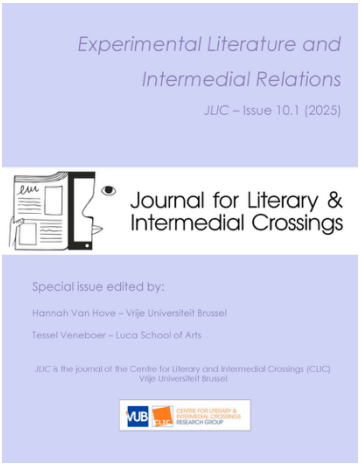

Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings

ISSN: 2506-8709

Journal homepage: https://clic.research.vub.be/journal

Submit your article to JLIC

Reading the Body as the Site of Dreams/Dreaming/Dreamers in Kathy Acker's Work

Eline Cremers – independent researcher

Issue: 10.1

Published online: 1 July 2026

To link this article: https://clic.research.vub.be/volume-10-issue-1-2025

To cite this article: Cremers, Eline. "Reading the Body as the Site of Dreams/Dreaming/Dreamers in Kathy Acker's Work." *Experimental Literature and Intermedial Realations*, special issue of *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2025, pp. 39–59.

Reading the Body as the Site of Dreams/Dreaming/Dreamers in Kathy Acker's Work

Eline Cremers

Independent researcher

The work of Kathy Acker frequently focuses on female subjects who are constrained by the limitations imposed on their bodies by the phallogocentric structures of society and narrative. Engaging with a statement Acker makes in her essay "Seeing Gender" (1995), "[w]hen I dream, my body is the site, not only of the dream, but also of the dreaming and of the dreamer" (*Bodies of Work* 166), this article suggests that dreams in Acker's fiction reveal more fluid ways of understanding the body, and that various motifs, metaphors and narrative techniques – all related to dreams – defy confining bodily boundaries. To indicate the evolution of the relationship between dreams and the body in Acker's oeuvre and shed light on the role of dreams in shaping her narratives, three texts from before, during and after her turn to mythmaking are discussed. First, the way in which dreams, abortions and death influence the boundaries of the bodily site in *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream* (1986) is examined. Then, the article explains how the dreamlike figure of the sailor in *Empire of the Senseless* (1988) reflects an understanding of the body as, in Judith Butler's words, "*a process of materialization*" (*Bodies That Matter* 9; emphasis in original), while the novel's storyworld blurs the distinction between dream and reality. Additionally, considering the motif of tattooing in relation to Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* (1994) illustrates how dreams not only shape the site of the body, but are also shaped by it. Finally, in *My Mother: Demonology* (1993), dreams can be extracted from the site of the possessed body in the form of language through an exorgasm, which can be linked to Julia Kristeva's definition of the abject and McKenzie Wark's discussion of the penetrable body. These readings of the body as the site of dreams/dreaming/dreamers demonstrate that Acker's novels problematize the Cartesian separation of mind and body and contribute to a queer perception of the body.

Keywords: Kathy Acker, dreams, embodiment, Judith Butler, McKenzie Wark

> The dreams we allow to destroy us cause us to be visions/see the vision world.
>
> — Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School* (1978)

> When I dream, my body is the site, not only of the dream, but also of the dreaming and of the dreamer. In other words, in this case or in this language, I cannot separate subject from object, much less from the acts of perception.
>
> — Kathy Acker, "Seeing Gender" (1995)

Kathy Acker "write[s] the way WWW people do" (Rosie X). At least that is what she tells the readers of Rosie X's e-zine *Geekgirl* in 1995. Acker claims she "take[s] stuff and […] put[s] it here and there" (Rosie X). This approach is particularly evident in her early writings,

which are shaped by deconstruction and decentralization, as Acker states in a 1990 text published in her book of essays and art criticism *Bodies of Work* (1997, 85). For her novel *Great Expectations* (1980), Acker, for instance, makes a "structural analysis" of Charles Dickens's novel of the same name (1860), "cutting it up, not even rewriting, just taking it and putting it together again, like playing with building blocks" (*Hannibal Lecter* 15-16). As part of these cut-up experiments, she incorporates dream material – her dreams and those of others – into her writing practice "to break down the boundaries between waking and dreaming" (Acker, *Hannibal Lecter* 5; Kraus 29). She endeavors to find a method of counteracting "self-censorship," because, as she says in a 1993 interview with R.U. Sirius, she worries that she is "writing what people expect [her] to write, writing from that place where [she] might be ruled by economic considerations."

Even when, from *Empire of the Senseless* (1988) onward, Acker's work becomes "constructive rather than deconstructive," as she puts it, her interest in dreams persists (Friedman 17; Nicholls 36). For example, in 1989, she expresses that she enjoys being confronted with what lies beyond control, beyond the rational (Nicholls 36). The cut-up method of her earlier texts has, however, become inadequate. She realizes that "[d]econstruction is always a reactive thing [in which] you're really reinforcing the society that you hate" (Acker, *Hannibal Lecter* 17). To pursue her ongoing efforts to combat self-censorship, Acker seeks a taboo language that "resists ordinary language," because, as *Empire*'s character Abhor states, "[n]onsense doesn't per se break down the codes; speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks down the codes" (House 469; Acker, *Bodies of Work* 147; Acker 134). Acker thus "return[s] to narrative" by "moving to a more internally driven process, writing fiction and myth that comes 'from her' and not from someone else" (Wollen 10-11; Gajoux and Finch 124). She now relies on a language that she "can only come upon" (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 166) by listening to her body, for example when working out and during sex. As a result, Acker's "language of the body" does not "reif[y] the Descartian mind-body split by denying the existence of the body" (*Bodies of Work* 147, 89). Her writing rather "insists upon the presence, even sacredness, of the experiencing body […] as being one with and at odds with the mind" (Nolan 191, 196). Thus, in many ways, Acker's "*body is her intelligence*" (Nolan 196; emphasis in original).

