Transmediality in the Work of Imtiaz Dharker: Gendered Spaces in Poetry and Visual Art

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The study of transmediality has been a new trend in German Literary and Cultural Studies in recent years. Closely related to the already thoroughly theorized concept of intermediality (Meyer, Simanowski and Zeller 7), a transmedial approach offers a slightly different perspective (ibid. 8). Whereas intermediality is concerned with the exchange between clearly demarcated media entities and with the boundaries that remain intact in the intermedial exchange, the focus of transmediality lies on the transgression of boundaries between media (ibid 8). The main interest of this approach is in the effect a transmedial exchange has on the participating media in the process of transgression (ibid. 10). As Alfonso de Toro stresses, a transmedial exchange consists of more than a combination of different media or a "mere overlap of forms of medial representation" (ibid. 43; my translation). Instead, in a transmedial process a "dialogue occurs between [the different] media [involved] and a meta-medial level develops" (ibid. 43; my translation). Thus, if a work of art consists of different media that interact in a transmedial way, the boundaries between these media do not remain intact but are transgressed in such a way that the media involved cannot be examined separately in an analysis of this work of art. On the contrary, the process of transfer of meanings between the separate media is crucial for the interpretation since the mutual exchange between the different media is at the heart of such a work of art. The interaction of its different parts, i.e. the different media it consists of, accordingly creates a meta-medial whole.

Such an approach offers up interesting perspectives on the work of Imtiaz Dharker, a poet, documentary filmmaker and visual artist, who illustrates her poetry collections with her own drawings, which "form an integral part of her books" (Astley 57). Dharker has often expressed that there is a mutual influence between the different art forms she employs. When asked how she goes about writing a poem, she says, "[i]t often starts with the one line. The rest of the poem grows out of that line" (de Souza 116). She further admits that her writing is strongly influenced by her visual art so that poems also often start from "an image" which she then proceeds to "work around" (de Souza 117). In another interview she describes an even closer interrelationship between image and line: "Everything starts with the image: sometimes as the line of a poem, sometimes as something I see as a visual, a drawing. No, that's not always true. Sometimes a poem can start with an idea and that can in turn spark off a drawing" (Pinto). There appear to be no clear-cut boundaries between the different art forms for her. Not surprisingly Jerry Pinto, the interviewer, adds: "Poet and art critic Ranjit Hoskote called them 'poems amplified by drawings' to which Imtiaz only wants to add, 'drawings amplified by poems.'" Poems and drawings can thus not be analyzed separately but need to be approached transmedially since only the interplay between these two media will convey the complex meaning in Dharker's art. For, as Sudeep Sen rightly remarks, "[b]oth her poems and drawings interact, not always directly, but very often as a counterpoint" (61).

It is this transmedial interaction between poetry and drawings that I will focus on the first half of Dharker's 2001 collection *I Speak for the Devil.* Like all her books of poetry, *I Speak for the Devil* comes in the form of an arrangement of poems and drawings; it is divided into three seemingly separate sequences, "They'll Say, 'She Must Be from Another Country,'" "The Broken Umbrella" and "I Speak for the Devil." Thematically, it is concerned with gender issues, the spaces women are allowed to inhabit in different societies and their struggle to break free from restrictive gender roles. These themes are very explicit in the first sequence, which

“traces a journey, starting with a striptease where the claims of nationality, religion and gender are cast off, to allow an exploration of new territories, the spaces *between* countries, cultures and religions” (Astley 57).

Poet and critic Arundhathi Subramaniam describes *I Speak for the Devil* as “[a]n iconoclastic in-your-face exultation – an unabashed celebration of a self that strips off layers of superfluous identity with grace and abandon, only to discover that it has not diminished, but has grown larger, more generous, more inclusive” and speaks of “Dharker’s unabashed embrace of unsettlement as settlement.” She is certainly correct in her assessment if only the poems of the collection are considered. However, in connection with the drawings, the “celebration” seems much less celebratory and hardly “unabashed.” The following analysis of the first two sequences of *I Speak for the Devil* will therefore attempt a transmedial analysis of Dharker’s art to show that it does not offer black-and-white decisions or answers but that its only colours are shades of grey.

