

# Critical Exchange

PUBLISHED BY



## FEMINIST POLITICAL STRATEGIES

SPRING 1988  
Number 25

CRITICAL EXCHANGE #25: SPRING 1988

GENERAL EDITOR

James J. Sosnoski

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Barbara Herrnstein Smith

3

FEMINIST POLITICAL STRATEGIES

GUEST EDITORS

Dale Bauer and Kristina Straub

MANAGING EDITOR

Andrew Lakritz

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Susan Jarratt & Arthur Casciato

FEMINIST POLITICAL STRATEGIES

Dale Bauer

6

FINDING THE HINGE: SUBVERSIVE PEDAGOGY

Mary Pinard

8

THE BABY M CASE: A RISKY BUSINESS

Janice Doane & Devon Hodges

18

BABY M: PARENTAL PRIVILEGE

Susan Jaret McKinstry

31

THE POLITICS OF READING: FEMINISM, THE NOVEL, AND  
THE COERCIONS OF "TRUTH"

Joanne S. Frye

37

IS TEACHING FEMINIST STRATEGIES OF READING ENOUGH?

Ann Ardis

50

POLITICS OF GENDER AND TEMPORALITY IN Beyond the  
Pleasure Principle

James A. Winders

53

Published by The Society for Critical Exchange

The Support of the English Department of  
Miami University is gratefully acknowledged.

Printed by Landen Desktop Publishing Center, Inc., Maineville, Ohio.

FEMINIST POLITICAL STRATEGIES

INTERPRETIVE FORCE James J. Sosnoski	63
WATCHING THE DETECTIVES Nathalie F. Anderson	65
PRIVATE EYE/T'S Colleen Kennedy	74
THE DISCOURSE WITHIN: FEMINISM AND INTRADISCIPLINARY STUDY Susan M. Griffin	81
SEXUAL DOUBLE CROSS: A RESPONSE TO SUSAN M. GRIFFIN'S "THE DISCOURSE WITHIN" Patricia Sharpe	91
THE POLITICS OF THE "AUTHOR-FUNCTION": IN CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST CRITICISM John Schilb	96
"CONSISTENCY IS ALL WE ASK": OR LEGAL RHETORIC AND THE APPEAL TO A HIGHER COURT Judith Roof	108

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Barbara Herrnstein Smith

I thank the Board for the honor, and all of you for coming here. I won't express my gratitude with a speech, but I'll take the occasion, as Jim Sosnoski has suggested, to note a few topics that I think will be or should be significant for the literary academy in the coming years and so warrant the attention of the members of the Society for Critical Exchange, either as such or otherwise.

The first of these topics is the very complex set of issues—historical, political, empirical, theoretical, practical, and tactical—that converge on the current movement for educational reform: that is, the discussion of falling scores, declining literacies, forgotten legacies, national danger, and cultural decay. The attribution of various social problems to defects of educational system—and the corollary expectation of the solution of such problems through educational reform—is hardly new, especially in America, where the elimination of illiteracies of various kinds has long been held the key to and sign of social progress and national well-being. The intensity and significance of the current movement, however, should not, I think, be underestimated. Clearly, when expressions of apocalyptic alarm issue from such powerful governmental agencies as the Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Humanities and are conjoined with scapegoating diagnoses and specific proposals for regressive measures on a quite massive scale, then we have reason to be concerned about their consequences for the future of American education—and more than education.

A number of projects sponsored by the Society for Critical Exchange—including GRIP and PRISM—are evidently already focused on related topics (indicating the prescience as well as boldness with which the Society has characteristically operated in identifying key issues for debate and exploration). There is one cluster of issues, however, namely those relating to popular and mass-mediated culture, that I would be especially eager to see pursued, both because they operate so crucially in the present debates over the state of American education and culture and also because they have been so routinely evaded or mishandled for so long by critical theorists. What I have in mind are questions about the role of the mass media in the transmission (or, as it may be thought, subversion or destruction) of cultural competency, the psycho-social dynamics of the revulsion of high-culture critics at the consumption by low-culture publics of popular art forms, and the history of accounts that link the cultural tastes of the Other with decay, degeneracy, savagery, and corruption. If we rise

to the challenge, I think we may yet live to see accounts of the social dynamics of popular culture that move beyond the narrow categories of traditional cultural criticism as played out along the axis that runs right to left from Arnold to Adorno.

The second general topic that concerns me is the continuation and current exacerbation of loose talk on the subject of theory, especially the tendency to oppose "theory"—in a very vague or elastic sense—to just about everything: theory versus literature, theory versus criticism, theory versus history, theory versus politics, and, of course, the font and engine of all these, theory versus "practice." As I have detailed elsewhere and will not repeat here, I think each of these, including the last, is questionable as a distinction even before it is produced as an opposition; what I wish to comment on just now, however, is the only faintly amusing intersection of two forms of anti-theory: one, sophisticated but institutionally vulnerable; the other, naive but institutionally powerful.

It must be recognized, I think, that, however else one defines it (and it can clearly be defined in many different ways), "theory" has become the label assigned to whatever is most innovative and disruptive in the literary academy and the humanistic disciplines more generally. It is not surprising, then, that any campaign mounted under the banner "Against Theory" will attract hurrahs from a sizable portion of the bystanders, many of whom will not pause to read the fine print. When the Secretary of Education, the Under Secretary of Education, and the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities all declare themselves to be against theory and theory to be against everything desirable—then, while it may not be reason enough to be for theory, it's at least reason to be especially clear about what one is against when one sings the same battle cry.

Third and finally, because my election to this position was probably not an altogether ungendered act, I would like to say something about women and theory. First, I think it is clear that, among the numerous, heterogeneous projects currently pursued under the label "theory," none has been more vigorously disruptive of standard operating procedures than feminist theory, and none less likely to submit to announcements of its expiration, irrelevance, or inconsequentiality. I doubt if there is now a question or practice in the literary academy—or perhaps in any field—that has not been marked, measured, and transformed by feminist theories (plural) and, as far as I can see, their intellectual vitality and institutional authority are increasing every minute.

But feminist theory per se (if it is "per se"—able, which I would seriously question) is not my third topic. What it is is something I file mentally under the label "theoretical women," by which I mean not a particular list of women theorists—though such a list could be compiled if one put one's mind to it, and had one's heart in it—but precisely the fact that, while such a list is possible, it is nevertheless in many places denied or thought suspect or grotesque. For along with the other questionable antagonisms that I mentioned earlier (that is, theory versus literature,

theory versus criticism, theory versus history, etc.), there is another that has begun to play itself out at just the moment of the mainstreaming of feminist criticism and theory, this antagonism being, of course, theory versus women—or, in some of its alternate permutations, women versus theory, or feminism versus theory, or real women versus theoretical women and male theory. It is suggested, in other words, that when a woman does theory, then either what she does is not theory or what she is is not a woman. And what must be questioned, of course, are the motives and consequences of that strenuous and, it is implied, inevitable disjunction.

