with anyone around her.

Psychopathology and spatial apprehension

Edna's psychological imbalance already transpires before she stabs her husband. Not having experienced what Donald Winnicott calls good enough mothering and healthy containment in childhood (1953: 94 and 1960: 593–594), Edna looks up to Harry as the saviour. To her, he will compensate for the abusive relational patterns that marked her childhood and caused her self-erasure out of terror, the very context of Balint's 'basic fault' (1969: 16–23), namely the maladjusted care received in early stages of development that does not meet or recognise the child's needs. However rather than building her own self in the newly discovered recognition of her being afforded by Harry, she adopts a dual pattern that reinforces her maladjustment: she clings to the relationship in ocnophilic fashion and protects herself by erecting walls around herself in philobating fashion.[2] Illustrating Judith Mitrani's views in her article 'On Adhesive Pseudo-Object Relations' (1994) that elaborates on Bion's (1959), Bick's (1968, 1986) and Winnicott's (1960) considerations of the second skin, Edna creates a false form of integration by attaching herself to Harry and by clinging to him. At the same time, she creates 'extra-ordinary protections' by sticking to a very rigid routine, the perfection of which enables her to avoid the resurgence of 'extra-ordinary happenings' that threatened her existence and sense of self in childhood (Mitrani 2001: 19, 1). Suffering from psychopathological anxiety, she finds an anchor in the invisibility that married life offers her and marginalises herself by centring her attention on the minute world she has created, rejecting a view of the world that would allot her personal space.

In its obsessive character, Edna's spatial apprehension reflects her psychopathology. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) defines mental and physical space as essential for biological and psychological survival. Inner and outer space imply freedom, 'power and enough room in which to act' (Tuan 1977: 52). With space, a person can map out his/her world with small and large monuments to the self, thus validating his/her individuality and experience. Edna, however, reduces the extent of her physical and psychological space by secluding herself in her home and its relentless repetitive housework recorded in spatially laden language. As a result, she cannot expand mentally let alone create an empowering sense of her own identity. To make it worse, her approach exemplifies to extremes George Matoré's considerations of mankind's mental and linguistic reactions in the face of chaos and the absurd (1962: 29–45) Indeed her use

of spatial language points to her psychotic outlook. Confirming her need for grounding, her notebooks abound in spatial metaphors and language whether describing her internment or her previous suburban life. The exiguity she lives in while interned feels 'the right amount of space' (DD 2). Her obsessive mapping of her territory and the space of objects in the asylum as 'mine' and 'other' address the need to stick to her own, to avoid entering space that does not belong to her. She retreats into smaller and more minuscule space, adopting self-imposed physical rigidity. As her opening words – 'I bind my wounds with paper' (DD 1) – suggest mummification to which she further adds her adoption of a foetal-like position while writing, and her desire to 'roll [her] eyes inward' (DD 3), Edna signifies her subconscious retreat to a womb-tomb. Even her fears reflect spatial angst: 'I am afraid of changes and things that are not precise … There are places for all things … There must be order in salvation' (DD 4). Typical of the need to determine the place of all objects and beings to ward off chaos, Edna favours polarities, such as in-out, up-down, where the first pole provides security.