Dharker begins “They’ll Say, ‘She Must Be from Another Country’” with a note that gives background information on the first poem: in 1999, “the last year of the twentieth century,” a woman was shot by family members in her lawyer’s office in Lahore for asking for a divorce. This deed was called an “honour killing” by the Pakistan senate, which “refused to condemn the act” (Dharker 11). Dharker explains that she wrote the first poem of her collection in response to this event (Astley DVD 1). Given its background, the poem called “Honour Killing” does not contain what one might expect. Its female speaker describes the process of stripping away layer upon layer of tradition and convention to find out who she really is after she has left all these things behind. She starts by “taking off this coat / this black coat of a country” (“Honour Killing” 1-2), in the process rejecting a national belonging which is clearly gendered and Islamic as the black coat alludes to the practice of wearing a chador. A “black coat of a country” thus shows the speaker’s experience that, for her, nationality, gender norms and religious practices are inextricably linked while also vividly pointing out the sense of restriction she feels because of them: the entire country is reduced to the size of the coat or chador, which takes away her independence and does not leave her much space to act. In the process of taking it off she realizes that this previously unquestioned part of her identity had restricted her in ways she had not even thought of before: “Born wearing it, / I believed I had no choice” (6-7).

The following three stanzas repeat the process by taking away further aspects of religion and gender in a similar fashion. Thus the second stanza states:

> I’m taking of this veil,
> this black veil of a faith
> that made me faithless
> to myself,
> that tied my mouth,
> gave my god a devil’s face,
> and muffled my own voice. (8-14)

Even more explicitly than in the first stanza, the speaker criticizes how religious norms inhibit her actions as a woman. Not only do they control and restrict her movements, they also attempt to take away her voice by making it harder for her to speak so that she feels she has been made "faithless to [her]self" since she is unable to voice her needs and opinions. This is, however, not a general rejection of Islam as the half rhyme of faith and (devil's) face suggests. It rather shows the speaker's belief that a religion that treats its members in such a way cannot claim to be a correct interpretation of the faith. After all, she still calls the god "my god" and therefore does not reject her belief in toto but only the practices of organized religion that she feels cannot be right because of the behaviour it requires from her as a woman.

The following stanza continues this critique of gender roles but widens its scope to include women from other confessions. Stripping away traditional symbols of Hindu marriage, the speaker claims that they "beggared" her, "rattling in a tin cup of needs" (19-20) while her own wishes and desires again were ignored. In a final drastic step she even takes off "the womb" (23) in the fourth stanza to be free of any kind of restriction that could be placed upon her because of her sex. Now that she has rejected all national, religious and gender affiliations, she is free to demand, "[l]et's see /what I am in here / when I squeeze past / the easy cage of bone" (25-27) and consecutively to begin "making, crafting, / plotting / at my new geography" (30-32).

The poem's ending sheds a very different perspective on the poem's title than suggested by the note preceding it. What has been killed in this honour killing is not the speaker, who in the following embarks on a journey to reformulate her self, but a notion of honour that from the speaker's perspective burdens women with a life that forces them to betray and neglect themselves. This position is further underlined by the fact that the process of taking away parts of the speaker's identity is mirrored in the length of the stanzas. They become shorter the more things she casts off, which is reversed as soon as she claims to take off her womb. Even before she has begun to actively refashion herself, formal elements imply that this striptease does not end in a reduced self of the speaker. Rather it gives her the chance to grow again, this time unrestricted by the influence of others and solely according to her own beliefs.

The poem is accompanied by the drawing of a female figure in the process of stepping out of black curtains – presumably coat and veil – and, nakedly, entering a different, lighter space. The parts of her body that have already stepped out appear undefined and blurred, which provides a striking contrast between this drawing and the first drawing of the collection that depicts a veiled woman. The drawing of the veiled woman is marked by strong lines and clearly demarcated boundaries between the body, its surroundings and the veil that encases it whereas in the drawing accompanying "Honour Killing," the woman's contours are so delicate that at times there is no dividing line visible between the figure and its surroundings. She is presented as having more space outside of the coat / veil, but at the same time it also pictures the uncertainty as to who she is without the roles and norms that had previously determined her existence.