According to Acker, some of the languages of the body are directly produced by the "material body," like "laughter, silence, screaming," while others "liberate corporeality by undoing fixed sense of self or meaning" (*Bodies of Work* 91-92). The latter category contains "languages of flux" – "in which the 'I' (eye) constantly changes" –, "languages of wonder" – in which "[t]he eye (I) is continuously seeing new phenomena" – and "[l]anguages which contradict themselves" (Houen 179; Acker, *Bodies of Work* 91-92). Logocentric language cannot accurately express the intensity of bodily experiences. Only structures reflecting materiality "controlled by change and by chance" (Cao 75; Acker, *Bodies of Work* 149) can convey the language of the constantly changing body in all its contradictions. Acker's emphasis on the materiality of the body and on

fluctuating identities "rather than having a stable essence" (*Bodies of Work* 92; Borowska 97) calls to mind Judith Butler's work. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler suggests that matter should not be seen as a fixed "site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" (9; emphasis in original). The body's materiality is an "effect of a dynamic of power, such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 2). Bodies can then only matter if they are important to the dominant order, the heterosexual matrix.[1]

Like dreams, the languages of the body are "not constructed on hierarchical subject-object relations" (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 166). As McKenzie Wark notes in her book *Philosophy for Spiders: On the Low Theory of Kathy Acker* (2021), "[i]n dreams no self is its own property or anyone else's" (73). When dreaming, the dreamer is both the writer and the reader of the dream. Or, as Acker puts it in her essay "Seeing Gender" (1995): "When I dream, my body is the site, not only of the dream, but also of the dreaming and of the dreamer. In other words, in this case or in this language, I cannot separate subject from object, much less from the acts of perception." (*Bodies of Work* 166). In this way, dreaming can be understood as a language (that can be found in the site) of the body.

Given that dreams are traditionally related to the mind-pole of the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy – because they are "a series of events or images that happen in your *mind* when you are sleeping" ("Dream"; emphasis added) – this article will examine how Acker's dealing with dreams ties into her work with the body, and how it evolves throughout her writing career. To do so, it will read the body as a site of "the dream, but also of the dreaming and of the dreamer" (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 166) in three of Acker's texts from before, during and after her turn to mythmaking: *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream* (1986), *Empire of the Senseless* (1988) and *My Mother: Demonology* (1993).

Like Christopher Kocela, who examines Acker's engagement with Butler in his reading of *Pussy, King of Pirates* (1996), this article will read the dreams, the dreaming and the dreamers across Acker's oeuvre in conversation with theories of gendered embodiment from her contemporaries. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1980) and Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* (1994) are foundational texts within the area of poststructuralism and gender studies. This article engages with them not only to understand the context within which Acker wrote her dream- and body-work, but also to add to the extant scholarship that has often read Acker in relation to poststructuralist theory and French feminist theory. To that end, this article also draws upon the work of McKenzie Wark and Kato Trieu, as the

[1] In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler defines the heterosexual matrix as "a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (151).

contemporary trans studies approach to Acker raises new questions about embodiment and the performativity of gender in her texts.[2]

Dreams, Death and Abortions in *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream*

Boundary-Blurring Abortions

The abortion in the opening scene of Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream* (1986) "problematizes" the patriarchal Cartesian "separation of mind and body which defines woman *as* body and object against a masculine subject," or as "pure matter" (Schlichter par. 13; emphasis in original; Cao 74). By intervening in her material body and "consciously choos[ing] against the feminine roles of motherhood, marriage and reproductivity," the title character becomes "a female-male or a night-knight" (Worthington 246; Acker, *Don Quixote* 10). The body's surface is thus "never merely material" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 131). Since it "is systematically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions," the skin rather designates "the limits of the socially *hegemonic*" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 131; emphasis in original). Wark (110-111) argues that Acker's playful use of gendered language creates mythic worlds where characters can oscillate between different genders – man, woman, girl and boy, as well as the occasional nonhuman – or even assume a plurality of genders. As Margaret Henderson points out, Don Quixote's new role is still very much defined by gender, though: she is a *female*-male – like a "woman president" – and a *night*-knight – or "night to man's day" (151). The abortion thus has boundary-blurring potential, but the outcome remains limited by phallogocentric thinking.

Despite her efforts to transgress the boundaries between male and female, mind and body, and subject and object, by means of her abortion, Don Quixote is held back by the physical pain associated with her female body. "[B]ecoming partly male" proves insufficient to escape her body's limitations: she gets an infection from her abortion and becomes sick (Acker, *Don Quixote* 29, 15). As Butler explains, "[t]he construction of stable bodily contours relies upon fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 132). Therefore, by breaching the boundaries of the body in an unregulated way – that is, by defying the societal expectations placed on the female body – "a site of pollution and endangerment" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 132) emerges,

---

[2] In her review of *Philosophy for Spiders,* Tessel Veneboer points out that Wark provides a reading of Acker that does not deny the philosopher's body but rather demonstrates that "theoretical thinking" is "a bodily task": "Weaving a web of Acker's selves, Wark unwraps herself too" (1, 5). Wark discusses three different philosophies, out of which the first, "of appearances, emotions, bodily functions," a "phenomenology of the body" (60, 81), is especially relevant for analyzing the embodiment of dreams in Acker's work. The second of "the asymmetry of penetration" (Wark 93), which conceptualizes gender in relation to penetration, also proves productive in understanding both the non-cis, non-Cartesian bodies in Acker and the embodied reading experience of her texts. Similarly, Trieu's analysis of the dysphoric body in Acker's work, as presented in his article "Building the Pirate Body" (2020), contributes to an understanding of the body as the unfixed site of the dream/dreaming/dreamer.

causing Don to become ill. For a while, Don's "Dream of Saving The World," which interrupts the linear narrative, provides a "remedy" for her pain (Acker, *Don Quixote* 17). However, given that "[r]eal love is sick," the protagonist realizes she should instead use her illness as "a knightly tool" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 18) to pursue her quest of finding real love. She tries to go past failure – that is, "beyond rationality" and the limits of her body – and chooses to embrace her madness and transform her reality into a dreamlike space of wonder where she can "believe anything" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 18, 19). In short, *Don Quixote* blurs, stretches and reshapes the boundaries between dream and reality, just as she does with the boundaries of her body.

Dreaming and Going Past Death

The dreams in the novel disrupt the linear narrative and blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. Similarly, the repetitive and cyclical dying in the novel creates such a blurring between fiction and reality. Dreams and other "insert[s]" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 21, 25) unexpectedly interrupt *Don Quixote*'s narrative just as death interrupts life. In one of these cut-in dreams, "A SCENE OF MADNESS AND/OR THE DREAM OF DON QUIXOTE," Don is told by a man that "[i]f a woman insists she can and does love and her living isn't loveless or dead, she dies" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 31, 33). He presents her with the option of stopping her visions, which will make her normal and will allow her to live. In other words, Don Quixote's attempt to use her dreams to resist being controlled by patriarchal structures, "requires [her] to submit to societal death" (Worthington 252). Even in her own dreams a man can tell her what to do. Eventually her quest fails because she decides to listen to the man and dies (Acker, *Don Quixote* 36). This will not be the only time Don dies, though. Toward the end of the novel, she claims that she is "dead" and later states: "I am dying" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 201, 205). The false endings affirm the narrative's cyclicality and the inability of the quest to move forward (Ellis et al. 27; Walsh 152). Richard Walsh argues that this creates a "sense of entrapment," generating "a nightmare condition of arrested or cyclical time" (153).