Typical of beings deprived of holding and containment in childhood, Edna hangs on to the security of her home and husband before the murder; she feels 'safe, inside two, and questions and fear ha[ve] no place any more' (DD 63); the reproduction of an ideal symbiosis echoes Bick's (1968) notes on babies. Not having experienced boundaries holding her mind together on account of a mother not offering holding or containment, Edna attempts to create a cocoon. Bick explains that in such cases 'the concept of a space within the self cannot arise' (1968: 484), which explains Edna's need to secure protections to hold her and feels safe 'inside two' like a new-born baby who makes no distinction between the self and the mother. Relying on her secluded world, she prefers the inside to the outside, since she knows and dominates the former and feels threatened by the latter's undefined and unknown reality. Recorded in terms of the in-and-out spatial polarity, her perception of her position in the world reveals her desperate need of confinement: safety she finds inside; outside danger lurks (DD 6). As Bick would put it, she experiences 'the catastrophic anxiety of falling-into-space, and the dead-end [that] haunts every demand for change engenders a deep conservatism and a demand for sameness, stability and support' (Bick 1986: 299). Happy to function as a housewife with no responsibilities other than those of keeping her house clean and nicely decorated, cooking perfect meals and attending to her husband's need of an attentive listener, Edna lives in a 'separate world, a small and enclosed universe' (DD 56) where the rules applying outside have no hold. Communication between inside and outside exists only through Harry, never through her. Except for – or perhaps because of – the illusory information gathered from 'magazines [bringing] news from the outside', which she 'devour[s] for clues' (DD 27), Edna retreats from the outside world,[3] 'long[ing] for the obligations and the demands [of housework] … [that] fence [her] life' (DD 62). Hiding behind the safety of repetitive and unchallenging chores, Edna builds a fortress of domesticity: in her notebooks she recalls her spatial obsession,

> I thought [my tasks] would protect us, build a perfect wall. Pictures I have seen of old cities: built inside great high impenetrable walls, so that no enemies could invade, and the citizens inside could go about their lives without the burden of fear. The walls made them safe, as long as they stayed inside. (DD 6)

She keeps building strict boundaries to reinforce her territorial integrity, creating 'extra-ordinary protections' (Mitrani 2001: 19) for herself through all the menial tasks her hands perform: according to Edna, her hands can recreate the walls of ancient

cities, 'the sense of them, in clean floors and dishes and well-cooked meals and vacuumed carpets, gleaming windows. Or so my hands believed' (DD 6). The polysyndetic coordination of tasks together with the hands replacing her brain or spirit suggests the desperate need of walling herself in; to her, the work around the house shapes the spatial security she craves for. To her skewed outlook, if walls break down the outside will flood in and she will dissolve, for inside nothing fills the space, in ways similar to Winnicott's, Bick's and Bion's patients.

Recalling Mitrani's description of 'adhesive pseudo-object relations' and 'extra-ordinary protections', Edna's wish for safety leads to her shunning responsibility for herself, indeed to her withdrawing into a non-existent self, erased by virtue of mental and spatial imprisonment. The thought that she can secure a fence or a wall through hard work encourages Edna's perfectionism (DD 62). Foreseeing 'chaos, a breaking down' (DD 86) if she does not carry out her tasks relentlessly, she slaves around the house. On the surface she appears self-reliant, in control and keen to achieve, but in fact she builds a fortress as a safe haven where to conceal her lack of confidence and paradoxically fight her fear of loneliness and vulnerability in the outer world:

> all those little jobs, they were my payment and my expression of my duty and my care. They added up to safety and escape, love and gratitude spoken in a different language, words in shining floors and tidy beds. (DD 69)

Resembling assembly-line work in their 'monotony, fragmentation and social isolation' (Oakley: 209), household chores provide infinite safety, but no constructive reward, which eventually effects dissatisfaction and frustration. Edna however represses her anger, for it 'might lead anywhere' (DD 103), a spatial metaphor that suggests either the destruction of the walls she has created to protect herself or the passage outside the safety created by the walling chores. Instead she fancies herself dancing in the dark after her day's work, dreaming of fame as a singer or actress. Her imaginary dancing could make her realise that her life without worthy achievements of her own has no meaning. But she denies her needs and frustration, clinging onto Harry as a second skin in Bickian terms or as a pseudo-adhesive relational foundation in Mitranian terms, for fear of experiencing the terrors of being cut loose, of having to find and secure her own moorings. As she fears abandonment, she excels at homemaking and refuses to admit her frustration by looking at the bright side and pretending satisfaction, thereby reinforcing the prison of marriage out of which Harry will want to flee.