When poem and drawing are taken together, an ambivalent picture emerges of the woman's rejection of affiliations. While the poem highlights the opportunity to energetically

remake a new self by "making, crafting, plotting / at [her] new geography," the drawing calls attention to the precariousness such an undertaking entails; the figure's somber facial expression does not appear to mirror the speaker's energetic tone. As often in Dharker's art "[t]he gray-scale subtlety is evident in both media, where the common strength is the 'line' itself" (Sen 61). This subtlety becomes obvious when both media and their dialogue are examined with a transmedial approach.

About half the following poems of the sequence are in a similar tone. As titles such as "Here," "There," "Announcing the Departure…" and "Announcing the Arrival" indicate this section is loosely structured in the form of a journey. In a conflation of metaphorical and descriptive level, this trip is presented both as a journey towards self-discovery and self-refashioning and at the same time also as a migratory journey to another country. The poems in the first half of the sequence accordingly pass through different stages of travelling, some with regard to changes in location, others regarding states of mind. They are marked by shifting perspectives and changing positionings and often show the sense of puzzlement and bewilderment that often comes with the new territory.

Thus, "The Orders" is marked by the sensation of seeing oneself through the eyes of another. Reflections figure prominently in addition to the speaker's "disordered face" (16), which can only be reflected correctly by a broken mirror (15). Nothing at all seems certain for the speaker, who appears to be looking at herself as if from a distance. Her emotional state is foregrounded in the consecutive poems, "Here," and "There," which are a reflection of the geographic distance she puts between herself and the nation she came from. Both poems are centred on the same geographic location, but the "here" she came from has turned into "there" if looked at from her new location. In addition, "There" is marked by a sense of regret. The speaker details that in the past, "there" was a chaotic, haphazard place in which somebody else had the power to make decisions while she had neither choice nor voice. Yet, upon her return, she realizes that much has changed that could have led to compromise between the addressee and herself, but she has come back too late for any reconciliation: "Now it doesn't matter when I speak. / It will always be too late" (31-32). The speaker realizes that she cannot go back to her past but appears not to have fully arrived in her new place.

"Stitched" likewise stresses her lack of belonging and lack of being accepted in an unspecified place that could just as well describe her country of origin after her return as the country she emigrated to. She is alienated and unable to fit in wherever she is:

> Someone stitched on my head and hands
> but they used some foreign stuff
> that pointed out the parts
> where I'd been mended.
>
> And so my mouth spoke Punjabi
> while my brain heard Scots.
> My ears followed German
> and my tongue did French.

It seems they were about to put me out
in a garbage bag, I looked so odd.

But I survived,
and they got used to the way I was.
Sometimes they act as if
I'm one of them. (1-14)

Strikingly, even after the speaker had set out to remake herself and gain control of who she was, she arrived at a "new geography" ("Honour Killing," 32) that she felt was still determined by others. "Someone" (1) put together her new self and "they" (13) have the power to reject her and cast her out if they are dissatisfied with the way she is made up.

While "they" is not specified any further, the drawing accompanying this poem offers an interesting addition. Similarly to the drawing described above, it shows another naked female figure, located in an empty space between drapes of black cloth. Yet this figure is not in the process of leaving the cloth but rather appears to be located behind the cloth as if the viewer is covered by it and looks out at the figure from behind it. It suggests that what makes the speaker look "odd" (10) is the perspective and judgment of someone who is not marked by many influences from different nations and cultures and who has never left the boundaries of nation, religion and gender. The speaker herself, however, is not in control of what happens to her and how her hybridity is evaluated. She is dependent on the acceptance of others, which only happens "[s]ometimes" (13). Understandably, she begins to question whether she has made the right decision and reflects on whether she should not better start the process of refashioning herself all over again: "Maybe it's time, again, to come undone" (18).

