Both/And Aesthetics: Gender, Art and Language in Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* and Ali Smith's *How to Be Both*

This essay sets out to read Brigid Brophy's 1969 novel *In Transit: An Heroi-cyclic Novel* alongside a more recent example of contemporary women's writing, *How to Be Both* (2014) by the Scottish writer Ali Smith. Although Brophy's novel falls outside the usual scope of this journal (if only by one year), I will argue that its literary and sexual-political preoccupations are in great measure consistent with those that contemporary women writers such as Smith are currently exploring. Indeed, Smith has acknowledged Brophy's importance to her own work through her support for the reprint of *The King of Rainy Country* by Coelacanth Press in 2012.[1] In particular, Smith shares with Brophy a critique of the artificial relationship between sex and gender, the dominance of heterosexual narratives and their relation to pornography, and an interest in the ways in which art, music and language mediate concepts of gender. The essay will provide an in-depth comparative analysis of *In Transit* and *How to be Both* to show how both writers refuse binary oppositions in a "both/and" writing practice that is simultaneously self-consciously aesthetic and political. I suggest that whereas Brophy presents gender as an 'illegible' or indeterminate category, Smith represents gender as a fluid category allowing women and men, in the realm of art at least, to be both.

In a 1995 Special Issue of *Review of Contemporary Fiction* dedicated to Brigid Brophy, which remains one of the few critical appraisals of her work, Stephen Moore attributes the scandalous critical neglect of the writer to the fact that she was "too far ahead of her time" and wrote about controversial topics "long before there was a critical context" for doing so (Moore 7). Similarly, Chris Hopkins, writing in the same issue, ascribes Brophy's absence from the literary canon to the "variety and sheer oddness" of her output and the fact that it isn't easily categorised, seeming to be "too late for modernism and too early for postmodernism" (Hopkins 13). He suggests that aspects of academic literary study have also worked against her being better known: her work has not been seen as

representative of any post-war decade and, by the 1980s, when new women writers were being published and studied in much greater numbers, Brophy's novel writing career was effectively over.

Notwithstanding the paucity of criticism on Brophy's work, critics agree that *In Transit* stands out as her most significant, experimental and challenging work – and therefore most egregiously overlooked. Moore, for example, calls it "the definitive novel about gender confusion" (Moore 7). And in an early review for *Vogue* magazine, soon after the novel was published, Elizabeth Hardwick described the plot as "avant-gardism itself" in which "words are the characters" and "[a]ll is flux, movement, anonymity, flight" (Hardwick 28). More recently, in one of the most illuminating analyses of the novel to date, Annegret Maack argues that *In Transit* "breaks with every convention of the traditional novel" (Maack 40), seeing it as evidence of a revolutionary change in the genre. Writing more recently in 2014, Charles Wheeler concurs with this assessment of the text, arguing that it represents the best aspects of radical art: "As a work of fiction and as a work of criticism, in spirit and execution, *In Transit* remains cutting-edge 45 years after its release. […] It's political art which sacrifices neither art nor politics for the sake of the other. It is balanced, challenging and absolutely vital." (Wheeler).

As Wheeler notes, *In Transit* was reissued by the Dalkey Archive Press in 2002 with an introduction by the avant-garde writer and critic Christine Brooke-Rose.[2] Placing the novel in the context of experimental fiction of the 1960s, particularly the nouveau roman, Brooke-Rose discusses the ways in which "narrative conventions are broken, played with, transformed" (Brooke-Rose ii). Brooke-Rose foregrounds the novel's ludic qualities, its deployment of linguistic games, especially bilingual ones. She highlights its treatment of complex philosophical themes such as the nature of consciousness, the notion of truth, authorial voice, and the role of the reader. These are all features that have become associated with literary postmodernism;indeed, Hopkins identifies *In Transit* as her most "postmodern" work owing to its obsession with language games. Yet, while Brophy may be seen as one of the earliest exponents of this mode in British fiction, her work as a whole exceeds this categorization.[3]

Despite her unjust critical neglect, however, Brophy is not as isolated in this regard as her critics sometimes suggest. While she undoubtedly actively sought cultural uniqueness, her contemporaries B.S. Johnson and Eva Figes were also employing anti-realist, modernist, and proto-postmodernist techniques and devices. Similarly, more mainstream figures such as Doris Lessing and Muriel Spark were also deviating considerably from a straightforwardly realist mode through the deployment of fantasy, satire and literary playfulness. As Patricia Waugh argues, women writers of the 1950s, 60s and 70s were not simply following the dominant post-war realist aesthetic or writing confessional novels. They employed diverse literary strategies including playfulness, (post)modernism, satire, and literary artifice. Rather than seeing a clear divide between post-war and contemporary novels, Waugh argues "a case for underlying continuities in British women's fiction since even before the emergence of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s" (Waugh 191). Moreover, it is not as if there were not precedents for Brophy's experimentation, both with language and gender identity: Virginia Woolf's exuberant fantasy of gender transformation, *Orlando* (1928), was published forty-one years before Brophy's *In Transit*. In retrospect then, despite this sense, both personal and critical, of 'outsiderdom' attaching to her work, Brophy may be seen as part of a longer tradition of experimentalism within women's writing, which continues today.

