SHE LURES, SHE GUIDES, SHE QUITS: FEMALE CHARACTERS IN TIM WINTON'S *THE RIDERS*

Mª Pilar Baines Alarcos[*]
University of Zaragoza

ABSTRACT. *Tim Winton is an Australian writer whose male characters often defy the traditional concept of masculinity. As for the notion of femininity, however, this kind of defiance is not displayed. In this essay, I study the presentation of the female protagonists in* The Riders *in order to illustrate this point, bearing in mind the Australian social and cultural context that surrounds them. Winton's fictional women, no matter whether they are strong or weak, are normally depicted according to female archetypes. This leads to their negative portrayal as ambivalent beings, thus making them unreliable and even dangerous, as is the case of Jennifer and Irma. In contrast, Billie is a positive female character. She, who is also significantly a child, combines both feminine and masculine qualities. It is precisely this characteristic that enables her to be her father's protector.*

Keywords: women, stereotypes, Australia, patriarchal society, female ambiguity, silence.

---

* Correspondence should be sent to: Mª Pilar Baines Alarcos. Email: pilarbaines@yahoo.es

Mª PILAR BAINES ALARCOS

ELLA ATRAE, ELLA GUÍA, ELLA SE VA: LOS PERSONAJES FEMENINOS EN *THE RIDERS* DE TIM WINTON

RESUMEN. *Tim Winton es un escritor australiano cuyos personajes masculinos desafían a menudo el concepto tradicional de masculinidad. Sin embargo, no se encuentra este desafío con respecto a la noción de femininidad. En este artículo estudio la descripción de las protagonistas en* The Riders *para demostrar este punto, teniendo en cuenta el contexto australiano social y cultural que las rodea. Los personajes femeninos de Winton, independientemente de si son fuertes o débiles, son presentados siguiendo estereotipos femeninos. Esto lleva a que sean descritas como seres ambivalentes, haciendo así que no se pueda confiar en ellas y que incluso resulten peligrosas, como es el caso de Jennifer e Irma. Por contraste, Billie es un personaje femenino positivo. Ella, que es significativamente una niña, combina cualidades femeninas y masculinas. Esta es precisamente la característica que le permite ser la protectora de su padre.*

Palabras clave: mujeres, estereotipos, Australia, sociedad patriarcal, ambigüedad femenina, silencio.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Riders (1994) tells the story of Fred Scully, an Australian in the process of settling down in the Irish countryside with his wife, Jennifer, and his seven-year-old daughter, Billie. The narrative opens with Scully giving the final touches to the old cottage where they are going to live. He is picking Jennifer and Billy up at the airport the following morning. However, only his daughter turns up. His wife has left them without an explanation. The fact that Billie refuses to say a single word adds up to Scully's anxiety. As a result, Scully sets off on a journey across Europe with Billie in a desperate search for his wife and hoping to find out the reason why she has abandoned them. In his journey, he meets Irma, a woman who sticks to him and interferes with his search. Along the way Scully gains in self-knowledge and forms a stronger and more independent identity. Jennifer, Billy and Irma fuel his journey of self-discovery in different, and often contradictory ways. The purpose of this essay is to analyse these three characters with a view to exploring the messages on femininity conveyed in the novel. Sarah A. Aguiar claims that female archetypes

"were created and propagated by men as the traditional writers of civilization. The characters passed down through legend and the oral tradition, even if they originated in female consciousness, reveal a deeply ingrained capitulation to patriarchal doctrine" (2001: 134). My aim is to study how *The Riders* contributes to the prevalence of female stereotypes.

To begin with, I will deal with Jennifer. Since she is conceived as the representative of the modern emancipated woman, I will start her analysis with a brief summary of the evolution of universal images of women until the present. Besides, I will relate her role as a modern woman and her ambitions with the fact that she comes from Australia. In fact, my thesis is that her patriarchal characterisation as an ambivalent being and the contradictory feelings she arises can be connected to the Australian attitude towards the land. Afterwards, I will study Irma, an ambiguous character who is presented as an obstacle for the protagonist's success. Finally, I will tackle little Billie and explore her function as Scully's guide and saviour.

2. JENNIFER

The world of women, and thus the world of intimacy to which they had always been relegated, underwent a considerable change in the second half of the twentieth century. Jennifer is an example of this change. That is why, before analysing this character, I think it is crucial to give a short account of the changing social attitudes towards women throughout history. Since this novel deals with Australia, it is essential to have a look at how these changes have affected this country in particular.

