

Gift Logic, Mother Sense and Language

On Victoria Welby's Significs

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Victoria Welby a conçu une approche spéciale à la théorie du sens qu'elle appelle significs. Le concept central de son œuvre, qu'elle appelle le « sens maternel », et qu'elle associe avec la “logique du don,” avec la capacité humaine pour l'altérité et la créativité, est le sujet de discussion dans sa correspondance avec le philosophe anglais Ferdinand C.S. Schiller et le pragmatiste américain Charles Sanders Peirce, entre autres. L'auteure ajoute que, au-delà de la contribution de Welby qui questionne les ordres linguistiques, sémiotiques, pratico-éthiques et pédagogiques, les implications de sa théorie du sens sont particulièrement intéressantes pour la « question-femme » et le discours féminin en général.

Meaning, Otherness and Gifting

The English philosopher Victoria Lady Welby (1837-1912)¹ designated her special approach to the theory of meaning with the expression “Significs.” Welby makes an original contribution to understanding life and language at the scientific level as a sign and language theorist and at the level of socio-historical reality, with her special focus on love and

care for the other as guiding values for healthy social practice. Otherness and gifting emerge as constitutive components of interpretive and translative practice, but even more essentially as antecedents with respect to communication, as the very condition of possibility of the latter. In the face of the limits of identity logic as it finds expression in the order of discourse, the capacity for otherness and gifting, for excess and overflow emerge as determining factors in the construction of subjectivity and interpersonal relationships.

In addition to Victoria Welby the sign experts providing the theoretical framework of this text—Mikhail Bakhtin, Charles Sanders Peirce, Charles Morris, Emmanuel Levinas—all know that signs, language and social practice converge, and that a sign calls for another sign which interpreting the former expresses and develops its meaning. In other words, the sign flourishes and functions in the otherness relationship. The sign's vocation, including the verbal sign, the word, is to be interpreted by the other, is encounter with other signs, with other words, is dialogue and listening. From this point of view,

orientation in the sense of dialogic participation, collaboration, living together, unindifference towards the other can be traced in the very “nature” of the sign. Essential to the practice of using signs is translation and encounter with other signs, with other words not only in other sign systems and other languages, but already within the same sign system, the same language. To speak and communicate at large, to signify and translate inevitably occur in the relation between identity logic and otherness logic (Petrilli and Ponzio, *Identità e alterità*), which sheds light on how scholars in linguistics, semiotics, philosophy of language, translation studies, in the sign sciences generally come to take an interest in the question of dialogue and dialogism, encounter with the other, living together, in the question of the relationship with the other, indeed with others, whatever their identity and community affiliation.

Significs can be considered as a contribution to the development of a new form of humanism, that which reading Emmanuel Levinas is described as the “humanism of otherness” (see Levinas, *Totalité et*

infini; *Humanisme de l'autre home*; *Autrement qu'être*) by contrast with the "humanism of identity." It can also be associated with the concept of "dialogism," what reading Mikhail Bakhtin may be specified as "intercorporeal dialogism," "intercorporeity," expressions that allude to the condition of inescapable interconnectedness with the other, among all life forms, human

Significs studies the relation between signs and values, signs and sense, evidencing how meaning develops in signifying processes across different sign systems, languages, fields of discourse and areas of experience without being constrained to any one of them. Meaning is engendered in expression and communicative interaction, and involves value of

language generally. This leads Welby to thematize the "critical linguistic consciousness" as a condition for the full development of our signifying resources and their expressive potential. These themes are addressed across all her writings and are developed in her books *What Is Meaning? Studies in the Development of Significance*, 1903 (new enlarged edition 1983),

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and nonhuman, of inevitable interdependency (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*). In such a framework, the problem of responsibility is centrally important.

In Welby, otherness, dialogism, and responsibility, also understood as responsiveness towards the other, find their condition of possibility in "mother sense," a gifting device and a priori with respect to social roles and functions. The gift-giving device implies the human capacity for creativity, for the construction of new worlds and for care in social practice, care of the other. The gift-giving device models subjectivity. On this account Welby distinguishes between the "Ident" and the "self" where the former is described as a generative centre of multiple selves and at once a multiplicity inhabiting each one of our selves. Identity, the Ident, a dialogically interrelated community of selves, is generated by gift logic and is associated with otherness and excess. Thus described the Ident is a dialectical and open unit with respect to the sum total of its parts, its multiple selves. With respect to the self, the Ident represents an overflow, excess value (see Petrilli, *Signifying* 645).

the semantic and linguistic orders, meaning as signification as well as ethic, aesthetic and pragmatic value, meaning as sense and significance. In fact, beyond meaning understood in strictly gnoseological terms, significs is committed to interrogating sense, to the problem of significance, and to evidencing the import of meaning producing processes for human behaviour. Other expressions used by Welby to qualify her significs include "philosophy of interpretation," "philosophy of translation" and "philosophy of significance." Meaning is ever more enhanced the more it translates across the different domains of everyday life, scientific discourse and the imagination (see Petrilli, *Signifying*).

With "significance" and "interpretation," "translation" is a key concept in Welby's research on meaning and signifying processes at large. To understand the meaning of a word it must be translated into another sign, whether verbal or nonverbal, into another word, from the same language even, or another nonverbal sign. Just as important for the enhancement of human understanding is the use of metaphors and figurative

and *Significs and Language. The Articulate Form of Our Expressive and Interpretative Resources*, 1911 (now 1985), which represent her main published contributions to studies in the sign sciences.

Another central concept in significs is, as anticipated, what Welby names "mother sense" which is associated to gift logic and may be considered as a gifting device and a priori with respect to communication in social practice. She discusses this concept in detail in her correspondence with such figures (among others) as the English philosopher and pragmatist Ferdinand C. S. Schiller (1864-1937) (now in Petrilli, *Signifying* 617-640) and the father founder of pragmatism and modern semiotics, the American philosopher, mathematician and scientist, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) (in Hardwick, *Semiotic and Significs*). The present paper is dedicated to an exploration of this concept, mother sense, at the basis of her theory of meaning and language.

Victoria Welby exchanged and developed her ideas in her correspondence with significant exponents from all walks of life. With reference to women, she was in dialogue, for

example, with such figures as Mary Everest Boole (1832-1916), a mathematician and educationist, and wife of the renown mathematician George Boole; Julia Wedgwood (1833-1913), a writer, historian and literary critic, and niece of Charles Darwin; Violet Paget (1856-1935), pseudonym Vernon Lee, a writer, engaged feminist and political activist; and Lucy Clifford (1846-1929), a novelist, journalist and wife of mathematician and philosopher William Kingdom. Moreover, beyond real life communication, Welby's ideas can be developed in "ideal dialogue" with authors she could not have met in her lifetime, as I have done myself relating her to the American philosopher Susanne Langer as well as to Genevieve Vaughan and her "gift economy" (see Petrilli, *Victoria Welby; The Global World and Its Manifold Faces*).