Indeed, Brophy's work bears strong comparison with the post-1970s generation of women writers such as Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, Michèle Roberts, and Ali Smith. Like them, Brophy does not sit easily within mainstream literary culture. Like them, she sets out to debunk artificial ideas about the nature of human identity, especially gender identity. As Brophy states, "I feel that mythology is a denial of imagination which I think one has to counter" (Dock and Brophy 159). Her view is reminiscent of Carter's famous 1983 pronouncement "I'm in the demythologizing business" (Carter "Notes" 71) and her penchant for "putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (Carter "Notes" 69). Like Carter, Brophy has a lively if equivocal relationship to feminism: both women took up a radical, pro-sex stance which was at odds with much of the feminist thinking of the early second wave, with Brophy's novel predating Carter's nonfiction work of sexual demythologization, *The Sadeian Woman*, by ten years.

As Patricia Waugh reminds us, "women novelists throughout the past four decades have refused to confine themselves to a narrow feminist agenda and have often taken up positions that are antithetical to those of the dominant feminist politics of their time" (Waugh 192-3). Brophy's work shares the refusal of binaries that characterizes this radical strand of contemporary women's writing, rejecting the concept of heteronormativity whereby sexuality can be "read off" from gender identity. Such writing revels in the confusion of boundaries and the celebration of gender indeterminacy and/or fluidity.

Maack places ambivalence, polysemy and polyphony at the heart of *In Transit*:"Opposing concepts are not brought into synthesis but are left 'in transit', in the in-between state of tension and dialogue with one another" (Maack 43). A similar claim could be made for the work of the Scottish writer Ali Smith, especially her 2014 novel *How to Be Both*, which resonates strikingly with Brophy's text in terms of both themes and style. Born in 1962, a scant seven years before the publication of *In Transit*, Smith is in many ways its literary heir. Over a twenty-two year career, Smith has produced an original and eclectic range of novels, plays and short stories, which seek to explore social and political issues in ways that experiment with language and foreground the role of art. As Emma Parker writes: "Showing there is no straightforward line of development in feminist fiction, Smith's linguistic and formal playfulness harks back to [the] avant-garde novels" of Brigid Brophy and Christine Brooke-Rose, "which engage in dizzying formal experiment to undo gender binaries" (Parker 86). The works of both writers may also be viewed in relation to transgender phenomena, which according to Susan Stryker, may be defined "as anything that disrupts or denaturalises normative gender, and which calls our attention to the processes through which that normativity is produced and atypicality achieves visibility" (Stryker 60). In the rest of the essay, I will explore the various ways in which Brophy's and Smith's texts defy binary logic, positing a both/and aesthetic, which simultaneously deconstructs and reformulates sexual, linguistic, and aesthetic identities through the tropes of music, art and language.

When interviewing Brophy in 1975, Leslie Dock confessed to finding *In Transit* "somewhat of an enigma. I can pick out some of the elements: pornography, musical tempos, confusion about one's identity in relation to others, plus a parody of detective fiction, but the pattern or design is

unclear" (Dock and Brophy 165). In response, Brophy stated, "The pattern is about the disintegration of accepted routines … So when the 'I' character of *In Transit* decides to miss the plane for which she or he has a ticket, the timetable is disrupted, and this is the first disintegration of the rule book" (166). Indeed, a central theme of the novel concerns rules and rule breaking, particularly the transgression of linguistic and sexual codes. When further questioned about her distinctive technique of "merging, reusing, or reworking sexual stereotypes […] for blending male and female stereotypical characteristics", Brophy replied that, "I feel an obligation to insist on the mental interchangeability of the sexes" (Dock and Brophy 159). As well as looking back to Woolf's theories of androgyny in *A Room of One's Own* and *Orlando*, which Brophy cites as a key influence in the Dock interview, this stance also anticipates the deconstruction or blurring of gender binaries characteristic of the work of contemporary women writers such as Angela Carter, Michèle Roberts, Sarah Waters, and Smith herself.

The novel is set in an airport transit lounge and the whole of Section One is narrated in the first person, which mischievously breaks with convention by never explicitly identifying the sex of the narrator or giving the reader enough information to establish it one way or the other.[4] Given that we do learn, in a dizzyingly punning monologue, about a range of topics including the narrator's Irish childhood and heritage, the appeal of international airports, and the perils of multilingualism, it is extraordinary that the narrator – and Brophy – can get away with such subterfuge. We know only that our narrator is a middle aged Irish person and that they are suffering from a severe case of "linguistic leprosy" (Brophy *In* 11) as a result of which their command of language is severely threatened. While waiting for his/her flight to be called, the narrator is persistently misunderstood or misrepresented, demonstrating the difficulties inherent in acts of communication, particularly those which take place across linguistic barriers. S/he muses on the absurdities and paradoxes of narration, fails to make her/himself understood at the airport bar; and, at one point, s/he spills a cup of coffee on her/his passport, rendering her/his title illegible (30), teasing the reader with the 'legibility' of her/his sex.[5] Eventually, we learn the narrator's initials at the end of a letter addressed to the reader, E.H. (P.) O'R" (67), but it is not until several pages later that these names are finally revealed as the significantly

non-gender specific Evelyn Hilary (Pat) O'Rooley. In a typically Brophian play of language, her/his initials, if reversed, spell ROPHE, which is the feminine or 'healing' element of Jehovah, or Yahweh.[6] The problems with language and mode of address reach a climax when the narrator "realized that I could no longer remember which sex I was" (71). While this may strike the reader as a logical absurdity, the narrator reminds us that it is equally difficult for them to take 'us' seriously: "I don't even know, for example, what sex you are" (73). It seems, therefore, that the problem of identity encompasses *both* author *and* reader.

