How to be a failure and still live well

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Chapter 2. Women, failure and the fear of loss

The times when I have most felt that I am a failure have all arisen from the sense that I have failed as a woman. This feeling can be triggered by the asking of a seemingly innocent question:

> '*Do you have children?*'

My heart sinks, I feel sick and I try to come up with an answer that doesn't open up all the pain surrounding this unrealized aspect of my life. At other times, a less innocent version of this question is offered as a statement, usually accompanied by a sense of smug superiority from the person making it, who is, most often, a mother herself:

> '*I don't think you can be fully a woman until you've had a child.*'

It is very difficult to think of a response that doesn't involve swearing or throwing something; though so far I have managed not to do either. I have, after all, been brought up properly and in England. Dinner parties would be much more exciting, I suppose, if I felt able to vent in this way.

Exploring female success and failure does more, you'll be glad to hear, than enable me to grapple with my own, deep-rooted feelings of failure. It also makes possible an engagement with that which is so often caught up with the feelings of failure: loss. These questions about motherhood grip so fiercely at my heart because they remind me of the deepest loss of my life so far: not being able to have a child. In this chapter, I want to suggest that it is by tracking the specifically female forms of success and failure that we encounter the things that human beings (of whatever sex or gender) cannot control.

The pursuit of success considered in the previous chapter acts as a powerful distraction from reflection on what it is to be a human being. Work and its 'relentless activity' makes it possible for us to ignore the forces which make human life precarious and unpredictable. Chuck Palahniuk in his novel *Lullaby* suggests that our society is particularly adept at distraction, peopled as it is by 'sound-oholics' and 'quiet-ophobics' (2003: 15). Noise drives out contemplation; busyness, the space for thinking. Yet the things we would ignore are as important – perhaps *more* important – than the things that are easy to talk about.[1] What happens if we pay attention to the spectre of the failed life; that ghostly presence that hovers at the periphery of our dreams of success? Considering that which is pushed to the margins of life makes it possible to uncover the fears which haunt the desire to be a success. According to Paul Tillich, all human beings struggle with the anxiety that comes with being finite beings in a world of chance and change. Born into the world, dependent upon it, subject to death, the threat of

non-existence (of non-being or *not*-being) is ever present.[2] This existential anxiety is felt in our fears of death, our sense of meaninglessness, our feelings of guilt. How do we cope with these feelings of anxiety? Tillich identifies one way of attaining an illusory form of control over the terror that comes with realizing that one day we will no longer exist:

> Anxiety strives to become fear, because fear can be met with courage. ([1952] 1977: 47)

If anxiety is the dull ache in the pit of the stomach, the unease brought about by the shape at the corner of the eye that cannot quite be grasped, fear is something that can be contained, for it can be connected to specific objects that the individual is then in a position to confront. Fear is easier to confront than anxiety, and much easier to manage.

How does this general existential anxiety get transformed into fears that can be confronted and contained? Consideration of the shaping of the idea of Woman reveals the way in which something habitually placed on the margins can be used to manage feelings of anxiety arising from the realization that we cannot always control our destinies. Historically, women's bodies have played a particular role in this attempt to exert control over the uncontrollable. In tracking the specifically female forms of success and failure we come face- to face with the inescapable realities which are part and parcel of the experience of dependent, finite beings. If we are to live well, we will need to bring these realities out

into the light, finding as a result ways of living with them.

Women, success (and failure) and the feminization of work

If I feel a failure as a woman, I might be expected to feel like a success when considering my place in the (supposedly) gender-neutral world of work. I was awarded my PhD in my mid-20s, I was made a professor in my mid-40s and I have a nice collection of books I have written on my bookshelf. (All very pleasing and tangible, blissfully free of the ghosts of bad reviews, rejected articles and books I started but failed to complete.)

If in previous ages I would have been excluded from the work of a philosopher because of my sex, today being a woman in the work place might even be seen as an advantage. Some of the major changes to the nature of work in contemporary Western societies have been construed as particularly beneficial for women. Work has become steadily less industrial, and while numbers working in the traditional (male) manufacturing sectors have declined, the jobs requiring supposedly female skills have steadily increased.

The expansion of the service sector, in particular – which includes hospitality, sales, shops and care work – would seem to put women in an advantageous position, not least because these jobs require skills women are assumed to have in abundance: caring, building relationships, paying attention to the needs of others.[3] Describing this shift in working practices as 'feminization' suggests women will be

the ones best placed to take advantage of the new jobs that emerge in a service-driven economy. If anyone seems to be failing in the world of work, presumably it will be men, as the kind of work associated with male physical strength is rapidly disappearing.[4]

Against such a backdrop, we might expect women to be more successful than men. The situation is rather more complex, however, for the work reflecting supposedly female skills continues to be low paid, insecure and of low status. This is even the case in the cosy academic world I inhabit. As the philosopher and feminist activist Michèle Le Doeuff notes in her account of women's entry into the university, 'When a respected activity admits women it loses value' ([1980] 1989: 110). And value means both its status and its pay.[5] There may be more women in paid work, but 'women's work' remains undervalued, even in those areas of life which once excluded but which now admit women.[6] Understanding why the extension of female work might not mean women are more successful requires digging a little deeper into the shape of this changing workplace.

What skills are needed to be a successful worker? As we saw in the previous chapter, what is valued in the contemporary workplace is the ability to shape yourself as a successful entrepreneur of yourself. You must be adaptable, able and willing to acquire the skills needed to be a success. In a 'feminized' work place, it makes sense to assume that the worker – be they female or male – will need to *play out* the

skills associated with the feminine if they are to achieve their goals.

The notion that we perform gender is illuminated by the ideas of the critical theorist Judith Butler. For Butler, gender is not something innate, but always a form of performance.[7] Her approach develops Simone de Beauvoir's claim that when we consider what it is to be a 'woman', we find a social construction which reflects society's ideals of what it is to be female.[8] As Beauvoir puts it, 'One is not born, but rather one becomes, a woman' ([1949] 1972: 295). In other words, I might be born with a set of female sex organs – breasts, vagina, womb, ovaries – but these do not by themselves make me 'a woman'. I have to learn to act in accordance with the values my society associates with 'being a woman'. As I grow up, so I attempt to become a (more or less) successful version of what a woman is expected to be.

Butler extends Beauvoir's ideas to cover male as well as female experience. *All* gender identities are forms of performance. This enables a more complex rendition of what it means for the workplace to become 'feminized'. The ideal worker in the post-industrial world is 'one who can claim to possess a flexible or mobile relation to gender performance and hence to have taken up a reflexive stance towards gender' (Adkins 2002: 58). This is less about being able to succeed *because you are a woman*; rather, it is about being flexible in the way you present yourself in the workplace. It is this flexibility that enables you to 'become' a success, not the

mere fact that you are female. The *values* traditionally ascribed to femininity are now prized in the workplace, *not* the fact that you are a woman.