After her marriage in 1861, not at all attracted to life at court where she had served as Maid of Honour to Queen Victoria, Welby retreated to Denton Manor, Grantham, and soon thereafter began her research, with her husband's full support. Initially, her interest was directed towards theological issues and in 1881 she published *Links and Clues* (a selection of passages is now available in Petrilli, *Signifying* 81-98), which expressed her sympathy at that time with evangelical movements. This book presents a collection of reflections on the Sacred Scriptures and as such was considered unorthodox by authorities in the clergy of the time. Welby drew attention to the inadequacies of religious discourse that she described as cast in outmoded linguistic forms. She was drawn into an examination of language and meaning, and found a pervasive linguistic confusion which stemmed from a misconception of language as a system of fixed meanings, and which could be resolved only by the recognition that language must grow and change with human expe-

rience. She also made a serious study of science, believing that important scientific discoveries supplied the new experiences by which religious discourse could be transformed into something more meaningful.

Central to Welby's philosophy is her analysis of meaning into three components: sense—"the organic response to environment" (Hardwick xxii); meaning—the specific sense which a word is intended to convey; and significance—which encompasses "the far-reaching consequence, implication, ultimate result or outcome of some event or experience" (*Ibid.*). This triadic typology relates closely to that established by Charles S. Peirce between "immediate interpretant," "dynamical interpretant," and "final interpretant" (*Ibid.* 109-11). Peirce read her 1903 book, *What Is Meaning?* (new edition 1983) and reviewed it for *The Nation* alongside Bertrand Russell's *Principles of Mathematics*, to which he compared it in importance. A flourishing correspondence developed between Welby and Peirce, which was crucial to the development of his thought. She has been regarded as the "founding mother" of semiotics and her continuing importance is illustrated by the publication in the 1980s and 1990s of editions of her work and volumes of commentary on her thought through to recent times (see Colapietro, Nuessel, and Petrilli; Petrilli *Signifying; Victoria Welby*). She has contributed significantly to modern theories of signs, meaning, and interpretation, and officially introduced the term "significs" in her essay of 1896. Significs examines the interrelationship between sign, sense—in all its signifying implications—and value.

Besides numerous articles in newspapers, magazines, and scientific journals (notably *The Spectator*, *The Expositor*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Open Court*, *Nature*, *Mind*, *The Monist*, the *Hibbert Journal*, and the

Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods), Welby published a long list of privately printed essays, parables, aphorisms, and pamphlets on a large range of subjects in numerous spheres: science, religion, philosophy, mathematics, anthropology, education, and social issues. Alternatively to using a series of pseudonyms or resorting to anonymity, she mainly published under her full name until the end of the 1880s, under the name of Hon. Lady Welby from 1890 to 1892, and as Victoria Welby from 1893 onwards.

As her research progressed, she promoted the study of significs, channelling the great breadth and variety of her interests into her "significal" perspective, aimed at interrogating the sense and significance of human behaviour, whether verbal or nonverbal, in the framework of the relation between language and values. Shortly after the publication of two fundamental essays: "Meaning and Metaphor," in 1893 (now in Petrilli, *Signifying* 421-430) and "Sense, Meaning and Interpretation," in 1896 (*Ibid.* 430-449)—the Welby Prize for the best essay on significs was announced in the journal *Mind* in 1896 and awarded to Ferdinand Tönnies in 1898 for his essay "Philosophical Terminology" (1899-1900).

Important moments of official recognition for significs are represented by the publication of the entries "Translation" (Welby 1902), "Significs" (co-authored with J. M. Baldwin and G. F. Stout, 1902), and "Sensal" (with G. F. Stout, 1902) in the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology in Three Volumes* (1901-1905), all of which are now published in *Signifying and Understanding* (Petrilli, *Signifying* 194-197). However, the official recognition Welby had so tenaciously hoped for only came after approximately thirty years of "hard labour," with the publication of the entry "Significs" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

in 1911. The Signific Movement in the Netherlands, which developed in two phases from 1917 to 1926 and from 1937 to 1956, originated from Welby's signification through the mediation of the Dutch psychiatrist, poet, and social reformer Frederik van Eeden (1860-1932).

From 1863 until her death in 1912, Welby was a friend and source of in-

In addition to the already mentioned F. C. S. Schiller and C. S. Peirce, her correspondents included Michel Bréal, Bertrand Russell, C. K. Ogden, Herbert Spencer, Thomas Huxley Benjamin Jowett, F. H. Bradley, Henry Sidgwick, H. G. Wells, William James, and many more. Nonetheless, in spite of the general awareness of the importance and originality of

one of the original founders of the Sociological Society, between 1903 and 1904.

Welby was an open-minded intellectual in the Victorian era in spite of—or, perhaps, thanks to—her complete lack of a formal education, which led her to search for the conditions which made her theoretical work possible. She highlighted the

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spiration to leading personalities from the world of science and literature. She wrote regularly to over 450 correspondents from diverse countries including Great Britain, the United States of America, France, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. It was largely through such correspondence that she developed her theories. She began writing to politicians, representatives of the church, aristocrats, and intellectuals as early as 1870 and created an epistolary network that expanded rapidly from 1880 onwards, both locally and internationally. She used this network for her own enlightenment, as a sounding board for her own ideas, and as a means of circulating these ideas as much as those of others. Thanks also to her social position and court appointment as maid of honour to Queen Victoria, she counted friends and acquaintances among the aristocracy and government officials. Moreover, because of her interest in religious and theological questions she corresponded with leading churchmen of her day and subsequently with eminent scientists, philosophers, and educationists, whom she welcomed into her home for open discussions.

her thinking, Welby was largely forgotten after her death, though never totally thanks to such exchanges. An important step towards recovering signification, the special approach she advocated to studies on language, meaning and communication, was achieved with publication of her correspondence with Peirce in the volume of 1977, *Semiotic and Signification*, edited by Charles Hardwick. This was followed by a series of important editorial initiatives, amongst which re-publication of her books *What Is Meaning?* and *Signification and Language*, all of which has led to recognizing her today as the “founding mother,” so to say, of modern semiotics alongside Peirce, the “founding father” (Petrilli and Ponzio, *Semiotics Unbounded*).

