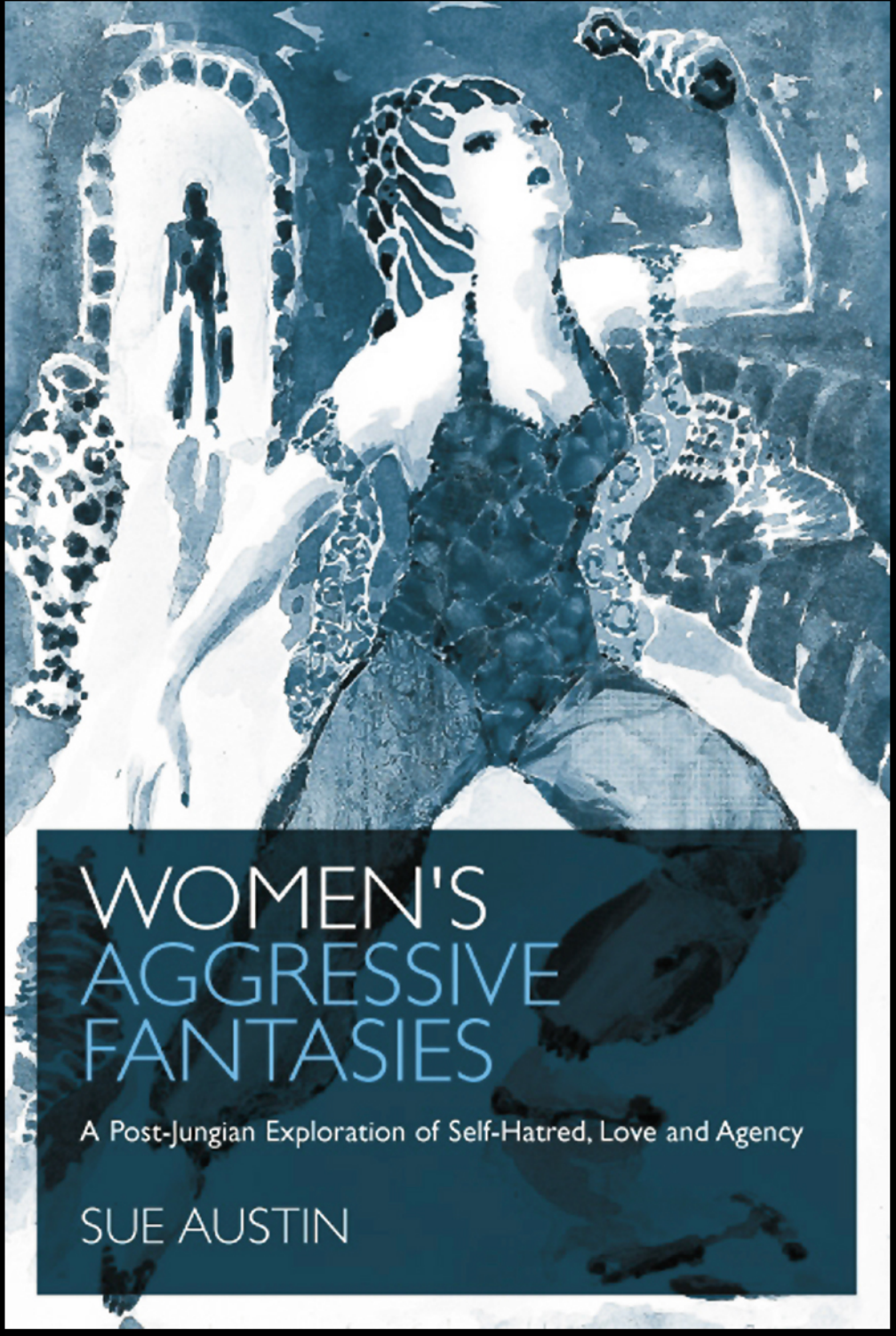

WOMEN'S AGGRESSIVE FANTASIES

A Post-Jungian Exploration of Self-Hatred, Love and Agency

SUE AUSTIN

Women's Aggressive Fantasies

Women's Aggressive Fantasies examines the roles of aggressive fantasies and impulses in contemporary women's lives. Such impulses have previously been overlooked by psychoanalysis, feminism and depth psychology when, as Sue Austin argues, they should occupy a central position.