The next poem, fittingly titled "Announcing the Departure…," marks the beginning of another attempt to find a place where she will fit in the way she is. The search proves difficult and frustrating, however, since the speaker realizes that while being free to leave offers a kind of "safety" (1), this safety comes at the price of being without home and in a state of complete uncertainty:

But every plane or train I catch
just brings me back
into this waiting space.
Glasgow, Baroda, Sialkot, Rome.
The names are roads of possibilities
that turn into lanes
with the undertow of home.
Every city, every street
I get to pulls the ground away
from underneath my feet. (7-16)

The following lines express her despair and discomfort with being lost and unconnected:

I think my body is asking
to be in some promised place.
I think my body is begging
for another face. (17-20)

However, the place she longs for is "unknown" (25) to her. This realization is followed by a new perspective/attitude as the speaker again begins to wonder whether it would not have been better not to leave and not to rebel against norms and traditions but, instead, to adjust to them.

The following three poems revolve around this question with markedly different responses. "Tongue" describes a visit to the dentist in the form of a humorous anecdote. The dentist tells the speaker to keep her tongue still since it is interfering with the treatment. The speaker in turn reflects that not controlling her tongue had gotten her into trouble before, but in a different sense: "Keeping my tongue still / all of my life, / had been a highly recommended skill" (13-15). Continuing the pun on tongue, the speaker remarks that complying with this request has by now been complicated by the fact that she feels that she has "many tongues" (26). Nevertheless, after the completion of the treatment, she admits in a bittersweet ending that betrays her struggle with her position as an outsider that "[t]here's something to be said, / after all, / for giving in" (41-43).

While her uneasiness is treated lightly in "Tongue," "12 Noon" depicts a profound sense of alienation and disillusionment. The speaker is possessed by an urgent desire to belong somewhere, which is mixed with nostalgia for the home she has left. The place she now resides in feels wrong to her. In a striking contrast to the previous "Here," which described a country almost claustrophobically crowded (1-7), the new "[h]ere" ("12 Noon" 9) appears to the speaker as "a new country / peopled by shrill absences" (7-8). Furthermore, she comments, "[h]ere the light falls / heavily, pressing shadows / in where eyes should be" (9-11). The rough enjambments stress the jarring impression while the shaded eyes resemble the eyes of all the female figures in the drawings following "Honour Killing," i.e. the beginning of her journey, up to this poem. The speaker has distanced herself greatly from the adventurous "[l]et's see" in "Honour Killing" (24; 28) that marked the beginning of her journey towards self-discovery and refashioning. Now she does not want to examine herself or her surroundings anymore. Since "[her] eyes are in another hemisphere. / Behind the eyelids, / it is night" ("12 Noon" 14-16), all she can focus on is what she left behind. The speaker feels painfully out of place in the country in which she is residing. She has become disillusioned with her constant in-betweenness while her nostalgia and longing for a sense of home continually grow stronger as the poem's ending indicates. Thinking about her continuing attempts to re-establish a connection with the place she has left behind, she states:

Having got here,
what is there to say?
What can I do with this passport?
anyway? It's just a means
to travel back and forth
between what is

and what might well have been.

And yet I still reach out
as if I were some old
blind lover, desperate
to seize and hold
and enter once again;

to press myself into this earth,
six feet or more.
Deeper, deeper.
All questions peeled away. (24-32)

The speaker is exhausted by never arriving and by all the opportunities she has missed by always being in-between. Still not emotionally separated from the past, she dreams of the possibility of a return, at the same time realizing that it is impossible. She could only return if she managed to be blind to all the problematic aspects that sent her questioning and searching for new answers and spaces of belonging in the first place. Yet she knows that these questions could only disappear if she killed and buried the part of her that keeps asking them, that is, the self she began to create in the first poem.