Death could be seen as the body's ultimate limit. Kristeva (3) posits that the process of dying entails that the body falls beyond the border of its existence as a living entity. What remains is the corpse, which is "a border that has encroached upon everything" and is turned into "an object" (3-4). Don's body is confined by the limit of death, but dreams allow for a more fluid relation to it. They allow her to move past the failure that is death without "fainting away" (Kristeva 4). For Don, "[d]reams which resemble death heal the wounds from living" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 184). The medicinal effect of death, made possible through dreams, is reminiscent of Amy Nolan's claim that the language of the body "illustrates the necessity of dying in order to be reborn" (195). Bodybuilding, for instance, necessitates the breaking down of muscle for it to grow back larger (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 145-146). The bodily language can be connected to Kristeva's notion of the abject, which Butler designates as "that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered 'Other.'" and which, while

giving form to the "not-me," "establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 133). Don searches for her body's borders and surpasses them, "challeng[ing] us to see beyond entrances and exits" and "to accept […] death, and move, via pain, to being in relationship with the world" (Nolan 204). Don thus finds power in the pain inflicted upon her by the Oedipal narrative (Worthington 244). According to Amy Nolan, the disruption of the narrative by the cut-in dreams and dying repetitions "reinforces that notion that death, or disintegration, an interruption to life, enables a subjectivity that cannot exist in life" (205). In her dreams, Don can, for example, be both "agent and object" (Schlichter par. 15). In the realms of death and the imaginary, Cartesian oppositions, such as mind/body, reality/imagination, male/female, life/death, subject/object, and rationality/irrationality lose their significance. So, dreams, dreaming and dreamers in *Don Quixote* offer an alternative, fluxional way of thinking about the body.

The Dreamer's Body as Process

Don Quixote's dreams not only blur and stretch out the body's borders, but, when Don accepts her madness, they can also take on the role of the body's matter:

> I'll no longer speak because you are not hearing and will never hear me no matter how I speak. So I am a mass of dreams [sic] desires, which since I can no longer express them, are foetuses beyond their times, not even abortions. For I can't get rid of un-born-able unbearable dreams, whereas women can get rid of unwanted children. (Acker, Don Quixote 194)

Don's inability to articulate herself in patriarchal language or to find a community with which she could share "a meaningful language outside the dominant discourse" (Walsh 167) turns her into a lump of inexpressible dreams and desires. This challenges the traditional Cartesian dichotomy between the mind and the body. Dreams are not merely cerebral phenomena; they are an integral and vital part of Don's body. Even though her dreams are trapped, Don's dreaming body *is* capable of changing and expanding its borders, approximating a non-Cartesian one. Moreover, Don *does* have access to the the dream language materializing inside of her, but she can only use it when speaking to herself – that is, within the confines of her own body (Acker, *Don Quixote* 195). In this "language which wasn't quite language," homophones like "mourning"/"morning," "night"/"knight" and "nuns"/"nones" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 195, 206) are interchangeable. Don's playful use of language likely adds to the confusing reading experience created by the cut-ins and repetitions. The reader is struck by a sense of *déjà vu*, urging them to pay close attention to the text. They are prompted to question whether there is another relationship between the homophones besides phonetic similarity. According to Trieu, this sensation demonstrates how it takes "a physiological operation" – a language of the body – "to engage with the phenomena of absence" (503), of the unknowable, non-Cartesian body. Experiences that create disturbances in the body or point to its physical limits, such as abortions, provide an opportunity for self-knowledge because they

temporarily put the body in control of how it is formed (Trieu 503; Finck 94). It is where the (female) body can start to escape gender (Trieu 505). Shannon Finck (83) identifies the possibility for self-knowledge in *Don Quixote* as coming from the merging of bodies as texts. The novel's abovementioned nightmarish "sense of entrapment" (Walsh 153) washes over onto the reader who, in merging with the text, feels stuck in the book. As Don states, "[t]he realms of dreams are that of death because the dreamer" – or reader – "doesn't expect" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 184). In accordance with Wark's claim that Acker's philosophy of phenomenology stems from "confusion" or "non knowledge" (63), the constant interruption of the reader's immersion in the book has a physical effect on their body. Trieu interprets Acker's masochistic struggle between ordinary language and language of the body as a means of understanding the impossible body dismissed as "unbornable, unbearable" (504; *Don Quixote* 194). As Don's body must bear her dreams, Don's and Acker's bodies do the same with the "MALE TEXTS" (*Don Quixote* 39) they adopt, and the reader's body with this unbearable book.

"DON QUIXOTE'S DREAM" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 201) further underscores the embodiment of her dreams. She writes down this dream after her death, stressing how she can communicate more freely in the realms of dreams and death. Since she realizes she cannot exist without language or love, she decides to "get married" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 202). Again, this entails that she must stop dreaming. Without dreams her "feelings and touchings [will narrow] into a controllable range," (Acker, *Don Quixote* 202) proving their visceral quality. This same quality is demonstrated when in her dream Don smells a bodily odor so strong that even the nostrils from which the deathly smell emanates, recoil in shame (Acker, *Don Quixote* 205). Thus, Don Quixote's *entire* body functions as the site of the dream, the dreaming and the dreamer (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 166).

Another false ending concludes the novel: the protagonist "aw[akes] to the world which lay before [her]" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 207). The circularity of the novel is foregrounded, proving that "resistance is only possible through the effort, not the result" (Worthington 252). She goes through death and comes back to life, proving that she does not have to succumb to rationality: "[t]he self must be more complicated than life and death, more complicated than duality" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 190). Dreams relieve the hierarchization of mind over body and rationality over irrationality and allow the bodies of the text, of Don, of Acker and of the reader to merge. The fact that Don wakes up "drunk" (Acker, *Don Quixote* 207) seems to indicate that she is still mad. So, despite waking up, she has not lost her ability to dream and blur (bodily) boundaries. As Emilia Borowska argues, madness allows for a "fluid" "passage between reality and the world of dreams" (130). In this way, the fluidity of Don's body is emphasized at the very end of the novel.