Drawing together apparently disparate strands of theory from feminism, critical psychology, contemporary psychoanalysis and post-Jungian thought, this book succeeds in providing a new insight into the phenomenon of women's aggressive energies and the images which express them. A collection of vignettes from women's day-to-day lives are used to demonstrate how the management of aggressive fantasies plays a significant role in women's self-experience and their position in society. These fascinating, moving and, at times, shocking, extracts demonstrate how aggressive fantasies form the basis for psychological, relational and moral growth. This book will help clinicians engage with the fantasies and draw out their therapeutic value. In particular, the author examines the crucial role of aggressive fantasies and energies in women's sense of embodiment, and in recovery from severe and chronic eating disorders.

Women's Aggressive Fantasies provides a valuable insight into the role of aggressive impulses in women's sense of agency, love and morality, which will fascinate all those involved in the practice or study of psychoanalysis, critical psychology and gender studies.

Sue Austin is a Jungian analyst specialising in working with people with severe and chronic eating disorders.

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Chapter 1

A different way of looking at aggression

AGGRESSION AS A POINT OF CONNECTION

For women, aggressive fantasy can act as a point of breakthrough in the realms of relationship and agency. Of specific interest to me is the point where relationship and agency appear to clash, leaving women with what appears to be a choice between the two. I argue that a capacity to hold and direct aggressive energy for the good of relationship is a significant human achievement, and that an increasing capacity to do so correlates with an increasing capacity to build and sustain lively relationships without compromising oneself or one's values.[1]

In order to help the reader get their bearings with these ideas, I will start by illustrating my theme with a short story by Helen Garner, 'The Feel of Steel 1' (2001) from a collection called *The Feel of Steel*. I quote Garner because of the clear way she describes her discovery of the potential embedded in her aggressive energies. She also makes links between her aggression and her capacity to experience the Other more fully, and she indicates a connection between her aggression and her sense of agency. Garner outlines an early encounter with the sport of fencing at age 15, describing her teacher in the following terms:

> What Mr Fadgyas had at his disposal was a way of focusing and directing aggression: of making fighting beautiful. The aggression in me, however, was deeply buried. Though I was quick on my feet, I was scared – not of getting hurt, but of attacking.
>
> (2001: 173)

Garner went on to flirt with fencing, but eventually lost interest through 'a couple of inglorious competition bouts'. Her interest was, however, re-aroused in her 50s, through her sister Judi (who had also been involved in fencing as a young woman) who faxed her an advertisement for 'Fencing for Older Adults'. Garner describes her second lesson:

> Judi and I pulled on masks and breastplates, stepped on to the piste and crossed swords. I went for her. She blocked me. I went again. It was thrilling. Adrenalin streamed through me. I wanted to attack, to be attacked, to have to fight back. I remember the lunges, the sliding clash of metal, how the sword hand rises as the foil-tip hits the target. It was glorious. We both burst out laughing. We only stopped because she didn't have a glove: I almost struck her hand and she flinched back. We lowered the blades. She pulled off her mask. Her eyes were bright, but I saw with a shock how gentle her face was, how feminine, under the cloud of hair.
>
> (2001: 174)

What is being described here is more than the pleasure of physical exertion, or even the thrill of fighting. Garner is exploring the edges of her identity as a woman, and in particular, the places where that identity breaks down in interesting and enlivening ways. The breakthrough that she is pointing to is that the disciplined, aggressive tussle of fencing connects her to her sister's gentleness and, I would suggest, not only her sister's beauty and humanity, but also to something important in herself. Through the shocking recognition of the immediacy of her sister's aliveness Garner is connected to her own aliveness.