In this context the outside functions as a place to fear. In her desperate need of the security offered by her confined existence as a housewife – or as Sharpe would put it, relying on 'her world['s] encapsulat[ion] within home' (53), Edna loses her make-belief security with an intrusion from the outside world she fears so much. A phone call from the wife of a colleague of Harry's lets her glimpse another reality, one that threatens the cocoon of her 'pseudo-adhesive object relation'. This imposed connection between outside and inside forced upon Edna shatters her inner universe. In other words, once the outside world infests her self-defining, unthreatening realm, the latter loses its stability. Losing ground, she spends the rest of the day focusing on a pattern of the wallpaper as if to control herself and to create a new inner wall protecting her unconscious so as not to let anything touch her.[4] The point she focuses on becomes the centre of her safety, enabling her to disconnect herself in a Bionian fashion from the threatening reality of her husband's likely infidelity. Incapable of facing the loss of her husband, her sole anchor in life, she stabs him, enacting her own death too. An attack on linking in Bionian terms (1959), killing her husband effects

her own death as she exists only by proxy to take care of his needs; without him her life loses its meaning, albeit menial. In other words, her violent act breaks the pseudo-adhesive relation, the bounds of security; without Harry's presence she has no existence of her own, she has nowhere to go, for the ruler of the house, as Harry's name suggests, ceases to grant her a life.[5] Put in other words, the existence and identity by self-negation or self-adhesion that has imprisoned her out of her own will reduces to still narrower boundaries as she can no longer cling to Harry.

Internment offers a narrow enclave, safe enough to review her life, which she does in notebooks that make up the entire novel. Far from an option in married life, spatial exploration, even through books, offered no option of personal enlightenment. Even though she has a Bachelor of Arts in English, she never read proper books because this would have implied a trip away from home and husband, a trip alone. Instead she turned to unchallenging women's magazines that reinforced her subservience. Encouraging submissiveness and selfless devotion, the rules and stereotypes of the weekly magazines for women she read with religious fervour contribute to the repression of her frustration. The magazines Edna read limited her perspective and distanced her from reality, reinforcing her withdrawal, the most 'extra-ordinary protection' she found not to encounter feared situations. Unable to decipher the stereotypical subtext of the magazines by whose debilitating sexist views she abided, she fretted over details that erased her identity, at best reduced her to the invisible hand behind cleanliness. Rather than making decisions based on her own values, she accepted the submissive role of housewife for fear of facing the challenge of a personal life with its satisfactions but also likely dangers. Refusing to see the flaw in the sexist approach developed by magazines, once her life has gone to shambles, she would like to 'go back. To undo and do again' (DD 20), even though she knows she cannot. Yet, to some extent, by rewriting her life she undoes it and proceeds to redo it in the exact same terms. For once interned she reproduces the same pattern as before, unable 'to apologize … for spending twenty years caring for [her] husband and home' (DD 95). She delights again in the environment walling her in: 'three feet, perhaps, between bed and window … is precisely the right amount of space. This much I can manage, most days' (DD 2). Satisfied with an even more confined territory, she even reproduces the patterns adopted before but this time reductively, turning her attention to narrower space: her obsession with cleanliness gets directed to the bedspread and the carpet at the foot of her bed, to the pins and fluff caught in them. She is preoccupied with 'tinier details, much smaller things to notice. But … impossible to see … beyond the powers of a microscope' (DD 162).

Although she tries to find the flaw of her life through the testimony she writes in her notebook, she cannot do so, for her writing merely repeats the pattern without allowing for transformation. Dana Amir's distinction between testimonial modes (2016)—the metaphoric, metonymic, excessive psychotic and Muselmann modes—applies to Edna's attempt at going over her life. Amir establishes that the metaphoric testimony moves between the experiencing *I* and the narrating *I,* or the first and third person of psychoanalytic work; the movement between the perspectives of the victim and the witness enables 'the creation of new meaning' (2016: 622) contributing to the transformation of the traumatic experience. Edna often remains in the first person never distancing herself from the experience to learn from it, to witness the actual experience. Her text actually reproduces the very characteristics of her past life, namely her obsession with cleanliness, with perfection over and over again reproducing her isolation from others and even from herself. Amir would term this