In an attempt to avoid flattery, Welby, as mentioned above, either published anonymously or signed her work with pseudonyms, various combinations of initials, or simply as Victoria Welby. The only honour she valued was “that of being treated by workers as a serious worker” (Hardwick 13). Though she had no institutional affiliations, she was a member of the Aristotelian and Anthropological societies and was

importance of her extensive travels as a child with her mother, which often took place in dramatic circumstances and ended with her mother's tragic death in the Syrian desert, leaving Victoria all alone until help came from Beirut. In a letter of 22 December 1903 to Peirce, who fully recognized her genius (as testified by their correspondence), Welby suggested that her unconventional childhood

accounts in some degree for my seeing things in a somewhat independent way. But the absence of any systematic mental training must be allowed for of course in any estimate of work done.... I only allude to the unusual conditions of my childhood in order partly to account for my way of looking at and putting things: and my very point is that any value in it is impersonal. It suggests an ignored heritage, an unexplored mine. This I have tried to indicate in “*What Is Meaning?*” (qtd. in Hardwick 13-14)

Welby died on 29 March 1912 at Duneaves, Mount Park, Harrow, and

was buried in Grantham, Lincolnshire in England. Her scientific remains are now mainly deposited in two archives: the Welby Collection in the York University archives (Downsview, Ontario, Canada) and the Lady Welby Library in the University of London Library (London, UK).

Welby's writings make an important contribution to a better understanding of problems connected with communication, expression, and signification from an interdisciplinary perspective. Moreover, beyond her contribution to questions of the specifically linguistic, semiotic, pragmatic-ethical and pedagogical orders, the implications of her theory of sign and meaning can contribute to presentday feminist discourse.

Mother Sense and Its Implications

Welby formulated her original concept of "mother sense" in a series of unpublished manuscripts written at the beginning of the twentieth century. Subsequently, she replaced the term with the expressions "primal sense" and its variant "primary sense." Other synonyms include "original sense," "native sense," "racial sense," "race motherhood," and "matrical sense" from "matrix". The expression "mother sense" was coined around 1890 and was not intended as a gender specification. However, as much as she preferred the expression "mother sense," she introduced alternatives like those just listed, in particular "primal sense" and "primary sense," to avoid misunderstanding and restrictions of the gender order. The concept of mother sense as thematized by Welby plays a central role in signifying and interpretative processes and in modelling worldviews. (The manuscripts referred to in this text are now all included in my monograph *Signifying and Understanding. Reading Victoria*

Welby and the Signific Movement in the Netherlands, Ch. 6; see also Petrilli, *Victoria Welby*).

Welby distinguished between "sense" or "mother sense," on the one hand, and "intellect" or "father reason," on the other. These are transgender specifications with which she wished to indicate a general difference between two predominant modalities in the generation of sense, which cut across the barriers of sexual difference: mother sense is not exclusive to women, just as "father sense," or "father reason" is not exclusive to men. Separable only by abstraction, on a theoretical level, they are in fact implicated together on a pragmatic-operative level in sense-producing practices. Mother sense is shared by the whole of humanity, indeed is a characteristic trait of humankind, that concerns us all, and that is also evoked through such concepts as "intuition," "judgment," and "wisdom." Its rudimentary forms are traceable in what Welby calls "in-sense" or "pre-sense."

This original or primal dimension of sense, "mother sense," interweaves with rational, intellectual life in a relation of dialectic interdependency and reciprocal enrichment. Knowledge and expression whether in specialized or everyday spheres, in scientific or nonscientific spheres, is grounded in "mother sense." "Mother sense" includes "father sense" or "father reason," "intellect" (even if latently), while the converse is not always true. Logic, the intellect, father reason must be grounded in the broader and generative dimension of sense, the original level, the primal level, mother sense, racial sense, the "matrix," in a relation of dialectic interdependency and mutual empowering, so that mother sense and father reason should be recovered in their original condition of dialectic and dialogic interrelation, on both the phylogenetic and ontogenetic level. The logical capacity must never

be separated from mother sense. On the contrary, for full development of the human capacity in terms of the intellect, of reasoning, critique, value, and significance, the relation between mother sense and rational life must be one of mutual empowering. With her signification Welby aimed to recover this relation. And though common to humanity, this mother sense, this primal sense is particularly alive in the woman, its main guardian and disseminator (for socio-cultural reasons and not through any form of natural necessity). This renders her especially responsible for the recovery of ancient wisdom and development of the capacity for creativity and critique, for planning and prevision.

In a paper dated 15 April 1907, "Primal Sense and Signification" (originally entitled "Mother Sense and Signification," now available in Petrilli, *Signifying*, 704-706), mother sense is described as the generating source of sense and meaning, of the interpretative and inventive capacity, of the capacity for solving problems, and for discernment. "Mother sense" is the matter of "immediate, unconscious, and interpretative intuition"; from an evolutionary point of view, it constitutes the "subsequent phase, on the level of value, to animal instinct." Therefore, it is at once "primordial and universal" and is traceable to varying degrees throughout the whole course of the evolution of humanity. Mother sense concerns the *real* insofar as it is part of human practice and the *ideal* insofar as it is the condition by virtue of which humanity may aspire to continuity, ongoing perfection and progress (Welby in Petrilli, *Signifying*, 704).

However in the history of civilization "mother sense" has often been artificially suppressed and the mother figure overpowered by the violence of her sons; indeed, she is often abused and violated by her own creation, the male, in spite of her social roles and responsibilities. In fact, in Welby's

description, the history of the human race is also the history of continual deviations in development, of the loss of mother sense and with it the loss of the sense of discernment and of the capacity for critique and responsible awareness, the most serious deviation of all. Such a loss, for example, induces one to be satisfied with the existent as it is. On the contrary, what

one of its possible manifestations.

Mother sense may be understood in the double sense of *sapio* and *scio* (with reference to the Latin *sapere*). Sense already senses and savors what the intellect must work towards. In other words, what the intellect must strive to discover, the body somehow already knows. For its full development, the intellect must be nourished

male and female *principia* are not divided and separate elements, but rather are interrelated in a spiral type of progression characterized by openness and continuity rather than by circularity and uncreative repetition.

What the Russian philosopher of language Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) conceptualized as the *dialogic relation among differences* can be

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is needed to the end of developing and perfecting the human race is the condition of *eternal dissatisfaction*, as Welby says (see below).

Mother sense denotes a broad capacity for knowledge through feeling and perception. It is specific to human beings, and though not exclusive to women, traditionally they are its main custodians for sociocultural reasons, as anticipated above. Father reason or father sense is associated with the intellect and implies the acquisition of knowledge through assertion, rational argumentation, the capacity for generalization, and experimentation in science and logic. Though commonly associated with men, it is not at all exclusive to them. "Mother sense" should not be confused with "female" or "feminine," with "woman." The masculine (the intellect) and the feminine (sense, mother sense), from which the intellect derives, coexist in each single individual, at least potentially. According to Welby motherhood implies the masculine in a way that "fatherhood" does not involve the feminine. Consequently, the term "motherhood" does not necessarily refer to physiological maternity, though this no doubt is

by mother sense. Mother sense sub-tends the capacity for argumentation and criticism as its foundation and very condition of possibility.