Men and women are assigned different roles in society. As happens with all cultural constructions, these values are transmitted through socialisation. Socialisation is a process through which people are taught the values and roles they are expected to comply with in their own culture. This process is carried out through conscious and unconscious messages conveyed by several socialising agents. Although the whole society is actually involved, there are some institutionalised sources which are vital, such as the family, the school, language — whose omnipresence makes it one of the most compelling actors —, religion and the mass media (Poal 1993: 76-77). It is by means of differential socialisation that women have traditionally been trained for the private sphere — domesticity, affection, reproduction, etc —, while men have been trained for the public sphere — politics, science, culture, etc.

Taking into account social attitudes towards women in history, in the book *La tercera mujer. Permanencia y revolución de lo femenino* (1997), Gilles Lipovetsky divides women into three historical categories. To start with, the "first woman",

a woman who was considered devious and dangerous. She represented evil, disorder, lies, etc. She was despised and regarded as inferior, and thus, she was marginalised to inferior roles. Later, in the Middle Ages, the "second woman" appeared. At the beginning, this "second woman" was idealised in the fashion of courtly love. With the passing of time, this sort of idealisation underwent a number of transformations that finally led to the Victorian concept of woman as "the angel in the house", labelled as such after Coventry Patmore's poem which celebrated the stereotype of the domestic woman. The praised roles of this angelic woman were exclusively those of daughter, wife, and mother (Auerbach 1982: 66, 69). These two types of women had in common their subordination to men. Western contemporary society has produced a third type of woman who is independent and able to define herself:

> [La] lógica de dependencia respecto de los hombres ya no es la que rige en lo más hondo la condición femenina en las democracias occidentales. Desvitalización del ideal de la mujer de su casa, legitimidad de los estudios y el trabajo femeninos, derecho de sufragio, «descasamiento», libertad sexual, control sobre la procreación son otras tantas manifestaciones del acceso de las mujeres a la completa disposición de sí mismas en todas las esferas de la existencia, otros tantos dispositivos que construyen el modelo de la «tercera mujer». (Lipovetsky 1999: 218)

The common perception of woman as dutiful wife and caring mother has faded away nowadays. Anthony Giddens states that contemporary society has questioned all the principles that gave men mastery over women. These principles were:

> 1. the domination of men over the public sphere; 2. the double standard [of morality]; 3. the associated schism of women into pure (marriageable) and impure (prostitutes, harlots, concubines, witches); 4. the understanding of sexual difference as given by god, nature or biology; 5. the problematising of women as opaque or irrational in their desires and actions; 6. the sexual division of labour. (1995: 111)

He adds that the questioning of these principles has brought about the democratisation of intimacy, a fact which is closely connected to the empowerment of women.

The empowerment of women and the rise of feminism have made it possible to problematise the dominant version of masculinity which, according to Hélène Cixous, rests on a series of binary oppositions which always relegate women to the negative side: activity/passivity, reason/feelings, sexual/spiritual, public/private, culture/nature, etc (1992: 146). This new female power has put to the test the patriarchal assumption that man is strong, aggressive and sexually potent, and that he is supposed to take the iniciative in courtship, to be the breadwinner, to protect

women and children, and to be the primary head at home. As a result, the traditional version of masculinity has been challenged and regarded as a cultural construction rather than an immutable essence (Arizti 2002: 32).

Australia has gone through this transformation in gender roles too. Here the impact has been more significant, since Australia is a country whose national identity has strongly been defined by virility:

> the image of the ideal or typical Australian associated with the new nationalism of the 1890s was a decidedly masculine one, whether conceived as a pioneer, gold-miner, or bushman. The figure of the soldier or digger was added to this list by the coming of World War I, and particularly events at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, subsequently enshrined in the Australian calendar as Anzac Day. (Webby 2000: 9)

Although the concept of Australianness is still biased by traditional notions of masculinity, Australian identity is currently undergoing a process of revision and now more attention is being paid to women, migrants, Aborigines, and all those who have usually occupied a marginal position as "others" to the white, male, Western European norm (Schaffer 1988: 6). Nevertheless, despite the fact that twenty-first century Australia is considered to be multicultural, another major shift seems necessary to really achieve this, since Australia remains a country "overwhelmingly white [...,] ancestrally British, [...and] a persistent echo of the 'old memories'" can still be heard (Feingold 2007: 70).