In the second part of the novel, punningly entitled "Sexshuntwo", the "I" undertakes a series of comically absurd adventures in search of their sexual identity; in one of these episodes, the narrator fumblingly feels around inside their corduroy trousers on the hunt for proof positive. Brophy here exploits and plays on the "trouser role", familiar from opera, in which female singers play the part of a cross-dressed character. Scenting triumph, in a chapter entitled "Interloo", the narrator suddenly but briefly becomes the third-person character, O'Rooley, before entering the male toilets in order to confirm "his" hunch that "he" is a man:

> O'Rooley approached the lavatory, unzipped his trousers and reached his hand inside.
>
> There was nothing there.
>
> That is inexact. Something – flesh briefly veiled by underclothes – was there, but not in the expected form.
>
> Half-fainting, Patricia staggered against the wall and dully heard that she had knocked her briefcase thumping to the floor. (117)

Thereafter the novel becomes an increasingly surreal quest for the "missing member" (132). As Karen R. Lawrence states, "the travel novel turns detective novel as the protagonist tries to detect first which sex she/he is and then to solve the mystery of his own missing phallus, which circulates somewhere in the airport" (Lawrence 231-2). A number of hilarious queer adventures ensue, including being conveyed via the luggage carousel into a "lesbian underworld" of butch porters plotting the overthrow

of patriarchy in the baggage handling depot (Brophy *In* 130), a parade of gay men on a modern-day Mincing Lane, and ultimately being caught up in an airport revolution. En route, Pat takes on the persona of the hard-bitten private eye Slim O'Rooley, a "dead-beat dick" and "down-at-heel heel" in order to solve the case (155), which he [sic] apparently achieves whilst eavesdropping on two Irish lesbians having talkative sex *sans* phallus in their Duty Free shop; the joke being that there is "nothing" there but also, according to the text's both/and logic, nothing missing. According to Lawrence, Brophy thus "parodies the myth of the phallus as transcendental signifier, the myth that props up all the paradigms of the journey underwriting Western culture" (Lawrence 233). The novel's radical anti-linear mise-en-abîme structure renders any attempt to determine identity, and crucially gender identity, impossible.

Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* similarly plays and puns on literary and sexual ambiguity, not least in its very formal composition. The novel is divided into two parts, which are paradoxically given the same designation as "One" owing to the fact that two versions were printed. As Justine Jordan explains: "And of course the novel itself, through the ingenious device of printing half the copies with George's perspective first, and half with Francesco's, manages to 'be both' – different from itself and yet the same" (Jordan). In my copy, the first half consists of a third-person narrative focalised by George (short for Georgia), a teenage girl whose mother Carol has recently died of a sudden illness leaving her overwhelmed by loss. The novel opens with George remembering a trip she made to Ferrara, Italy with her mother in which they visit a palazzo to look at frescoes painted by the fifteenth-century Renaissance artist Francesco del Cossa who died of the plague in 1477/8. Apart from a striking painting of a man in white rags that inspired George's mother to come to Italy, there is another painting of "a young man or young woman, could be either, dressed in beautiful rich clothes and holding an arrow or a stick and a gold hoop thing, like everything's nothing but a charming game" (Smith 51). George asks her mother whether the figure is male or female to which she replies: "Male, female, both […] Beautiful all of them" (52). In this way, Carol confirms the both/and aesthetic that structures the whole novel and gives George licence to experience gender as a fluid

construct. Soon after her mother's death, she befriends and falls in love with a female schoolmate known as H (short for Helena), and their intimate friendship helps George recover from her loss.

The second half of the novel is narrated in the first person by Francescho [sic] who, it transpires, was born a girl. In a disembodied voice from behind the fresco and beyond the grave, Francescho explains the circumstances of his gender transition, the need to dress as a boy to get an artist's apprenticeship (for which there are many historical precedents), and observes the viewers of art who come and go in the palazzo including George. Francescho also lost his mother at a young, impressionable age and this shared circumstance as well as their gender ambiguity causes him to keep an eye on George even after her return home. As a transgender man, Francescho has many love affairs with women and is attuned to sexual ambiguity in others. When he first sees George he assume she is a boy but gradually realizes that "this boy is a girl", one whose gender performance goes against convention (251). Sex is thus not an either/or proposition but something provisional upon and shaped by cultural norms. Smith's denaturalizing of normative gender and her focus on marginalised gender expressions may be seen in terms what Stryker has called 'transgender feminism' (60). The emphasis on the sexual ambiguity of the characters recalls Brophy's characterisation of Pat O'Rooley for whom sex is in the eye of the beholder and changes according to how it is presented to the viewer. One episode begins with Patricia being wooed by an elderly Don Juan only to end with Patrick being propositioned by a mature gay male roué.[7] Both George and O'Rooley initially seek to pin down sexual identity but they both sooner or later give up on the attempt. As David Vichnar observes, *In Transit* is a text "that repeatedly (and deliberately) stages a failure to nail down the body in and through language" (Vichnar). However, compared to Pat's feverish if avowedly futile hunt for actual organs, George and her mother explicitly enjoy the sexual fluidity of the painted figures. While Pat would appear to be perpetually "in transit" between male and female, in Smith's world, as the title suggests, people can revel in being "both".