In the light of evolutionary theories prevailing at the time, of which she does not fail to be critical, Welby rereads the Bible story and places woman at the centre of creation. In fact, it is the woman who represents the power of reproduction and the principle of continuity and as such she best symbolizes the human race, while men introduce the principle of variation. The human being, whether male or female, is not fully human if the maternal element or "mother sense" is lacking, or denied. In an unpublished paper entitled "Motherhood of Man," Welby specifies that the woman in the mother is passive and anabolic, while the fe-male in her is catabolic, an active source of nourishment.

As a mother, the woman incorporates man in a relation where the male and female components in her are actively interrelated: "man is the whole term; it means human," where "man" may be understood in the sense of the original Greek term *anthropos*. In such a framework the

extended to Welby and her concept of *dialogic complementarity* among sexual differences (rather than of separation), based on mother sense.

Sense is also described by Welby as "instinctively religious," where "religious" is understood as "feeling awareness of the solar relation." Her reference is to a universal sense of dependence upon something greater, a sense of implication in a vaster world, a more elevated world, a world made of other origins and other relations beyond the human, beyond the merely planetary. As she clarifies in her papers, mother sense does not imply anthropomorphism, but far more extensively organico-morphism, on the one hand, and cosmomorphism, on the other. On this account too Welby's approach can be associated again with Peirce's, in particular his synechism.

Mother sense is the condition for the generation of infinite new worlds in a potentially unending variety of possible articulations and signifying processes, of worldviews. It is both analytical and synthetic. We have anticipated that it determines the capacity for knowing in far-reaching and creative ways through sentiment,

perception, intuition. As such, in terms of inferential procedure, it allows for cognitive leaps, for the ability to progress in both quantitative and qualitative terms, which involves the capacity to change attitude and perspective: "Calculation gives useful results but without sense and judgement of quality it can only give the description of the fact" (Petrilli, "Identity, Otherness, and *Primal Sense* as a Modelling Device," in Petrilli and Ponzio, *Semiotics Unbounded*, 8.2). Thanks to mother sense, the idea is intuited before it is possessed or before it possesses us, to evoke Charles S. Peirce's (1839-1914) terminology. Peirce speaks of "agapic" or "sympathetic comprehension and recognition" (see below), which can be associated to Bakhtin's concept of "answering comprehension" or "responsive understanding."

Welby's signficant approach to the life of signs recovers the relation of responsive understanding among signs, which is only possible by keeping account of the relation between mother sense and father reason, and by embedding logical procedure in this relation. Such a relation is the necessary condition for the full development of critical sense, of the maximum value, meaning, and purport of all experience.

The implications of the concept of mother sense as a gifting device become clearer in light of modelling systems theory (Danesi and Sebeok, *The Forms of Meaning*), with special reference to the concept of "primary modelling" as thematized by Thomas A. Sebeok (1920-2001; see Sebeok, *I Think I Am; Signs; Global Semiotics*; Petrilli, *Expression* 7-10, 150-152). The "primary modelling system" is described as an innate modelling device present in all living species. On the basis of this innate simulatory modelling capacity, all species simulate their worlds in their own species-specific ways. Primary modelling

in anthroposemiosis is thematized as a necessary condition for the acquisition and generation of knowledge, for communication through the various sign systems forming human behaviour, both verbal and nonverbal. Verbal language arises specifically as a response to communication needs in the course of evolution, though it remains rooted in the primary modelling device and itself takes on a secondary modelling function in addition to its communicative function (Petrilli and Ponzio, "Modeling, Dialogue and Globality").

Primary modeling as we are describing it is already present in the mute hominid and acts as the departure point for a new course in evolution leading to the rise of *Homo sapiens sapiens* (see Posner, Robering, and Sebeok Art. 18, § 5-6; Sebeok, *I Think Am*; Danesi and Sebeok, *The Forms of Meaning*). Given that the primary modeling system specific to humans is a syntactical device, Sebeok also denominated it "language," distinct from "speech" and antecedent to it (Petrilli and Ponzio, *Semiotics Unbounded*, 8.1). Because of the syntactical component, another term proposed for primary modeling in the human world is "writing," that is, writing *ante litteram*, writing that precedes the letter (*Ibid.* Ch. 9).

"Secondary modelling systems," in part now redefined as "tertiary modelling systems," may be described in terms of derivative signifying behavior characteristic of human culture, including "speech" which arises specifically for communication and intellectual work generally and is generated by primal matter, as its possible expressions and manifestations. Secondary and tertiary modelling systems are grounded in the primary modelling system and like primary modelling are also endowed with a capacity for creativity and inventiveness at the highest degrees.

As articulate, signified, already

configured realities, human derivative worlds are at once the projection, interpretation, and development of mother sense, on the one hand, and its reduction and simplification, on the other. Similarly to language as theorized by Sebeok (revisiting the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics), mother sense is a necessary condition for the evolution of the human race both ontologically and phylogenetically and, therefore, for the full development of historical and social practices.

The concept of mother sense can also be associated with Peirce when he maintains (in a note to his 1878 essay, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear") that the "great principle of logic is self-surrender." Self-surrender is the rule itself that governs one's relation to the other, it means to put oneself at the other's disposal, to listen to the other. As Peirce says, self-surrender does not imply that "self is to lay low for the sake of an ultimate triumph. It may turn out so; but that must not be the governing purpose" (CP 5.402, note 2). Mother sense can also be associated to Peirce's "principle of continuity," according to which "all is fluid" and "every point directly partakes the being of every other," Peirce also maintains that "individualism and falsity are one and the same":

We know that man is not whole as long as he is single, that he is essentially a possible member of society. Especially one man's experience is nothing, if it stands alone. If he sees what others cannot, we call it hallucination. It is not "my" experience, but "our" experience that has to be thought of; and this "us" has indefinite possibilities (CP 5.402, note 2).

In a letter to Peirce of 21 January 1909, Welby agrees with his observation that logic is the "ethics

of the intellect”; this is in line with her “ethics of criticism.” Scientific rigor in reasoning, to be worthy of such a description, must rise from what evoking Peirce we might name agapastic logical procedures, from “primal sense,” and, therefore, from the courage of admitting to the structural necessity of imprecision, instability, and crisis for the evolution

you like” (Welby in Hardwick 21).

Like Peirce, Welby too underlined sociality as an essential dimension of the human condition. She thematized the need to develop a “social conscience,” relating mother sense to the capacity for a radically critical sense of the social. Here, a critical social conscience also implies the capacity to transcend the constraints

to recall Peirce.