This kind of heightened apperception of the Other (and of oneself through the splendour of the Other) is a moment of passionate love. That it can come through the disciplined and focused use of aggressive energy is the point that I will be exploring in this book. Garner recognises the rarity and value of what her aggression offers and concludes:

> That's what I want. I want to learn to fight, but not in the ordinary wretched way of the worst of my personal life – desperate, ragged, emotional. I want to learn an ancient discipline, with formal control and purpose. Will my body hold out? I hope it's not too late.
>
> (2001: 175)

Garner's short story was brought to my attention by an analysand – a woman in her 60s, who felt that Garner's description echoed a crucial aspect of her own struggle. My analysand, whom I shall call Amy, had brought up her children more or less single-handedly, having been left by her partner when the children were young. Amy had structured her career around her responsibilities to her children and came into analysis saying that she had been angry all her life, and felt that now, for the first time ever, she had space to explore that. When, some time into analysis, she came across Garner's story she was very drawn to the idea of learning to fight, but, as Garner says, not in the ordinary, desperate, ragged, emotional way, but in some other way, for which she had no language or images. Like Garner's, Amy's aggression was

buried, and she was scared of her desire to attack. Amy could see, however, that something about her buried, unmapped aggression might provide a link to the sense of aliveness and capacity for greater intimacy with others that she sought, and Garner's short story seemed to be gesturing towards these links too.

Amy's concerns echoed the many conversations I have had with women analysands who describe themselves as having always been angry, or having been angry for decades. Her comments also resonated with something from my work with women with long-term, severe eating disorders, which is my area of clinical specialisation. These clinical interactions have been amplified by everyday dealings with women and men: a few months ago I had a conversation with the real estate agent from whom we were buying our new home, and she spoke of how her life had changed when her sister gave her a book on women's anger to read in her 50s. A few months before that I had a social conversation with a woman in her 60s who, in addition to looking after her terminally ill husband, running her business and being a mother to her now grown-up children, wrote short stories. Our conversation was pleasant, but fairly run-of-the-mill polite until I asked her what she was working on. She lit up with enthusiasm when she told me that she had just written a story about a woman who commits a murder and gets away with it. It turned out that she had written numerous stories about women's 'badness' and that doing so was her great passion.

In response to these vignettes, I found myself asking the Jungian question: what are these aggressive energies for? But I wanted to give it a feminist twist: what are these aggressive energies for, both in terms of inner, psychological priorities and in terms of identity formation (or perhaps refusals of the categories of identity themselves)? How do these dynamics interact with the ways in which female identity operates and is circulated in Western culture? (that being the culture which I have direct access to).

As a tactic for trying to answer these questions, I have drawn from Moira Gatens the notion that for feminist theory to be effective, it has to operate as a patchwork quilt, drawing what it needs from wherever it can be found. In this way it is possible to move beyond existing bodies of thought to say something meaningful about women's experience (1991: 1).

BROADENING THE DEFINITION OF AGGRESSION

Thus my choice has been to focus on what women's aggressive energies *are for*, rather than what they *are*. As well as being a standard Jungian tactic for engaging with unconscious material, this is also a deliberate political move, which I make in response to the fact that defining aggression or the energies associated with it is an unavoidably political act. Gerda Siann spells out the extent to which this is the case:

> how a particular individual selects an approach or paradigm for [classifying or understanding aggression] depends on a host of factors. These range from those that might perhaps be regarded as situational, such as culture, era and discipline, to those that are more idiosyncratic, such as the value systems that the individual endorses and his or her temperamental disposition. Thus, to take an example, it seems to me impossible to extricate a deep belief that aggression is largely innate, and therefore inevitable, from the political implications of that belief. And it seems equally likely that those individuals who present an approach to aggression which argues for one clear and unambiguous root, whether it be innate or environmental, are likely to be people who find ambiguity not only theoretically unsatisfactory but personally threatening.
>
> (1985: 225)