approach the metonymic mode as it does not evidence any attempt at keeping a distance from the traumatic past but rather a repetition of it. At times too Edna attacks her own text so that the experiencing *I* even disappears, which characterises what Amir calls the excessive-psychotic mode that attacks the experiencing subject. This happens when she erases the subject of her sentences, namely herself, an attack recalling Bion's 'Attacks on Linking' (1959). At other times she also plunges into the Muselmann mode that 'annihilates both the capacity to represent the traumatic events and the ability to preserve vital contact with them' (622). Numerous brackets actually show that she refuses to see the whole picture (DD 8). By repeating her life in meticulous reproduction she stays at a distance from the traumatic experience she refuses to report. The twelve hours of thinking and the murder are merely mentioned but not experienced and relived through testimony to fathom their impact.

The notebooks evidence that Edna's original psychopathological tendencies kick in, preventing the re-emergence of a mentally sound being, for she savours the protective exiguous environment offered by the asylum; even after recording every single move of her life, every single aspect of her self, she cannot bridge the gap because her obsessive account of life before and after contributes to another construction, that of a walled fortress without even an opening for a drawbridge. She feels 'safe inside [t]here' (DD 1). She mentions

> I might float off forever, without this anchor of my body to the chair, my ankles neatly crossed, the notebook precisely on my lap, the pen moving neatly across the pages, following the lines. (DD 19)

'The notebook is like the wallpaper [she focused on for twelve hours after hearing about the betrayal]; it helps me keep my balance' (DD 19) like cleaning. She also adds, 'if it were possible, I would roll my eyes inward and stare only at myself' (DD 3). Retreating inwardly, Edna lives her life in smaller and smaller concentric circles: 'Now I am tiny here in this tiny room, whirling in diminishing circles to the absolute moment, the world grows smaller and smaller and my life is a pinpoint of a moment' (DD 171). The reduction of life to a point proves that Edna cannot possibly escape the paralysing force of her disconnection.

Just as she used to erase any trace of their lives through her obsessive cleaning (DD 85), Edna obliterates her own self through the very specific features of her diaries, which highlight the source of the primary trauma that has shaped her being. With it, she 'bind[s] her wounds with paper' (DD 1) like a mummy protected from the outside air. Written in the first person as most diaries, her notebooks nonetheless often erase the first-person subject, symbolically depriving her of existence. She 'wipe[s] [her]self off like a child at the blackboard' (DD 169) so that in the end she is reduced to 'this pen, and this notebook' (DD 161), not much of a human existence. To crown it all, she heightens the erasing process by leaving the spaces for her name and subject blank, so that the cover of her notebooks enhance her lack of identity. The void suggests she cannot address, let alone name, her search for meaning. Brackets in her diary also adopt a peculiar pattern; they isolate the realities she feared most as though visually signifying that her writing can keep the feared realities at bay. In other words, rather than reviewing the issues she fears, she avoids close contact by relegating them to a bracketed zone. In order to escape the angst of the void she has created to protect herself against childhood erasure, Edna clings to ever-reductive spatial metaphors and similes as to a life buoy. Her fear of the holes that might reduce the strength of the fortress, like 'the holes, irregular and unspaced, made by a knife in a body' (DD 1), explains her fear of incursion from the outside as well as her clinging to the positive

safety of a two-dimensional space ruled straight lines. With its straight lines organising her writing, the notebook offers such security to cling to. The neat writing in her notebooks like the cleaning or the wallpaper helps her keep her balance, not to fall. 'What I write,' she notes, 'is a constantly diminishing possibility' (DD 163).