Both texts explore the representation of sexuality in relation to pornographic language and imagery, albeit in different ways: while *In Transit* parodies pornographic discourse in the service of a critique of language, *How to Be Both* presents it as an example of the impoverishment of visual

culture. In Brophy's novel, as Leslie Dock states, "sex and art are interwoven; the book continually weaves in the pornographic 'sub-art' form" (Dock and Brophy 160). For Brophy, it should be noted, pornography is a human rights and free speech issue, which puts her on the libertarian side of feminist debate and at odds with much of the 1970s radical feminist critique of pornography. Brophy undertakes a re-examination of the power relations of pornography in a similar way to her near contemporary Angela Carter. Just as Carter calls into question the passivity and victim status of the female in her rewritings of fairy tales and in *The Sadeian Woman*, so Brophy reconfigures the power relations between the characters "He" and "Oc" in a tale entitled "The Story of the Tongue of Oc". 'Oc' refers to the Southern French dialect, which lost out to the more powerful Northern French language and, as a suppressed and minoritized tongue, is thus figured as feminine in French language debates.[8] Punning on the two meanings of tongue, both body part and regional dialect, Brophy conflates sexual and linguistic signifiers. The novel contains a number of scenes of sexual torture and flagellation in which "He" whips "her". During one such sado-masochistic encounter, in which Oc is blindfold and her tongue is held in a contraption, the following punningly absurd exchange takes place:

Q. Who is the Master?

A. I do nothing except on your sado.

Q. Where is Oc's tongue?

A. In her cheek.

Q. Where is ox tongue?

A. At the counter that has Occam's razor-sharp bOCan-slicing apparatus. (144)

By having Oc give "cheek", Brophy parodies the idea that the male is the dominant figure in the scene so that power resides in the supposedly masochistic "Oc" rather than with "The Master". The function of such absurd and comic punning is to deflate his phallic presumption of power. According to Lawrence, moreover, Brophy rejects the idea that power in modern thought necessarily resides in the

"masculine" category and that the "feminine" therefore represents powerlessness. As Sue Kuykendall has also argued, Brophy's feminism is not concerned with recuperating "phallic signification" for women, nor with positioning them romantically "outside" it, but in deconstructing it (Kuykendall 196). "He" and "she" are therefore linguistic signifiers in a discursive system that positions them as unequal oppositional terms. Given also the gender ambiguity of the narrator, "Master" and "Oc" may be seen as two aspects of Pat him/herself rather than two distinct sexed beings.

Whereas *In Transit*'s pornographic context is the long French tradition of sado-masochistic literary pornography from the works of the Marquis de Sade to *The Story of O* (1954) by Pauline Réage, in *How to Be Both*, pornography has become a series of decontextualized visuals observed by a sixteen- year-old girl on an ipad. In comparison to the relative inaccessibility of pornography, especially to children and young people, in the 1960s and 70s when Brophy was writing, Smith points to the ubiquity of pornography in the twenty-first century via social media. Initially, George searches porn sites to find out what the kids at school are talking about: "It was interesting at first. It was quite eye-opening. It got boring and repetitive quite fast" (Smith 32). George is intrigued by the realism of the images: "Was it real? Or was the woman just acting?" (33). Like Brophy, Smith has her protagonist ask ontological questions about the nature and status of sexual imagery and discourse. Whereas *In Transit* foregrounds the artificiality of all discursive systems, *How to Be Both* asks ethical questions about pornography's numbing effect on its audience. In contrast to the artistic creativity of Francesco del Cossa exhibited in the frescoes of the Palazzo Schifanoia or 'Palace of Not Being Bored' in Ferrara, contemporary digital pornography evinces a boring sameness and a poverty of language and the imagination.

In one scene she witnesses, George experiences an acute sense of identification with the girl in the image:

> There was a girl in it who must have been sixteen because of the legality but looked much younger than George. She looked about twelve. There was a man in it who looked about forty. When he kissed her he took her whole face into his mouth. They were in a yurt-like

> room for a very long time doing stuff and the uncomplaining smallness of the girl alongside her evident discomfort and the way she looked both there and absent, as if she's been drugged, given something to make her feel things in slower motion than they were actually happening to her, had changed something in the structures of George's brain and heart and certainly her eyes, so that afterwards when George tried to watch any more of this kind of sexual film that girl was waiting under them all. (35)

As a result, George pledges to watch the same pornographic sequence every day, in an empathic act of being "attentive" and bearing witness to the trauma of the girl. Smith therefore not only exposes the power relations of pornography as Brophy does, but sees it as an exploitative relation that may impact the viewer negatively (35). Of course, as Smith's dual narrative implies, sexual assaults on young women were also commonplace in Renaissance Italy, as in the rape of the artist Artemesia Gentileschi. In contrast to George's response of bearing witness by reliving sexual trauma, her mother responds to such abuses of power by exposing them through the use of subversive techniques of absurd punning in a manner very reminiscent of Brophy's strategy in *In Transit*. Smith's account could only perhaps be written after the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s, to which Brophy passionately subscribed but which has arguably had an ambivalent legacy. Pornography, especially that involving children, has grown exponentially since the 1960s and 70s, and its effects on young minds and bodies have been researched and highlighted in numerous studies[9] While Brophy emphasizes the subversive possibilities of playing with pornographic imagery and language, Smith foregounds the material bodies on which it is enacted; empathic unsettlement rather than the restless play of language and desire is uppermost in her representation.