The consumerist economics of neoliberalism affects what this means in practice. To be a success in the neoliberal world of work, I must pay attention to 'appearance, image and style at work'; these three qualities are closely aligned to what Lisa Adkins calls 'the aesthetics of the feminine' (Adkins 2002: 61). But this is not about women *per se*: for both women *and men* to be successful, they must perform this aesthetics.[9] In practice, however, it is easier for men to ' "take on" the aesthetics of femininity, perform reversals and gender hybrids' (Adkins 2002: 75). Men may even find it easier to take on the flexible forms of self-presentation required in order to be a success. For women, it may be far more difficult to perform the masculinity required in some work situations. Put simply, men can enact both masculinity *and* femininity, while women can only enact femininity.

An example from the world of politics may help us. During the US Presidential campaign in 2016, any sign of weakness was taken to show that Hillary Clinton was not tough enough to be president. At the same time, her habitual wearing of the 'pantsuit' was seen by her opponents as a form of masculine presentation; and not in a good way. She was somehow less a woman by striving to be more like a man. By way of contrast, Donald Trump for all his weaknesses was seen to look more like a president than she did. It was easier for him to embody the masculinity

believed by many to be necessary to become the president of the United States (POTUS) because he was male.

Businesses expected to thrive on 'high testosterone', like the banking sector, raise similar problems for how women are to present themselves in the world of work. Social occasions used to cement connections with business associates are not always welcoming of women. Business women report finding it 'demeaning to try to be one of the boys' (Adkins 2002: 146). Being 'a ladette' doesn't always work: as one woman working in finance comments, 'You can't go out and get ratted as one of the boys in the pub; it just won't work' (Adkins 2002: 154). In contexts where maleness is seen as an advantage, women have to decide whether to be 'more or less female', rather than 'more or less male'.[10] Far from 'levelling the playing field' for women to succeed, the playing out of gender might well be more advantageous for men than it is for women.

A further aspect of women's experience should be considered when exploring what is required to be a success rather than a failure. Here, a vista opens up into the things that haunt the constructions of success as attainment. Here, we get a glimpse of the anxieties accompanying the construction of failure.

What does it mean to be successful as a woman?

As I've suggested, this involves more than pursuing cultural measures of success as defined by the things you attain and achieve in the workplace. What it means to

succeed *as a woman* is also shaped by a powerful set of social, historical and political norms where female success is conceived quite differently from that expected of the male. Let's consider appearance and style, those features which are apparently as important for male success as for female success in a society shaped by consumerism. Appearance remains more important for women in a context where female beauty is more obviously prized. Here are a set of random and common images: the beautiful, young woman used to sell products as diverse as cars, washing powder and perfume; the craggy old businessman (or president) accompanied by the beautiful trophy wife; the habitual description of women – in whatever context – as primarily wives and mothers. When the UK MP Jo Cox was murdered by a right-wing extremist in 2016, her friend and fellow MP Rachel Reeves said in the debate to mark Cox's life that 'Batley and Spen will go on to elect a new MP, but they won't replace a mother'. Reeves is right; but if Cox had been male, would this comment about her status as a parent have been made in quite this way? And here is another vision of what makes for a successful woman: when 71-year-old Manuela Carmena became mayor of Madrid in June 2015, taking up one of the most powerful positions in Spain, the media summed up her warm personality by calling her 'the Hugging Grandma'.

Women are never judged just by what they *have done*; they must also succeed at embodying a particular set of qualities associated with femininity. When Julia Gillard stood to be leader of the Australian Labor Party in 2005, she was

photographed at her kitchen table, on which was placed an empty fruit bowl. This innocuous object was endowed with particular significance by her opponents. Gillard did not have children, and so her 'fruit bowl' was empty, a sign of her lack of femininity. She was 'deliberately barren'. To run for high office and not to have children is, for a woman, a sign that something is not right.[11] A similar criticism was directed at Theresa May during the Conservative Party leadership contest in July 2016. Another contender, Andrea Leadsom, drew attention to the fact that Mrs May did not have children. 'She possibly has nieces, nephews, lots of people. But I have children who are going to have children who will directly be a part of what happens next', Leadsom argued.[12] Not having children lessens, it seems, the ability of a female politician to connect to the future. Rarely are men expected to show their fitness for government as something located in their ability to procreate.

The shadow side of female success modelled as achievement *and* feminine appearance emerges from a survey taken in 2006. When questioned, 90 per cent of American women claimed they felt financially insecure, with nearly half the women surveyed expressing fear that they would become a bag lady, living on the streets, with no home, no security and no support. The language one woman used to describe her fears it revealing: 'The inner bag lady, wrinkle-faced and unkempt, is no joke. She's the worst-case-scenario future' (Standing 2011: 108).

This image of the bag lady provides a telling way into the

anxieties masked by the claim that failure is always a result of your own actions. The fears expressed by this woman are not just about failing at work, becoming homeless and without resources: although given the lack of a welfare net to stop such an eventuality, this is far from a baseless set of fears for the majority of Americans. What is significant is *the way* this woman expresses her fears. She fears being 'wrinkle-faced and unkempt'. This metaphor might be read as simply expressing her fears of losing the powers of femininity, so prized in the feminized workplace. Yet her description suggests something more and here we see an opening into Tillich's existential anxiety. The failure this woman fears is connected to the experience of physical loss – ageing and the loss of bodily powers – common, of course, to *all* individuals, not just women. Yet in practice, there is a long history of the female body being used as a container for the anxieties which arise from the experience of being embodied beings subject to change. The body is never 'just' a physical entity: it is always shaped by social mores and values. By exploring success and failure through the concepts routinely played out on the female body, it is possible to discern powerful anxieties regarding loss running beneath cultural narratives of what it is to fail.

Standing out from the world: The masculine roots of 'human' success

As a young student, back in the days when dinosaurs roamed the earth, I remember being shocked as I realized the extent to which women's voices were excluded from the Western

philosophical tradition. It wasn't just that there weren't many (any) women philosophers referred to in my classes, it was that the way the world had been shaped reflected male ideas of what was required to live a fulfilling life. Being human was identified with the attributes of reason, choice and autonomy. Far from being 'gender neutral', however, these attributes reflect male experience of the world and have a particular bearing on the framing of success as attainment.

Leonardo Da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man' provides a fitting illustration for the way in which 'the human' comes to be defined in Western discourse. Placed in a circle, arms and legs outstretched, Da Vinci's image captures the Renaissance ideal of humanity. It is not just any old body that is placed at the centre: Da Vinci employs the male body as a mirror for the movements of the cosmos. All is to be understood through 'Man's' values and activities. While this idealized vision of Man is offered as the exemplar of all that is human, the female body is notable by its absence. Man, not Woman, frames the world. Language, similarly, lends itself to a view of the world where 'the human' can be understood without the female. The male generic – 'he', 'him', 'his', 'man', 'mankind' – is habitually used to denote *all* human beings. 'Woman' is an unnecessary extra, consigned to the margins of experience. If Man is equatable with the Human, Woman is subsumed in Man. The assumption that the male 'includes' the female allows attitudes gleaned from male experience of the world to be taken as emblematic of *all* experience: an habitual assumption not without impact on the way in which success and failure are shaped.