Aggression has been defined through a number of discourses, including anthropology, ethology, psychology and criminology. As Siann indicates each discourse emphasises different aspects of aggression, but almost invariably they take as given the *status quo* assumption that men 'do' aggression, sometimes 'to' women, although mostly 'at' each other in order to get something they want. As Campbell observes, '[m]en own aggression. They do not recognise the legitimacy of any other expression of it but their own' (Campbell, 1993: 54). Women's acts of aggression are seen as aberrant and pathological. Women's place in the schema of aggression is usually to be seen as the natural 'victims' of male aggression, males being thought to be innately more aggressive. Occasionally, women are cited as having aggression which is related to their hormonal cycles or to protectiveness towards their children, but women's aggressive energies remain somehow contrary to an assumed 'natural' order.[2]

Unsettling these assumptions to make room for accounts like Garner's has involved working from a much broader notion of aggression. Women's aggression is so rarely expressed in straightforward, externally focused, measurable ways. Another way of putting this might be that the traditional definitions of aggression are structured in ways which exclude and render invisible the locations and styles of women's aggression. Indeed, even talking about women's aggression is problematic – so little of it is clearly visible, and even less of it creates the kind of impact needed to rate on traditional scales as 'aggression'. Hence my choice to blur the language slightly and refer to 'women's aggressive energies' and 'women's aggressive fantasies' when I want to say something about women's experience, and 'aggression' when I want to refer to more traditional definitions, usually structured around male socialisation. Occasionally, I refer to women's aggressive energies as aggression, but usually only when I feel that the context makes it clear that I mean the enlarged concept of aggression that I am seeking to develop.

Women's aggressive energies show themselves in no-go zones of identity:

places where female identity cracks or breaks up, and it is not always obvious that the resultant fragments are connected. I suggest that shards of women's inner lives such as self-hatred, erotic rape fantasies and elements of eating disorder (and disordered eating) contain a connective, and potentially transformative unconscious thread of aggression.

Numerous authors have examined the actions of 'monstrous women' – women who kill or act sociopathically.[3] Again, however, this takes us back into traditional, masculine socialisation-focused models of aggression. I am more interested in the aggressive energies of ordinary women – where these energies turn up in their inner dialogue, in their fantasies, dreams, fears and longings, how this relates to the ways in which women live their lives, and what choices are available to them on a moment-to-moment basis. In order to bring these kinds of aggressive energies into focus I take as a starting point Andrew Samuels' definition of aggressive fantasy:

> Aggressive fantasy promotes a vital style of consciousness . . . Aggressive fantasy has much to do with our desire to know; it is not, in itself, completely bloodstained and unreflective. . . . Aggressive fantasy can bring into play that interpersonal separation without which the word 'relationship' would have no meaning. In this sense, aggressive fantasy may want to make contact, get in touch, relate. . . . Aggressive fantasy forces an individual to consider the conduct of personal relations. When one fantasizes an aggressive response to one's desires on the part of the other, one is learning something about that other as a being with a different but similar existence to one's own. Without aggressive fantasy, there would simply be no cause for concern about other people and so aggressive fantasy points beyond ruthlessness to discover the reality and mystery of persons. 'It is only when intense aggressiveness exists between two individuals that love can arise'.
>
> (1989: 208–209, quoting Storr)

Samuels' definition opens up a more interior, psychological understanding of aggression, but it also emphasises the relational, moral dimensions of aggressive fantasy as it brings us up against the Otherness of the Other. These dimensions emerge in Garner's account because what she offers is not a bald account of the thrill of aggression, but the psychological possibilities which emerge from engaging with her own aggressive energies and fantasies.

In a follow-on essay, 'The Feel Of Steel 2' (2001a), Garner finds out that she is expected to fence in the Inaugural Veteran's Section of a State fencing competition. She tries to get out of it, but her coach will not let her. The day of the competition arrives with muggy, 30°C weather, and she pulls on the mask – heavier than her practice one, with darker wires, smaller holes and a more spongily padded bib than she is used to. Garner describes sweat trickling through her hair, and dripping off her as she dons the layers of

competition clothing. She faces a Sherman tank-like man from the country, who swats her blows like a mosquito. Just as we expect her to start to withdraw in the face of anticipation of a humiliating, ugly defeat, she writes: '[h]e wiped me out. I shook his hand in bliss' (2001a: 205).