As Dock observes: "To varying degrees, [Brophy's] works all evince a continuing emphasis on art, in the broadest sense. She uses musical patterns and shifting tempos, cinematic or photographic effects, and images – most notably, baroque – to evoke the texture of her fiction" (Dock and Brophy 152). As this suggests, Brophy's work is highly interdisciplinary, bringing the techniques of musical composition, film, and baroque art and architecture to bear on the structure of the novel. In several

works, Brophy elaborated her understanding of baroque as a form which could inform and facilitate her narrative method. In *Baroque-'n'-Roll and Other Essays*, for example, she writes:

> Baroque is an open, sometimes an explosive embrace of contradictions, intellectual and of feeling. Ambiguity and puns are its raw material merely. Its essence is the ambivalence, in full deep psychoanalytic import, of emotions. It is a pair of giant curly brackets that clip together things irreconcilable. (Brophy *Baroque* 149)

Indeed, Brophy's whole approach to art represents a refutation of the Aristotelian principle that "a thing cannot be both x and not-x" (Dock and Brophy 166). As Maack states: "Through this appropriation of music and painting Brophy attempts to create a baroque *Gesamtskunstwerk*: a work embracing every medium" (Maack 44). There are numerous painterly and/or sculptural references in the text, from the woven weeds of Piero della Francesca's angels in his 'Madonna del Parto' fresco (Brophy 142), and the blue of de Chirico's painted skies (150), to the novel's closing image of Bernini's Ecstasy of St Teresa, which is considered the most extreme statement in Baroque sculpture, yet one whose sincerity is not always taken seriously.

Art is also central to *How to Be both*; in particular it is Baroque's predecessor, the Italian Renaissance that Smith celebrates in terms of a playful both/and aesthetics. On the trip to Italy, George plays the "what's-the-point-of-art game", demanding, "what's it got to do with *anything*?" (Smith 46). One of her mother's political slogans or 'Subverts' provides the answer: "Art makes nothing happen in a way that makes something happen" (46) in an echo of Auden's line "For poetry makes nothing happen". George doesn't understand this until she sees how the art they are viewing affects her mother's mood, making her feel joyful. Looking closely at the fresco by Francesco del Cosso, George realises that the "picture makes you look at both – the close-up happenings and the bigger picture" (53). The same could be said of *In Transit*, in which the obsessive focus on language games draws attention to the aesthetic power of art to shape experience and, crucially, identity as well as highlighting the political power relations that art simultaneously invokes and subverts, as in the pornographic literature Brophy parodies.

In the opening scene of *How to Be Both*, George is replaying in her mind a conversation with her mother Carol: "You're an artist, her mother says. Am I? George says. Since when? […] Ha ha, her mother says. Humour me. Imagine it. You're an artist" (3). The scene provides an objective correlative for the whole novel in so far as it is an invitation to imagine alternatives, to think and live artfully. Carol poses George a "moral conundrum": should an artist be paid more than other artists if they believe their work is superior? George queries whether the artist is alive or dead, male or female to which her mother replies "does it matter?" "It can't be both. It must be one or the other" counters George. "Who says? Why must it?" responds her mother. This question lies at the heart of both *How to Be Both* and *In Transit*: while both novels could be said to answer "both x and not-x" to the question of sexual difference in art, the answer Smith gives is qualitatively different to that of Brophy. Whereas Brophy defers the sexual signified throughout the text, oscillating between designations, here male, there female, linguistically and psychologically indeterminate, Smith's text produces a rich layering of embodied experience that is both woman-centred in the mother–daughter episodes but also records the transgendered experience of the artist in a particular historical context.

According to Brophy, the structure of *In Transit* represents an attempt to write in symphonic form, using four movements rather than three, and Brahms's symphonies in particular, which create a sense of disintegration rather than concordance, were apparently the model for the book (Dock and Brophy 167). In fact, the novel is divided into four sections according to the structure of Brahms's Fourth Symphony: Allegro non troppo; Andante; Scherzo and Fugue, Allegro Energico e Pasionato (followed by a Codetta). As Tom Service states, Brahms's Fourth Symphony is characterised by an "uncompromising intellectual complexity and refinement" and an "expressive implacability and even tragedy"; indeed, the music "is some of the darkest and deepest in the 19th century. What you're hearing in it is an E minor nail in the coffin of the possibility of a symphonic happy ending" (Service). Service notes the response of Eduard Hanslick, Brahms's critical champion who, on hearing the first movement, commented "I feel I've just been beaten up by two terribly intelligent people" (Service). Given the formal and intellectual challenges posed by their texts, the same could be said by readers of both Brophy and Smith! The last few chapters of Section One of Brophy's novel are devoted to the

libretto of a parodic classical opera called "Alitalia" - clearly a pun on the name of the Italian national airline - in which, in subversive fashion, men sing the soprano and women the bass parts, thus mirroring the gender reversals of the plot and the narrator's own confusion about his/her sexual identity (Dock and Brophy 159). For example, the character of Orestes is a mezzo-soprano (Brophy *In* 56) while Sappho takes the decidedly "butch" baritone role (53). Brophy's depiction of Sappho as a "butch" figure is undoubtedly inspired by her literary hero Ronald Firbank's use of her in his Sapphic novels, as elaborated over hundreds of pages in her biography of Firbank, *Prancing Novelist*.[10]

Smith's *How to Be Both* is similarly full of music but rather than presenting it as a principle of design of the novel as a musical form, Smith foregrounds the importance of music in her characters' lives. While her mother was alive, music brought the family together and functioned as a collective experience of shared joy. Following her mother's death, George attempts to assuage her grief by listening to music, particularly songs that her music-loving mother has shared with her such as "Let's twist again" (4) and "Tell Laura I love her" (25). She tries to honour her mother's memory by looking for songs to dance 'the twist' to in the way her mother did in daily life. In this way, music both acts as a carrier of memory and as a life-affirming practice. In both Brophy and Smith's work, therefore, music is a privileged category in so far as it is a gender-indeterminate notational form, capable of expressing a both/and aesthetic.