Jennifer is the prototype of the modern independent woman, the "third woman". She is depicted as atypical, not attached to the home and lacking motherly instincts. In Scully's words: "[She] loved working, you know. She was never the type to stay in and look after the kids. That was more me" (39). Or according to Alex: "[She was] sensibly deserting domestic bliss" (157). Jennifer plays the active part of the couple. She is the one who always takes the initiative. For instance, she was the one who started courtship when she met Scully (39), or she was the one who proposed travelling around Europe and settling down in Ireland: "Used to be men who followed", comments Peter surprised (40).

Not only is Jennifer atypical, but she is married to an atypical man as well. Scully is uncommon because in their marriage he plays the role that has usually been attributed to women. He is the one in charge of the private domestic sphere. As Tim Winton explains: "Scully has been the kind of man who's stayed home, looked after the child, while his wife had a career. He's been a follower and happy to do that" (Wachtel 1997: 76). In addition, he owns characteristics usually considered feminine — for example: he is sensitive, he cries, etc (84) — and is always willing to do whatever Jennifer proposes: "Admit it, Scully, he thought. You followed, you'd follow her anywhere" (40-41). But it is vital to highlight that Scully's unusual masculine role does not contradict his portrayal as the stereotypical Australian

male: "his adeptness with his hands and his willingness to tackle hard outdoors work and improvise, his basic honesty and goodness and, it must be said, his inability to understand women" are evidence of his conformity with "the Australian of the legend" (Taylor 1998: 109).

Jennifer and Scully are opposite poles. This is emphasised by describing them in opposition in every possible aspect: beautiful/ugly, ambitious/easily safistied, middle-class/working-class, career-oriented/domestic, active/passive, intellectual/ natural, etc (Arizti 2002: 39). There is also opposition between the worlds they prefer to move in. Jennifer prefers Europe — which stands for the city, culture, reason, intellect, independence, freedom, etc —, whereas Scully does not fit in Europe — except in Ireland — and prefers Australia — which symbolises the country, nature, feelings, egalitarianism, mateship, etc.

Jennifer is said to be "straight" and likes things "neat and sharp" (72). She works as a civil servant in Australia, but she hates being ordinary. She wishes to be an artist. She longs for something new, self-fulfilling, "weird, risky things" (72). She feels "safe, dull" (72), so she decides to quit her job and go to Europe. It is significant that she desires to be an artist, a profession characterised by freedom and independence, something that Jennifer desperately wants. Once, referring to the foreigners that live in Greece, Scully comments: "Jennifer found them engaging. She loved their backlog of stories, she envied the poets their old words, the sculptors their hands, idle or not, and the heirs their independence" (132).

Her reasons to leave Australia may be linked to current living conditions in that country. Although changes are going on, as has been clarified before, Australia is still a very male culture. As regards women, writer Peter Carey asserts: "Women have a tough time in Australia. And when Australian women who have lived outside Australia go back, many of them can't believe that they ever put up with it. It's no accident that we've produced Germaine Greer" (Tausky 1990: 33). What is more, Australian identity has been constructed in opposition to the British, a parental authority that represents an old-world bourgeois culture. Therefore, as Kay Schaffer declares:

> since the construction opposes the natural to the cultural, aspects of culture inherited from the parent culture (religion, intellectual and cultural pursuits generally, and also class divisions and the authority of members of the ruling class) are given negative value. Within discourse, in relation to masculine-feminine dichotomies, that which is demeaned in value is also feminized. So, the city, urban life, morals, intellectual and cultural pursuits come to be represented as derivative, inauthentic, unnatural and thus 'feminine'. (1988: 21)

Consequently, Jennifer is a woman with a cultural goal in a country which is still hostile towards both women and culture. For this reason, only outside Australia can Jennifer find some freedom as an individual and make her artistic dreams

come true. Andrew Taylor points out the significance that in the novel "artistic pretensions, even aspirations [...] are the domain of women and foreigners" (1998: 111). This may also be related to the tendency of Australians to regard all things Australian as inferior to things abroad, an attitude branded as "the cultural cringe" by A. A. Phillips in the middle of the twentieth century (Birns 2007: 2). This feeling of inferiority led many writers and artists to go abroad in search of artistic freedom and success (2007: 4). Sahlia Ben-Messahel describes Jennifer as an alienated cultural other and asserts that: "Jennifer [...] still believes in the cultural grandeur of Europe, and imagines that she can give up her life and routine with Scully and Billie in order to express herself through art. Her fascination for European culture stems from her belief that Australia is a cultural desert" (2006: 89).