Then, as the tournament went on:

> The longer we fenced in the awful heat, the cooler my head became. I felt *daring*. I didn't care if I lost but I went all out to win. My mind, normally so scattered and fleeting, tuned itself to my body. I grasped for the first time in my life what tactical thinking might be, how I could vary my attacks, feint and wait and spring a surprise. I saw in a series of bright flashes what was required, what I might one day be capable of, if I stuck at this.
>
> (2001a: 205–206; original italics)

Garner's text points to the extraordinary transformation which comes from being able to play over her own aggressive desires again and again, until there is a shift in her capacity to think. Garner's commitment to exploring her own aggressive energies and the outer edges of her capacity to stay with them enables her to keep going without being overcome by shame, humiliation, sense of helplessness, frustration or despair. Through this, I would suggest that she is able to be totally absorbed in the moment – without self-judgement or self-criticism. She simply no longer cares what the Other thinks of her. Garner has forged an amalgam of aggression and curiosity – a passionate desire to learn about herself, which she is exploring relationally. Hence, perhaps, her bliss while shaking hands with the man who has beaten her, and has provided her with the opportunity to learn something vital (in both senses) about herself.

Most importantly, Garner is not interested in winning – simple notions of competition and power are not her focus. Instead, she is after a different kind of power: genuine power 'within', rather than power 'over'. Thus she describes getting a bronze medal for her participation as a moment of 'radiant companionship'. Garner is not exploring aggression in order to beat others, but to come closer, to know herself and others better.

This fits with Amy's trajectory in analysis; what emerged for her was that in order to find out what she wanted in life and to be better able to support her adult children emotionally, she needed to get into muscular emotional and psychological tussles with people, and that she longed for friends to meet her in this and to engage with it as a central aspect of relationship and love. I suspect that it is also part of what black feminist Audre Lorde is asking for when she makes her plea to white women to confront her chronic anger (Tietjens Meyers, 1997: 212), and what Lorde is also talking about when she writes that anger between peers births change (Tietjens Meyers, 1997: 204).

Garner wisely explores the limits of her aggressive capacities in a place

where the gradients are favourable: a fencing class is much safer than being a female teacher dealing with violent children or adolescents, or in a violent domestic situation. I suggest, however, that ordinary women explore their own aggressive energies and fantasies in less apparent ways all the time, and often in unfavourable circumstances. While circumstances may vary, there is an area of overlap, which is the frame of mind in which aggressive energies are most likely to flip over into a vehicle for breakthrough. This emotional space is often arrived at through some form of disciplined psychological work and Radical Buddhist nun Robina Courtin sketches a Buddhist perspective on the kind of emotional framework in which such a breakthrough is possible.

While being interviewed on Australian national radio, Courtin explains that the Buddhist emphasis is on learning to distinguish between the negative, neurotic, I-based use of energy and other potential uses of the kind of strong energy which can manifest as anger, or, if configured differently, as compassion. She lists the characteristics of energy coming from such a negative state of mind as:

> it comes from a huge sense of I, it comes from fear, it's narrow, it's a sense of separateness, and it wants to harm.
>
> (Courtin, interviewed by Rachel Kohn, 2003)

Garner's story describes the non-neurotic, positive use of strong energy – her aggression is expressed with a minimal sense of I, very little fear, great breadth of vision and willingness to engage as fully as possible, and without the desire to harm herself or the Other. From this place, aggression becomes a point of connection and expansion.

The female psyche offers a vast array of points of engagement with these energies, many of which are hard to see as the start of potentially valuable journeys, because of the way in which female identity has traditionally been viewed. As mentioned earlier, self-hatred can offer just such a point of engagement, although it can be hard to recognise it as such, and hard to keep a clear eye on the seeds of agency embedded in it. This book offers a way of seeing the value in these points of connection through aggressive fantasy, and some ways of thinking about how to take up the invitations they offer.