If music and art are central preoccupations of both writers, the theme of language is also central: "Ce qui m'étonnait c'était qu'it was my French that disintegrated first" (Brophy 11). *In Transit*'s very first sentence is a bilingual one, thereby highlighting the novel's preoccupation with language and linguistic constructions, the 'qu'it' ("quit") cleverly signifying the point at which linguistic mastery is apparently lost. In Section One, significantly subtitled "Linguistic Leprosy", the narrator ponders the complexities of mode of address in the novel, especially in partially non-gender specific languages such as English[9]: "How can I address you, interlocutor, when the only language I so much as half command is one in which the 'you' does not even reveal (Stepasiding that problem of *where* you are) how many there are of you and of what sex?" (41). Even explicitly gender-inflected languages such as French can prove ambivalent in this respect:

> They're sly these Romance languages, in this matter of sex. Sly rather than shy, I shurmise [sic]; for they sometimes do, sometimes won't, the girlish things. Sometimes the adjectives don't change. Vous êtes triste? Tick:-masc. □ fem. □. Strik(e) out whichever does not apsly [sic]. J'en suis content(e). (41-2)

Of course, on another meta-fictional level, the text only works at all because of the non-gender specific character of English in the 'I' and 'you' forms.[11] But, English does utilize gender conventions for designating certain nouns, which leads the narrator to remark testily: "*I do not want to be told the sex of inanimate objects*" (42). The novel is attuned to the colonial overtones of language too. As Pat tells the reader at one point, "We [the Irish] speak English as a foreign language, even when we have no other" (Brophy *In* 35), thus echoing the scene in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* when Stephen thinks resentfully of the English Dean of Studies: "His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech" (Joyce 166). As David Vichnar has argued, "*In Transit* is a fundamentally Joycean text" in which "Brophy clearly aligns her experimentation, however mock-seriously, with what she recognises as Joyce's anti-imperialist, de-colonising linguistic project" (Vichnar). As well as alluding to Anglo-Irish colonialism, Brophy's linguistic punning on "the langue d'Oc" refuses the imperialist privileging of dominant (Northern) French at the expense of a subordinate regional (occidental) dialect. In the Southern dialect the word for 'yes' was 'oc' rather than 'oil', which became 'oui' in modern French. Brophy's deployment of the concept of both/and therefore extends beyond gender and sexuality to encompass language itself: the yes/no binary signifying which French language will be legally allowed in print and official discourse is literally opposed by the ongoing co-existence of *both* Oc *and* Oil/Oui in a yes/yes complementarity. Once again, Brophy is years ahead of her time in challenging the French political orthodoxy in the post-war period and anticipating the language rights movements of the last few decades, which have resulted in the introduction of bilingual street signs throughout Provence and the Cote D'Azur.[12]

Smith's *How to Be Both* similarly evinces a strong interest in the 'political' aspects of language. The protagonist's mother Carol is an economist and cultural activist who produces "Subverts", a form of pun employed for political purposes along the lines of the Guerrilla Girls'

interventionist graffiti art.[13] According to one of Carol's Subverts, in which Margaret Thatcher gives birth to "Baby" Blair, an image of a naked Tony Blair dressed in a nappy is superimposed onto a Botticelli-like scene with the caption "The Birth of Vain Us" (Smith 19), a pun that would not look out of place in *In Transit*. Georgeherself deconstructs every sentence, word and lyric she comes across. She is obsessed with grammar and consciously uses constructions such as "he or she" as in: "he or she can look at the inside […] anytime he or she chooses" (12). That is, until the death of her mother when she suddenly ceases to care about such language matters: "At least they've used an apostrophe, the George from before her mother died says. I do not give a fuck about whether some site on the internet attends to grammatical correctness, the George from after says" (5). Whereas George habitually sees language as a fixed set of rules, her mother Carol encourages her to break them: "I subscribe to the belief that language is a living growing changing organism" (9). Like Brophy, whose story of Oc's tongue ended with the disappearance from official French culture of this regional dialect, Smith acknowledges the provisionality of linguistic and political constructions. In the second half of my copy of the novel, also called Part One in order to underline the equality and equivalence of the two narratives and disrupt the notion of primacy, the artist narrator's friend Barto declares that stories infuriate him; "They're never the story I need or really want" (368).[14] In contrast, Smith, as author, writes the story she really needs and wants, just as Brophy deconstructs the form and language of the novel, revealing the sleight of hand at its heart.