There is a noticeable caesura after "12 Noon" which is marked by an abrupt change in tone so that the poems now show a much more positive outlook on the speaker's situation. This change begins with the very short and rather inconspicuous "Crab-apples," which describes how the speaker's mother used Glasgow crab-apples "to change / her homesickness / into green chutney" (4-6). This action in itself may not seem to be of great importance, yet the positioning in the sequence is crucial. It marks the beginning of a new and somewhat pragmatic approach to the speaker's feelings of unsettlement and also reintroduces gender as a central aspect of the sequence. While many of the previous poems did not specifically focus on gender issues but rather evoked a general sense of homelessness and alienation, questions of gender become increasingly more frequent again in the second half of the sequence. The presence of the mother in "Crab-apples" is therefore not coincidental: she functions as a role model for the speaker, who takes up the mother's example and attempts to put her feelings of alienation to an equally productive use by creating something new out of them. The mother's presence thus introduces a theme of intergenerational female solidarity that appears to enable the speaker to relate to her past in a different way by evoking and joining in a female tradition.

Accordingly, her position is evaluated very differently in the following poems. In "Front Door" she is no longer lost and unhappy but "addicted now, / high on the rush / of daily displacement" (15-17). She seems to have found her place in placelessness. That she has finally arrived somewhere is stressed by the inclusion of not just one but two poems called "Announcing the Arrival…." These two poems form a group with "Monsoon Words" which separates the arrival poems. The first arrival is not concerned with the end of the speaker's journey as one might have expected. Rather, it is the only poem of the sequence to focus exclusively on the experiences of men. The poem is peopled with "tired businessmen" (8)

“[o]nce thin boys” (11) who have “[g]rown to men who struggled / past a paunch to tie / their feet into shoes, this morning / along with a Bombay dream or two” (18-21). These men are accompanied by the looming presence of words that “arrive like terrorists / on this flight” (5-6). Vaguely threatening, they accompany the men and only seem to wait for their cue to attack:

> [W]hen they untie their shoe-laces
> and free their swollen feet,
> the stowaway words tumble out
> hot from tarmac and the street.
>
> Announcing the Arrival….
>
> Words circle above them, waiting. (26-31)

Here is another journey that does not stand for a simple change in location. These men not only arrive somewhere else but also in “another century / another year” (4) and clearly this new epoch will not be theirs. They are depicted as old and inflexible and soon their time will be over; eventually, the words will eat them up like vultures.

The following two poems depict a future that will belong to a new generation of women for whom words have a quite different meaning: they are the opportunities to change and influence the reality of their lives. This can be seen in the girl in “Monsoon Words,” who runs down a road which is full of possibilities that were impossible before: “A child picks up a stone. / The stone opens one eye, and blinks” (19-21). It seems that the “skilful monsoons” (2) of words that “fall off the page / on to [the speaker’s] mouth” (5-6) are imbued with the power to change everything for the better:

> Look away, and the rain will fall
> on to your mouth.
> The city’s seashore drifts
> a few words to the left.
>
> We belong in this time,
> after all. (23-28)

The city’s seashore that belonged to the “once thin boys” in the previous poem (11 ff.) now accommodates the speaker and other women. Because of this, she looks more hopefully both at the present and to the future since they suddenly offer space for her to fit in.

This sentiment is even stronger in the second “Announcing the Arrival…,” which is dedicated to Ayesha (presumably Dharker’s daughter of the same name). The poem wildly celebrates the end of the century that was announced in the first arrival poem. The repeated stress on a new and better century connects the arrival poems with the note at the very beginning of the collection about the honour killing “in the last year of the 20th century” (11) and clearly suggests looking at the end of this century through the eyes of women. It is hardly

surprising, then, that the speaker is overjoyed to leave this past and to create a vision of a better time to come that leaves behind all the things that used to constrain her: “the hypocrites, the prudes / running our lives / with their holier-than-thou prissy attitudes, / the bigots with offended sensibilities” (12-15). She can already almost see, almost grasp a utopian future characterized by girls like her daughter (19-22), by whom the new epoch is “silvered” (26). She desperately wants the beginning of the new century to be a turning point so that the “potential in goodbyes” (30) can be used to the girls’ advantage. Vastly optimistic and euphoric at the prospect of change, she encourages Ayesha, “[l]et’s pretend the hand of a clock / moving forward by one second / can unhinge our lives” (33-35). In her vision, the power to transform lies in the hands of the next generation of girls like Ayesha. If they want it to, “[t]he world shifts / with a lift of your hair” (36-37) so that everything becomes possible.