HIDDEN AGGRESSION AND AGENCY

But before embarking on an exploration of the covert images of women's aggressive energies which dominate the chapters that follow, I want to introduce some overt images to amplify the aggression-agency link I am making. A woman who had read a paper of mine contacted me and recounted the

following dream. The dreamer is larking about with some friends, as though at the end of a school term (but as adults). They create an explosion and run for their lives. Later conversations reveal a rumour that someone suicided in the explosion – remains were found. The dreamer is very concerned about whether or not to confess, and whether she will be caught if she does not. She is also worried by some splashes of the explosive material on her body, which she notices later and feels that others must have seen. The horror of the dream left the dreamer profoundly unsettled.

Another woman who participated in a seminar described a dream in which she saw an unknown man standing at the edge of a cliff. He lifted his hand to wave at her in a non-threatening way. She suddenly found her body being lifted into the air, against her will so that she was arranged like a torpedo, with her right arm stretched out like a battering ram. She felt her face contort in murderous hostility; her body was carried by an incredible force straight ahead towards this man, intent in killing him, even though she had no desire to do so.

In a similar vein, David Hart describes the following incident that occurred in the life of a male analysand of his:

> This man was on vacation far away from home and from analysis, in fact on a trek in the mountains of Nepal, when a decisive event occurred. He was resting in a mountain pass over an abyss when there walked by him a Sherpa carrying an immense load of baggage. My client had a sudden, almost over-powering urge to push this little man off the pass and into the abyss. He struggled with the temptation and the moment passed: the Sherpa went by. But he was left with a shattering realization of what he could actually do to another person, not merely, as before, of what others were always doing to him . . . he had a new and vivid sense of himself *as the agent of his life and not merely as a reactive victim*.
>
> (1997: 97–98; italics added)

Note again the connection between aggressive fantasy and agency. Furthermore, awareness of one's capacity for destructive expressions of aggression does not necessarily make one more violent: in the case of Hart's analysand, it brings to his attention the violence done by imagining oneself to be merely a reactive victim. As Samuels suggests, aggressive fantasy becomes the basis of moral consideration.

I would say, however, that such interpretations, while true for both genders, are often much harder to access and build on for women. Again, this is because of the structure of female identity and the way in which femaleness has been taken to be synonymous with non-aggression (as both have traditionally been defined). Clearly this traditional arrangement is false: women do have aggressive energies, and struggle to find ways of engaging with them and learning about the amalgams they can form.

Often women's aggressive fantasies and impulses are well disguised, barely acknowledged, and encoded in what might, at first sight, appear to be a fantasy of romance; close inspection, however, reveals intricate systems of expression and management of aggression. Tania Modleski comments on the appeal of Harlequin Romances:

> A great deal of satisfaction in reading these novels comes, I am convinced, from the elements of a revenge fantasy, from our conviction that the woman is bringing the man to his knees and that all the while he is being so hateful, he is internally grovelling, grovelling, grovelling . . .
>
> (1984: 45)

More frequent are women's 'victim' fantasies, and it is these which dominate this book because they are the more traditionally socially sanctioned (and therefore far more common) vehicle that women use to explore aggression. My reasons for being loath to label women's 'victim fantasies' masochistic are discussed later. What needs to be said at this stage is that labelling them in this way obscures a link I want to draw to the foreground, that is, the connection between women's aggressive fantasies and women's sense of their own agency. Through her discussion of a dream of her own, Marie Louise von Franz, an early analysand and subsequently fellow analyst of Carl Jung, provides an important clue for thinking about these matters which forms the basis of Chapter 2. von Franz's dream is a classic 'victim' dream, but she makes the link between it and her creativity and agency, and in so doing, I suggest that she takes responsibility for the aggressive energy in the dream and the question of the self-destructive amalgams it had formed.