What are the motives, for example, when, within a still male-dominated literary academy, there is a persistent conflation of women-doing-theory with feminist theory? And what are the consequences when women's production of theory or dealing with theory produced by men is regarded as class-betrayal, self-betrayal, or mental transvestism? Do those motives not include such familiar ones as the protection of social dominance and institutional privilege? And do those consequences not include the continued segregation of women? It seems to me that what we are seeing here is a repetition of the familiar process whereby the traces of an historical exclusion (in this case, the exclusion of women from institutional intellectual activity and significance) are taken either as the signs of an underlying incapacity or the badge of a negative authenticity, the effects of each being, in this case, not only the continued segregation of women but the reinscription of just those dualisms—mind/body, thought/feeling, public/private, general/particular, etc.—in the name of which those historical exclusions have always been justified. The disjunction and opposition between women and theory are, in my view, a mistake, both conceptually and tactically, and I look forward to the time—which I have no doubt will come—when it is generally recognized that theoretical women are not just theoretical.

Well, these are all topics for future critical exchange. I thank you for coming.

\*Delivered at a convocation of friends, colleagues, and members of the Society for Critical Exchange held at the MLA convention, San Francisco, California, December 28, 1987.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith  
Duke University

## FEMINIST POLITICAL STRATEGIES

Dale Bauer

On behalf of SCE I want to thank the participants in the two sessions, "Feminist Political Strategies" and "Feminism and Other Discourses," at the MMLA Convention in Columbus, Ohio (Fall 1987) whose papers are published here.

This issue of Critical Exchange explores the importance of postmodern theories to feminism and political practice. We would argue for an investigation of ways of reading not only literary texts, but also theories of the subject, of high theory, and popular culture, of entertainment, of judicial decisions. We want to put theory and feminism into dialogue, hoping that this dialogue will result in reinvestigations of the culture which surrounds us and inevitably the culture we teach.

In order to encourage such collaborative dialogue, Jim Sosnoski, Patricia Harkin, and Leroy Searle began the Society for Critical Exchange in 1976; since then, SCE has sponsored exchanges about Derrida's and Jameson's work, men in feminism, and third world theorizing, among other issues in cultural studies. What's important about SCE is that it discusses work in progress and invites its members to participate in its projects. It also serves as a forum for collaborative exchanges in the academy.

Perhaps by highlighting the tension between theory and practice, the central and the marginal, the phallogentric and the eccentric, the authors here have shown how to continue the dialogue between politics and reading.

I want to draw from Mary Russo's "Female Grotesques" (an essay in Teresa de Lauretis's Feminist Studies/Critical Studies) in order to explain the imperative for bringing feminism to the fore both in politics and discursive communities. Russo claims that women have been punished for making spectacles of themselves. With respect to political and theoretical discourse, she writes:

There has been . . . a carnival of theory at the discursive level, in the poetics of postmodern criticism and feminist writing. It has included all manner of textual travesty, "mimetic rivalry," semiotic delinquency, parody, teasing, posing, flirting, masquerade, seduction, counterse-duction, tight-rope walking, and verbal aerialisms of all kinds. Performances of displacement, double displacements, and more have permeated much feminist writing in our attempts to survive or muscle

in on the discourses of Lacanian psychoanalysis, deconstruction, avant-garde writing, and postmodern visual art (221).

The conjunction of feminist theory and other discourses has led, according to Russo, to the "acting out" of women's silenced or marginalized roles in the academy.

Our goal in this exchange is to "act out" viable intersections between feminism and interpretive conventions in and outside the academy. There is no zone or arena which gender does not enter and dispute the territory. There is no world elsewhere beyond patriarchal language—gendered voices constitute the interpretive world.

Patriarchal culture is not a monolith; nothing is internalized totally and irrevocably. We will always have internalized norms from various cultural contexts and contacts as long as we have interpretive communities. The Society for Critical Exchange hopes to open up a dialogue about interventionist strategy, about pedagogical and political moves to counteract the normalizing and disciplinary structures of patriarchal culture.

Finally, collaboration, of the sort Devon Hodges and Janice Doane do, of the sort Joanne Frye calls for as a possible response in teaching the novel, and of the sort Mary Pinard teaches in her classrooms at Katie Gibbs is an important strategy. Collaboration makes us collaborationists—working against a common enemy in the hegemony of patriarchy, a common enemy whose tactics and methods are strong and must be muted in order for our voices to be heard. The Society for Critical Exchange encourages such collaboration. This issue is a beginning.

Dale Bauer  
Miami University

## FINDING THE HINGE: SUBVERSIVE PEDAGOGY

Mary C. Pinard

The secretary. Does she go to a real college? Does she actually spend time learning how to type? Make the boss's coffee? File? Isn't she the one with long, slim fingers just made for typing, big hair, no opinions, no voice from behind her machine?

These are only a few of the questions I hear when I say I teach at a secretarial school. I continue, explain. No, I am not a typing or shorthand teacher, nor am I the librarian. I teach an Introduction to Women's Literature course in the Liberal Arts Department at Katharine Gibbs School in Boston. Astonishment. Liberal arts for secretaries? They think? Read? And literature by women?

The negative stereotype of the secretary and of her "training" is widespread and probably well-deserved. (The use of the term "training" when referring to secretarial instruction is revealing: it implies the unsophisticated nature not only of what a secretary learns but how she learns it; it's secretarial training, not secretarial education.) What I have discovered in the two years I have been teaching at the Gibbs school, however, is that the stereotypes we flippantly assign secretaries and the training they literally internalize are in place because we need them to be. Who else will file, type, duplicate, transcribe, delete, alter documents while remaining cheerful, loyal, stylishly coiffed at the same time? Fawn Hall, Oliver North's personal secretary, provides a perfect example of the secretary's peculiar position as employee: she's a key figure in office matters, but ultimately has no power to exert her own judgments or opinions. And can we live with ourselves if we hire truly educated, motivated people to do these less than fulfilling tasks for less than fulfilling wages?

According to government statistics, in 1984 there were 4.9 million secretaries in the U.S., and some 439,000 new secretarial jobs open up every year.<sup>1</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor reported that in 1985 half of working women were in occupations that were over 70% female; women made up 98% of secretaries, stenographers and typists.<sup>2</sup> Katharine Gibbs, which has been in continuous operation for over seventy-five years, trains over 6000 students each year at its eleven schools;<sup>3</sup> alumnae records now show a total of over 65,000 students.<sup>4</sup> And Katharine Gibbs is not the only secretarial school in this country.

I feel strongly that as feminist teachers we cannot ignore this enormous population of largely female students, nor can we assume they do not want to be exposed to ideas, issues, some awareness of themselves

in the workplace. How their particular needs get served is a more difficult question given how secretarial schools operate. In order to share with you some of my experiences in the classroom at Katharine Gibbs, I will first explain the situation there.

In thinking about the Gibbs system, I have found Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed very useful. His discussion of the "banking" concept of teaching fits perfectly the primary training method at Gibbs:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat.<sup>5</sup>

This is literally true in the typing classroom where the teacher dictates a series of single letters, words, sometimes sentences and business letters. The students hear the letters and words and reproduce them—unprocessed, ideally unaltered—through their fingers. In a sense, this Gibbsian scenario is bleaker than Freire's banking concept: he says students are containers, receptacles to be filled by the teacher, "the more completely the teacher fills the receptacle the better teacher he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are."<sup>6</sup> In the typing classroom, however, the words never really settle inside the "receptacles." They merely pass through briefly. There is no true expectation for process, no real "investment."