The concluding poems of the sequence echo the speaker’s newfound optimistic and idealistic attitude. Nostalgia and homesickness no longer hold her back; she has found a sense of home in a space she has created for herself in which questions of gender, religion or nationality no longer seem to matter (“At the Lahore Karhai”). The culture she left can be remembered in a shared meal with friends if she feels in the mood for it but if she does not, there are other possibilities (“At the Lahore Karhai”). Affiliations with and attachments to collective identities have become interchangeable and casual: “This winter, we have learnt / to wear our past / like summer clothes” (“At the Lahore Karhai” 37-39). The speaker is now securely positioned in-between and has rejected the possibility of ever belonging to just one nation or culture again. Even after her death, she does not want to be associated with religion or nationality but asks for her ashes to be left in “some country / I have never visited” (Not a Muslim Burial” 10-11), “[o]r better still, / leave them on a train, / travelling / between” (12-15).

Nowhere is this new, positive attitude more explicit than in the sequence’s last poem, “They’ll Say, ‘She Must Be from Another Country.’” Defiantly the speaker rejects everyone, no matter where, who attempts to control her through norms and conventions because she recognizes these as arbitrary artificial constructs. She aligns herself with others who feel the same way and discovers a sense of freedom in not belonging:

> But from where we are
> it doesn’t look like a country,
> it’s more like the cracks
> that grow between borders
> behind their backs.
> That’s where I live.
> And I’ll be happy to say,
> ‘I never learned your customs.
> I don’t remember your language
> or know your ways.
> I must be
> from another country.’ (62 – 73)

By repeatedly upsetting the metric regularity in an otherwise rather regular poem and by

subverting the rhyme scheme through the inclusion of extra lines in the course of the poem, she shows that she has become too big for these constructions and does not fit in anymore. In addition, she does not care anymore for the judgments of those who still belong to them and who try to impose their values on her. At the end of her journey, she is free of all that. The end poem of the sequence thus admittedly appears very much like the "unabashed celebration of a self that strips off layers of superfluous identity with grace and abandon, only to discover that it has not diminished, but has grown larger, more generous, more inclusive" that Subramaniam described.

However, the sequence does not end with this poem but with a drawing of a woman's shaded eyes and therefore relates the ending right back to the speaker's moment of deepest despair (cf. "12 Noon"). Like all the drawings in the second half of the sequence, this drawing differs considerably from those in the first half. While the latter were marked by the women figures described above, in the second half of the sequence they are replaced by several pictures of an umbrella, and collage-like drawings of the umbrella with small details of a woman's face. The umbrella drawings seem to be an abrupt and random change when they first occur. However, the title of the second sequence, "The Broken Umbrella," shows them to be a transmedial bridging device. They link the first two sequences and relate certain poems to one another, with the poem "The Umbrella" as the clearest point of reference.

"The Umbrella" marks a radical change in attitude compared with its preceding poem, "They'll Say, 'She Must Be from Another Country.'" In this poem, there is no celebration of unsettlement but instead a sense of loss and even an admission of self-delusion. The speaker states that in the routine of daily life, "as if it were an old umbrella, / I lost your soul" (5-6). The 'you' addressed is not identified at this point. Looking for it everywhere she could not find the soul but, in the midst of all her journeys and migrations, she admits that instead "[she] found pain" (21). After this admission she details:

> I brush past strangers and look away.
> Things have shifted.
> My eyes lock on empty spaces.
> I get out my boarding-pass.
> I have forgotten where I want to go.
>
> At Chowpatty, a woman is standing
> under a crippled umbrella,
> staring out to sea.
>
> If I can't feel the rain,
> she can't be me. (22-31)

The speaker is utterly lost even though she does not want to admit it to herself. She tries to distance herself from who she is and begins to speak of herself in the third person in order not to have to face the pain and maybe even the lost soul that could refer to herself. She does not want to recognize this truth that does, however, not come as a surprise. Through several

transmedial as well as intertextual connections this poem is intricately connected to "Monsoon Words" and the second arrival poem, i.e. the poems when the speaker was most optimistic about the possibilities of future generations of women. But while the shifting beach in "Monsoon Words" opened up space for her, now her hopes are disappointed and she looks at "empty spaces" (24). Whereas the monsoon of words offered empowerment and new possibilities, she is now standing unprotected against the rain she tries to ignore.