Dreamlike Worlds and Dreams Carved onto the Sailor's Body in *Empire of the Senseless*

The Sailor's Body

Empire of the Senseless (1988) marks a shift in Kathy Acker's writing as, instead of relying on cutting up the narrative like in *Don Quixote*, she turns to "to the communal myths that pervade our culture" (Scholder xii) as the structuring element for her work. Kocela (78-79) describes the shift as going from a castrating (cut-up as piracy) to a penetrative writing method. In this new method, piracy takes the form of incorporating other theories and texts, such as Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, into her own fiction by overwriting and merging them with her search for a non-phallocentric myth (Kocela 98). Also, her interest in finding languages of the body in her writing process results in a further development of the body as the site of the dream/dreaming/dreamer. The fluid body of *Don Quixote* paves the way for the bodily fabulations of the figure of the sailor in *Empire* that "does not exist on either side of the gender binary" (Trieu 500) and more overtly breaks down the mind/body split through its connection to the dream world. This non-Cartesian model has as its center the labyrinthine colon instead of the head (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 91). The decapitated body "precedes the mind because only its physiological functions can think through the impossible" (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 90; Trieu 504). Acker's sailors have identities that can fluctuate like waves, whose "selves happen as effects" (Wark 147). The cyborg character Abhor observes that "[t]hough the sailor longs for a home, her or his real love is change. Stability in change, change in stability occurs only imaginarily" (Acker, *Empire* 114). The domain of dreams acts as a bridge between the realms of imagination and reality, and the sailor has unimpeded access to this liminal space. This is suggested by the nautical nature of dreams in the novel. The world of these "wet dreams" "is so embodied that words cannot describe it" (Acker, *Empire* 189; Nolan 204). This can be exemplified by a passage where Abhor dreams of having sex with her sailor father:

> Let's fuck on top of this fountain. Splashing the waters of hydro-chloric acid into my nostrils. Daddy. Pull off my fingernails. My back has been carved into roses. You scream that it's not only by you. As if you're alive or as if I'm not dreaming. As if I really possessed you and you really possessed me, we tore off each other's head and ate out the contents, then pecked out the remaining eyes, pulled out the sharks' teeth and sucked opium out of the gums, my vagina was bleeding. And I said to my father, the sailor, 'Let's not be possessed.' (Acker, *Empire* 84)

Alex Houen interprets this visceral passage as the Oedipal ban becoming undone through the medium of dreams, which permit a different type of relationship to the body (182). Like an "Oedipal exorcism," the bodies of Abhor and her father are torn apart, "dislimn[ed]," thereby revealing their fluid and mutable nature, "break[ing] open taboo dreamscapes" (Houen 182, 181) through Acker's language of flux and wonder. The characters' bodies are described as a jumble of different (body) parts that can be sculpted, carved, and taken apart, suggesting that they are in a constant "*process of*

materialization" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 9; emphasis in original). Indeed, Abhor suggests further in the novel that "[h]umans make themselves and 're made through pain plus dreams" (Acker, *Empire* 138). The presentation of the body as a fabrication is reinforced by the fact that the text itself is also presented as such, as Houen notes (182). The dream is conveyed in the "mode of possibility" and "change" through the repetition of "As if …" (Cao 76; Houen 182), which stresses its fictional nature. Upon awakening from her dream, however, all that remains of Abhor's father is his corpse (Acker, *Empire* 85). The non-Oedipal, non-Cartesian body that can go beyond death only exists in dreams. However, by repeating the phrase "[c]arved into roses" (Acker, *Empire* 86) when mentioning that she and Thivai are going to get tattoos, Abhor hints at the ability of tattoos to similarly transform the body.

The Dreamlike World as a Space of Wonder

Like the physical body, the body of the text can go past failure. According to Acker, when writing, the writer is "fucking with" (*Hannibal Lecter* 22) the text. The body of the text is therefore subject to the same laws of "change or chance" (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 150) that control the material body. Going past failure with a text means "go[ing] into a space of wonder," a world that "isn't about ownership" (Acker, *Hannibal Lecter* 23). Like in a dream, things become blurry. The distinction between subject and object is unclear and names, sexuality and gender can be left undefined (Acker, *Hannibal Lecter* 23). The writer, reader and characters are thrown "*in medias res* into situations" – like the eye/"I" is in dreams – and sail through these unusual and dreamlike maritime spaces without the prior knowledge of what they are going to write, read or experience (Gajoux and Finch 131; emphasis in original; Acker, *Hannibal Lecter* 23).

Empire of the Senseless's storyworld feels like a space of wonder. The reader is encouraged to leave "their fixed place" and immerse themselves in a world where "[d]ualities are cancelled in favor of an immediate consciousness of the interrelation and interdependence of things" (Kleeman xi; Glück 55). At times the fictional world of the novel bears resemblance to the present-day world, yet it is incomplete and contains gaps, paralleling the nature of a dream. As Alexandra Kleeman writes, "[w]hen viewed from one angle, it remains a recognizable collage of miseries and drab pleasures, a mirror of our own times. But viewed from another, it possesses an alien sheen, the sense of a non-patriarchal, non-phallic newness" (xi). This "hologram"-like (Kleeman xi) quality is underscored by the labyrinthine structure of the plot. *Empire* begins with an "attempt to find a myth," after which the second part "trie[s] to describe a society not defined by the oedipal taboo" (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 11, 12). Yet, Acker states that by the conclusion of the latter part, she recognized the impossibility of conceiving such a world and thus returned to her "original question" (*Bodies of Work* 13). The novel's structure seems to coil in on itself. Also, even though dreams do not interrupt the narrative to such an extent as in *Don Quixote*, they still add a disruptive and confusing element. As Abhor's abovementioned dream demonstrates, the dreams are described viscerally and lyrically

(cf. "My back has been carved into roses" (Acker, *Empire* 84)). This could result in an embodied reading experience, in which the reader is invested in the plot without necessarily knowing what is going. Chapters end abruptly – like when the narrator wakes up from their dream – and storylines suddenly switch – as do the narrators – evoking the dream sensation of trying to escape a seemingly endless "series of rooms" (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 95). To put it in Wark's terms, even though the textual body is penetrable/ readable in many ways, the penetrator/reader is not its master (162). Instead, the bodies of the text and the reader are both simultaneously penetrator and penetrated, "opening while being opened" (Wark 153-154, 162). Through their contact, they get to know themselves rather than the other. So, the relationship between the textual body and the reader's body lies in the lines of Finck's (83) abovementioned merging of bodies as texts. Thus, despite the turn to a more linear narrative, the novel's space of wonder has a similar effect on the reader as the repetitive dying in *Don Quixote*.

Tattooing Dreams onto the Body

In *Empire*, tattoos reflect how dreams simultaneously shape and are shaped by the body. Dream tattoos mold the site of the body, while also literalizing the embodied experience of dreaming. This can be illustrated by a scene in which Abhor meets with a fortune teller, who provides her with the following prediction:

> As soon as you step out of here, everything in your life will be exactly as it was. You will spend all your time sleeping. When you sleep, you will dream you have a lover. She will be about to come. Always about to come. Your body straining into her will waken you. (Acker, *Empire* 109, 118)

After this encounter, Abhor meets a sailor named Agone. The real world begins to merge with her dream world, resembling "the edges of a dream during the waking state" (Acker, *Empire* 138). In what follows, this article will provide a close reading of a scene where Abhor watches as a dream is inscribed onto the site of Agone's body through a tattoo.