Freire proposes an alternative to the banking concept in the form of a problem-posing education which, through dialogue, involves the "constant unveiling of reality" and allows students to "perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as static reality, but as reality in process, in transformation."<sup>7</sup> He goes on to say that a problem-posing process demythologizes reality and is based on creativity which, in turn, will stimulate true reflection.<sup>8</sup>

Ideas of creativity, problem-posing and critical thinking, dialogue and reality unveiled, are, you must understand, radical in themselves in the context of Katharine Gibbs. A few facts about the school will explain. Katharine Ryan Gibbs started her first secretarial school in Providence, Rhode Island in 1911. It was her idea that success for women in the business world depended on a combination of superior technical skills and outstanding personal character.

Her curriculum was to provide not only courses in technical skills, but the polish that comes with exposure to liberal arts and polite society. She recruited young women from upper middle class families and taught them not only typing and shorthand, but finishing school conduct as well. In the early years of the school, students were never to appear in public without wearing white gloves and the proper hat. Even today, National Secretaries' Day is commemorated with high tea at Boston's Ritz Carlton; the proper

hat and white gloves are optional, but many Gibbs students wear them for the occasion.

When Mrs. Gibbs died in 1934, her son became president of the school until 1968 when it was sold to Macmillan, Inc., who owns it today. Katharine Gibbs is a proprietary school, the only one of its kind in Massachusetts that awards a two-year Associates Degree in Applied Science. Officially, Katharine Gibbs is accredited as a business junior college. This is significant considering Freire's banking concept of education in the sense that the educational decisions at Gibbs revolve around the bottom line: profit.

Vestiges of Mrs. Gibbs' vision remain today. There is a strict dress code ("This policy requires that students wear only skirts and blouses, dresses or suits. Slacks are not acceptable. Hosiery should be worn at all times."),<sup>9</sup> male visitation hours, and a regulation in The Directory of Student Information under the heading "Defiance of Authority" which states: "Refusal to obey an order issued by the administration, faculty or staff is a serious offense and will be reported immediately to one of the deans or the director of the school."<sup>10</sup> The impact of these policies and regulations on the classroom dynamic is clear: the teacher is recognized as a complete authority figure not to be addressed out of order and certainly not to be challenged. The atmosphere can be austere. Students expect—and in some cases demand—to be told what to do, what to think. There is little conflict anyway since most of the classes are skills-oriented. The teacher dictates; the student records. In Freire's terms, these secretarial students are the oppressed, "those who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed."<sup>11</sup>

The curious benefit for me in all this is my position in the Liberal Arts Department. I have an amazing amount of freedom in the classroom (considering the situation) because skills courses (like Gregg Shorthand, Stenocript, Speed Building and Transcription, Typewriting for Speed, Accuracy and Production, and Machine Transcription) always take priority over liberal arts electives (Humanities, Psychology, Women's Literature, Drama, etc.). This means no one associated with skills really takes the elective courses seriously enough to monitor or disapprove them. In addition, my dean, a feminist herself, has given me more support than I had imagined possible from someone in her position. As long as I dress properly, turn in the correct forms, I am left alone. I do, of course, report to my dean, and she shares her insights and helps me understand the limits that I cannot change.

There are those, however, that I have managed to modify slightly. For example, I am not supposed to distribute a syllabus; I asked why, and it was explained to me that if a student received a syllabus, an expectation would then be established for a certain amount of work to be covered in a certain amount of time. If the teacher falls behind or ultimately fails to deliver, the student could demand her money back. Without a syllabus, the teacher retains control, and the school protects its investment. For the type

of course I teach, however, a schedule of assigned readings becomes essential for students to plan reading time around their other skills courses. I do distribute a syllabus. Also, I am not to allow the students to sit where they wish; a seating chart is preferred. Why? It's easy to see and mark absences, and there is no urgency to learn students' names if one has them all matched to a chart. I have noted that this is inappropriate for my women's literature classroom: the structure is less rigid, more open to discussion where the chairs might be moved into a circle and where responding to each student using her first name is important. In this classroom situation, therefore, a seating chart would be unnecessary. I do not use a seating chart, but I must admit that students tend to sit in alphabetical order anyway since they must in all their other classes.

Perhaps you can begin to see how my teaching style at Katharine Gibbs is at least radical and certainly subversive. And the students are as surprised as anyone that my course is now an option in their curriculum.

\*\*\*\*\*

The title of my paper is "Finding the Hinge: Subversive Pedagogy." If I establish a problem-posing approach in the classroom, then I am at the outset subverting the typical procedure at Katharine Gibbs. And another aspect of "typical" at Gibbs is that all my students are female. In fact, in the history of student enrollment at Katharine Gibbs there have been some males, but overall less than one percent. This does make a difference in my classroom, and I have found another book to be useful in understanding why. The ideas of connected teaching and the teacher as midwife for female students are discussed in Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. In their research, the authors examined how women learn and then described different perspectives from which women view reality. They refer to Freire several times and quote his idea that "banking education anesthetizes . . . [and] attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness. . . ."<sup>12</sup> From this they portray an alternative teaching method which they call connected teaching, then characterizing the teacher in this setting:

Midwife-teachers do not administer anesthesia. They support their students' thinking . . . help students deliver their words to the world, and they use their own knowledge to put the students into conversation with other voices—past and present—in the culture.<sup>13</sup>

The midwife teacher, then, functions in what the authors call a connected class wherein truth is constructed not through conflict but through consensus.<sup>14</sup> This would seem to suggest an entirely subjective approach, but the authors caution against "undisciplined subjectivity," saying that the role of midwife or connected teacher "carries special responsibility. It does

not entail power over students; however, it does carry authority, an authority based not on subordination but on cooperation."<sup>15</sup>

These ideas speak directly to my questions regarding the specific needs of my Gibbs students and it is in this context that I mention them.

As I mentioned before, most classes are skills-oriented so the method is not open-ended. There are other electives, but most are taught using a lecture/note taking style, to my mind yet another version of banking education. In order to reach the students, to stun them out of their "receptacle" mode, I must begin by making a connection with them. They must know that I will let them express themselves out loud in class, that I will listen, and to their amazement, respond. They must know that I take them seriously and that at least in my class, they may venture opinions, not only on issues but also on texts that we discuss. This takes time. For this reason, Gibbs' long 17-week semesters are necessary. It is easy to take the liberal arts mentality for granted; we as college teachers assume that most of our students are what we call "college material." Gibbs students, like other vocational students, are not necessarily prepared in the same way. So for them learning how to verbalize in the classroom can be a painful, lengthy process, but it is the first step.

I use the phrase "finding the hinge" to describe the connection, the bridge first between me and my students. Once they feel this connection, we can move toward discovering hinges between students and the texts we read and finally the hinge to the world they consciously or unconsciously plan to enter. Hinges facilitate movement, the action of pivoting, the possibility of passage. This kind of energy in the Gibbs' classroom is unusual but certainly not impossible to attain.