Jennifer is a transgressor of patriarchy. However, she is portrayed in the negative, so the new model of woman she is representative of is depicted in a negative way too. Her negativity is mainly conveyed through her role as a mother. In sharp contrast with Scully, she is described as an incompetent mother. She favours her own interests and desires in detriment to her family, to the point of abandoning her little daughter Billie on a plane. But even before this, a reproach against modern women as mothers is made by Scully: "this stuff [motherhood] used to be automatic, you know, natural. Women aren't so keen to have them [children] anymore [...]. They've got other fish to fry, which is fair enough. But they don't realize, sometimes, what they're missing, or what they're withholding" (58). The message against Jennifer as an irresponsible mother is also conveyed through several images. For instance, through the dog that attacks Billie (176). From a patriarchal perspective, this dog — significantly owned by a woman — embodies Jennifer, a woman able to destroy her daughter by neglecting her. Another example is when Irma gives Billie some stick-on tattoos. One of them has the word "mother", but immediately afterwards, there is a tattoo with the picture of a shark (302). In this way, Jennifer and emancipated women who are mothers are connected to animals that can kill their own children (Arizti 2002: 40).

Jennifer is also an ambiguous character because she is portrayed from an archetypical perspective of femininity. This kind of ambiguity is more clearly seen when Scully dreams the following situation:

> she surfaced beneath him in the clear shade of the boat, naked and slick, breasts engorged, belly huge. Jennifer. Laughing, calling, buoyant. He didn't even hesitate. He went over the side in his sea-boots and heavy apron, the gloves greedily sucking water at his elbows, and he sank like a ballasted pot, roaring down in a trail of bubbles to the hairy, livid base of the reef where Billie waited smiling, her face ragged from sharks, her body breaking up and the shadow of the swimmer on the surface passing over like the angel of death. (253)

13

This scene clearly displays the stereotypical double nature ascribed to women (Creed 1994: 106). Scully sees Jennifer as desirable, attractive, fascinating. But at the same time, he finds her repulsive, horrible, dangerous. These contradictory feelings are related to the archetypical conception of women as life givers — Jennifer is pregnant, the presence of water — and life usurpers — Jennifer is compared to a shark or called "the angel of death". In relation to this, Barbara Creed argues in *The Monstruous Feminine. Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis:*

> What is most interesting about the mythological figure of woman as the source of all life is that, within patriarchal signifying practices, [...] she is reconstructed and re-presented as a *negative* figure, one associated with the dread of the generative mother seen only as the abyss, the all-incorporating black hole which threatens to reabsorb what it once birthed. (1994: 27. Original emphasis)

Therefore, the dream clearly points to male fears of woman as castrating other. Susan Lurie, challenging Freudian theory, explains that men are afraid of women, not because women are castrated, but because they can castrate, in other words, they possess a *vagina dentata*: "woman is *not* mutilated like man might be *if he were* castrated; woman is physically whole, intact and in possession of all her sexual powers. The notion of the castrated woman is a phantasy intended to ameliorate man's real fear of what woman might do to him" (in Creed 1994: 6. Original emphasis).

The fantasy of the castrating woman, found in many cultures and under different shapes, still exists in the modern world. Several images such as "knives, axes, ice picks, spiked instruments, teeth, yawning chasms, jagged rocks, the deadly *vagina dentata*" are connected to this kind of woman (Creed 1994: 151). Hence, the association of Jennifer with a fierce dog and sharks — animals provided with deadly teeth — links her to the figure of the castrating woman. Billie and Scully's scars are proof of her castrating powers. Moreover, Scully has a damaged eye and he cannot see properly with it. Blindness is also related to castration. Sigmund Freud asserts in "The Uncanny" (1919) that: "no physical injury is so much dreaded by them [children and adults] as an injury to the eye [...]. A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated" (1985: 352). There are two types of castration: genital and symbolical. The latter can be experienced by men and women alike, and it may involve loss of mother's body or breast, or loss of identity (Creed 1994: 107). In *The Riders*, the castration inflicted by Jennifer is symbolic: she deprives Billie of nourishment and a maternal body, and she also causes a loss of identity in Scully (Arizti 2002: 41).