First, dreams allow the site of the body to expand its borders by being carved onto the body's surface, causing pain or pleasure. In her discussion of "The Body as Inscriptive Surface" in her book *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz claims that inscriptions on the skin "function quite literally to increase the surface space of the body, creating out of what may have been formless flesh a series of zones, locations, ridges, hollows, contours: places of special significance and libidinal intensity" (139). The tattoo of the dream creates such zones on Agone's skin, literally making it the site of the dream, the dreaming and the dreamer. During the tattooing process, the body's surface space expands, making it capable of reaching new extremes. Like a bodybuilder, Agone surpasses failure by "turn[ing] his mind from the actuality of this pain away to dream" (Acker, *Empire* 138). This suggests that dreams are more real than physical pain or at least pave the way to another kind of reality or space of wonder.

The process of tattooing the dream coincides with a climb toward a bodily climax, reinforced by a narrative climax. By following how the tattoo gets carved onto Agone's body, which builds suspense, the reader is stimulated to become absorbed in the development of the plot. The narrative accelerates when Agone and the tattoo artist share a sexual experience: "[m]ale hand on male hand. Stomach on stomach. Male feet on male feet. Mouth on mouth. Cock on cock. Agone pulled away from the tattooer before either of them came because he didn't want to reach any port" (Acker, *Empire* 140). This speed, which the reader might also experience through embodied simulation, comes from the rhythm of the paragraph. The short sentences with elided verbs become shorter and sharper in sound, until the narrative ends in an abrupt way as the characters pull away from each other before reaching a physical climax. Just as the orgasm moves through Agone's body, the text runs through the reader's body. So, dreaming also expands the site of the reader's body by allowing it to transgress its own boundaries through experiencing the limits of the character's body.

After the anti-climax, Abhor surprisingly reappears and says, "I went outside into morning's beginning" (Acker, *Empire* 140). This awakening suggests that the whole scene with Agone was just a dream. The sudden ending of the chapter and the shift in narration in the next one reinforces this hypothesis. The dream world and storyworld are temporary dwellings from which the dreamer/reader can abruptly awaken. The fortune teller's prediction ("Your body straining into her will waken you." (Acker, *Empire* 118)) also points to the fact that Abhor was awakened by Agone's near-climax. The process of penetrating the body's skin with the dream brings the body toward a climax without reaching orgasm – that is, without crossing the body's limit, but stretching it, seemingly in control of the body's borders.

Secondly, in *Empire*, abstract dreams become concrete by being tattooed on the skin. Because "the tattooist has to follow the body" (Friedman 18), the dream is shaped by the body. This could be seen as a metaphor for how dreams are influenced by lived experiences. Abhor points to the relationship between Agone's body and the tattoo:

> The first colour was red. The first colour was blood. The ship's sails were crimson. Blood makes the body move. Blood made the ship's body move. Blood changed the inhuman winds into human breath. Agone sang with the pain. The crimson streams of the winds were the roses surrounding the ship. (Acker, *Empire* 139)

Just like blood makes the body move, the red ink/blood makes the tattooed ship's body move. This symbolizes the projection of embodied memories into one's dream world. Grosz points out how "it is problematic to see the body as a blank, passive page, a neutral 'medium' or signifier for the inscription of a text" (156). Each person's body enters into a unique, symbiotic relationship with what is carved onto its surface. Ink and blood merge, resulting in a tattooing process in which "dreams are made actual through pain" (Acker, *Empire* 138; Neldner 4). The dream tattoo "living" (Acker, *Empire* 140) on the site of Agone's body is so real that its thorns cause physical pain. In short, due to the figure's connection to the dream realm, the decapitated body of the sailor can easily influence

and shape its boundaries, and vice versa. This illustrates the importance of recognizing the body's unique materiality, while also highlighting the potential of dreams/dreaming/dreamers to impact the body that is their site (Grosz 156). By encouraging an embodied reading experience, dreams draw attention to the possibilities of the non-cis, non-Cartesian body that embraces its nature of being "*a process of materialization*" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 9; emphasis in original).

The Exorgasm as a Portal to the Internal Dream Space in *My Mother: Demonology*

The Exorgasm as a Narrative Technique

In *My Mother: Demonology* (1993) bodies are possessed by different entities in numerous ways. This possession or confinement can be counteracted by exorcising *demons* through the combination of dreaming and masturbating. The ensuing dissolution of the mind/body split enables the dreamer to access a bodily site of resistance, an inner dream space. In its possession/embodiment of the dream character's body, the body of the reader becomes possessed/absorbed by the body of the book, or the site of the novel's dream space.

For Kathy Acker, the (female) orgasm is a language of intensity one can come upon like a dream. "Since the body's […] end isn't transcendence but excrement," the "pure intensity" of the body can be extracted in the form of a stream of language by simultaneously masturbating and writing (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 92; Rickels, "Body Bildung" 168). Nevertheless, Acker describes the two as different writing techniques: "[t]he writings I get from masturbation aren't fantasy narratives" – like the ones derived from dreaming – "but are descriptions of architectures, of space shifts, shifting architectures, opening spaces, closing spaces" (Rickels, "Body Bildung" 169). Yet, *My Mother* implies that the two are connected:

> Being able to come, I decided while touching myself, necessitates being able to relax and enter another world. To come is to dream. I don't know how it is for males. But I just can't come when I need to protect myself from my parents, and this is the time when I need to most. (Acker 43)

The "culture of censorship" in the United States – represented by the protagonist Laure's parents – has resulted in a "*loss of language*" (Colby, "Radical Interiors" 193; Acker*, My Mother* 237; emphasis in original). Georgina Colby argues that in the novel this form of censorship can be resisted by turning to the body and extracting language from within its inner realms ("Radical Interiors" 193). During dreams (and orgasms), the mind – or rationality – departs from the body. As a result, what could be called an *exorgasm* (a portmanteau of exorcism and orgasm) occurs, whereby a portal opens to the "[d]reams run[ning] through [the] skin and veins," allowing desire and writing to "ooze" (Acker*, My Mother* 133; Gajoux and Finch 145) from the body.