APPRECIATING AGGRESSION

Ultimately, it is women's hidden levels of aggression and aggressive fantasy that I am most interested in. Specifically: why does women's aggression end up being expressed so often in self-hateful, and apparently masochistic imagery? How do such shapings and expressions conceal, promote or destroy possibilities of agency? How can such imagery be engaged with so as to bring out the creative, connective, enlivening possibilities that Garner encounters in her own aggressive energies?

But before proceeding with this exploration, I need to outline some positions and assumptions which exploring women's aggressive fantasies have led me to. First, a key dimension of understanding individuals' struggles with themselves and others is the breadth and depth of their repertoire for creative engagement with their own aggressive energies and those of others, as well as the extent to which they can use these energies in enlivening and relational ways. Here I take my measure from Bersani's reading of Freud

which is that in *Civilization and Its Discontents* we 'don't move *from* love *to* aggressiveness . . . rather, love is redefined, re-presented, *as* aggressiveness' (Bersani 1986: 20–21, original italics). Translating this into everyday life, one might say that a hallmark of a good relationship is the capacity to enjoy a really muscular, 'down to the wire' disagreement from time to time, and know that it is not only safe to do so, but that committed, aggressive engagement is an expression of one's own deepest love, and, likewise, that of the Other's deepest love too.

The second assumption is that 'aggression' is shorthand for certain kinds of energies which are, in themselves, 'value neutral', but tend to focus around the relentless nature of aliveness and desires for agency. Again, Samuels provides an insight when he quotes Tom Steel: 'aggression wants to bite, tear, smash, explode, find alternatives and push on to new territory' (1993: 163). This comment points out the creative possibilities and push towards embodied agency which dwells within aggression, alongside its destructive and annihilatory potentials. What matters are the amalgams formed between aggressive energies and other energies, and the degree of consciousness which can be brought to them. For example, an aggression/love/curiosity amalgam could express itself as creative passion. Alternatively, an aggression/hatred amalgam might express itself as an outburst of physical violence in certain circumstances, or violent withdrawal in other circumstances. Here, I am including in the term 'circumstances' the gender and social position of the protagonist(s): it is socially more acceptable for men to express an aggression/hatred amalgam in violence, while it has traditionally been more acceptable for women to express such an amalgam as a cutting withdrawal.

Repertoire of expression and use of aggression is so central to identity that it is even possible to argue that its range and style of performance are key indicators of a person's gender, class, ethnic background and choice of sexual object. The phenomenon of middle-class, professional men going to soccer matches in order to be involved in brawls between fans may be a kind of subculture tourism – making excursions into groups where the rules around where and how aggression (and also violence) can be expressed may be quite different to those attached to other areas of their lives.

The third point develops from the preceding suggestion that the process of defining aggression is political. As a consequence, the definitions of aggression, which are embedded in psychological theories, are also political entities, carrying with them social values and assumptions about what constitutes the best social order, and the ideal citizen. When I started this project, I looked to object relations theories of aggression for understanding. Eventually I gave up, realising that I could learn more about aggression and the range of emotional amalgams it can form from popular culture than I could from reading object relations theorists. Two particular sources of insight stood out: the first was stand-up comedians, much of whose effectiveness seems to me to rest on a capacity to engage with their own aggressive energies and the aggressive

dynamics of their audience with style and daring. Different performers handle these aggressive energies differently, channelling them towards different ends, moving them through different amalgams and different tones in idiosyncratic ways. Also of note is how often stand-up comics weave their humour together around places where our performance of identity fails.