In a similar fashion, her room, 'arranged in straight lines … always in order' offers her stability because she is 'not responsible for it' (DD 3) while preventing contact with others by virtue of the parallelism found in lines—straight lines running parallel never meet. They safeguard her against the perception (or conception) of depth, the very dimension that might open her eyes to her condition that might alert her to the flattening process of her psychopathology. This explains why when looking at herself in the mirror, she notes, 'there should be something [in the mirror] that says "I have lived for forty-three years, I have existed." The mirror should have something to say' (DD 23). Like her own vision of the self, her image on the mirror remains flat, two-dimensional. Like her life spent in cleaning surfaces, her thinking does not go beyond the surface. The third dimension – depth – she cannot handle, for she has given it up by setting up house with Harry and regressing out of excessive filial needs to find the protection not warranted her as a child.[6] Her world she has divided as in and out; she has chosen to live inside and let Harry live outside. Perfectionism like a wall has kept her clear of the outside world and its dangers. Though she shows some awareness of her reductionism, she does not seek to escape it; she favours it because it puts the original trauma of being 'unwanted' (DD 19) at bay. For when she wonders about the possibility of turning outside, it offers no real expansion, no change in outlook, as she remarks that 'there would be a thousand things to touch, examine, and describe minutely' (DD 163) out there. Eventually she realises that she cannot leave the seclusion of the asylum:

> At least I've found out what I needed to know: that I can't go outside. So my choices are clear. I can pursue the smallest of bedspread fibres, peering my way to blindness, my handwriting getting tinier and tinier, like the details; or I can face the moment and the white and yellow daisy clock. Tunnelling in or spiralling out. (DD 166)

Since Edna cannot conceive her life without Harry nor with his betrayal, she can only resort to further withdrawal and disconnection. Even at the court hearings, she is an absence in presence who can only think of the chores she has not finished. Her sole intervention at court regarding her desire to go back to her vacuum cleaning symbolically points to the vacuum she has created in married life. Prolonging self-imprisonment, her life in a mental hospital reproduces patterns of her previous life, creating 'extra-ordinary protections'. The notebooks she writes during internment evoke the attacks on linking of Bion's (1959) patients as the fragmentary style and organisation reveal her inability to recognise the patterns that have led to her downfall. In the testimony through which she tries to fathom the source of the failure faced in her marriage, she considers her menial tasks, 'the trivialities of [her] own existence' (DD 3) in a manner that reveals her self-obliteration. Her review of her past chores, for instance, manifests such tendency through her relation to her hands as an agent, rather than herself:

> They have washed so many dishes and pushed a vacuum cleaner so many times. They have wiped so many cloths over so many windows, and their fingernails have scratched at so many small stains. They have scrubbed vegetables and peeled them, and they have carried hot things from the stove to the counter to the table. They have picked flowers from the garden, and tins from grocery shelves. They have stitched torn seams and pressed irons over crumpled cloth. They have lifted pillows to make them plump again,

> and heavy bags of groceries. They have turned pages and mattresses. I know they must be strong, but they are also docile, dutiful. They have almost always done what they were supposed to. (DD 6)

Contrary to countless other passages characterised by fragmentary sentences, the entire paragraph juxtaposes simple sentences all following the subject verb object pattern. The structural pattern points to the hands as the subject symbolising her spirit as though only they can serve as means of actualisation. The one sentence diverging from the pattern only does so by using the *I* as the fake subject of the clause, as the real focus remains the hands that function as the subject of the subclause. The *I* merely stresses their putative strength followed by their negated individuality on account of their docility itself challenged by the adverb *almost* in the next clause whose passive reduces the level of agency. The paragraph shows how her hands engage in the minuscule service for the other by maximising their role through the use of amplifiers ('many') and the sheer succession of activities as though they amount to much. The actual juxtaposition highlights the importance of the actions in Edna's eyes, rather than herself. Clearly, these actions amount to no individual creation as they open no space for personal enlightenment.