The concept of “mother sense” signals the need to recover the human capacity for gift logic implicated in inferential procedure, the capacity for otherness, dialogism and unprejudiced thinking. It accounts for the critical instance of the intellectual capacity, for open-mindedness. This involves the capacity for shift and

**Recovery of the relation of rational intellect to mother sense,
of reason to reasonableness, reason oriented by the logic of otherness,
is a condition for developing a radically critical social consciousness
capable of transcending the constraints of convention, while criticizing
the threat of vague and void abstractions.**

of sign, subject, and consciousness (see Welby to Peirce 21 January 1909, in Hardwick 91).

In a letter to Welby of 7 May 1904, Peirce observes that “reason blunders so very frequently that in practical matters we must rely on instinct and subconscious operations of the mind, as much as possible, in order to succeed. Thus, in my logic there is a great gulf between the methods proper to practical and to theoretical question, in which latter I will not allow instinct, ‘natural’ reason, etc. to have any voice at all” (in Hardwick 19-20; see also *CP* 1.616-1.677). Welby thematizes a dialectical relation between distinction (which is never separation or division) and unity and responds to Peirce in a letter of 29 June 1904 commenting that “in my logic (if you will allow me any!) I see no great gulf, but only a useful distinction between methods proper to practical and theoretical questions. So then ‘Never confound, and never divide’ is in these matters my motto. And I had gathered, I hope not quite mistakenly, that you also saw the disastrous result of digging gulfs to *separate* when it was really a question of *distinction*,—as sharp and clear as

of convention and the effort to benefit what can be designated as a concrete abstraction, that is, future generations.

Similarly to Peirce who worked on the concept of creative love or agapasm and maintained that evolutionary development engendered by the logic of love derives from love orientated toward something concrete, Welby too, though independently from Peirce, described the logic of mother sense as orientated toward one’s concrete neighbor, that is, one’s neighbor understood in terms of affinity or similarity beyond distance in space and time. And while theorizing the concept of “concrete neighbor,” Welby criticized the threat of “vague and void abstractions” as exemplified by bad use of the term “future.”

In terms of logic and argumentation, the “intellect” or “father reason” may be associated with induction and deduction, that is, with inferential processes dominated by the logic of identity. Instead, mother sense is associated with the capacity for abduction which is oriented by the logic of otherness, creativity, dialogism, freedom, and desire, in the last analysis by creative love, *agape*

dislocation in sense producing processes beyond the order of discourse, for prevision and anticipation, for translation (understood in a broad sense) across time and space, across the different orders of signs systems and value systems related to them, across different languages and cultures. Recovery of the relation of rational intellect to mother sense, of reason to reasonableness, reason oriented by the logic of otherness, is a condition for developing a radically critical social consciousness capable of transcending the constraints of convention, while criticizing the threat of vague and void abstractions. Welby thematizes the need to safeguard mother sense for the sake of future generations and their development. Like Peirce who introduces the concept of *agapasm* (creative love) and maintains that the evolutionary results it generates are directed towards something concrete, Welby too (independently from Peirce) describes the logic of mother sense as oriented towards one’s concrete neighbour, that is, one’s neighbour by affinity and similarity, though distant in time and space. Human behaviour oriented by “creative love”

involves inferential procedure of the abductive order, ruled by the logic of otherness.

That abductive inferential processes are oriented by values connected with the logic of otherness, means to say that they are called forth by the other, in a relation of “proximity,” to use a concept introduced by the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), which means to say in a relation where the other evades the comprehensive totality and its identity logic. The self is structured and articulated in the relation with the other, turned to the other in close “proximity,” the other understood as a “concrete abstraction” (Marx), in its “sign materiality” which alludes to the self’s incarnation in a body and its signs.

With reference to Peirce’s classification of signs into symbol, index, and icon, while father sense is associated with the symbolic and indexical dimension of semiosis, mother sense is characterized by iconicity. Again, this means to say that it alludes to the creative and generative forces of sense, to the capacity for identifying both analogical and homological relations, the capacity to associate things that may seem distant from each other, but which in reality are attracted to each other, as in the case of the iconic relation among signs, precisely.

More Insights

In a letter dated 2 October 1907 to Welby, Ferdinand C. S. Schiller (1864-1937) suggests that she replace “mother sense” with the expression “common sense” to avoid oversimplified interpretations of her position. He believed that the expression “mother sense” could be easily misunderstood as intending to exclude the male sex. In Schiller’s own words:

But why should you not identify your Mother sense with Com-

monsense and call it (mainly) that? It is what at bottom you mean—the wisdom of the “tout le monde” which is wiser than the sages, which pervades society and its history and is rarely formulated and never adequately expressed in set logical terms. It is truly “common” in that it can be fathered upon no one, and in that it is at the basis of our “common” life in society; it is also “mother,” in that the logical acumen grows out of it. I am also willing to believe that women in general, when one gets beneath the surface of their frivolities and follies have retained a closer contact with this force and that e.g. the “maternal instinct” will (despite all appearances to the contrary) triumph over “race-suicide” temptations, if only women are given a free hand in the regulation of things. So you would have ample reason for calling this “common-sense” a “mother sense,” but the more you emphasised the former phrase the more intelligible you would become to the mere male! (Schiller to Welby 2 October 1907, in Petrilli, *Signifying*, 632)

With Schiller to analyze intuition is not so much to deny logic as to reformulate it, which in fact is very much in line with Welby’s own view. In any case, as much as “mother sense” may converge with “common sense,” such that under certain aspects this statement may seem a truism, Welby chose to avoid the term “common” because of its negative and oversimplifying associations.

However, she did agree that the term “mother” risked being interpreted reductively, as when it is simply identified with the biological dimension of life. Far more broadly “mother sense” or “primal sense” refers to primal signifying matter,

primordial and pre-sexual, where the female and the male *principia* are united. As anticipated above, with the concept of “mother sense,” “primal sense” Welby invites us to reflect on the maternal component in human beings generally and on the logical capacity insofar as it is a derivative of this primordial device. In her own words from a text of 30 June 1908:

My own transition (as a matter of precaution) from “mother” to “primal” (with, as variant, “primary”) sense, is an illustration of the difficulties created by our neglect of Significs. For it ought to be understood at once, *that in such a context as mine* I cannot possibly mean by Mother sense, mainly, still less only, the shrewd or practical insight of the typical “mother” in the actual or organic sense. Naturally I mean a primordial, inceptive, inborn, need-fertilised, danger-prompted, interest-stimulated, Sense. *“Mother” is indeed or ought to be, the wide and general, “father” the specialised, term.* The pre-sexual organism *was* the maternal, and *included* the paternal element. We already recognise this in our philosophical and scientific use of the term matrix. We never, in this connection, use the term patrix; and we are quite right. The “mother” is enabled by stimulus to conceive, develop, nourish new life. (Welby 1908, in Petrilli, *Signifying*, 710)

With Welby we have claimed that mother sense is a necessary condition for the development of the human race, from both the ontological and phylogenetic perspective, and for the historical practices of socialization. After introducing this expression around 1890, she only focused on it systematically from 1904 onward, initially as part of her contribution

to the public debate on Eugenics in the (important but naïve) conception of Francis Galton. In a paper read on 16 May 1904 at a meeting organized by the Sociological Society, Welby explains that eugenics, a new science, “studies the influences that improve and develop to a maximum the innate qualities of the human race” (now in Petrilli, *Signifying*). She was the only

sponsiveness towards the other, care for the other.