The effect is further reinforced by the umbrella drawings. Conspicuously, the first umbrella appears in the collage-like drawing located next to "Monsoon Words" and in addition to a small greyish white umbrella also includes a detail of a veiled woman's face, including her eye, and several white, grey, or black squares. The following two drawings, which are positioned around "Announcing the Arrival… (For Ayesha)" show the umbrella being blown away by the wind. Furthermore, the umbrella is now no longer light in colour but has black patches that grow larger in the second drawing while its outline becomes more rigid with every drawing, thereby foreshadowing the one beside "The Umbrella." In this collage-like drawing the squares and the detail of the female face have become part of the umbrella. The woman's eye is in shadows now, the umbrella squares surrounding it are all black, and the outlines of umbrella and squares clear-cut. It seems as if the umbrella of fixed identities that was lost in the previous sequence has returned and been combined with the speaker's state of being in-between as symbolized by the woman with the shadowy eyes. The drawing seems to suggest that any kind of permanent positioning, even if it is settling in unsettlement, will lead to alienation and disillusionment: any radical positioning will not offer protection against outside forces. The one extreme – inflexible national, cultural or religious identifications – appears as harmful as the other – a rigid rejection of these same things. Thus the speaker in "The Umbrella" is standing in the rain, drenched by the words that seemed so promising in "Monsoon Words" and especially the second "Announcing the Arrival…"

The following development can be briefly outlined since it follows a familiar pattern. As in the first sequence, much of "The Broken Umbrella" consists of constant negotiating, evaluating, and re-/positioning of the speaker and her situation. Initial disillusionment gradually passes, again through a transfer of the debate to another, more personal level which allows questions of national, cultural or religious belonging to be approached differently. Accordingly, the poems of this sequence focus ever more strongly on interpersonal relationships in which individual solutions are found and a middle ground is negotiated. With this approach come new insights, such as that "[k]nowing doesn't make / a straight line" ("Today We Spoke" 7-8) and that only continuing dialogue can lead to understanding. Only after mutual understanding has been achieved – "[w]e have found the voice / we share" ("Dot" 41-42) – can individual freedom be established for the speaker. Understood and accepted, it is then possible for her to see: "Nothing's broken. / I just feel a bit / more rounded suddenly" ("Knees" 20-23).

In the end, the speaker feels optimistically realistic and states, "I am busy making dreams / for the daylight to eat / when it gets up" ("Yellow Today" 1-3). It shows an acceptance of the fact that, for her, identity and belonging will always be a process of negotiation and positioning that will some times be easier than others. Uncertainty and nostalgia will probably not leave her completely, but she appears to have found a way to deal with them productively

and to position herself on a flexible middle ground. The drawing that closes the sequence suggests the same thing. It shows another umbrella made up of squares of many different colours and textures. Its contours are uneven and indicate room for both individual and collective development. In addition, this is the only one of all the umbrellas that is not viewed from above or in the process of flying away but in such a way that it actually might provide shelter from the rain.

Yet, the female face is not part of the drawing anymore. It is hard to say what this absence is supposed to symbolize. Is gender no longer important under the umbrella? Is the speaker's impression of any form of collectivity irreconcilable with her ideas of gender? What does this umbrella protect from? As usual, there are no clear-cut answers, nothing black and white, only a constantly shifting perspective of a speaker who looks critically at herself, her surroundings and her positioning within them. Things may change again on the next page so that the perspective may need to be readjusted in the next poem or drawing or through their interplay. The only certainty this collection offers is the uncertainty that comes with the highly self-reflexive speaker's distrust of definite positions. I can therefore only agree with Subramaniam's assessment that, "[h]ere is no glib internationalism or modish multiculturalism. If you trust this voice, it's because its 'bigness' is never grandiose; it is arrived at through a process of concerted exfoliation." Reading the different media involved as part of a transmedial whole only further emphasizes the highly complex and differentiated nature of Dharker's art.

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