Jennifer's depiction as a castrating being can be related to the Australian attitude towards the land. The bush has usually been imagined as feminine, which means that the ambivalence applied to women is also applied to the bush. Accordingly, the bush is regarded as an Edenic place desired to be conquered, possessed and tamed, but it is also loathed and feared because it has the power to cause defeat, madness, despair, isolation or death (Schaffer 1988: 22-23). The concept of the land as mother earth is a universal idea. But since the Australian landscape is so harsh and hostile, this idea becomes problematic here. Thus, Australians have defined their landscape as a cruel or castrating mother, something/somebody "dangerous, non-nurturing and not to be trusted" (1988: 62). However, it is necessary to clarify that this peculiar relationship with the land affects white Australians mainly. The Aborigines' connection to the land is fundamentally different from that of the white colonisers. They do not regard it as property. They are linked to it spiritually. The Aborigines have never felt the Australian land as a hostile force, but as an ally: "El aborigen, animado por el respeto que siente hacia el mundo y el medio ambiente y a su preocupación por sobrevivir, distingue en la naturaleza los signos de una complicidad y se acerca al arte del saber" (Crossman 2007: 267). The land provides them with everything they need to live: "El desierto australiano es un granero inextinguible, una tienda sin paredes, pasturas sin límites" (2007: 279). In return, they respect and look after it.

Another stereotypical way of presenting Jennifer is by not allowing her to speak. She does not really appear in the novel. We only know her through the focalisation and the memories of other characters, mainly Scully. Her silence and absence place her in a marginal position in the story. As Gayatry Spivak declares with reference to women in patriarchal systems: "she is assigned no position of enunciation [...] every one else speaks for her, so that she is rewritten continuously as the object of patriarchy [...]. She is a signifier, whose distinction is that she is shifted from one position to another without being allowed any content" (in Young 1995: 164). There seems to be an exception on page 271, when we get the point of view of a mysterious woman. This woman runs into Scully and Billie in Paris, but she hides before she is seen and watches them pass her by. The information we get about this character is so little that we can never know who she really is. It could be Jennifer, but it could also be Irma because the feelings expressed here could belong to any of them.

Jennifer's permanent silence pictures her as an enigma. We will never know why she deserts her family. But that is precisely what makes the story so interesting. For this reason, despite her absence, Jennifer is an essential and powerful character. If she had not disappeared, there would be no story — "Recovering his absent wife is the motivation for the hero's voyage" (Ben-Messahel 1998: 68) —, following in

this way the Australian literary tradition of presenting women as the source of all trouble (Arizti 2002: 34). If we knew the reasons for her behaviour, we would not find the story so intriguing. As Andrew Taylor states, her power lies in her silence: "*The Riders*, by disenabling Jennifer's ability to speak, emphasises her power, but augments her as enigma" (1998: 110). However, the downside is that her picture as a mystery helps to reinforce the myth of women as inscrutable riddles, as the "other" of men (Arizti 2002: 42). In addition, by not allowing Jennifer to speak, something that also happens with the other female characters as will be seen, the novel perfectly reflects women's powerlessness in a phallocentric society where female voices are silenced or conveniently distorted by men.

Among the multiple imagined reasons for Jennifer's desertion, the lesbian relationship with Dominique seems to be the most probable. First of all, thanks to this relationship Jennifer would not only satisfy sexual desires, but also individual and artistic, because Dominique is European and a photographer — an artist. In addition, through a lesbian relationship Jennifer would defy patriarchy "not only in neglecting her duties as a mother and wife but also in favouring an unproductive gay relationship over the heterosexual norm" (Arizti 2002: 41). Therefore, her relationship with Dominique would mean more than just being unfaithful to Scully, it would be another step to challenge the patriarchal society she lives in.

3. IRMA

Irma is also characterised in the negative. She is another version of the dangerous woman, the stereotypical Circe (Taylor 1998: 109) or Calypso (Ben-Messahel 1998: 70) in Homer's *Odyssey*. She appears in the middle of the story and threatens to put a stop to Scully's physical and introspective journey: "He knew now that he had to get free of her. She was like a foul wind, the whispering breath of nightmares" (223). She is a castrating woman who "promises paradise in order to ensnare her victims" (Creed 1994: 106). As Irma defines herself: "I'm the good, the bad and the ugly" (225). She is constantly trying to excite Scully sexually (212, 305) and Scully sometimes refers to her as a whore (220, 303). She is often compared to a snake (302, 305) — the symbol of temptation and sin par excellence. She is also associated with objects such as a knife, a too-wide mouth, teeth, nails, a cigarette, etc (202, 302, 312), which depict her as a castrating woman, that is, provided with a *vagina dentata*.