Welby sets herself the task of illustrating “the specialized mental activities of women distinct from men.” However, “mother sense” or “racial sense,” whose rudimental forms, as Welby says, are traceable in what she calls “in-sense” or “pre-sense,” is largely suppressed throughout the

world as-it-is. On the contrary, what is needed to the end of developing and perfecting the human race is a condition of *eternal dissatisfaction*: “We are all, men and women, apt to be satisfied now... with things as they are. But that is just what we all came into the world to be *dissatisfied with*” (Welby 1905, now in Petrilli, *Signifying* 727).

“Mother sense” ... evoked through a series of stereotypes such as “intuition,” “judgment,” “wisdom,” is described as a form of sense common to men and women, “a heritage common to humanity,” though mainly handed down from a historical-social perspective to oncoming generations by the woman through the social practices she is called to carry out daily.

woman to take part in the discussion. However, as an aside with respect to our concerns in this paper, we will point out that contrary to anything Welby could have ever imagined, we know that eugenics was subsequently translated into the ideology of the perfect race with the crimes against humanity that ensued.

In her paper Welby reflects upon the woman’s responsibilities in the social sphere as a consequence of the racial sense she is endowed with and is held to transmit to future generations. As anticipated above, “mother sense,” “racial sense” or “racial motherhood,” evoked through a series of stereotypes such as “intuition,” “judgment,” “wisdom,” is described as a form of sense common to men and women, “a heritage common to humanity,” though mainly handed down from a historical-social perspective to oncoming generations by the woman through the social practices she is called to carry out daily—for example, as mother and wife, caring and nurturing, caring for one’s offspring and the future generations they represent. Such practices are oriented by the logic of self-donation, gift-giving and responsibility for the other, re-

history of civilization. All the same, given that in historical-social terms it is especially the woman who is responsive to mother sense, racial sense, the sense of racial motherhood, Welby underlines the responsibility of women who should be committed to recovering ancient wisdom and with it the human capacity for critique and creativity.

In addition to indicating the social practices and functions carried out by women daily, Welby also underlined the crucially important role played by women in the development of speech, in the acquisition of verbal language, consequently in sign and social activity overall, therefore we might add in the construction of the “symbolic order,” or in our own terminology, the “semiotic order.” Paradoxically, however, womankind has constantly been inhibited when a question of public roles. And, as hinted above, Welby sees in this historical fact one of the causes for continuous deviations in the social development of the human race, for loss in the capacity for discernment and critique, being the most serious consequence of all given that it induces one to be satisfied with the

With the concept of mother sense, racial motherhood, Welby expresses the need to recover the creative and critical capacity of the human intellect, the propensity for creative interpretation, translation, transformation, prediction, and innovation. Mother sense is connected with the capacity for critical social consciousness beyond the conventions of any order whatsoever such as the social, moral, and religious, for the sake of future generations. As she stated in an undated reply to Schiller’s letter of 2 October 1907:

(A) Well, the mother sense never “sets its heart” on any “pet hypothesis”: if it had done this in the original days of its reign, you and I would never have been here. The race would have been snuffed out. No: it takes one hypothesis after the other, treating the one it “cares” for with a more uncompromising scrutiny and severity than the others. The very life of its owner and her children once hung upon this instinct of suspicion and of test. It is sheer mother sense—instinct of intellectual

danger—which in you, as in Dewey, Peirce and James, calls out the pragmatic reaction! It is the direct descendent of the keen awareness of the signs of primitive danger to the babes of the pair or the tribe, left in relatively weak hands. But let the pragmatists beware of exchanging one fallacy or one overworked method for another perhaps its opposite.

(B) Yes, *all* half-words (and some spuriously used whole ones) are handicaps. They settle your involuntary dualisms from the first. As to the “majority of women,” the dominant Man with his imperious intellect has for uncounted ages stamped down their original gift: all their activities beyond the nursery (and, alas, there also now) are masculinised: language, originally the woman’s as custodian of the camp, creator of its industries and first trainer of the next generation, is now wholly “male”: the whole social order is laid down, prescribed for the woman on masculine lines only. Who ever, for instance, thought of consulting her about changes in marriage law? Well, it would after all have been useless: you have crushed out all but her illogical prejudices and her emotional insistencies, which urge her to set her heart on pet hypotheses or to cling to doctrinal mummies as though they were living. These are really the last refuge of a balked prerogative of mind. Frivolities and follies! What else is left to one for whom “strong-minded” has become an epithet of dislike and contempt? And when the suppressed energies of the race do, in spite of all, “spurt up” in us women, what can their fruit be, as things are, but abortive and

defective? The present mode of “College” or “technical” training can at best but make the woman a second- or third-rate Man: she further loses thereby what little she has of the racial gifts—her natural and complementary powers of interpretation and problem-solution, of suggestion and correction. Again look at her inventive complexities, e.g. of weaving.

Woman was of course the original weaver. Look at her logic and mathematics of the knitting-pin, the hook, the shuttle, the needle. Look at old lace and embroidery. I myself have “invented” elaborate figures produced by a mere hook, and “stitches” by a mere needle. No man has ever, apparently, seen the significance of woman’s ingenuities here and applied them to his inventions, or in his training of students. Practically only the sailor and the fisherman understand even knot- and net-work.