I usually begin the semester with one to two weeks of open discussion during which I use a variety of activities. I begin by having the students interview each other using a series of questions I prepare. In this way I get a sense of their personal preferences: what they do on weekends, boy-friends, movies, hometowns, diets, religion, issues around hair, nails and clothing, birth control. Yes, I might just throw that in, listen to the shocked silence and wait for the response. By introducing what many at Gibbs might consider an inappropriate topic for the classroom, I can begin to find the openings, the chinks in their Gibbs' professional persona, so the hinges that connect us allow them to think more freely about themselves, the stories, the discussions. By saying the words "birth control" out loud, dressed as I am in a suit in the front of the class wearing proper hosiery, I am letting them know what kind of teacher I am, and that I have brought reality into the classroom with me despite my "professional" look. I also ask them to bring in fashion magazines (there is no shortage of these at Gibbs) and we look at how women and men are represented. We look closely. I ask them to share their impressions. I suggest we "read" the advertisements as if they were stories. Once they catch on to the "plot," critical thinking becomes a kind of game: let's see who can figure out what's really going on in this Guess Jeans ad.

Early on in the semester, I often distribute an article called "The Killing of Laura" by Carolyn Weaver, originally published in Mother Jones in 1984.<sup>16</sup> It concerns victimization. The students are shocked by the story a sister tells about her own sister's murder by a despondent ex-boyfriend. They are shocked but intrigued that this story sounds familiar. This sense is strengthened as classmates are compelled, but more importantly feel safe enough, to tell their own stories of victimization. I say that victimization is an issue. I suggest that students think about this issue, bring in news clippings in which it is a factor, and talk about it among themselves. I say that during the semester we will discover other issues and how writers deal with them in fiction.

At this point, I begin choosing the stories I want to use on the syllabus. I have used a number of texts but have found three that seem to work for my students and for reasons that are not entirely literary. Students object if the texts are too big or too expensive; once I used Gilbert and Gubar's Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, and a student complained that the pages were so thin and her nails so long that she had difficulty turning the pages (to hearken back to those negative stereotypes). I now use Susan Cahill's anthologies Women and Fiction, Women and Fiction 2, and New Women and New Fiction. Together they offer a wide variety of short stories by women beginning with Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton and including Jayne Anne Phillips and Lorrie Moore. (Although this term I'm experimenting a little: I still used two of Cahill's anthologies but added Margaret Atwood's Lady Oracle and a Gothic Romance. I discovered that many of my students read romance novels and I thought a critical reading of just one might be useful.) We generally do a short story during every 50-minute class period.

Typically, I might begin with Kate Chopin's "The Story of An Hour." It's popular with the students because it's short (three pages), the plot is straightforward, the writing style is accessible, and there is a surprise ending. My students are pleased with the fact that the story is simple (they think) albeit "old-fashioned," to use their term. No big words and a surprise ending, like O. Henry. I use this story to relax them, to allow them to feel in control. I also offer comments on figurative levels in the story they may not have noted: paying attention to what the main character does and when, noting that her name changes in the course of the story, discussing the fact that there are several ways to "read" the story. We move on to Colette's "The Secret Woman," which they usually hate. They complain that they cannot understand the words. We talk about a writer's style in this story and how mood is developed. The same is true for Woolf's "The New Dress." We discuss the technique of stream of consciousness. They like that and the fact that they, too, like Woolf's main character Mabel Waring, have let their thoughts wander, have felt embarrassed, ugly, useless and unfulfilled. They are surprised to feel these things, especially in a story by someone who has been dead so long.

All this time the hinges are creaking into place. Attached doors are



swinging a bit more easily and there is even exchange in the class. I give a daily quiz on the reading (otherwise, no one would read any of them—too much typing homework, they say) and by the fourth and fifth weeks, students are talking about characters, plot, style when I walk into the room.

Class differences are the topic of discussion in "The Garden Party" by Katherine Mansfield. For the first time for many of the students, there is a brief recognition that not everyone in the room will go to the Bahamas for Christmas or be able to share photos of the Debutante Ball. When we get to "To Room Nineteen" by Doris Lessing, the class is relaxed. Students are beginning to tell stories about their families as they get to know the fictional families of the stories. I encourage students to focus on their mothers in connection with Lessing's story. The main character is Susan Rawlings, a woman who even with the perfect marriage and perfect children cannot apprehend her "enemy": irritation, restlessness, emptiness. Nothing fulfills her, nothing sustains her. Finally she kills herself in room nineteen of a dingy flat. Initially students blurt out, "She's crazy! My mother would never do that!" The fact that they blurt is reason enough to celebrate. But we discuss Lessing's character, her motivations in the story. For some, another hinge develops here, one that leads to dialogue between mother and daughter. I suggest they have their mothers read the story, and the next week in class I ask them to share their mothers' responses.

Sister Irene, a young college professor in Joyce Carol Oates' "In the Region of Ice," is a popular character with my students. Most of them are Catholic and have attended parochial schools, so the character of a nun inspires stories about their school experiences. It allows me the chance to pose questions, then, about religion. How does Sister Irene's religion affect her teaching? Her relationships with students? Does religion belong in school? Why bother? What makes women become nuns? All of this connects to the story, but also hinges to my students' lives. Tangents are welcome; in fact, as the term progresses, they occur more and more often.

Perhaps the most controversial story we read is Julie Hayden's "Day-Old Baby Rats." The style is fragmented, the plot unclear. The point of view is that of a young woman, clearly obsessed by something that has happened to her. It is full of images that at first seem disconnected, but with each reading become the composite of a woman in despair over her abortion. The students come to class declaring that they have no idea what the story is about. None. Then they all pass the quiz. I say, "How is this possible that you don't understand any of it and then get 100% on the quiz?" They look down at their desks. "I say you know more than you let on. What is this story about?" A brave student begins with, "Well, I'm not sure but I just got this feeling that it . . . now I know this will sound stupid but is it about, like, an abortion?" Others turn toward her, look shocked, not that she has understood the story but that she has said the word "abortion" out loud. I say, "Yes, I think you're on the right track. What makes you feel it's about an abortion?" Then we're off. I ask her to point

to passages—we read them closely. I explain that every image in the story refers to or evokes a fetus, birth, or death. I explain the abortion procedure hinged, as it must be, to the story, thereby partly solving the puzzle of Hayden's images while clarifying a procedure most have only learned to ignore. This puts into place yet another hinge between myself and the students: who is she, they think, that she knows this stuff? Can't she get fired for talking like this? Does she do them herself? Has she had some? This may very well lead to a discussion of abortion. There are also hinges developing between students themselves. Some barriers to talking about this subject are broken down just by virtue of the fact there was a class discussion about it—but again, in relation to a story.