The resolution of both novels foregrounds the materiality of language. *In Transit* ends with an operatic "Codetta" in which the quest to assign gender identity is finally abandoned with the recognition that "It no longer matters a damn of course whether 'I' is masc. or fem. Or whether 'you' is sing. or plur." (Brophy *In* 234). In a gesture of authorial liberation, Brophy hands over responsibility to the reader: "So You'll have to make the choice" (235). The capitalization is yet another example of Brophy's both/and aesthetic: *both* an emphasis on the second person *and* a reference to those languages (such as German, ("sie"/"Sie") that connote the difference between both singular and plural, and polite and informal, forms of "you" and "they". Two columns then provide alternative endings for Patricia/Patrick. Brophy acknowledges that the whole thing is "Explicit

fiction" (236). She concludes with a fittingly "baroque metaphor", an image of Bernini's statue of St Teresa, head thrown back in orgasmic ecstasy. The novel ends with an image of rebirth, that of Aphrodite rising from the waves. The narrator admits: "I conceive I can read as well as be read like a book" (236). Turning the tables, s/he exhorts the reader to "locute to me" and tell the story themselves. The final line, punning both on grammar and the concept of rebirth reads: "I am coming out now, quite datively, to and for You – to and for, that is Scholiastically to say, the both of You" (236). And, in a segue from the literary to the visual, the text concludes, in Vichnar's words, "with a fish-ideogram, the French word for end, FIN, written over its lower 'fin'" (Vichnar). Conventional novelistic closure is therefore explicitly abandoned in favour of the meta-fictional foregrounding of the relationship between artist/writer and audience/reader.

In a strikingly similar manner, Smith concludes *How to Be Both* with the long dead yet immortal Renaissance artist Francesco del Cosso (*both* dead *and* still living) watching George and her friend H as they paint two watchful eyes on the wall of the house where Carol's friend lives. The text transforms into a kind of pattern poem reminiscent of the metaphysical poets, such as George Herbert's "Easter Wings". The reader's attention is drawn to the way the words are arranged on the page, and significance is given to the shape they form rather than simply their semantic meaning. The eye is drawn down the page and simultaneously down the wall itself, to the place where it meets the paving "look/the line where/one thing meets another/the little green almost not-there weeds/take root in it/by enchantment" (Smith 370). The scene resolves into a plane, a place "where a horizontal line meets a/vertical and a surface meets a surface and a/structure meets another which looks to/be 2 dimensions only but is deeper than/sea" (371). The "eye" of the mural becomes the artist's eye/ "I" through which we are invited to look, and see the natural world created in and through art. This, Smith suggests, is a world that calls into question gender and linguistic constructions; in which shape, colour, and pattern re-create our sense of the real, encompassing "everything to be made and unmade both" (372). Thus both texts advocate a philosophy of both/and regarding gender, language and art; for Brophy and Smith, we co-create gender identity in and through the aesthetic and textual worlds we inhabit.

The idea of being "in transit" in a deep ontological sense is one that is central to both novels. We all, they suggest, occupy the spaces in-between genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and all identity is in a sense provisional. Pat O'Rooley is alternately male and female depending on whether the narrative is rendered in the past (male) tense or present (female) tense, and on how s/he is interpellated by the other "characters". Moreover, O'Rooley is both a literal and metaphorical diasporic subject – hailing from Ireland but translocated to Britain, an embodiment of the wandering Irish person. S/he is not so much an economic migrant or a refugee as a subject-in-process, perpetually between departure and arrival in another unnamed state. In Smith's *How to Be Both*, George's mother, observing the way George watches TV and uses her laptop and phone all at the same time, reflects that information technology has made 'migration' a new norm: "We are all migrants of our own existence now" (Smith 41). She adds that this is a risky state to be in given "how migrants get treated all over the world" (41). George may also be seen as a character whose identity is "in transit"; in so far as she is between the states of child and adult, between girl and boy in terms of identification and desire, and between loss and recovery following the death of her mother. If O'Rooley is exiled from his/her (adopted) homeland, then George, the searching adolescent protagonist, is exiled from love.

Arguably, Brophy could be criticised for paying insufficient attention to the concrete, material sites of travel, transition and sexual performance, and this is possibly another reason why a more realist-oriented feminist canon lost sight of her work. Like Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, she suggests the idea of both/and gender identity as a feature of the androgynous mind. Smith, on the other hand, adopts a more materialist approach which, while queering the sexed body, identifies and condemns a set of power relations between economically empowered (male) subjects and disempowered (female) ones. Criticising Brophy's preoccupation with "language games, gender bending, and the exploration of multiple identities", Carole Fabricant argues that, "in our era sites of transit have produced situations of considerably greater urgency and import than linguistic quests for errant female phalluses" (Fabricant 269). However, just like Joyce before her, Brophy was fully aware of the concept of psychological exile and migration.[15] Moreover, we cannot expect her to have

mapped the paradigmatic shifts that sexual politics, globalisation, and technology have brought to contemporary writing since the 1970s. Nevertheless, her work goes a long way towards anticipating them as I hope this comparative analysis of Brophy's and Smith's novels has shown. Defending Brophy from the charge of playing mere language games, I would suggest that, far from being apolitical, Brophy's linguistic experimentalism bring us into closer proximity to issues of both aesthetic and political import. As Wheeler argues in his perceptive appraisal of Brophy's novel: "For commentary from 1969 to ring so true today is as astonishing as it is upsetting – Brophy observed and criticised so much, and the world did so little" (Wheeler). Smith's work combines a similar political and formal radicalism, thereby both continuing and urgently reminding us of Brophy's extraordinary legacy.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Richard Canning for his many insightful comments and helpful suggestions on the first draft of this essay.

Notes

1. Smith's praise appears on the front cover and among the testimonials on the first page: "This pitch-perfect novel, an inquiry into romanticism and disaffection, is witty, unexpectedly moving and a revelation again of Brophy's originality. Entirely of its time, it remains years ahead of itself even now, nearly 60 years later, in its emotional range and its intellectual and formal blend of stoicism and sophistication."
2. The novel had previously been reprinted by Gay Men's Press in 1989, which is significant given that the press does not usually publish lesbian works.