Scully's journey follows the archetypal journey of the hero described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). After tracing virtually all the mythologies of the world, Campbell establishes a constant that can be found in narrative everywhere. Somebody sets off on a journey full of obstacles to fulfill a

special mission. When this person returns, they will have stregthened their own personal identity. In the light of Campbell's description of this journey, Irma comes to represent the temptress of the hero's — Scully's — quest. At this stage of the journey, the ambiguous nature of woman is clearly shown because she no longer stands for life but for evil. She becomes "the queen of sin". Thus, she has to be rejected so that the hero can succeed (1973: 122-123).

Irma poses a further threat to Scully. Since she gets on so well with Billie, she may steal her from him: "Last night this woman had his wallet open and this morning she was dressing his kid. She's moving in on you, mate" (220). The reason why Billie likes Irma is because she is similar to Scully (322). Both are childish, drink a lot, have marks on their bodies — scars and bruises —, but above all, both are dependent beings who have been abandoned. Regarding their dependent nature, an ironic situation arises. Scully is so attached to his wife that he sets off on a journey around the world to find her. Irma is in the same situation: "'We're in the same boat [...] I mean our situation. I'm abandoned too.'" (217). She has been abandoned by her lover, and as she does not have a strong sense of identity, she needs somebody to stick to, so she follows Scully everywhere. Consequently, what Irma is doing to Scully is an ironic and grotesque representation of what Scully is doing to Jennifer. In this way, both chases are presented as crazy and suffocating for the victims. This repetition can also be described as uncanny, as defined by Sigmund Freud. According to him, repetition, when it is involuntary, produces a feeling of uncanniness. Therefore, "what would otherwise be innocent enough" becomes uncanny "and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of 'chance'" (1985: 359-360). He goes on to claim that in the unconscious mind there is a compulsion to repeat, which probably lies in the natural instincts of the human being, "a compulsion [...] lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character" (1985: 360-361), and whatever reminds us of this inner compulsion is perceived as uncanny.

Irma also serves to bring to light the violent side of Scully (226-227). The violence inflicted on Irma is caused by the arousal of Scully's masculine side because he is afraid of being castrated, "of being weakened by the woman [...] infected by her femininity" (Creed 1988: 162). This explains why he is able to make ill use of her in Paris: he drops her after having sex, steals her money, does not pay the bill of the hotel and writes an unkind message on the bathroom mirror (315). At the same time, this course of action offers him the opportunity to take revenge on Jennifer for her desertion (Ben-Messahel 1998: 70).

It is important to point out that Irma's negativity is only transmitted through Scully's male-biased focalisation. As happens with Jennifer, Irma is not allowed a position of enuntiation. We can never hear her own voice, so she cannot define

herself. She appears as an object of patriarchy, something that can be used and dropped without further consequences, as Scully's behaviour towards her seems to prove. It is only when we briefly get Billie's focalisation that we get a different version of Irma. Thanks to this, Scully's version is put to the test: "She felt bad about her. Irma wasn't a real grown up. She was little inside, but her heart was big. One day Scully would see that. Irma wasn't a statue [...]. She was just like Scully. Maybe that's why Billie liked her. Yes, she'd find them and Billie wouldn't mind at all. All anyone needed was a good heart" (322). Billie's perspective contributes to portraying Irma as a more complex being. It makes us realise that there is something more that we cannot see. According to Tim Winton, it is like Hemingway's idea of the story as iceberg because we can only see the tip, but there is a lot more underneath (McGirr 1999: 115). It is precisely this fact that reinforces the mystery that surrounds Irma, as is the case with Jennifer. Unfortunately, these women pay a high price for their association with mystery, since it comes from their portrayal as negative archetypes.

4. BILLIE

Billie is the typical child in Winton's fiction, that is, she is a "little-woman" (168), too mature for her age. She is seven years old and maintains a very good relationship with her father, since she has always been more in touch with him than with her mother. He is the one who has looked after her, an unusual role for a man, but something that Billie loves and appreciates: "She feels sorry for kids with ordinary fathers. They only made one Scully" (83).