Essentially, the teacher's challenge in this situation is to (1) make rich, challenging, textual choices. It is not necessary to choose overtly liberal or radical texts, but at the very least those in which stylistic complexities as well as content and characterization hold potential for dialogue; and (2) to help students discover the hinge between themselves and the teacher; themselves and the text; themselves and their reality. I have found this to be incredibly successful at Gibbs. Students at least react, often process a variety of stories and the issues they raise. We do not do sophisticated literary criticism, nor do we explore literary history *per se*. Eventually, however, I will propose a course in which these areas will be studied. Currently, the semester allows us as a class to read over thirty-five stories and by allowing the students to talk, to ask, to respond we encounter a variety of topics: motherhood in Natalia Ginzburg's "The Mother," childbirth and Catholicism in Doris Betts' "Still Life With Fruit," irony and sisterhood in the women's movement in Fay Weldon's "Alopecia," child abuse in Sallie Bingham's "Fear," black culture in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," mother/daughter relationships in "I Stand Here Ironing" by Tillie Olsen and in "Home" by Jayne Anne Phillips, war in "The Gifts of War" by Margaret Drabble, the young woman writer in "How to Become a Writer" by Lorrie Moore, to mention a few.

By the end of the term, I ask my students to write their own stories. I do not allow research papers of any kind, but they are encouraged to read about topics that they plan to incorporate into their stories. Each student writes a story, a series of poems, or lyrics for a song. For many, it is the first time they have ever made something, at least something creative. I give everyone the option of typing their story so that I can xerox it and distribute copies to the class. The last week of the term is reserved for sharing stories, some anonymously, others read aloud by me or by the writer. It seems to be an empowering experience for the student, and most are pleased and proud of the products. I hope to secure a small part of the education budget for printing costs so that I can collect some of my students' stories in a book for distribution to the entire student body.

P. K. Page, a Canadian poet who herself worked as a secretary, has written a number of poems in which she portrays the experience of office workers, in particular women. The first two stanzas of her poem "Typists"

are appropriate to my discussion and are as follows:

They without message, having read  
the running words on their machines,  
know every letter as a stamp  
cutting the stencils of their ears.  
Deep in their hands, like pianists,  
all longing gropes and moves, is trapped  
behind the tensile gloves of skin.

Or blind, sit with their faces locked  
away from work. Their varied eyes  
are stiff as everlasting flowers.  
While fingers on a different plane  
perform the automatic act  
as questions grope along the dark  
and twisting corridors of brain.<sup>17</sup>

It is this trapped longing and the questions that “grobe along the dark/ and twisting corridors of brain” that I have found in the hands and fingers and minds of my students. They do not expect to be so transparent—that’s what the secretarial “uniform” behind the machine is for. They often resent that I have seen beyond the dress code, beyond that machine and taken seriously what I find there.

Is it feasible to subvert secretarial training? Is it fair? I would ask, is it fair not to? When I walk to my classroom through the halls at Gibbs and close the door on the roar of hundreds of typewriters, carriages slamming, it is easy to forget there are people making those machines work and that the students who sit in front of me for fifty minutes of problem-posing dialogue will again leave my class and take their places at typewriters. The space between the woman and the machine, however, at least initially, is wide. We as educators must resist easy stereotypes that serve to distance us from these women. We must learn from each other as Freire states:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the student-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.<sup>18</sup>

Can we see and maintain the hinge between ourselves and the population of secretaries? It is there, and they are waiting.

Mary C. Pinard  
Emerson College

I would like to thank Dale Bauer for her encouragement and support for me and for this paper.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Carol Hymowitz, “If She Is Wearing Purple Eye Shadow, She Isn’t from Gibbs,” The Wall Street Journal, 5 April, 1984.

<sup>2</sup>This information appeared in an abbreviated format in Women’s Work 1987: A Directory for Greater Boston Professional/Business Women, ed. Bonnie Watson (Needham, MA: J.O.V. Publications, 1987), p. 69.

<sup>3</sup>Katharine Gibbs School Catalog, 1985-86, Volume LIX, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Katharine Gibbs School Student’s Handbook, 1985-1986, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), p. 58.

<sup>6</sup>Freire, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup>Freire, pp. 70-71.

<sup>8</sup>Freire, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup>Directory of Student Information, 1984-85, Katharine Gibbs School, p. 22.

<sup>10</sup>Directory, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup>Freire, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup>Freire, p. 68.

<sup>13</sup>Mary Field Belenky, et al., Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986), pp. 217-219.

<sup>14</sup>Belenky, et al., p. 223.

<sup>15</sup>Belenky, et al., p. 227.

<sup>16</sup>Carolyn Weaver, “The Killing of Laura,” Mother Jones, Feb/Mar 1984, pp. 32-39.

<sup>17</sup>P. K. Page, The Glass Air: Poems Selected and New (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>18</sup>Freire, p. 67.

## THE BABY M CASE: A RISKY BUSINESS

Janice Doane and Devon Hodges

When Judge Harvey Sorkow handed down his decision on the Baby M. Case, he announced that his primary concern was the best interests of the child. Yet, to some feminists, his rhetoric about the child's interest seemed to disguise a prejudice for upholding paternal rights at the expense of maternal rights. The good father was rewarded and the bad mother punished. Should Baby M have gone to Mary Beth Whitehead? Such a question assumes what we do not have—real alternatives. Though William Stern and Mary Beth Whitehead were represented as polar opposites in a three-month long courtroom drama, those representations both uphold—one as the bad example, the other as the good—traditional notions of the family. In this family the mother is a natural caretaker, the father is a kindly provider, and the child is the object of a selfless attention (presumably like the judge's). The judge's decision to reward the Sterns as an example of this idealized family was in tension with, but finally triumphant over, more complicated issues, as is demonstrated by the wording of his ruling: "The value and interests underlying the creation of family are the same by whatever means obtained."<sup>1</sup> Eager for a resolution that preserves traditional notions of the family, the judge ruled that the means—in this case, surrogacy—justified the end, securing a "good" family for Baby M. We propose to suspend our desire for an either/or resolution in order to look at the way representations of the Whiteheads and the Sterns relied upon a network of oppositions that support familial ideology and made one solution almost unthinkable—joint custody. Such scrutiny, we hope, will acknowledge the centrality of familial issues to feminist theory while challenging a conservative backlash that seeks to affirm the traditional family and the mother's "natural" place within it.

Last spring, *The Washington Post* ran an article about what was called the "women's movement's response to the Baby M case." According to Nora Ephron, who helped draft the statement, it was written "broadly to encompass diverse views and avoid taking sides on the current trial." She explained that while many feminists objected to the allegations by experts that Mary Beth Whitehead was "unfit," "I know that some of the people who signed it think the baby should go to the Sterns and some think she should go to Mrs. Whitehead and some have no idea."<sup>2</sup> When members of the New Jersey state chapter of N.O.W. met to discuss surrogate motherhood, feelings "ranged the gamut."<sup>3</sup> In her *Ms.* article on the case, Mary Gordon best sums up this sense of division and contradiction most feminists have felt: "For months I have thought about this case, these

people, and this child. Every woman I know seems obsessed by it. I keep changing my mind . . . Every road I turn down opens up 10 paths overgrown with thorns and dark, engulfing brush."<sup>4</sup> Why this tangle, unusual even though feminists have always engaged in contentious debates with each other?