Conclusion

Through spatial language, Edna signifies the need for exiguous pursuits and the contrasting psychopathologies of sinking into depression or exploding into madness. In order to escape the angst of the void she has created to protect herself, Edna clings to ever-reductive spatial patterns as to a life buoy. Her fear of the holes that might reduce the strength of the fortress, like 'the holes, irregular and unspaced, made by a knife in a body' (DD 1), explains the positive safety of straight lines. The notebooks with their straight lines organising her writing offer such security to cling to, for their superficial neatness distances her from the chaotic content and meanders of her writing that highlight her psychopathology. She has however enough insight to realise that she would 'end there again, with more notebooks and a dwindling field of vision' (DD 163). Only death lies ahead: 'I cannot re-observe and re-describe something already impaled by this pen in this notebook' (DD 162), she remarks. Disconnection from her life prevails: she realises that 'it doesn't seem to have been my life at all' (DD 170) and wonders '[i]f I were free, what would I be?' (DD 170). Though she imagines a life different from her past and present lives, she knows she does not have such an option; for 'the paper no longer binds the wounds. Blood seeps between the pages, and oozes out the covers' (DD 171): she is marked by both murder and her psychopathology. As she enacts her pain through a dance appearing insane to onlookers, she visualises the bleakness of the future ahead. No opening comes out of her vision of the future; she remains stuck alone in exiguous space. With 'the dream [of her youth] shattered, the pillow shredded, the man torn' (DD 181), Edna's dream world vanishes; she loses what little identity she thought she had and can only find make-belief freedom in the narrowing spaces of the asylum.

As the novel ends with Edna envisaging her next forty years as '[a] whole pure future in which to sketch a new Edna, the singer and the dancer, the free woman in the narrow corridor, alone in a small white bed' (DD 183), the readers may debate her ability to build a bridge for posttraumatic growth. Such growth, as Judith Herman (2001) argues, emanates from a state in which the traumatised can empower herself and actively seek 'the creation of new connections' (133). But as Edna's notebooks

meticulously examine and report the twenty-three years of married life to spot the flaw that has led to her downfall in the illusive hope that life will provide her with a second chance to perfect her life story, one may question such ability. For she does not address and attempt to heal the cause for her pathological approach as the theories of Amir, Balint, Bick, Bion, and Winnicott highlight. Her reflection about the use of notebooks as therapeutic tools clarifies the psychoanalytical theories as Edna points to her testimony as functioning as a retreat in ever-protective circles: 'They thought a notebook might be an opening? It has built a new wall instead. And this time it is just my wall, I don't have to share it' (DD 125).[7] The spatial boundary thus erected metaphorically signifies her relational avoidance, already prominent before when, apart from the idyllic, but fake, relationship to Harry, she entertains no safe intimate relationship with anyone, which according to Herman consists in a primordial stage towards recovery from traumatic experiences (2001: 133–136). By preventing herself from advancing and by sabotaging her own originality on the grounds of excessive affiliation needs to experience the relationship above all else, she has refused the risk of self-creation and the option of healing. As she refuses contact with anyone around her – psychiatrist, nurses, inmates – returns to prenatal or postnatal dependence without human exchange. Obsessively seeking spatial grounding to the detriment of spatial opening, Edna will unlikely ever achieve posttraumatic growth.

Endnotes

1. References to the novel will be documented within the text with the abbreviation DD.
2. Ocnophilia refers to clinging behaviour as though the person cannot function alone while philobatia refers to avoidance of relationships for fear of meeting dangerous objects (Balint 1968: 68).
3. The magazines Edna reads indeed limit her perspective and distance her from reality, reinforcing her withdrawal. Unable to decipher the stereotypical subtext of the magazines by whose debilitating sexist views she abides, she frets over details that erase her identity, at best reduce her to the invisible hand behind cleanliness.
4. Quoting Grant McCracken, Susan Elmsie equates her focusing on the wallpaper with a 'kind of ballast' (1999: 54) that keeps her together.
5. A shorter version for Henry, the name Harry comes from '*haim* home + *rīc* power, ruler' (Hankes and Hodges 1994: 153).
6. However, as the novel clarifies, and as Paul Milton rightly notes, she has 'traded the prison of her father's house for the prison of her husband's house' (2005: 176) so that she has no opportunity to expand, let alone emerge as a full-fledged person.
7. This recalls Susan Elmsie's discussion of material culture in the novel and the dissatisfaction that results from having to share the purchasing power with the financial supporter to such an extent that whatever good acquired aims at securing the husband's ideals, not hers (1999: 59-60).

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