Reflection on male psychosexual development and socialization suggests something of the way in which attainment becomes the marker for the successful life. According to psychoanalytic theory, identity is not a given, but something that has to be achieved.[13] Identity is 'psychosexual', and so bodily experience is significant for the development of mental processes. Early on in the development of this approach, Freud stressed the importance of sexual difference for understanding male and female psychic experience.[14] While we might resist the rigid structure this places on understandings of gender (not least in light of the ideas of Judith Butler we have just considered), the physical differences between male and female and, importantly, the way in which social norms and values have been derived from these differences, cannot be so easily ignored.[15] In psychoanalytic theory, it is the way in which these differences are interpreted that shapes and reflects specific social values and attitudes. In particular, it is the relationship to the mother's body that makes the struggle involved in establishing one's identity different for boy and girl. While the girl sees her identity reflected in her similarities with the maternal body, the establishment of male identity depends upon distinguishing the self from the mother. To be male is to 'stand out from' the mother's body.[16] If we accept this framing of maleness as an achievement rather than a given, it is not so surprising to find the institutions established historically by men reflecting (albeit it unconsciously) the belief that success is to be measured in terms of attainment.

To accept this account of male sexual development is not to suggest that the struggle for female identity is any more straightforward. Freud's account of female sexuality, for all the criticisms directed at it,[17] recognizes the complexity of female psychosexual development. Far from being a static representation of what it is to 'become' a woman, Freud eventually settles on a position that sees a girl moving from identification with her mother, to identification with her father, before finding her ultimate resting place with the mother's identity.[18] Yet the role assigned to the mother assumes a different status for men than for women. In the terms of Freud's argument, the girl will – or at least should[19] – come to locate her identity with that of her mother. For the establishment of male identity, an alternative solution is required. The mother must be escaped if the male is to establish his masculine identity. D. H. Lawrence's portrayal of a son's desperate attempts to escape the cloying clutches of his mother's love in *Sons and Lovers* (1913) offers a dramatic account of what is required by male maturation. A relatively short step is needed to arrive at the view that the female represents that which is to be avoided in order to successfully achieve a male identity.

The existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre may have rejected psychoanalytic theory out-of-hand, but he accepts the idea of identity as a form of achievement.[20] To become a subject, to 'stand out' from the world, requires resisting the pull of the Other who would turn the developing individual

into an object that could be controlled. This 'Other' who would trap the individual in the things of this world is illustrated by a variety of examples Sartre derives from the female body. Body parts associated with sexual desire are turned in Sartre's writing into horrible reminders of the mutability of all flesh. He describes the Other as the full breasts of a woman, flattened out when she lies on her back.[21] An innocuous representation, perhaps: not so the images he derives from female genitalia. Now, the oppressive Other is the 'moist and feminine sucking' that 'draws me as the bottom of a precipice might draw me' (Sartre [1943] 1969: 609). The Other is 'the obscenity of the feminine sex … which "gapes open"' (Sartre [1943] 1969: 613). I am reminded of the horror movie, *Teeth* (2007), where the 'monster' is a woman whose vagina bites off the penis of the man foolish enough to penetrate her. While not equipping his Other with teeth, Sartre describes this feminine threat as 'a sweet, clinging, dependent threat to male freedom' (Collins and Pierce 1980: 117). This feminine Other threatens to subsume the unwary individual in the things of the natural world which must be overcome in order to attain the status of a transcendent.[22]

> *Success is the achievement of escaping the physical. Failure is to be trapped in the feminine world of material things*

Sartre is French, and so we might excuse his apparent sexism by accepting that he distinguishes the 'feminine' from the 'female'. However, his language betrays him. The examples he

uses are derived from the realities of the *female* body: vagina, breasts, bodily secretions. Such is the problematic nature of this connection between Woman and body in Sartre's existentialism that when Simone de Beauvoir shapes her own philosophy, built on his categories, she takes a largely negative stance to motherhood. To be a mother is to lessen the possibility of claiming one's place as an individual 'standing out' from the world.[23] The conclusion to be derived from such comments seems to be that it is better for women to reject maternity in order that they might become fully creative human individuals. (Perhaps I should cite Simone next time someone tells me I can't be a 'proper' woman if I don't have children.)

Of female success

Beauvoir's solution – while offering me a ready retort – isn't, of course, very helpful. It fits all-too-neatly with a common view of female success: give up those qualities identified with the female, and become, as far as possible, the same as the male. When the successful life is modelled in this way, the experiences associated with the female body become forms of failure to be overcome, not just by manly men, but by women too. There may be good reasons for this radical, if unsatisfactory, solution: not least when we consider the history of philosophical suggestions which would demarcate the scope of female success. A remarkable consensus emerges when male philosophers turn their attention to defining Woman.[24] And their vision suggests a distinct form of female success located in a set of physical attributes which are, in reality, doomed to fail.

In the Western tradition, female success is consistently associated with the things of the body: beauty, sexuality, appearance and reproduction. A powerful expression of this idea is found in the writings of Immanuel Kant, Father of the European Enlightenment, whose ideals sit so closely with the neoliberal construction of selfhood: human beings are rational, free and capable of choice. Kant's account of the complementarity of the sexes, written in 1764, endows each sex with a set of essential qualities. These qualities affect the goals set for men and women. Men are to strive for nobility, depth, reflectiveness, learning, profundity and principled action. Women, by way of contrast, are to be beautiful, charming companions.

Male attributes *require* action: they are to be achieved. Female attributes require the woman to do nothing. As Kant sets about defining 'the fairer sex', he starts with those things with which a woman is born: 'Her figure is generally finer [than man's], her features more delicate and gentler' ([1764] 1960: 76). Emanating from such physical charms are a set of values appropriate to this 'breeding' which, presumably, any woman (given the right social conditions) could acquire:

> Her mien [is] more engaging and more expressive of friendliness, pleasantry, and kindness than in the male sex. (Kant [1764] 1960: 76)

From an early age, she takes delight in dressing up, finding pleasure in 'trivialities' that make her happy.[25] The image

that springs to mind is that of the doomed French Queen, Marie Antoinette, who in one year had over 150 dresses made for her. Dresses don't make an intellectual, and we might wonder at the attractions such a vain creature would have for the serious, thoughtful man who Kant thinks should accompany her. Helpfully, he addresses this problem, explaining that Woman exudes 'a secret magic' that inclines Man to look favourably upon her ([1764] 1960: 76). Taking such features as a whole, Kant concludes that Woman is known 'by the mark of the beautiful' ([1764] 1960: 76), while the male sex can 'make a claim on the title of the noble sex' ([1764] 1960: 76). His language is revealing. Women bear the physical mark of 'the beautiful', while men must *work* to be called noble.[26] To be a success as a woman is to be passive; to be a success as a male is to be active. To be successful as a woman requires doing nothing; to be successful as a male requires application.