One reason this case is so confusing is that any position one takes seems to be implicated in its opposite, making it impossible to choose a side simply on the basis of traditional political alignments. Mary Gordon tries to find a grounds for her opinion by opposing herself to a traditional foe to feminists, the Vatican: "I have moved in the direction of supporting [the judge's decision] by the Vatican's opposition to it. I have always felt it a safe position that whatever position the Vatican takes on the sexuality of women I'm in a good place on the other side."<sup>5</sup> But there is no "safe position," no "good place."<sup>6</sup> Gordon argues for acknowledging men's need to nurture, and for severing concepts of motherhood from biology and nature, certainly feminist political goals. She also turns from the Pope to another patriarch, the judge, implicitly accepting his reliance upon confused experts who all pontificate upon what a fit mother should be. But those in strong sympathy with Mary Beth Whitehead accept an uneasy alliance with the Vatican and with arguments about women's nature. Indeed, it seems that some feminists themselves are pontificating about women's nature in pregnancy. Assuming that a biological connection to the fetus automatically engenders an emotional one, Marilyn French insists that: "The woman who spends nine months in intense emotional interaction with the foetus has the right to say whether she wants that child or not and whether she changes her mind."<sup>7</sup> Marilyn French makes the argument "from nature," while Mary Gordon's position is argued from "nurture." Neither side of this age-old debate challenges male prerogatives. Avoiding essentialism only aligns Mary Gordon, who argues so eloquently for men's need to nurture (this may be based upon instinct she says), with a judge who argues in favor of men's driving need to procreate. We are back to nature. However, arguing on behalf of women's biology places women within a separate sphere ideology promulgated by men to keep women in their place. Other suggested solutions to the case appealed not to biology but to economic justice, to fears that a woman's right to control her own body will be forsaken by women in desperate need of money. What's problematic here is that many surrogates argue that they want to be surrogate mothers, to earn money by using their bodies in this way. So who is being more controlling? The rich that seem to exploit them or the liberals who want to protect them from their chosen occupation?

Women's right to control their own bodies was the right most often mentioned in feminist discussions of the case, but discussion of this right also confused rather than clarified issues.<sup>8</sup> Feminist critics feared that surrogacy would turn women into breeding machines, and make them risk their health and life for another low paying job (one that contractually controls what women can do during a pregnancy). But the Sterns'

attorney, Gary Skoloff, and the judge, Harvey Sorkow, also insisted upon women's rights to control their own bodies. Skoloff said that Mary Beth Whitehead was just exercising her rights to control her own body when she signed the contract to be a surrogate mother. The judge said it would be patronizing to women if he said Mary Beth Whitehead was not making a rational choice about her own body when she signed the contract. Yet the judge's decision made Betty Friedan sputter: "It is a terrifying denial of what should be basic rights for women, an utter denial of the personhood of women—the complete dehumanization of women. It is an important human rights case."<sup>9</sup>

Mary Beth herself was less concerned about her right to control her own body than about her parental rights. These almost inalienable rights of parents to their biological children became narrowed to maternal rights by some commentators on the case. As Maggie Gallagher argued in an article in *The National Review*, nine months of pregnancy should give women a "right to your children."<sup>10</sup> In his ruling, the judge used an argument about biological rights to support parental rights for non-biological parents: "It must be reasoned that if one has a right to reproduce coitally, one has the right to reproduce non-coitally."<sup>11</sup> The child's rights were not forgotten, either. According to the Vatican, "every child has the right to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up by his own parents."<sup>12</sup> Contracts insure rights too, namely, the right of privacy, the right of individuals to make a deal.

Rights discourse has long been a basic way to agitate for social change. As Denise Riley has written: "... the uncertain speech of the philosophy of 'rights' is the chief inherited discourse—whatever its deficiencies—for the framing of any demands for social reform or revolution."<sup>13</sup> Yet, in the 1980's, rights discourse has increasingly been appropriated for conservative ends (the "right" to life, the "right" to work, for example). The Baby M Case exemplifies the chaos that results when everyone claims "rights." How does one decide which "right" should be honored when each right is supposedly basic to the individual who claims it? Furthermore, in some instances the same right, the right to control one's body, for example—is asserted by different individuals for different ends. The assertion of rights by feminist interpreters of the case cannot be an effective form of political intervention.

Instead, it seems more useful to notice that what we have here is a discourse, the discourse of "rights," that prompts us to focus on individuals and their property. As Paul Hirst remarks, "Rights are expressions of the attributes of subjects and are possessive. Secondly, all rights are modelled upon ownership" (initially the inalienable ownership of one's own body).<sup>14</sup> In this case, such a focus privileges men (the paradigmatic individuals) with property (the sign of their power). William Stern is a stable individual with property; Mary Beth Whitehead lacks both propriety and property. These characterizations are a product of a system of representation that is built on a set of familiar oppositions: male vs. female, self

vs. other, truth vs. lies. No one will ever know what William Stern and Mary Beth Whitehead are "really" like. What we have instead are representations of Stern and Whitehead that fit into predictably arranged slots.

In this system of representation, William Stern operates as the mirror for men in power. The experts called in to evaluate Stern and Whitehead found Stern as "thoughtful and sensitive" as they found themselves to be. The judge extended these claims. In his decision he pointed to the Sterns' excellent educations and their ability to cope with crisis (i.e. to spend lots of money on detectives and lawyers, not to mention babies). When one "expert" visited their home, he found the Sterns cooing and laughing on the floor with Baby M, who played happily with a briefcase.<sup>15</sup> These are our kind of people, our kind of family.

As several commentators have remarked, the Sterns' self-representation, reinforced by the judge and their lawyer, was never questioned but seemed obvious and self-evident. Against their confident representation of the "same," Mary Beth Whitehead was consistently represented as the "other." Far from being a coherent individual she supposedly suffered from a "mixed personality disorder." Though not all the experts could agree on this diagnosis, its very name sounds ominously threatening to the unity and consistency so apparently vital to one's ability to create a stable self and environment. Gary N. Skoloff, the Sterns' lawyer, stated that his goal was "to create a perception of Whitehead as a 'liar.'"<sup>16</sup> Lacking in truthfulness, she was also deemed to be emotional, narcissistic, immature, preoccupied with grooming, manipulative. Her lack of propriety and property meant that she couldn't measure up as a proper bourgeois individual, and in a sad way Whitehead was on some level aware of this. She was willing to settle for less than the Sterns (she would have granted them visitation rights); she struggled to attain the semblance of middle class respectability by taking on a house she could not afford and furniture that one expert noted "was better than the Sterns"<sup>17</sup>; she paid back welfare money she had received. The judge didn't care if his representation of Whitehead was inconsistent because Whitehead became a repository for inconsistency. As Ellen Goodman pointed out, the judge's decision relies upon seeing Whitehead as rational and competent enough to have signed the contract, but hyper-emotional and incompetent as a mother.<sup>18</sup>

And to be scrutinized as a mother guaranteed that Whitehead would be the victim of a classical double bind created by centuries of advice to mothers. Told they should be devoted to their children, mothers following this advice are then said to be "overidentified" and "too enmeshed" in their children's needs. This symbiotic bond, at once desired and denigrated, guarantees that a mother, if she is good, will never fully be herself, an autonomous individual. Whitehead was simultaneously represented as the devoted, good mother who selected her children's clothes, styled their hair, and had "an almost myopic" view that being the biological mother "enables her to understand her children better than anyone else";<sup>19</sup> and as the bad "homicidal" and "suicidal" mother.