Despite Scully's strong love of her daughter, he becomes so obsessed with the search for his wife that he neglects Billie. In relation to this, Tim Winton comments: "He runs the real risk of destroying his daughter in the search for her mother. He thinks he's doing the right thing but is liable to destroy what he has left" (McGirr 1999: 118). A different interpretation of the dog's attack on Billie provides us with a physical proof — her bruised face — of her father's neglect. Dogs are domesticated animals whose well-known feature is loyalty, but as happens in this case, they can sometimes turn wild and kill. The following parallels can be drawn between Scully and the dog of the novel: firstly, both are domesticated beings and owned by a woman — Jennifer, in the case of Scully —, and secondly, both turn mad and wild in the story. Another symbol of Scully's neglect is the doll on the river. Scully tries to save a doll that is floating on the river, but he fails (293). This can be seen as a foreshadow of what might happen to Billie if he continues with his crazy quest: he might lose her and see her go away, as he sees the doll float away.

Billie is the only female character presented in the positive. She is also the only female with a voice of her own. Her moments of focalisation are few and short, but they offer a more realistic perspective. They help to make us realise Scully's distortion or idealisation of other characters and events. At the beginning, she does not talk to anybody at all. The following explanation is suggested by the author: "She is traumatised, I imagine [...] she knows what took place at the airport and it's as though she knows way too much to bear. She's protecting herself and him [Scully] from the truth, I think. Maybe" (McGirr 1999: 114). But if she talked, if she told Scully what she knows, Scully's quest would not start. In this way, her temporary silence carries the same weight as Jennifer's in two aspects: firstly, in the process of educating Scully, and secondly, as a way of giving an intriguing touch to the story.

Billie grows more powerful as the novel develops. She guides Scully, forced by his immature behaviour. They interchange roles, so she ends up being the child-carer, the nurturing mother. She leads him to the houseboat in Amsterdam, which is described as a "cocoon" (368), a metaphorical womb where Scully — the hero — goes to be born again (Campbell 1973: 91). Besides, it is Billie that saves him and makes him come back to the real world. She makes him leave the boat and return home when she phones Peter (370). And at the end of the novel, she pulls Scully away from the riders. The riders are mysterious figures. Scully sees them twice in front of a ruined castle at night: the first time just before the beginning of his journey (79-81), and the second time after returning home at the end of the story. The figure of the rider in the novel can be read as a metaphor for Scully's inner battle to achieve a strong identity. A rider is somebody who controls a horse, and from a more general view, it can be said that a rider is somebody who masters hostile forces. Scully is in search of his own identity, so he has to get to know and dominate himself. However, if he enters the castle with the other riders, his identity, and thus himself, will be lost there forever. By preventing Scully from joining the riders, Billie saves him (377). The fact that she is Scully's saviour is reminded over and over in the story, as the next fragment illustrates:

> snagged by the hair in the huge bare tree. Scully. Crying, he was, calling out, begging for help and no one down there in the deep mud moving at all [...]. Billie just prayed for an angel, prayed and prayed [...] and suddenly someone else was up there [...]. Billie saw it now, it was her up there, Billie Ann Scully [...]. A silver flash. She saw it, the little glowing hand reaching out with the scissors open [...] cutting his hair free so that he fell, calm and still [...]. Billie saw herself up there, the crying girl with wings, slumped in the tree like a bird. (289-290)

On this ground, Billie fits the functions of the goddess that the hero meets in his quest. Joseph Campbell explains that: "As he [the hero] progresses in the

slow initiation which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters" (1973: 116).

Furthermore, Billie can be seen as the ideal woman of the future, somebody able to combine feminine and masculine qualities (Arizti 2002: 43). In the novel she is depicted as an androgynous being. For instance, she has a masculine name (Ben-Messahel 1998: 69) and she is often compared to an angel (290, 351), that is, an asexual being. Moreover, she is still a child, so the sexual organs that can mark her more clearly as a woman are not totally developed. Regarding her androgynous qualities, she can be related to the male-female gods that are often found in mythology (Arizti 2002: 41). According to Campbell, when the integration of opposites takes place at the end of the hero's quest, the image of the divine is recollected and wisdom regained (1973: 153-154). Thus, Billie does not only embody the masculine and the feminine, but also all sorts of femininity. Scully takes part in this defiance too — in his case, regarding masculinity — because, thanks to Billie's help, he is finally able to integrate his feminine and masculine sides (Arizti 2002: 44-45). Accordingly, at the end of the novel Scully succeeds in forming a fuller identity, he recovers control of himself, and accepts his new life without Jennifer.