This affects the expectations placed on the sexes as they confront the difficulties of moral decision making. Woman's moral decisions will reflect the sentimental connections she makes with others, for her moral inclinations result from her 'many sympathetic sensations, goodheartedness and compassion' (Kant [1764] 1960: 77). Male morality will be more robust, shaped by knowing where your duties lie and acting accordingly.[27] There is nothing equal, though, about the values ascribed to male and female, for in practice it is the morality which accords with duty (and which Kant identifies with the male) that expresses the highest form of moral action.[28] If moral

action is based on feeling, it is quite possible that there will be circumstances in which you fail to feel sympathy for the other person, and as a result fail to act morally.[29] I can relate to this. Walking through Oxford late at night, I probably feel less inclined to help someone begging than I might be at other times of the day. Feeling isn't always a good way of shaping our moral commitments.

For now, though, the important thing to consider is what all this means for women and how we are supposed to shape our lives. Kant's duty-based morality is arrived at through using the intellect, not through extending your feelings, and this means that men, not women, are those most capable of the serious reflection necessary for arriving at the right moral positions. Here's Kant's conclusion:

> Deep meditation, and a long-sustained reflection are noble but difficult, *and do not well befit a person in whom unconstrained charms should show nothing else than a beautiful nature*. (Kant [1764] 1960: 78; my emphasis)

The differences between the sexes lead to different moralities, but we should be in no doubt as to which morality is preferable:

> The virtue of a woman is a *beautiful virtue.* That of the male sex should be a *noble virtue*. Women will avoid the wicked not because it is unright, but because it is ugly. (Kant 1764: 81; his emphasis)

Male morality is deep, female morality based on the surface of appearances. What does it mean to be a female success? It is not the same as male success. Female success is denoted by the achievements of the body: desirability, sexuality, appearance and style. These are the very things that the successful male should avoid, or at least treat lightly. If 'the principal object is that man should become more perfect as a man', Kant's goal for woman is different, for she is to become 'more perfect … as a wife' (Kant [1764] 1960: 95). A woman who attempts to attain the things that denote male success (intellect and independently cultivating the life of the mind[30]) runs the risk not just of failure, but of failure *as a woman*. And Kant has damning words for the women of his day who have the audacity to attempt such things:

> A woman who has her head full of Greek, like Madame Dacier, or carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics, like the Marquise de Châtelet, might as well even have a beard. ([1764] 1960: 78)

A woman's ability to embody the beautiful is threatened if she dares to think: 'Her philosophy is not to reason, but to sense' (Kant [1764] 1960: 79). Female success is defined by the extent to which a woman aligns herself with the natural forces played out on her body: a process which suggests something of the luck that attends to being a successful woman in the terms which Kant sets out. But it also does more than that. It opens up a kind of failure that is inevitable, regardless of how beautiful or charming a woman is.

A woman's body and the virtues derived from it are subject to the ravages of time which ensure that even female success will turn to failure

Arthur Schopenhauer is more explicit about woman's failure than is Kant, who – rather chivalrously, perhaps – avoids this obvious conclusion. Schopenhauer's jaundiced eye is on motherhood, which, far from being a form of success, he sees as merely revealing the weakness of women. (If he weren't long dead, I might ask him to come with me to the next dinner party.) Where Kant is sentimental, Schopenhauer is ruthless. Here is his description of motherhood:

> She expiates the guilt of life not through activity but through suffering, through the pains of childbirth, caring for the child and subjection to the man. (Schopenhauer [1851] 1970: 80)

Far from being a success, motherhood keeps women as infants.[31] Their very childishness makes them fit only for the repetitive (and boring) task of playing with children. Schopenhauer is convinced that no man worth the name would be capable of bringing up children:

> One has only to watch a girl playing with a child, dancing and singing with it the whole day, and then ask oneself what, with the best will in the world, a man could do in her place. (Schopenhauer [1851] 1970: 81)

Now, we might dismiss these reflections as mere misogyny.

The form Schopenhauer's attack takes, however, reveals a disquieting reality. Even when deemed most successful in the realm of 'women's work', female success is ultimately viewed as a form of failure *even by those men who construct it in this way*. And Schopenhauer is highly effective at pointing out the transience of the things deemed necessary for the successful female life. Think what happens to physical beauty and the ability to have children:

> Nature has acted with its usual economy. For just as the female ant loses its wings after mating, since they are then superfluous, indeed harmful to the business of raising the family, so the woman
>
> > usually loses her beauty after one or two childbeds, and probably for the same reason. (Schopenhauer [1851] 1970: 81)

Schopenhauer makes explicit what Kant's romantic vision of the female ignores. Female virtues are transient, emerging from processes that render beauty and human relationships fragile and subject to loss. The peculiarly female form of success, located in physical beauty and the processes of reproduction, is doomed to failure. When the philosopher sets about 'his' quest for that which is eternal, it is not surprising to find him rejecting the female and the attributes associated with her. So Plato shapes the philosopher as one who must resist physical procreation in order to produce 'children of the mind'.[32] The offspring women produce from their bodies are doomed to die. Only ideas – these 'children of the mind' – are truly eternal, truly capable of transcending

mutable, fallible human flesh. Hence the person who is truly wise pursues only that which is eternal, and this necessitates putting aside the things which are merely transient.

This might make me, a childless woman, feel better. It doesn't. Rejecting procreation because it leads only to death reflects Plato's broader disregard for the physical world itself.[33] It also acts as a way of belittling the status of women. Despite arguing in the *Republic* Book V that men *and* women are capable of ruling (or at least they would be in his idealized society), a less optimistic destiny is given to Woman in Plato's discussion of love in his *Symposium.* Here, love ofwomen is described as something base. Such a love can only lead to that which is mortal; its ultimate goal is, after all, the production of children who are themselves destined to die. It is a love which cannot lead to the immortal values the philosopher seeks. These values can only be attained through the companionship of another male.[34] Explicitly connected with the world of reproduction, the female body comes to be identified with mutability. Her body becomes a receptacle for forms of failure which are to be avoided. It cannot be allowed to stand as a model for the experiences which accompany *all* human lives, not just women's. The failure of Woman, lived out in her flesh, meets the losses of embodied existence which are common to all experience. Yet rather than accept that loss is a fundamental part of *all* human experience, the female body is connected *exclusively* with the processes of change and, ultimately, decay.

Even the successful female, it transpires, is a failure.

The transience of the qualities viewed as fundamental to female success reflect a deep vein of misogyny within the Western tradition, for, as Schopenhauer's vitriolic words suggest, Woman *herself* is an *ontological* failure: that is to say, she is a failure in her very being. It is not so much that a woman might fail to achieve in the same way as her male counterparts. Nor is it that any particular woman might not be able to embody the values of beauty and fertility ascribed to her by philosophers like Kant. Even if she is 'successful' on the terms they set, she is still doomed to be a failure *because of the specific nature of female success*.