3. John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, another early example of postmodernism in British fiction, was published in the same year.
4. Several other lesbian writers have adopted a similar device of not declaring the gender identity of their characters. Maureen Duffy's (1971) *Love Child* was written as a direct response to *In Transit* and outdoes the latter by incorporating not one but two gender indeterminate characters. Jeanette Winterson's (1992) *Written on the Body* is another more recent example of the genre.
5. An increasing number of countries and regions including Australia, Canada and the EU now allow third-sex designation on passports although this document remains the crucial denote of sex (M/F/X).
6. My thanks to Richard Canning for pointing this out.
7. Brophy was obsessed with Mozart and with *Don Giovanni* in particular. See *Mozart the Dramatist*.
8. While the langue d'Oc was defeated in print, it survives in spoken French and the region is still known as Languedoc today. For further discussion of Brophy's exploration of the 'Oc' dialect in the context of colonialism, see the section on Language below.
9. See, for example, Pardun, CJ; L'Engle, KL; and Brown, J. (2005). "Linking exposure to outcomes: early adolescents' consumption of sexual content in six media." *Mass Communication & Society*. 8 (2), 75-91. 10; and Flood, M. (2009). "The harms of pornography exposure among children and young people." *Child Abuse Review*, 18, 384-400.
10. See Peter Parker's essay in the Special Issue.
11. While English specifies gender in the third person's/he' forms, there are signs of a move towards a third person singular 'they' to accommodate transgender and binary fluid subjects.
12. See Rodney Ball. "Language: divisions and debates." *The Cambridge Companion to Modern French Culture*, edited by Nicholas Hewitt, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp.125-144.
13. The Guerrilla Girls are a shifting collective of radical feminist activists and artists, formed in 1985, who are committed to exposing and challenging discrimination and inequality in the art world through strategies of visual and linguistic subversion.

14. It was Brophy's contemporary B.S. Johnson who pioneered the book whose pages could be read in any order with his 'book in a box', *The Unfortunates* (1968).
15. Indeed, Brophy's *Black Ship to Hell*, explored by Michael Bronski in this Special Issue, completely revises Freud's understanding of the concept of psychological trauma in terms of exile.

Works Cited

Auden, W.H. "In memory of W.B. Yeats." *Another Time*, Faber, 2007.

Brooke-Rose, Christine. Introduction. *In Transit: An Heroi-cyclic Novel*, by Brigid Brophy, Dalkey Archive Press, 2002, pp. i-vii.

Brophy, Brigid. *In Transit: An Heroi-cyclic Novel*. Introduced by Christine Brooke-Rose, Dalkey Archive Press, 2002.

---. *Baroque-'n'-Roll and Other Essays*, Hamish Hamilton, 1987.

Carter. Angela. "Notes from the Frontline." *On Gender and Writing*, edited by Michelene Wandor, Pandora Press, 1983, pp. 69-77.

---. *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History*, Virago, 1979.

Dock, Leslie and Brigid Brophy. "An Interview with Brigid Brophy." *Contemporary Literature*, vol.17, no.2, Spring 1976, pp. 151-170.

Fabricant, Carole. Review of *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* by Karen R. Lawrence. *Modern Philology*, vol. 95 no. 2, Nov 1997, pp. 265-270.

Hardwick, Elizabeth. "Review of *In Transit*." *Vogue*. 15 March 1970, p. 28.

Hopkins, Chris. "The neglect of Brigid Brophy." *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 15 no. 3, Fall 1995, pp. 12-17.

Jordan, Justine. “Ali Smith’s joyful curiosity about language, love and everything else.” *The Guardian*. 3 June 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/03/ali-smith-baileys-fiction-prize

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. A Norton Critical Edition, edited by Paul Riquleme, Norton, 2007.

Kuykendall, Sue. “Reinventing the Empowered Self: Feminine Adventures in Masculinity.” *College Literature*, vol. 23 no. 1, Comparative Poetics: Non-Western Traditions of Literary Theory, Feb. 1996, pp. 193-203.

Lawrence, Karen R. *Penelope’s Voyages*. *Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*, Cornell UP, 1994.

Maack, Annagret. “Concordia Discors: Brigid Brophy’s *In Transit*”, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 15 no. 3, Fall 1995, pp. 40-45.

Moore, Steven. “Brigid Brophy: An Introduction and Checklist.” *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 15 no. 3, Fall 1995, pp. 7–11.

Parker, Emma. “Re-envisioning Feminist Fiction”. *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction Since 1945*, edited by David James, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 79-94.

Réage, Pauline. *The Story of O*. (1954), Corgi, 1976.

Service, Tom. ‘Symphony Guide: Brahm’s Fourth.’ *The Guardian*, 13 May 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2014/may/13/symphony-guide-brahms-fourth-tom-service.

Smith, Ali. *How To Be Both*, Penguin, 2014.

Stryker, Susan. “Transgender feminism: queering the woman question”. *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, edited by Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp.59-70.

Vichnar, David. “On Brigid Brophy’s *In Transit*.” https://equuspress.wordpress.com/2014/08/18/the-fearless-iconoclast/.

Waugh, Patricia. “The woman writer and the continuities of feminism.” *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction*, edited by James English, Blackwell, 2006, pp. 188-208.

Wheeler, Charles. “Review of Brigid Brophy’s *In Transit*.” http://everybodysreviewing.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/review-of-brigid-brophys-in-transit-by.html.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own*. (1929), Penguin, 2002.

---. *Orlando*. (1928) Penguin, 2000.