Although the exorgasm "[t]extually […] enacts the projection of the corporeal and psychical interior outwards," it is through this purging that the body's interior can become the "site of dream, memory, desire, sexuality and corporeality" (Colby, "Radical Interiors" 192-193). Through the expulsion/abjection of language from the body, the narrator discovers a sense of empowerment in her female body that, as Grosz puts it,

> has been constructed not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as a formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment – not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order (203)

The language leaking from the body refuses "to conform to the laws governing the clean and proper, the solid and the self-identical" (Grosz 195) and blurs the lines between the internal and external, the real and imagined. As Claire Finch observes, it is important to acknowledge that "any body can ooze, even if historically porousness tends to be associated with female-identified bodies (with all their penetrability / stabilized against a mythic male impenetrability)" (Gajoux and Finch 145). This perspective adds to Wark's (104) reading of Acker which asserts that any body can penetrate, as the penetration might as well come from a tattoo needle or a strap-on. In this regard, she owes bodily difference more to penetrability than to gender, the asshole or mouth being an equal port of entry into the body as the vagina (Wark 104). This results in an understanding of the bodies in Acker's texts as all being "potentially trans" (Wark 90). So, despite its connection to the female orgasm, the exorgasmic language also fits into a non-cis view of the body. It establishes a boundary around an inner space that is not externally imposed but made on the body's own terms.

The exorgasm gives rise to narratives driven by desire that combine labyrinthine, shifting spaces with fantastical elements, making them feel like dream spaces. This points to the intertwinement of the narrative techniques of dreaming and masturbating. As Wark points out, describing "a body that is not" (172), necessitates a language that is not – that is, which does not conform to conventions and instead examines its possibilities – wherefore, imagination comes into play. As Colby ("Radical Interiors" 197) suggests, the protagonist's labyrinthine travels occur within the domain of the imaginary, as evidenced by the following scene:

> Now I would have to buy a motorcycle to get Hans back. Though I had never had him … I traveled through the countryside … in the countryside … This land is bleak. Gray and a green that is actually gray, flat as a sheet of paper ……..……
> ……...
> Its depths are circular roads, the closest actual thing to which are racetracks within racetracks which have no center …….
>
> Just beyond these depths lay my first stop, a place where motorcycles could be purchased.
>
> […]

> Riding so excited me that I forgot all about Hans.
>
> […]
>
> In the section of my childhood before I had any friends, the architecture of my uniform and school building and all that they named education was static (not subject to time or change), or fascistic. I have destroyed that architecture by dream in which learning is a journey. Chance and desire form the voyage. (Acker, *My Mother* 192-193)

When the narrator leaves behind the static architecture of her childhood for a fluid, irrational and impossible dream space, the narrative becomes driven by chance and desire (Colby, "Radical Interiors" 199). It transitions "from conventional narrative structures […] to language-centred writing and non-conventional grammatical constructions" that more effectively and authentically convey a sensory experience (Colby, *Kathy Acker* 199). The typography – which features numerous ellipses and paragraphs that differ substantially in length – gives the passage a wave-like quality, reminiscent of the undulating nature of the female orgasm.[3] This is exemplified in Acker's *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996):

> While I masturbate, my body says: Here's a rise. The whole surface, ocean, is rippling, a sheet that's metal, wave after wave. (32)
>
> Relaxation's opening the field, but I don't dare – I'm holding back – open to being a rose; a rose unfolds again and again until the nerves drive the flesh into pure nerves; they are – I'm closing again (becoming rigid) – these are the rhythms of the labyrinth. (32-33)

Through the use of repetition ("the countryside") and irregular pauses, the passage in *My Mother* mirrors the opening and closing of a rose or rising and falling of a wave described in *Pussy*. Additionally, *My Mother*'s narrator describes the process of starting and stopping her motorcycle, and how her excitement makes her forget about the object of her quest. Both the narrative and protagonist are led by desire rather than rationality.

The Possessed Body

In *My Mother*, as in *Don Quixote*, the character's bodies are constrained by phallogocentric language and structures. This limitation is shown through the possession of these bodies by other physical and textual bodies. The book's second epigraph, for example, evokes "the property of divisibility" (Hanson 87) of the maternal body.

> My mother began to love at the same moment in her life that she began to search for who she was. This was the moment she met my father. Since my mother felt that she had to be

[3] In her essay "Colette" (1985), Acker describes "[f]emale sexual awakening" as "a process of traveling rather than of arriving coming and stopping" (*Bodies of Work* 155). She points out that the female orgasm has its oscillating or sailing nature in common with the act of dreaming: "The woman comes, but she comes to somewhere only to go somewhere else, as in a dream." (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 155-156). Both dreams and sexuality can cause the self's identity to shift, only to shift again.

> alone in order to find out who she was and might be, she kept abandoning and returning to love.
>
> My mother spoke: (Acker, *My Mother* 3)

As the narrator and the mother have not yet been identified, Fergus E. O'Brien (94) reads the first section of the book as raising the question whether its narrator is still the first narrator or their mother, thereby blurring the distinction between mother and child. According to Kristeva, leaving the womb – the separation of a body from another body, an abjection following the loss of distinction between "I" and an Other who "precedes and possesses" the "I" – is "a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling" (10, 13). So, in the words of Laurence A. Rickels, "[y]our relationship to your own body is always at the same time the relationship to your mother's" ("Body Bildung" 174). This restricts the connection to one's own body and pleasure. Despite their separation, the demon mother always remains present in the child's body, "interioriz[ing] prison" (Acker, *Bodies of Work* 69). As a result of the maternal possession, the narrator reaches a state of non-existence in which she has no language of her own (Acker, *My Mother* 10).

Yet, as the narrator's body matures, the mother cannot control (the borders of) the daughter's body anymore and "an unseen site of rebellion" (Colby, "Radical Interiors" 195; Acker, *My Mother* 10) emerges. By exploring her sexuality through masturbation, the daughter can exorcise the demonic mother. By moving "towards orgasm," a portal opens to a new type of language of wonder in which she can "make [her] body's imaginings actual" (Acker, *My Mother* 10). She tells herself a story which contains sensory descriptions of the natural spaces surrounding her, filled with alliterations and assonances: "*[c]ricket-rustling and fat-bumblebee-buzzing. Filthy flies are fertilizing its pastures*" (Acker, *My Mother* 13; emphasis in original). Still, the narrator believes masturbation to be insufficient and seeks the help of a man "to escape [her] parents" (Acker, *My Mother* 11). She loses her virginity, which allows her to exorcise the demons of her past, releasing a short stream of exorgasmic language: "[i]n me dead blood blushed crimson into the insides of roses and became a living color that's unnameable" (Acker, *My Mother* 14). By having sex (which is linked to the color red) she gets "the authority to be other than red" and instead, she becomes a rebellious "living color" (Acker, *My Mother* 14). The metaphoric language and descriptions of spaces and colors help the reader to visualize the impossible space. Like a demon possessing someone, the reader possesses – or latches onto – the narrator of the novel, literalizing the embodied experience of reading as in *Empire of the Senseless*. The recurring motif of the color red – the color of dreams, nightmares and "of all the journeys which are interior, the color of the hidden flesh, of the depths and recesses of the unconscious," "of rage and violence," "of wildness and of what is as yet unknown" (Acker, *My Mother* 7, 10) – especially contributes to visualizing the fictional world and its dream spaces, immersing and absorbing the reader in it.