Plato's pupil, Aristotle, makes this clear as he attempts to determine the processes of reproduction. According to his theory, the male is the sole source of life. The female 'merely' provides the passive matter which the male principle shapes.[35] So far, so passive. But Aristotle goes further. Because she lacks this active principle, Woman is 'as it were, a mutilated male'.[36] Her very passivity reveals her failure: and it is a failure grounded in a fundamental lack of agency. When the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas applies Aristotle to his theology, this failure is given a further (divine) twist. According to Aquinas, woman is a 'misbegotten male' who can only find wholeness through relationship with the man from whom she was made.[37] 'Man' is created in God's image. And before we conclude that he must be using 'Man' in an inclusive way which describes both men *and* women, note how he employs the image of how Woman was made. Just as Eve was made

from Adam's rib in the creation story of Genesis 3, so *all* women are created in *Man's* image. Man is closer to God than Woman, for only Man is made in God's image.[38] For Augustine, whose ideas also influenced Aquinas, it is in the mind that the image of God is to be found.[39] Man is defined by godly reason, Woman by her participation in the body of Man.[40] To be Woman is to lack something that only the male can provide.

We might be unimpressed by this sojourn in the world of philosophy. Who cares what a bunch of philosophers from the dim and distant past think? It is not just philosophers who open up this world of female failure. Literary sources also expose the precarious nature of female success. In Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the ageing Southern Belle Blanche Dubois resorts to hiding in dimly lit rooms in order to persuade her lover that she is still young and beautiful. This strategy comes to a brutal end when he turns on the light in order to 'look at you good and plain' (Williams [1947] 1962: 203). If light destroys the illusion of Blanche's beauty, in Emile Zola's *Nana* it is small pox that destroys his heroine's good looks. Zola makes plain just how fragile a thing female beauty is. The novel opens with Nana the theatrical sensation. She has no talent to speak of, cannot sing, nor can she deport herself on stage. But she is so beautiful that she is described as 'Venus rising from the waves' (Zola [1880] 1972: 44), a goddess who captivates her audience. The end of the novel cruelly turns this image on its head. 'What lay on the pillow was a charnel-house, a heap of pus and blood, a shovelful of putrid flesh … Venus was

decomposing' ([1880] 1972: 470).

Female success is precarious, and inevitably turns to failure. Woman's very flesh means she can never succeed, because she is too closely connected to the impermanent material of the natural world. When Aristotle and Aquinas claim this failure to be of her very being, they suggest that the male is somehow set apart from the corruption inherent in the physical realm. Human frailty is located in *female* flesh, and so it becomes possible to see the male as standing apart from the facts of mortality and the limitations of being human.[41] Making the male the embodiment of nobility, rationality, freedom and action allows scant regard to be paid to the fact that all human pride and achievement ultimately end up in the grave. By using the female body as a receptacle for the limitations of being physical, the male comes to enact an illusion of control over the limitations of loss and death.

Failure, loss and the ageing female body

And yet …

There is no escaping the relentless march of Time. Women may age, but so too, of course, do men. A woman's struggle with ageing is, however, never simply a matter of personal concern. Her changing body is greeted with levels of disgust, fear and repulsion rarely directed at the ageing male body. We need only consider the lack of male equivalents for terms like 'crone' or 'hag', 'old bag' or

'battle axe', to realize that the ageing male is not subject to the same criticism as the ageing female.

In the consumerism that drives neoliberal economics, the struggle with ageing takes on a particular shape. To create a market, it makes sense to identify an anxiety in your chosen client group, creating and marketing a product which provides a solution for that anxiety. The cosmetics industry is extremely successful at nurturing women's fears of ageing. In 2015 alone, the US beauty and personal care business had a market value of $80 billion.[42] For a working world that emphasizes the importance of appearance and style, it makes sense for the successful entrepreneur of the self – be they female, or, indeed, male – to pay attention to how they look. Yet as Barbara Walker commented in the mid-1980s, the older man is not subject to the same pressures as the older woman:

> Women are socially and professionally handicapped by wrinkles and grey hair in a way that men are not. (Walker 1985: 31)

It is tempting to consign Walker's comments to the dustbin of history: after all, they come from the 1980s. Surely we have moved beyond this kind of crude sexism? In practice, it is far from the case that the working world is less sexist than it was at the time when Walker was writing these words.[43] Indeed, her comments have a particular resonance for those working in that most visual of domains, the world of broadcasting. In 2011, the presenter of the BBC's *Countryfile* programme,

Miriam O'Reilly, took her employer to an employment tribunal after she was one of four female presenters – all in their 40s or 50s – dropped from the programme. While her case was upheld on the grounds of age discrimination, the tribunal rejected O'Reilly's claim that she had been the victim of sex discrimination. Yet the numbers of older women broadcasters in the UK would seem to speak for themselves. In a report commissioned by Labour MP Harriet Harman in 2013, 5 per cent of TV presenters were found to be women over the age of 50, while older men were found to outnumber older women by four to one. This isn't to say that attempts aren't being made to ensure that men feel just as insecure about their appearance in order to expand the market in cosmetic solutions to ageing. A recent advert in the United States had a daughter encouraging her father to use a hair colourant as he prepared for a job interview, so that he might look more youthful, and thus 'more energetic'. While the pressure is on for men, women are far more likely to seek cosmetic solutions to the signs of ageing. A survey by the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons found 91 per cent of cosmetic surgery patients in 2007 were women;[44] a figure that remains remarkably static, and which was repeated in the Association's survey of 2015.

Cosmetic solutions hold out the promise of eternal youth: a promise that is gratefully grasped by many. Yet in practice, potions and procedures cannot forever hold back the passage of time. As Jacqueline Zita notes, the failure of these solutions contributes to the experience that to be female is to fail: 'Because these attempted restorations of youth and

beauty ultimately fail, it is women in the end who fail, and fall' (Zita 1993: 105). The distinctive form of female success outlined by the philosophers, playwrights and novelists we have considered depends on youth. Physical beauty is equated with it, the ability to reproduce depends on it. And just as cosmetic procedures cannot succeed in holding back the years, so medical solutions offered to women attempting to conceive in later life are also unlikely to succeed.[45]

When female success is defined through looks and motherhood, it is not surprising that ageing should pose a problem for women that goes beyond its construction as a marker of mortality. The introduction to a volume on women and ageing in film from the 1980s still resonates, some thirty years on:

> A woman's greatest social prestige has long been associated with youth, an idealized attractiveness, and reproductive abilities; society offers few comforts or securities to the older woman who, through an inalterable physical process, no longer fits the ideal. (Stoddard 1983: 5)

Representations of the ageing female body reveal more, however, than a simple marginalizing of the older woman. Advertisers routinely exclude older women from their campaigns. The adverts run by Dove Skincare and Marks & Spencers stand out as exceptions that prove the rule, consistently including – and celebrating – women aged 50 and above. More often, the exclusion of women from film

and broadcast media is accompanied by disgust if an older woman attempts to conform to the youthful ideal by which all women are judged, and then is found wanting.