As either, she could not win. This contradictory portrait of her came to us via the testimony of influential experts who played into the hands of the Sterns' lawyer, Gary Skoloff. One of Skoloff's partners managed to get the experts to reverse their previous decision that Whitehead's visitation rights should be preserved in the best interests of the child. Indeed, Skoloff successfully created Whitehead not only as a bad mother, but as a dangerous one. As *The New York Times* commented, ". . . Skoloff has so routinely raised [Whitehead's characterization as "suicidal" and "homicidal"] in motions, court filings, and his questioning that it is easy to lose sight of the fact that few of the mental health experts who have testified agreed with it."<sup>20</sup> Skoloff knew exactly what representations were necessary to win the case. Harold J. Cassidy, Whitehead's chief counsel, never saw the necessity to critique these representations, especially Skoloff's favorite terms for Whitehead, "homicidal" and "suicidal." Instead, Cassidy rested his case on Whitehead's emotional bond to the child (the very bond that so put her propriety into question) and insisted on avoiding "mudslinging" the Sterns in order to preserve Whitehead's "dignity."

Women take note: hire lawyers who understand that femininity is deeply bound up with an oppressive system of representation. Whitehead's predicament demonstrates the double bind created for women identified as "mothers." As mother, she was judged on the basis of a position that requires a lack of autonomy and individuality. Good mothers are "selfless." But because autonomy and selfhood are so valued in American society, she is then accused of losing the boundaries between herself and her children. Further, as a "woman," predictably enough, she was represented as the "other," as less than a full subject because she lacks propriety. Moreover, the shifting and clashing images of Whitehead promoted by both her supporters and her detractors make it impossible to sustain consistent sympathy for her as an individual. The very incoherence of her representation shatters the mirror of identification. Even feminists who claimed she was a victim have had to concede that she is not passive in all of this; she perjured herself on the stand, threatened to kill herself and the baby. Was she simply desperate? We will never know; she remains the other.

If Whitehead knew she was lacking as a proper individual, Elizabeth Stern knew that as a proper woman she was lacking a family. She remarked that Mary Beth Whitehead was like a "sister" during the course of the pregnancy,<sup>21</sup> and this remark points to a desire to naturalize the relationship between the two of them, to make Stern in some way biologically attached to the process. This remark also covers up Whitehead's lack of cooperation—she refused to tell the Sterns the baby's sex after amniocentesis—and Dr. Stern's coerciveness. Whitehead said she felt that Stern was "trying to take over [her] life."<sup>22</sup> As the journalist who recorded Stern's remark about sisterhood commented, "There was never a more unlikely pair—the quiet, self-contained pediatrician and the housewife who had dropped out of high school at 16 to marry a 22-year old she met in the luncheonette where she worked."<sup>23</sup> Stern and Whitehead are represented

as opposites: the cool and self-contained woman vs. the hysteric, the professional woman vs. the housewife, the non-mother vs. the mother. One begins to feel that the last opposition, in fact, contains all of the others, and so the polarization protects Stern from being scrutinized on the basis of her maternal capacity.

This lack of scrutiny seems odd, since Stern was anxious for the status of mother and adamant about not giving Whitehead visiting rights. As she put it, "I don't want to be known as the stepmother." She also claimed that she was already the "psychological mother." But if she had been held up to standards of maternal fitness, she, like any other woman, would have been found wanting. She lied on her form to the fertility center, she manipulated Mary Beth Whitehead, her lack of sympathy suggests egocentrism and narcissism. Who is going to babysit while the Sterns go to work? (Perhaps they could hire Mary Beth Whitehead.) What we are trying to suggest here is not that Dr. Stern is a bad person (indeed her attempt to protect her health—she has a mild case of multiple sclerosis—by not getting pregnant seems more than reasonable) or a potentially bad mother, but that her image could have been constructed in the same way as Mary Beth Whitehead's was. It is the very absence of concern about Stern's "fitness" as a mother that is so interesting. Elizabeth Stern's lack of visibility points out that a central issue in the case was not actual relationships between mothers and children but instead the ideological power of a very limited notion of what families are. This notion emphasizes the family, not as a historically and ideologically constructed institution, but as a timeless, harmonious, private sphere. This view of the family does not necessarily correspond to empirical reality.

In the "Baby M Case" a powerful metaphoric of the idealized family is weirdly at odds with the facts of the case: surrogacy, custody battles, arguments about parental fitness are signs of the family as a site of tensions that reflect cultural change. Elizabeth Stern's assertion of sisterhood with Mary Beth Whitehead deploys the language of family relationships to negotiate in acceptable terms her own anxiety and self-interest. Testimony during the trial also deployed a metaphoric of the idealized family to cover a real callousness toward the family. Despite all the talk about the necessity for a stable family environment, neither the Sterns nor the judge cared about the Whitehead family. The judge disallowed evidence about Whitehead's bond with her child; Whitehead's parents' bond with their granddaughter; and about the Whitehead children's suffering as a result of the brutal abduction of their sister. Indeed, Whitehead's effort to show this suffering by displaying a note written by her daughter Tuesday to her baby sister was called "manipulative" by her detractors and a "desperate" action by her supporters. The judge helped enhance a middle-class notion of the family and what it provides for the child by contrasting it with the instability of the Whitehead family, and his decision exacerbated that instability, at the very least in its effect on the Whitehead children. Though the judge, as some feminists have pointed out, was supporting the idea of paternal

genealogy—William Stern “needs” an heir—there is more at stake than the perpetuation of genes. What really matters is the perpetuation of an ideology of familialism. The incongruity between the rhetoric about the family and the issues of the case both highlights the artificiality of this ideology and demonstrates its continuing vitality as a shaper of our desires for happiness.

The proper family that Judge Sorkow is defending is nuclear, and above all else, economically self-sufficient so that it seems separate from the state and society. The Sterns, Sorkow said in his decision, lead “private” lives and in this shelter Baby M will live “free from the public eye.”<sup>24</sup> Within this private space, a husband and wife have children who are seen as possessions of their parents, as the case of Baby M makes very obvious. These children should become individuals who are competent, secure, and stable. If the children have problems, the fault lies in the parents or in the children, not in the world at large. The home, a warm and separate haven, is not involved in larger social conditions, so the mother, whose domain this is, takes the blame if the child has problems and, typically, the father is blamed if the family is not economically self-sufficient. Yet, in the face of recent social changes contradictions have emerged. For many middle class families, economic viability is possible only if the mother works. If the mother works, the traditional division of labor is challenged. Either she is pulled apart by her attempts to fulfill both her traditional role in the home and her new role in the work force, or more and more money is essential to maintain the privacy and harmony of the family sphere, by hiring, for example, babysitters and housekeepers.