Another way in which Laure counteracts the possession of her body caused by parental and patriarchal confinement is by assuming demonic properties herself. Wark writes that Acker's "[g]irls enter masculine identities, penetrate them, through the senses, through the projection of their own penetrability" (149). For Laure, this means that she can take on different forms or enter different bodies by dreaming and reaching toward orgasm. To illustrate, she gets rid of her obsession with and possession by B with the help of a "continual" exorgasm generated by the "Antichrist" (Acker, *My Mother* 151). During their sexual interaction "hundreds of goat-headed devils" "travel into, slap, scratch, even stroke the inner regions of [Laure's] body," triggering the source of the "language of the flesh" (Acker, *My Mother* 151-152) – and triggering a bodily response from the reader through the visceral description. The experience frees her from the "ties" of conventional language and limitations of her female body, as evidenced by her transformation into "an animal by rolling on [her] own back and playing with [her] lower lips" (Acker, *My Mother* 152). Like Justin Gajoux states in his discussion of one of Acker's early writings, the "reference to the animal [...] could be deeply linked to [an] alternative semiotics of desire" in which "tactile and olfactory sensations are suddenly spread, intensified and multiplied" in an attempt "to intervene on the scopic narrow perspective of language organized around the phallus" (Gajoux and Finch 144). Laure's strategy for increasing her pleasure is to repeatedly approach orgasm, only to subsequently relinquish it (Acker, *My Mother* 152). Although female sexuality is often conceptualized as an "uncontainable flow" (Grosz 206), it is through masturbating and working toward failure that Laure learns how to understand and control her own body. She trades her obsession with B for a preoccupation with the body (Acker, *My Mother* 152). In this rational "male world" where there is "no language" for women, Laure has finally found a language she can "speak" (Acker, *My Mother* 168, 152): the language of the body.

Reminiscent of the medicinal properties of dreams in *Don Quixote*, dreams in *My Mother* can heal the body by exorcising (childhood) traumas that possess and restrict it, reinforcing the embodied nature of dreams and their ability to break down the distinction between mind and body. Given that "[m]urder is a dream," the devil can guide the narrator past death to "the source of dreams" – her childhood – which is located in the same bodily site as the "underworld of writing/reading/remembering" (Acker, *My Mother* 35, 24, 265, 80; Rickels, "Devil Father Mine" 84). In so doing, her "body extricates itself" (Kristeva 3) from the border between life and death, allowing her to break free from the restricting ties to her parents. Following her death, the narrator "descend[s] into her dreams" to "the witch's library" (Acker, *My Mother* 261)[4], which houses the language of the body. Long ellipses emerge, along with architectural descriptions ("This beach was also a building") and repetitions ("time passed in which there was no memory") (Acker, *My Mother* 261, 263), instilling within the body of the reader a sensation of being pulled

[4] Acker considers the witch to be a non-authoritarian figure, because, unlike the parent, she "doesn't want to control humans" *(Bodies of Work* 36).

downward by the oozing language through embodied simulation. The sensory intensity of the exorgasmic language in *My Mother* engenders a more immersive experience than in *Don Quixote* and *Empire*, where the reader is continually snapped out of the dream. The narrator cries, grinds her teeth, vomits and finds her childhood back in the interior realm of the body, but becomes stuck there: "I'm now in a dream in and from which it's impossible to move" (Acker, *My Mother* 265, 267): the body as site of the dream/dreamer/dreaming. As Kristeva puts it, "[i]t is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled" (3-4). She uses the "red writing" of her dreams to start over, demonstrating "the liberating possibilities offered by non-rational languages" (Rickels, "Devil Father Mine" 97; O'Brien 123). *My Mother: Demonology* ends with "a reflection of [the narrator's] face before the creation of the world," "as if the novel were the frontal features of a consciousness that precedes the fixity of mind-body splitting" (Acker 268; Harryman 39). So, like in *Don Quixote*, death is not the end. Paradoxically, it is through death and dreams that the narrator can heal and "reinvent herself and get beyond the essentialist indoctrination of her childhood" (O'Brien 74).

Conclusion

In conclusion, in Kathy Acker's novels, dreams are not dismissed as mere escapism; rather, they are depicted as having an actual impact on the body. Houen suggests that over the course of Acker's oeuvre, dreams are put in a more "positive" light by having more "biopolitical potentials" (165). At first sight, the pessimistic connection between dreams and death in Acker's novels seems to prove otherwise. Both in *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream* and in *My Mother: Demonology*, it is by dying that the protagonists find power and control over their own bodies, reinforcing how there is no hope for female bodies and other abject ones in patriarchal societies. The only viable solution is to die and escape into a dream world. In an interview with Larry McCaffery, Acker responds to the feminists criticizing her work because of her pessimistic portrayal of female masochism:

> I feel that this business about positive role models is just as stupid. If you're arguing that the society is sexist, why do you want to argue that everything is happy? And why do you want to insist on having these strong, wonderful, terrific women? [Laughs.] That implies there's no reason to have this violent struggle. (96)

Hence, pessimism can be necessary to shed light on the confining limitations imposed on female, queer, trans and other abject bodies by phallogocentric structures and language.

However, focusing on the dream-body relation in Acker's work shows how, despite this prevailing pessimism, there is a gradual shift toward a more positive connection to the body throughout the three novels. As the discussion of *Don Quixote* illustrates, transgressive bodies are already present in Acker's novels prior to *Empire of the Senseless*. That being said, Don's multiple deaths, her capitulation to marriage and the narrative's cyclical structure reinforce female powerlessness to a greater extent than in *Empire* and

My Mother. Thus, Acker's work increasingly encourages dreaming up more fluid and queer ways of understanding the body and its relationship to gender, the mind/body split and its surrounding environment. In 1989, Acker articulates her intention to "find more than survival," indicating her interest in "value" (Nicholls 38). By attentively focusing on and listening to the body, new languages can be identified to articulate a queer perspective on the body and challenge the constraints imposed by societal and phallogocentric structures. In her novels, unlike in the real world where "values have disintegrated so that the only value left is life" (Nicholls 38), there are alternative values to be found in death, dreams, myths, wonder, tattooing, orgasm, and so on. In short, reading the body as the site of dreams, dreaming and dreamers in Kathy Acker's writing not only reveals the inextricable intertwinement of dreams and the body in shaping (the reading experience of) her experimental narratives, but also demonstrates the importance of dreaming up novel, non-Cartesian, queer ways of meaning-making.

Works Cited

Acker, Kathy. *Bodies of Work*. Serpent's Tail, 2006.

———. *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream*. Grove Press, 1986.

———. *Empire of the Senseless*. Grove Press, 2018.

———. *Hannibal Lecter, My Father*. Semiotext(e), 1991.