The rise of social media has amplified this disgust. In 2014, a 'Twitter storm' accompanied suggestions that the actor Renee Zellweger had had plastic surgery.[46] 'Robert$chultz' (@Bosssexy711) gives a flavour of this with a tweet posted on 17 January 2015: 'Watching Renee Zellweger age is like watching the Titanic hit the iceberg in really slow motion.' In 2016, photos of Zellweger, taken in 'full sunlight', and looking 'like what you would expect a woman in her late 40s to look like'[47], were published, sparking further comments on her 'shocking' appearance. The suggestion that Zellweger avoid bright sunlight implies that all women over 40 should adopt Blanche Dubois's strategy, and dim the lights.[48]

The disgust directed at the ageing woman tells us about more than the number of mean-spirited people inhabiting the Twittersphere. According to psychoanalyst and philosopher Julia Kristeva, disgust accompanies the presence of the abject. The abject is that which is perceived to be a threat to the integrity of the subject. It is that which has to be excluded from the subject, for it 'draws me toward the place where meaning collapses' (Kristeva 1982: 2). It suggests the failure of human attempts to stand out from the physical world, to escape the pull of the finite. Kristeva's examples of the abject include those things which remind us most of our own mutable physicality: blood, the open wound, shit.[49] These things we

would rather hide are connected to that which lies behind their offensive qualities: Death, that ever-present reality which has the power to break in and destroy the comfort of both the world of language and human action.[50]

The abject must be excluded if the individual is to preserve a sense of their own integrity. In the ageing female body we get a taste of how this process works. Ageing comes to all of us; it confronts all of us – male and female – with the imminence of death. How to resist? One method: locate ageing and the terror we feel in the bodies of older women. This method is by no means new; it is simply made more explicit by social media and broadcast technologies. To get a sense of the role women play in embodying the abject requires accessing the things ordinarily cast out and excluded from examination. Visual portrayals are particularly helpful for getting at that which is routinely ignored.[51]

Two paintings by the Flemish artist Quentin Massys (1466–1530) suggest something of the old woman cast as abject. In the *Ugly Duchess* (1513), Massys portrays an elderly woman in a low cut dress, more like an ape than a human being. Her skin is wrinkled, her ears and nose extended by age. Her lips curl over toothless gums in a leering smile, while her hair (what we can see of it) is thinning. If we are not revolted enough by this hideous depiction of a coy old woman, Massys repeats this theme in his *Temptation of St Anthony* (*c.* 1520–4; painted with Joachim Patinir). Here, the contrast between the ugliness of the old woman and the beauty of the young woman is made explicit. As a trio of lovely maids tempt the

saint with forbidden pleasures of succulent, youthful flesh, a laughing old hag hovers in the background, opening her neckline to reveal one of her breasts which is weathered and wrinkled and sprouting tufts of thick hair.

In making his old women ape the actions and appearance of desirable young women, Massys draws upon a tradition of disgust with women who hide 'their true appearance' through the application of creams and potions.[52] But this is also an image which reveals *all* women, regardless of age, to be connected to the mutable and changeable processes of the natural world. The youthful maiden will one day be the aged crone. This is the terror that lies behind the disgust with the aged female body: *but it is about more than just the female body*. It is about the inevitable passing of Time that affects every single one of us.

In Massys' *Temptation of St Anthony*, the fear of sex leading the saint into sin meets something else in the form of the aged woman. Beneath the paint of the sensual young woman – and beneath that of the dissembling older woman – is a skull. In the bone lying beneath desirable (and not-so-desirable) flesh, we find the source of the anxieties which accompany us through life. Contrary to the myths of immortality with which we like to endow our lives and our accomplishments, we are fragile creatures whose very existence is dependent on the processes of a world defined by change and decay. In the ageing body we come face-to-face with this reality, and with

the inevitability of death. In the fear of the old woman, existential anxieties *affecting us all* take on a more manageable shape: they become *her* problem, not ours.

While there are many examples in Western art of the ageing male body, it is seldom treated with the same level of disgust as that visited on the older woman.[53] Representations of elderly males are more often used to elicit sympathy than contempt. In Goya's *Two Old Men Eating* (1820–3), one of the men is so cadaverous as to make one wonder if he is Death Itself, while the other, who appears to have no teeth, is trying to eat. This is a rather pitiful image, and it may make us fear for our own aged future. It does this, however, with pathos and compassion. We, too, will need the care of others. Mariano Fortuny's *Elderly Nude in the Sun* (1871) is rather more upbeat, depicting an old man smiling contentedly as he warms his naked body in the sun; a hopeful view of what the latter part of life might be like.

That the ageing *female* body is treated with disgust, fear and repulsion should give us pause. After all, *all* age and die, regardless of gender, wealth or status. Germaine Greer is onto something when she claims that Western society is 'anophobic', a term she uses to describe the irrational fear of old women.[54] There is something about women and age that stands apart from more general discussions of 'human beings' and ageing. This reflects, I suspect, the regular connection made between women and the natural world.[55] The female body, its changes and cycles, has been routinely connected to

the processes of sex and birth in a way in which the male body has not. Historically, women have been valued for their youth and fertility. When they cease to embody these virtues, there is no place for them. If women over the age of 40 have a superpower, it is invisibility (try ordering a drink at a bar).[56] No wonder women fear 'the Coming of Age'.[57]

Loss accompanies ageing, and we should not deny that. For women, menopause can be a difficult and painful time. It marks the end of the possibility of child-bearing, and for those of us who have not had children and who wanted them, this can feel like another failure, perhaps even a bereavement. These complex feelings meet a medical profession that constructs menopause principally as a disease, a dysfunction, a loss of health. It is possible to think differently about it. It can be something that is embraced, rather than feared. With the sadness that comes from recognizing that something is no longer possible can come something else; perhaps not quite the 'positive life transition' that some feminists would suggest,[58] but something that holds out the possibilities of a new stage of life. As a young woman, I found the idea of the end of menstruation deeply disturbing. Hot flushes, mood swings, the end of fertility, the coming of age. All seemed terrifying, and I preferred not to think about their inevitability. Now the menopause is past, the sadness of not having children sits alongside a feeling of liberation. No longer do I have to spend money on tampons and pads. No longer do I have to try to remember when my period is due. The hot flushes I feared, when they came, felt like a burning away of that which was extraneous to my life. They left me with Bev as

she *really* is, rather than Bev as she is viewed by others.

Losses of this kind act as provocations for new ways of constructing a meaningful life. Feminist philosopher Pamela Sue Anderson suggests something of this in her work on vulnerability. When we experience loss, 'we glimpse … the potential in vulnerability for transformation' (Anderson 2017: 10). There is pain and there is hope, and these feelings can sit side-by-side. We can think differently.[59] The question is whether we are able to move beyond fear of such changes, and think again about where, precisely, the meaning of our transient lives should be located.