That the Mother sense is “common” seems to me a truism. Of course it is common. Only, the word common is used in several senses. In one it means despicable and is coupled with “unclean.” On another side, Loeb’s tropisms are common! And my Originating, Birth-giving, Reproductive, Interpretative—my Mother sense, is common to the whole range of life and extends *beyond* it and *beneath* it. (Welby in Petrilli, *Signifying* 634)

Welby does not refuse dominant logic, the established symbolic order whose incalculable value she recognizes, but in the spirit of signification she appeals for constructive criticism with respect to our use of logic itself, of cognitive instruments and interpretative models. In “Primal Sense and Signification,” she describes “primal sense” as

the “mother of senses”; it indicates a comprehensive and homogeneous faculty, a psychic-physical power of response and adjustment, an organic form of knowledge necessary to the survival of the human race. Mother sense is the generating source of the rationalizing intellect and the task of signification is

not only to criticise, but also to reason out and construct from the *données* of Primal Sense, its warnings, its *insights* and *farsights*, its revelations, its swift readings of worth, its penetrative recognition of reality. It is just here, then, that the place and work of Signification is to be found, as the necessary link—rather, the medium of interpretative communication—between the constant “givings” of Mother sense and the constant “constructions” (in all senses) of the intellect. (Welby 1907, in Petrilli, *Signifying* 704)

Recovery of the connection between the rational dimension of the intellect and primal sense is a sure way to enhance the value, meaning, and import of all experience. In fact, as stated in the citation above, one of the main tasks assigned to signification is to recover the relation of mutual interpretability and dynamical interdependency between the constant *données* of mother sense, on the one hand, and the constant constructions of the intellect on the other. Primal sense provides us with the material of “immediate awareness, conscious and interpretative”; from an evolutionary viewpoint, it represents “a further stage in value, of the animal’s instinct.” Therefore primal sense is together “primordial and universal” and is present at all stages of human development in varying degrees; as such, it is the condition for the development of

significance. To evoke Levinas once again, we could claim that mother sense corresponds to significance before and after signification.

By reconnecting primal sense and rational behaviour, it is possible to recover the sense of symbolic pertinence active in the child, whose propensity for investigation Welby goes so far as to describe as a cognitive model for the adult. Critical work is inevitably mediated by language, here understood in the strict sense of verbal language. Welby's critique of language is central to signification. Language and consciousness are inseparable and together are grounded in primal sense. Welby underlines the importance of developing a "critical linguistic consciousness" and of using language in such a way as to enhance the exquisitely human capacity for "answering comprehension," for understanding that is dialogical and responsive, to say it with Mikhail Bakhtin (*The Dialogic Imagination; Speech Genres; Art and Answerability*).

Under certain aspects, Peirce and Welby adopt approaches to the problem of mind and subjectivity that, though elaborated independently of each other, are similar. This emerges, for example, from their observations on the so-called "obscure part" of the mind, or on behavior governed by intuition, sense, "mother wit"—the expression is Peirce's (on the concept of wit and ingenuity in Peirce and in Welby, see Colapietro). Consider the following excerpt from Peirce's "Logic and Spiritualism" in the light of Welby's work:

Swarming facts positively leave no doubt that vivid consciousness, subject to attention and control, embraces at any one moment a mere scrap of our psychical activity. Without attempting accuracy of statement demanding long explanations,

and irrelevant to present purposes, three propositions may be laid down. (1) The obscure part of the mind is the principal part. (2) It acts with far more unerring accuracy than the rest. (3) It is almost infinitely more delicate in its sensibilities. Man's fully conscious inferences have no quantitative delicacy, except where they repose on arithmetic and measurement, which are mechanical processes; and they are almost as likely as not to be downright blunders. But unconscious or semi-conscious irreflective judgments of mother wit, like instinctive inferences of brutes, answer questions of "how much" with curious accuracy; and are seldom totally mistaken. (CP 6.569)

To Peirce's observation that logic is the "ethics of the intellect," Welby responds with her conception of primal sense which she presents as the way to the ethical dimension of signifying processes beyond the strictly gnoseological. Reflecting on her preference for the term "signification" rather than "semeiotic" as the name for her theory of sign and meaning, she makes the following considerations:

Of course I am fully aware that Semeiotic may be considered the scientific and philosophic form of that study which I hope may become generally known as Signification. Though I don't think you need despair of the acceptance of your own more abstract, logically abstruse, philosophically profound conception of Semeiotic. Of course I assent to your definition of a logical inference, and agree that Logic is in fact an application of orality in the largest and highest sense of the word. That is entirely consonant with the witness of Primal Sense. Alas,

there is no word (except religion) more dangerously taken in vain than morality. (Hardwick 91)

We know that one of the main goals of the project for signification is to fully recover the connection between logic and primal sense, the matrix of sense, in a relation of reciprocal interdependency and enhancement. This implies recovering mother sense, common sense in all its signifying valency from the instinctive-biological level to the level of signification. By recovering the relation between logic and sense, sense and value, sign and sense, signification furthers the quest for the properly human and theorizes the possibility of extending logic beyond its strictly gnoseological boundaries.

Signification reconnects logic to bio-logic, on the one hand, and to the ethical and aesthetic spheres, on the other, prefiguring what today we propose to describe as the "semio-ethical" turn in studies on sign and meaning (see Petrilli, *Sign Studies*). In fact, opening toward the other, to the capacity for involvement with the other, for responsiveness to the other points to the importance of the ethical dimension of human signifying practices, to the relation between signs and values before and beyond the strictly gnoseological order.

With specific reference to subjectivity, like Peirce Welby too describes the human being as a community of parts that are distinct but not separate. Far from excluding each other, these parts, or selves, are reciprocally dependent on each other; they are regulated by the logic of dialogic otherness and of unindifference. Such an approach excludes the possibility of undifferentiated confusion and homologation among differences and specificities, as in the case of the monological and monolingual self. To confound is to sacrifice distinction. Nor does interrelation and interconnectedness mean to sacrifice uniqueness, singularity,

just as uniqueness does not call for sacrificing the condition of dialogical interrelatedness, intercorporeity, contact, and communication.

In her writings on subjectivity, as anticipated above, Welby distinguishes between the “self” and the “I” or “Ident” introducing yet another neologism (see her paper “I and Self,” June 1907, now in Petrilli *Signifying* 647-648), where the I represents an excess with respect to the sum of its parts. The Ident is a generative centre of multiple selves and at once a multiplicity inhabiting each one of our selves. Thus described the Ident is a dialectical and open unit with respect to the sum total of its parts, its multiple selves. With respect to the self, the Ident represents an overflow, an excess value, a gift (*Ibid.* 645). The I is not the “individual” considered as separate from the other, but rather the “unique.” Welby’s conception of “uniqueness” (which has no connection with the monadic separatism of Max Stirner’s conception of the unique and the singular) may be related to what Levinas thematizes as “nonrelative otherness” or “absolute otherness.”

As Peirce says in his 1892 essay entitled “The Law of Mind,” the type of evolution foreseen by synchism, the principle of continuity, is evolution through the agency of love, whose prime characteristic consists in recognizing the germs of loveliness in the hateful and making it lovable (*CP* 6.287–6.289). Peirce polemically contrasts the “Gospel of Christ,” according to which progress is achieved through a relation of sympathy among neighbors, with the “Gospel of greed,” which reflects the dominant ideology of his day and encourages the individual to assert one’s own rights and interests, one’s own individuality or egotistic identity, over the other (*CP* 6.294).