5. CONCLUSION

The Riders is a novel that conveys contradictory messages about women. On the one hand, Jennifer and Irma are portrayed from an archetypical male perspective. Both are seen as ambiguous, and thus unreliable beings, whose only function is to cause trouble to the male protagonist. What is more, Jennifer is regarded as an irresponsible mother who gives priority to her own interests over her family's. Consequently, the new type of independent woman she represents is severely critisised. However, on the other hand, there is Billie, a female viewed in the positive. She is used as a symbol of the ideal union of the masculine and feminine qualities that every person should have in order to get rid of prejudices and achieve more egalitarian roles for men and women in society. That is precisely how Billie saves her father: she helps him to come to terms with his masculine and feminine side.

Tim Winton defies notions of masculinity is his stories, but he often reinforces female archetypes, as my analysis of *The Riders* proves. It may be argued that *The Riders* is male-biased because it is focalised mainly through Scully, since he is the centre of the novel. It is exactly the lack of other non-male perspectives that prevents the novel from challenging female stereotypes. The moments in which Billie acts as a focaliser are few and far between, so they fail to demystify Jennifer and Irma. Although the ending promotes the integration of the culturally

constructed masculine and feminine qualities as personified in the character of Billie, this does not serve to erase the negative images that have been ascribed to Jennifer and Irma from the very beginning. Therefore, it can be said that *The Riders* contributes to spreading deep-rooted conceptions of women that go against the pluralism of contemporary female roles.

REFERENCES

Aguiar, S. A. 2001. *The Bitch Is Back. Wicked Women in Literature*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Arizti, B. 2002. "The Crisis of Masculinity in Tim Winton's *The Riders*". *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 24 (2): Spring 2002: 29-45.

Auerbach, N. 1982. *Woman and the Demon. The Life of a Victorian Myth*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press.

Ben-Messahel, S. 1998. "The Boomerang Effect of Time and History in Tim Winton's Fictionalized Australia". *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 21(1): Autumn 1998: 63-71.

Ben-Messahel, S. 2006. *Mind the Country. Tim Winton's Fiction*. Crawley: University of Western Australia Press.

Birns, N. and R. McNeer, eds. 2007. *A Companion to Australian Literature since 1900*. Rochester, New York: Camden Press.

Campbell, J. 1973 (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Bollingen Series XVII.

Cixous, H. 1992 (1986). "Sorties". *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*. Eds. A. Easthope, and K. McGowan. Buckingham: Open University Press. 146-157.

Creed, B. 1994 (1993). *The Monstruous Feminine. Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London, New York: Routledge.

Crossman, S. and J. P. Barou. 2007. *Saberes indígenas. Estudios sobre los tibetanos, los navajo y los aborígenes*. Castellón: Ellago Ediciones.

Dickson, A., ed. 1985. *Art and Literature: Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*. Vol. 14. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Penguin Freud Library.

Easthope, A. and K. McGowan, eds. 1992. *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Feingold, R. 2007. "From Empire to Nation: The Shifting Sands of Australian National Identity". *A Companion to Australian Literature since 1900*. Eds. N. Birns, and R. McNeer. Rochester, New York: Camden House. 61-71.

21

Freud, S. 1985 (1919). "The Uncanny". *Art and Literature: Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*. Vol. 14. Ed. A. Dickson. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Penguin Freud Library. 339-376.

Giddens, A. 1995 (1992). *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Erotism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lipovetsky, G. 1999 (1997). *La tercera mujer. Permanencia y revolución de lo femenino*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama.

McGirr, M. 1999. *Tim Winton: The Writer and His Work*. South Yarra: Macmillan.

Poal Marcet, G. 1993. *Entrar, quedarse, avanzar. Aspectos psicosociales de la relación mujer-mundo laboral*. Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno.

Schaffer, K. 1988. *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in an Australian Cultural Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tausky, T. E. 1990. "Getting the Corner Right. An Interview with Peter Carey". *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada* 4: 27-38.

Taylor, A. 1998. "Tim Winton's *The Riders*. A Construction of Difference". *Westerly*, Spring 1998: 99-112.

Wachtel, E. 1997. "Eleanor Wachtel with Tim Winton". *Malahat Review* 121, Winter 1997: 63-81.

Webby, E., ed. 2000. *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Winton, T. 1994. *The Riders*. London: Picador.

Young, R. 1995 (1990). *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London and New York: Routledge.