Success, failure and the transience of life

Tracing the gendering of success and failure should not lead to the conclusion that the habitual connection made between women and the physical world renders women's priorities essentially different to those of men.[60] My concern in investigating the use to which women's bodies have been put is to expose the fears surrounding the mutable physical body. Connecting women with the supposed 'failures' of the body reveals more than just the limitations of an account of the meaningful life based around attainment and achievement. More importantly, it reveals how the ordinary losses that come with being mutable human animals have become read as forms of failure. When being subject to loss is constructed as failure, the natural processes of the physical world become problems to evade. Of course, the reality is that these

processes *cannot* be avoided: they are the necessary features of a physical universe; they provide the context in which we must live out our lives. Ageing, decay and death are not features of life any of us can avoid; rather they bear witness to the human condition. Instead of framing this reality through the lens of failure, we would be better advised to see these physical processes as providing the necessary limits within which the human task of creating meaning is to be located. Beauvoir's approach to old age in her later philosophy suggests the problem of denying limits in order to emphasize human striving.[61] Like Sartre, she locates the creation of human individuality in a double movement. To become an individual requires being orientated to the future, *and* committed to meaningful projects. 'The coming of age' challenges the extent to which this approach can ever succeed. For the elderly, the future *is* limited; death is a present reality, rather than an abstract boundary framing the context for choice and decision-making.[62]

> What old age reveals starkly is 'the failure of all success.' (Beauvoir [1970] 1996: 368)

The actor, singer and icon Marlene Dietrich would have understood Beauvoir's conclusion. In her forties, her faltering acting career was invigorated when she recreated herself as a singer, performing for Allied troops. Even as she revels in this new success, she fears it will not last:

> I'm afraid, period. A funny feeling. Fear of failing. Fear of having to give up, of being unable to endure this way of

> living. And everybody will say, with a smile, 'Of course, of course, that was a silly idea.' I can't confide my fear to anyone. (Wieland 2015: 374)

There is an anxious anticipation of failure that haunts even the most successful, precisely because success is never final in a world of chance and change. Viewed from the perspective of old age, the anxiety that one's achievements will not last seems far from ridiculous.

Now for Beauvoir, recognizing the inevitable end of the achievements on which success depends is not particularly problematic. With Sartre, she accepts all life's projects to be rendered ultimately absurd by death. This rather pessimistic conclusion raises the question of whether there could be an understanding of life that does not arrive at the conclusion that *all* life is meaningless if one's achievements cannot be secured in any lasting way. Is there a different way of understanding the place of loss – and failure – in life?

Beauvoir alludes to just such a possibility in the concluding remarks to her book on old age. Having noted the phenomenon of elderly politicians who cannot accept that their time is over – often with lamentable results – she comments that 'if old age is not to be an absurd parody of our former life' ([1970] 1996: 540), there is but one solution:

> In old age we should wish still to have passions strong enough to prevent us turning in upon ourselves. One's life has value so long as one attributes *value to the life*

> *of others, by means of love, friendship, indignation, compassion.* (Beauvoir [1970] 1996: 540–1; my emphasis)

Rather than emphasize the self and its projects, a subtle shift takes place. Now it is about locating one's life alongside others: in love, relationship and political action. Reflection on ageing leads her to an understanding of life where projects still have their place, but where they are located more explicitly in the context of life with others.[63]

Beauvoir's words urge us to think again as to whether the categories of 'success' and 'failure' are the right ways of judging a meaningful life. Rather than 'standing out from the world' through identification with our projects, Beauvoir directs us to that which *grounds* us in the world, drawing attention to the relationships that form our sense of who we are. Far from the world being a problem for our identity, the world which surrounds us becomes the realm in which we discover the things that this world enables; and the four qualities Beauvoir suggests – love, friendship, indignation and compassion – are all linked to our relationships with others. This grounded way of thinking affects the perspective taken on the things that cannot be controlled. Conflating loss with failure might hold out the illusion of control over the things that cannot be controlled: ageing, decay and death. But by making ageing a problem primarily for women, a proper engagement with loss and death is avoided. Excluding the ageing female body makes possible the denial of death, but at a price.

Loss and failure are not the same.

The notion of failure reflects a sense of responsibility for an outcome that could have been avoided. Loss, on the other hand, *cannot* be avoided, regardless of how careful we are, for its experience reflects the very nature of life. If I think of my childlessness, this is not a form of failure, even if, at times, I feel it as such. I am, rather, living with loss. That is painful, at times difficult. But accompanying that feeling of emptiness is something else: something that makes me want to explore more deeply my place in a world which is not subject to human control; where the very processes that make it so beautiful are mysterious, beyond the human, and which therefore hold out a rather different way of thinking about the meaning of life than one which would locate it in a set of goals to be achieved or things to be accumulated.

When women are blamed for failing to consistently embody a desirability based upon physical attributes, we get a glimpse of the way in which failure and loss become intertwined. And this muddling of the two suggests something more. When failure and loss are connected in the bodies of women a strategy is offered for controlling the reality of transient life.

The ageing woman becomes the problem, not age itself.

Tempting as this suggestion might be, it is, of course, impossible to follow through, for the fact is that in the midst of life we are *all* in death. No amount of cosmetic surgery

will lessen that reality. No number of nubile young wives can hold that reality at bay forever. If the projection of ageing onto Woman cannot succeed at eradicating death, looking at ageing and death honestly and without fear must become central for thinking again about what it means to live well. When we hide from the ravages of Time, or project its effects onto others in order to escape the fears of our own mortality, we lose the ability to think seriously about what it means to be human in a world of chance and change. We avoid grappling with the existential anxiety which lies beneath the fears that hamper our ability to live well.

If we refuse to run from the things that frighten us, we create the space for thinking differently about the meaning of our lives. Recognizing the reality of transience and dependence makes possible renewed engagement with the question of what it is to be human. Fixating on the striving, independent and resilient individual of neoliberalism does not make for an easy accommodation with such reflections. Paying attention to the experiences of illness and dying opens up better ways of living: as we shall see in the next chapter.

1 As Judith Butler notes, 'Exclusions … haunt signification as its abject borders or as that which is strictly foreclosed: the unlivable, the nonnarrativizable, the traumatic' (1993: 188). 'The basic anxiety, the anxiety of a finite being about the threat of non- being, cannot be eliminated' (Tillich [1952] 1977: 48).

2 See McDowell and Court's trinity of feminine virtues: 'sociability, caring and, indeed, servicing' (cited by Adkins 2002: 60).

3 See Susan Faludi's powerful study of the effect of changes to the workplace on American men in her *Stiffed* (1999).

4 For an analysis of this factor, see Adkins (2002: 59).

5 See also Adkins (2002: 62).

6 See Butler (1990).

7 See Susan Hekman (2014) for an analysis of the influence of Beauvoir on later feminist theorists: and, specifically, the debt to her work in theories like those of Butler.

8 See Adkins (2002: 62).

9 See Adkins (2002: 76).

10 For Gillard's reflections on the sexism of Australian politics, see her autobiography, *My Story*, London: Bantam Press, 2014. For Bill Heffernan's description of her as 'deliberately barren' and the fruit bowl incident, see pp. 101–2.