A parallel may be drawn between Peirce’s critique of the supremacy of

the individual and Welby’s in her analysis of the dynamics between I and self, where she criticizes the self’s tendency to transform “selfness” into “selfishness” and “selfism.” According to Peirce, Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, with his concepts of natural selection, survival of the fittest, struggle for existence, is a significant example of how this conception of the individual is translated from political economy to the life sciences, from economic development to the development of the living organism. Peirce himself chose the agapastic theory of evolution, and in fact he considered his own strong attraction to this doctrine as possible proof of its validity (*CP* 6.295). On Peirce’s account, love is directed to the concrete, and not to abstractions; it is directed toward one’s neighbor, not necessarily in a spatial sense, locally, but in the sense of affinity, a person “we live near ... in life and feeling.” Love is a driving force in logical procedures dominated by abduction, iconicity, and creativity. In accordance with his interpretation of St. John, the development of mind understood in an extended sense occurs largely through the power of love.

Recalling the writer Henry James, Peirce distinguishes between self-love, which is directed at another insofar as that other is identical to self, and creative love, which is directed at what is completely different, even “hostile and negative” with respect to oneself; this latter type of love is directed at the other insofar as this other is absolutely other, as Levinas would say.

On this basis, we could propose a typology of love designed on a scale transiting from high degrees of identity to high degrees of alterity. But truly creative love, as both Welby and Peirce argue, is love regulated by the logic of otherness, love for the other, considered in that other’s absolute otherness. The logic of otherness is

agapastic logic. And absolute, non-relative otherness, iconicity, love, dialogism, and abduction together constitute the generative nucleus of sign and sense as they translate across worlds whether real, possible, or imaginary.

Welby’s concept of mother sense can be read in the light of our project for semioethics and the goal of accounting for the “reason of things” (Petrilli and Ponzio, *Semioetica*; “Semioethics”; *Semioetica e comunicazione globale*; Petrilli, *Teoria dei segni e del linguaggio*; *Sign Crossroads in Global Perspective*). However, as Welby’s signification no less than Peirce’s semiotics teach us, the *reason* of things cannot be separated from the capacity for *reasonableness*, and reasonableness is other orientated. The issue at stake is the following: given that social reproduction today constitutes a threat to life, *human beings must at their very earliest transform from rational animals into reasonable animals*, and on this account the concept of mother sense can make a contribution that is no less than decisive. Semioethics is not intended as a discipline in its own right, but as a perspective, an orientation in the study of signs, a propensity to recover the ancient vocation of semiotics understood as “semeiotics” (or symptomatology) with its focus on symptoms. We believe that in the context of globalisation today characterised as it is by crisis—ecological crisis, humanitarian crisis, political and economical crisis—this orientation must be urgently recovered as never before. Otherness and gifting in a global perspective, where sign activity and life converge, is a major concern for semioethics (Ponzio, Petrilli 2005: 562) and is prefigured by Welby and her signification.

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Endnotes

¹Victoria Welby was the last of three children of Charles James Stuart-Wortley (1802-1844), and his wife, Lady Emmeline Charlotte Elizabeth Stuart-Wortley, née Manners (1806-1855), poet and traveller. James Archibald Stuart-Wortley (1776-1845) was her grandfather. As a child Victoria Welby had had little formal education, aside from some private tuition, which was not at all exceptional in her day, particularly when a question of female children. From 1848 to 1855 she travelled extensively with her mother in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Spain, Morocco, Turkey, Palestine, Syria and many other countries. Her travel diary was published in 1852. After her mother's death she lived with a succession of relatives before being taken in by her godmother, the duchess of Kent, mother of Queen Victoria. In 1861 she was appointed Maid of Honour to Queen Victoria; she spent almost two years at the royal court before her marriage in London, on 4 July 1863, to Sir William Earle Welby-Gregory.

During the first years of her marriage, Victoria Welby founded the Royal School of Art Needlework.

²Welby's two main theoretical books are *What Is Meaning?* (1983 [1903]) and *Significs and Language* (1985 [1911]). Her youngest of three children, Emmeline Mary Elizabeth (1867-1955), painter, sculptor, and writer, authored under her married name, Mrs H. Cust, her mother's biography, *Wanderers*, and edited her correspondence in two volumes, *Echoes from Larger Life* and *Larger Dimensions*. A substantial collection of her writings, published and unpublished, are now available in my book, *Signifying and Understanding*, published in 2009. This is followed (for what concerns my publications in English) by my monograph, *Victoria Welby and the Science of Signs: Significs, Semiotics, Philosophy of Language*, published in 2015, as well as numerous book chapters and essays in journals.

³The latter includes approximately 1000 volumes from Victoria Welby's personal library and twenty-five pamphlet boxes containing pamphlets, reprints and newspaper cuttings, religious tracts, sermons, and published lectures by various authors. Four boxes without numbers contain duplicates of most of Welby's own publications. The main part of her scientific and literary production is in the York archives. Half of the collection consists of Welby's correspondence covering the years 1861-1912, and still mostly unpublished. A large part of the remainder comprises notes, extracts, and commentaries on a variety of subjects—biology, education, ethics, eugenics, imagery, language and significance, logic and significance, matter and motion, numbers theory, philosophy and significance, significs, and time. There are also speeches, lessons, sermons by other authors, numerous unpublished essays and a collection of poems by Welby,

diagrams and photographs, translations, proofs, copies of some of her publications, and newspaper cuttings.

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ILONA MARTONFI

My blind sister's mortuary dress

Mártonfi Éva, April 28, 1944-April 16, 2014

Lacemaker with bone bobbins
braided mesh with slim, oval leaves.
Plum on black silk.

As the bobbins twist together
plait the threads.

Middlesex Terrace Long Term Care
by the Thames River, Rural Route 1, Delaware
fruit belt of southern Ontario

late into the night
I sew sister's mortuary dress:
tiny silver buttons.
Buttonholes,
lace ruffles as for a child.
Budapest, Liszt Ferenc utca 14

Mártonfi Magda
bears a daughter, Éva Ibolya,

two years of high school.
Cashier at Warshaw's at seventeen
on the Main in Montréal
met and married Alfonso.

Late into the night
I sew sister's burial gown:
tiny silver buttons.
Bobbin lace.
Died of complications of diabetes,
congestive heart disease.

One daughter, two sons,
two grandsons,
husband, attend the urn funeral.

Late into the night.
Tiny silver buttons.
Peasant lace.

Ilona Martonfi published four poetry books: Blue Poppy (2009); Black Grass (2012); The Snow Kimono (2015) and Salt Bride (2019). Forthcoming, The Tempest (2021).