The second source was listening to rock music from as many bands, styles and eras as possible, but with a focus on those who were most creative and diverse in their engagement with amalgams of aggressive energies. Indeed, careful listening reveals rock as something of a random, but broad-ranging exploration of amalgams of aggression, and the different kinds of energetic and erotic effects these amalgams can be used to produce. What comes through in rock music and is missing in object relations is the raw pleasure associated with the sheer aliveness of aggressive energy. The energies associated with amalgams of aggression are pleasurable in their own right, and this is what Garner expresses so well. These pleasures resist and outmanoeuvre bourgeois anxieties about aggression and desire, anxieties which are revealed by the object relations desire to move rather too quickly towards positions which are considered more psychologically 'developed'. Above all, rock music shows how aggression is not just 'aggression' in the object relations way. It is 'aggression and frustration', or 'aggression and a desire to explore power and sexual charisma', or 'aggression as part of the thrill of being alive', and so on.

OBJECT RELATIONS AND WOMEN'S AGGRESSIVE ENERGIES

This kind of *appreciation* of aggression, its potentials, its amalgams and pleasures is a sensibility which is missing from object relations and a comment from Samuels provides an account of why this was so:

> Object relations theories unwittingly perpetuate the political *status quo*. The findings of depth psychologists are, inevitably, embedded in a particular cultural and sociopolitical matrix and hence cannot avoid taking on a prescriptive as well as a descriptive project. Object relations theories focus on intrapsychic and interpersonal explanations for personality development and dysfunction. They tend to rule out sociopolitical or other collective aspects of psychological suffering. The version of personality that object relations presents, with its accent on the decisive part played by early experiences, maternal containment, and the move toward the depressive position or stage of concern, is, in many senses, little more than a reproduction of the kind of personality that the culture which surrounds object relations already valorizes.
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> (1993: 275–276)

My interest is in how and where these energies are felt and lived by ordinary women, and the challenge of finding a language for exploring these matters, which does not import the conservative identity politics of object relations. Samuels' definition of aggressive fantasy (quoted earlier) is an important first step towards this because it opens up a way of thinking about the inter-relationship between the interior, psychological dimensions of a woman's experience of her own aggressive energies, alongside the ways in which identity politics seek to set the parameters of her experience of herself and the world around her.

Shortly, I will resume my critique of object relations, but first, I want to return to the theme of how the production of gender has been entwined with the definition and positioning of aggression, and introduce some illustrations. These processes of mutual definition are central to the creation and stabilisation of Western identity as we know it. As the parameters of identity change over time, the standards and practices around women's expression of aggression and agency change with them.

Consider how, in Jane Austen's eighteenth century *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennett is discussed in terms of ridicule by the young women who are her social superiors. Her 'crime' is to walk across the fields to Netherfield Park to visit her sister who is sick there, and arrive with a good deal of mud on her petticoats (1987: 81–82). The women, who are wealthy socialites, recall the state Elizabeth's clothes were in when she arrived, and make fun of them. But the member of their party who is most important socially, Mr Darcy, fails to join in this 'sport'.

On the contrary, his comments indicate that when Elizabeth arrived, he had not noticed the state of her clothes, but saw, instead, that the exercise had brightened her eyes (1987: 82). Austen writes '– A short pause followed this speech, and Mrs Hurst [one of the society women] began again' (1987: 82). At this point Mrs Hurst resumes her character assassination of Elizabeth and her family. The pause of Mrs Hurst's surprise which Austen puts before this resumption of the attack is a mark of surprise, possibly shock, that Elizabeth's agency – her desire to be the source of her own thoughts, actions and movement – did not make her an object of ridicule for Mr Darcy too. It should have made Elizabeth unacceptable to any right-thinking man, but Mr Darcy's response rather takes the wind out of Mrs Hurst's sails. In order to be recognisable as a 'good' young woman, Elizabeth should have been performing her role within its socially ascribed limits, displaying her frailty and fine sensibilities in a suitable fashion.

At a subsequent meeting, the other society lady (Miss Bingley) teases Elizabeth, saying that Elizabeth despises cards, and is a great reader, taking no pleasure in anything else. Again, this is an attack on Elizabeth for being independent-minded. One of the great appeals of *Pride and Prejudice* to a woman is that Elizabeth's wilful self-reliant agency, with its honest, sharp-eyed edge of intelligent feistiness actually makes her more attractive, not less,