11 May Bulman, 'Andrea Leadsom on Theresa May and Motherhood', 9 July 2016 https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/andrea-leadsom-interview-theresa-may-mother-tory-leadership- campaign-a7128331.html. Accessed 1 March 2019.

12 See for example Melanie Klein ([1946] 1997) and Anna Freud ([1937] 1993) for two rather different psychoanalytic approaches that maintain the centrality of

achievement of psychosexual development to psychoanalytic theory.

13 See Freud (1925).

14 While there is a move to downplay the significance of bodily sexual markers in light of the experience of people identifying as 'transgender', I am not sure that the significance of sexual identity, present at birth, can be so easily ignored, given the way in which such physical markers have been used in the process of socialization. If we wish to challenge such notions, we cannot ignore the history of ideas that have shaped understandings of male and female; hence my concern to consider success and failure as grounded in the experience and interpretation of the body.

15 See James Nelson (1994) for reflections on what this model of male identity means for understandings of spirituality.

16 See Luce Irigaray's critical reflections on Freud's theory of female sexual development, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

17 See Freud's 'Female Sexuality' (1931) for the complex account of female sexual identity at which he finally arrives.

18 Freud (1920b) suggests that women who look beyond this identification are suffering from a pathological condition.

19 See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (London: Routledge, 1971), section II for Sartre's critique of psychoanalytic theory.

20 For this description, see Sartre ([1943] 1969: 608).

21 'The transcendent' is Sartre's term for the one who is able to 'ex-sist', to 'stand out' from the world. For discussion of the role Sartre assigns to the female body, see Clack (2002: 43–51).

22 For Beauvoir on motherhood, see *The Second Sex*. Recent feminist reappraisals of Beauvoir's work suggest a rather more complex account of motherhood in her writing than simple rejection: see Alison Stone, 'Beauvoir and the Ambiguities of

Motherhood', in ed. Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer, *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pp. 122–33). According to Stone,'a more positive portrayal of embodied maternity – its pleasures, values and complexities – can also be found in *The Second Sex*, so that Beauvoir's attitude to motherhood goes beyond simple hostility' (p. 125).

23 For the range of theorists offering such views of women, see Clack (1999).

24 See Kant ([1764] 1960: 77).

25 Although as Kant points out, the whole point of being noble is not to hope to receive such a title, as much as to bestow it ([1764] 1960: 76).

26 For a feminist analysis of this hierarchical construction of moral frameworks, see Carol Gilligan's classic account (1982).

27 See Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for Metaphysics of Morals* (Indiana: Hackett, [1785] 1981), pp. 11–12.We will return to this claim in order to contend, with Schopenhauer, that a morality located in feeling for others might actually provide a rather better basis for moral action than Kant suggests

28 Kant does suggest that as a woman ages and her 'charms diminish, the reading of books and the broadening of insight could refill unnoticed the vacant place of the Graces with the Muses, *and the husband should be the first instructor*' ([1764] 1960: 92; my emphasis). Female learning is placed carefully within the boundaries of male approval.

29 For Schopenhauer, women remain 'big children, their whole lives long' (Schopenhauer [1851] 1970: 81).

30 See Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 209a.

31 Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993) offers a compelling analysis of the detrimental impact Plato's dualism has on the

appreciation and preservation of the physical world.

32 See *Symposium* 209c–211c.

33 See *On the Generation of Animals* 729b–730b.

34 See Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals* 737a.

35 See *Summa Theologiae* Ia. 92, 1.

36 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a. 93, 4.

37 A similar argument, and doubtless one that Aquinas draws upon, is made by Augustine in *De Trinitate* Book XII, chapter 7.

38 For a classic exploration of the 'Man' of Reason, see Lloyd (1984).

39 We might add something about the uses to which the biblical figure of Eve has been put over the centuries: sin and punishment came into the world through the actions of Eve, not through those of Adam. See Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988); Uta Ranke Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) for two important accounts which trace this process at work.

40 For a ground-breaking feminist analysis of the cosmetics industry, see Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (London: Virago, 1990).

41 The exposure of widespread sexual abuse in Hollywood in 2017 and the '#MeToo' campaign on Twitter revealed the continuing presence of sexism, misogyny and sexual harassment.

42 See Banyard (2010: 39).

43 According to the UK's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in 2014, the success of IVF according to age was as follows: women under 35, 32.2 per cent; women between 35 and 37, 27.7 per cent; women between 38 and 39, 20.8 per cent; women between 40 and 42, 13.6 per cent; women between 43 and 44, 5 per cent; women 45 and over, 1.9 per cent.

44 See Yahoo7 Lifestyle, 22 October 2014.

45 For the 'full story', see *Daily Mail*, 23 August 2016, http://www.dailymail. co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3753829/Maybe-stay-sun-Renee-Actress- looks-tired-wrinkled-promotes-new-Bridget-Jones-film-Australia.html#ixzz4Uyepxo00. Accessed 17 July 2019.

46 In contrast to the criticism directed at Zellweger, 'Peaches &Scream' (@ keli_juepner) posted: 'People talking about Renee Zellweger like they're surprised women look older when they age' (8 August 2016).

47 See Kristeva (1982: 3) for description of these elements as the abject.

48 The abject is found in death 'as it really is,' not in how it might be presented, aesthetically, to us. Thus, 'the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject' (1982: 4).

49 Umberto Eco is a powerful advocate of this method (see Eco 2007: 8).

50 So Tertullian: 'Those women who torment their skin with make-up, or stain their cheeks red and extend the line of their eyes with soot sin against him. There can be no doubt that these women dislike what God has created' (in Eco 2007: 160); and Boccaccio 'You saw her tall and slim…just as you believed her face was real, not having seen those drooping jowls concealed by rouge and powder' (in Eco 2007: 164).

51 See Beauvoir ([1970] 1996: 169–71) on the treatment of elderly women in art and literature where she makes a similar point.

52 See Greer (1991: 4).

53 See Clack (1999), Lloyd (1984), Plumwood (1993) for discussion of this connection.

54 An article on the online magazine Caring.Com suggests the fear of becoming invisible is the number 1 fear women have about ageing. https://www.caring.com/articles/5-

things-women-fear-about-aging.

55 The perceptive title of Beauvoir's (1970) work on this theme.

56 See Zita (1993).

57 'The loss of health, of life, of love, never leaves us unaltered' (Anderson 2017: 16).

58 I am wary of the kind of philosophy of sexual difference that shapes Luce Irigaray's writing and that was developed by Grace Jantzen in her *Becoming Divine* (1998).

59 See Beauvoir ([1970] 1996).

60 See Beauvoir (1970: 377), but also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, for a discussion of the role of death.

61 Sartre makes a not dissimilar distinction between 'being-for-others' whereby a person over-identifies with the values and judgements of others, and 'being-with-others' whereby a secure subjectivity enables authentic action with others. See Cooper (1990, pp. 101–6) for discussion of this distinction.