———. *My Mother: Demonology*. Pantheon Books, 1993.

———. *Pussy, King of the Pirates*. Grove Press, 1996.

Borowska, Emilia. *The Politics of Kathy Acker: Revolution and the Avant-Garde*. Edinburgh UP, 2019.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* Routledge, 1993.

———. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.

Cao, Claudia. "The Rhetoric of Madness in Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*." *International Journal of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2017, pp. 72-79. *ProQuest*, https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijclts.v.5n.3p.72. Accessed 17 Feb. 2021.

Colby, Georgina, "Radical Interiors: Cindy Sherman's 'Sex Pictures' and Kathy Acker's *My Mother Demonology*." *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2012, pp. 182-200. *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2012.677236. Accessed 5 July 2022.

———. *Kathy Acker: Writing the Impossible*. Edinburgh UP, 2016.

"Dream." *Cambridge Dictionary*, 2025, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dream. Accessed 7 Nov. 2025.

Ellis, R. J. "Informal Interview." *Kathy Acker: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, edited by Amy Scholder and Douglas A. Martin, Melville House Publishing, 2018, pp. 25-32.

Finck, Shannon. "Bodies at Liberty in Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*." *Angelaki*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2017, pp. 81-97. *Taylor & Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2017.1406049. Accessed 17 Feb. 2021.

Friedman, Ellen G. "A Conversation with Kathy Acker." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1989, pp. 12-22. *Dalkey Archive*, https://www.dalkeyarchive.com/2013/08/02/a-conversation-with-kathy-acker-by-ellen-g-friedman/. Accessed 2 August 2022.

Gajoux, Justin, and Claire Finch. *Kathy Acker (1971-1975)*, edited by Justin Gajoux, Éditions Ismael, 2019.

Glück, Robert. "The Greatness of Kathy Acker." *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, edited by Amy Scholder et al., Verso, 2006, pp. 45-57.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana UP, 1994.

Hanson, Clare. "The Maternal Body." *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, edited by David Hillman and Ulrika Maude. Cambridge UP, 2015. *ProQuest*, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781107256668.007. Accessed 7 July 2022.

Harryman, Carla. "Acker Un-Formed." *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, edited by Amy Scholder et al., Verso, 2006, pp. 35-44.

Henderson, Margaret A. *Kathy Acker: Punk Writer. Routledge*, 2020. *Open Research Library*, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315100098. Accessed 15 May 2021.

Houen, Alex. *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing Since the 1960s*. Oxford UP, 2012.

House, Richard. "Informational Inheritance in Kathy Acker's 'Empire of the Senseless.'" *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2005, pp. 450-82. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4489127. Accessed 30 June 2022.

Kleeman, Alexandra. "Introduction." *Empire of the Senseless*, by Kathy Acker, Grove Press, 2018, pp. ix-xii.

Kocela, Christopher. "Resighting Gender Theory: Butler's Lesbian Phallus in Acker's *Pussy*." *Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 17, 2006, pp. 77-104. *Taylor & Francis* Online, https://doi.org/10.1080/10436920500468659. Accessed 19 June 2025.

Kraus, Chris. *After Kathy Acker: A Biography*. 2017. Penguin Random House, 2018.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. 1982. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 2002.

McCaffery, Larry and Kathy Acker. "An Interview with Kathy Acker." *Mississippi Review*, vol. 20, no. 1/2, 1991, pp. 83-97. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20134512. Accessed 10 Aug. 2022.

Neldner, Jonas. "'This book is dedicated to my tattooist': Corporeal Inscriptions as Écriture Féminine in Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*." *Gender Forum*, no. 74, 2019, pp. 13-32, 80. *ProQuest*, https://doi.org/10.18716/ojs/gefo/2019.2509. Accessed 30 June 2022.

Nicholls, Stan. "Kathy Acker Interview by Stan Nicholls." *Interzone*, no. 27, 1989, pp. 36-38. *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/stream/Interzone_027_1989-01-02/Interzone_027_1989-01-02_djvu.txt. Accessed 2 Aug. 2022.

Nolan, Amy. "Writing a Sacred Self: Kathy Acker and Wonder." *Reading and Writing Experimental Texts: Critical Innovations*, edited by Robin Silbergleid and Kristina Quynn, 2017, pp. 189-210.

O'Brien, Fergus E. *The Politics of Family in the 1990s Postmodern Fiction of Kathy Acker, William Gaddis, and Robert Coover*. 2006. Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, PhD dissertation.

Rickels, Laurence A. "Devil Father Mine." *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, edited by Amy Scholder et al., Verso, 2006, pp. 78-98.

———. "Body Bildung: Laurence A. Rickels Talks with Kathy Acker." *Kathy Acker: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, edited by Amy Scholder and Douglas A. Martin, Melville House Publishing, 2018, pp. 161-76.

Rosie X. "Pussy and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (or How to Be a Pirate Online and Channel Your Energies so as to Remember Your Dreams…)." *MobyLives*, 1995, https://editions-ismael.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/1995-Interview-with-Rosie-X-for-Geekgirl2.pdf. Accessed 14 Jan. 2026.

Schlichter, Annette. "'I Can't Get Sexual Gender Straight': Kathy Acker's Writing of Bodies and Pleasures." *Postmodern Culture: An Electronic Journal of Interdisciplinary Criticism*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2007. *Project MUSE*, https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2007.0023. Accessed 17 Feb. 2021.

Sirius, R. U. "Kathy Acker: Where Does She Get Off?" *Io Magazine*, vol. 2, 1993. ALTX, https://www.altx.com/io/acker.html. Accessed 24 July 2022.

Trieu, K. K. "Building the Pirate Body." *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2020, pp. 499-507. *Duke UP,* https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-8553188.

Veneboer, Tessel. "Penetration as Philosophy (Review of McKenzie *Wark's Philosophy for Spiders: on the Low Theory of Kathy Acker*)." *The B2o Review*, 12 Aug. 2022. *Ghent University Academic Bibliography*, http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-8764338. Accessed 2 July 2025.

Walsh, Richard. "The Quest for Love and the Writing of Female Desire in Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*." *Critique*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1991, pp. 149-68. ProQuest, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1310172641?accountid=11077. Accessed 20 Feb. 2021.

Wark, McKenzie. *Philosophy for Spiders: On the Low Theory of Kathy Acker*. Duke UP, 2021.

Wollen, Peter. "Kathy Acker." *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, edited by Amy Scholder et al., Verso, 2006, pp. 1-11.

Worthington, Marjorie. "Posthumous Posturing: The Subversive Power of Death in Contemporary Women's Fiction." *Studies in the Novel, vol*. 32, no. 2, 2000, pp. 243-63. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/29533393. Accessed 14 Feb. 2021.