Mary Beth Whitehead showed that her own family was sustained by kinship bonds, but such bonds no longer make a family. Her family failed the ideological litmus test for the proper family—self-sufficiency—because it had economic problems. Richard Whitehead was not a stable provider. The family had to move often, and Mary Beth Whitehead left her husband for a time and worked herself. She worked as a dancer in a bar owned by her sister and later, reconciled to her husband, became a surrogate mother. In different ways both these jobs exploit her sexuality. In the logic of traditional representations of women, mothers don’t “use” their sex, floozies do. Elizabeth Stern’s “good” job—as a physician who takes care of children—obviously does not as readily work against her role as a mother, and moreover, provides more money to maintain the proper family’s respectability. Increasingly, to attain the ideological idea of the family, money is required.

But those who sympathized with the Sterns are not simply reflecting narrow class interests. The Whiteheads also strove to attain the attractive ideal of the family. As Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh point out in their book *The Anti-Social Family*, “Familialism is not a ruling-class or patriarchal ideology repressively foisted on an unwilling population. . . . We see investment in the family as an easily comprehended, indeed highly rational, choice, given the material and ideological privilege accorded to it

in our society.”<sup>25</sup> What makes the family so appealing, Barrett and McIntosh go on to say, are its claims to meet the needs for emotional security not easily met elsewhere; to provide the most supportive and rewarding means of having and raising children; and to be a natural given, biologically determined. The family “of desire and myth,” they conclude, “has an orderly division of labour between husband and wife, and a firm but kindly style with the children that will be good for them in the long run. It appears in child-care manuals, in advertisements for cars and insurance policies, in the formal and the ‘hidden’ curricula of schools, in the catalogues of Mothercare and the brochures of travel agents.”<sup>26</sup> And so, given the immense appeal as well as the rationality of this construction at our particular historical moment, Barrett and McIntosh remind us that there is no “outside” to appeal to. It is not, for instance, possible to see Whitehead as standing by with a good alternative to the family, since she herself was trying hard, but failing to “measure up” to this overpowering ideology. But neither is it possible wholeheartedly to endorse the judge’s decision on this basis, for to do so would be either to preserve deep cynicism about the possibility for change or unthinkingly to endorse familialism even as unendurable contradictions emerge, especially for women as they try to maintain an ideological fairy tale.

It might seem that one way to avoid this double bind would be to appeal to the sanctity of the contract between the Sterns and Mary Beth Whitehead. If the contract is valid, then the issues of maternal propriety and the child’s best interests seem irrelevant. As Harold Edgar, Professor at the Columbia University Law School, remarked, if the contract is viable, “then why make Baby M’s interests of primary consideration? If the contract was central to the case, the judge’s attack on Mrs. Whitehead was entirely gratuitous.”<sup>27</sup> Edgar is wrong to assert that the contract can be separated from attacks on Mary Beth Whitehead as an individual. The judge’s attack on Mary Beth Whitehead, so essential to preserving traditional notions of the good family, is intimately bound up with a defense of the bourgeois individual. The traditional family creates this individual, and contract law protects his rights. The ideology of contract and the ideology of familialism both define and defend the idea of the bourgeois individual.

Peter Gabel and Jay M. Feinman demonstrate how contract law protects notions of the bourgeois individual in their essay “Contract Law as Ideology.” As they put it, the idea of the “freedom of contract” participates in a fantasy (particularly persistent among the right-wing) that we are all “free and equal individuals, ready to take whatever action serves our respective self-interest.”<sup>28</sup> Courts upholding contracts without considering issues of fairness protect this ideological image:

This imagery, drawn . . . from the exigencies of competitive exchange, [serves] to deny the oppressive character of the market and the lack of real personal liberty experienced by people in their private and work lives. Most important, it [serves] to deny that there [is] a system at all

that [is] coercively shaping and constricting the social world, because the imagery [makes] it appear that this world [is] simply the perpetual realization of an infinite number of free choices made by an infinite number of voluntary actors.<sup>29</sup>

As feminists have pointed out, surrogate mothers are not making “free” choices.

Discussing surrogate motherhood, Andrea Dworkin writes that:

arguments as to the social and moral appropriateness of this new kind of sale simply reiterate the view of female will found in discussion of prostitution. . . . If a woman wants to sell the use of her womb in an explicit commercial transaction, what right has the state to deny her this proper exercise of femininity in the marketplace? Again, the state has constructed the social, economic, and political situation in which the sale of some sexual or reproductive capacity is necessary to the survival of women; and yet the selling is seen to be an act of individual will—the only kind of assertion of individual will in women that is vigorously defended as a matter of course by most of those who pontificate on female freedom.<sup>30</sup>

Yet the Sterns are not free either. Their desires are generated in the same marketplace as Mary Beth Whitehead's. They do not sell themselves, but they do sign a contract that validates the notion that children are property. The Sterns, two people deeply committed to challenging professional careers, still feel the cultural imperative to “have” a child. The present “infertility crisis” may be a symptom of the power of familial ideology and the marketplace to shape our sense of individual worth and identity.

Appeals to contract law, then, do not take us beyond the tangle of this case; there are safe, or pure, positions. Feminists have sensed for some time the difficulty of placing themselves on one side of the debate between nature and nurture, or between individual rights and the social order, or even between men and women. The tangle of the Baby M case dramatizes the breakdown of oppositions that have long worked against women not simply by restricting women's lives but by masking economical and social conditions that make us long for the nostalgic ideal of the family.<sup>31</sup> What was at stake in the trial was the good family. The very rigidity of the judge's position—upholding the contract, depriving Whitehead of all parental rights—symbolically functions to preserve a threatened ideology of familism. (And the ruling cannot work: on appeal, Whitehead was immediately granted visitation rights and Baby M will hardly grow up sheltered from the public eye.) Despite the judge's desire for closure, the case of Baby M remains unresolved.

Have we opted for theoretical correctness—exposing a system of representation, deconstructing a series of false oppositions—rather than entering into the fray on one side or another, safe ground or not? Feminist

theory is not opposed to feminist practice. A feminist deconstructive ruling might look like this:

“Both parties in this case have taken an unusual risk, though one party, the Sterns, felt contractually insured from it, and this unusual risk has called for an unusual decision, one that will not make either party particularly happy and that others will see as intolerable or unthinkable. For three months I have listened as lawyers and experts have woven a web of representations that repeats dully familiar ideas of masculinity and femininity, nature and nurture. I am particularly dismayed by the testimony of experts on mothering, and I refuse to render a decision further encouraging this claptrap that unmistakably attempts to contain and denigrate women. From my own experience as a parent, I can tell you that it is impossible (and unnecessary) to be this idealized good mother. Elizabeth and William Stern will suffer as many anxieties as less affluent parents like Richard and Mary Beth Whitehead, and that's because no parents ever measure up to the standards of familial ideology. I am not going to consider each of your claims to this child or which of you is to blame for the present state of affairs because I empathize with all of you, not simply as individuals, but as individuals caught up in a system that none of us can completely master but all of us hope to change.

“Since legal disputes mark moments of instability in interpretation, this is the perfect moment for change. Both parties have demonstrated a barbaric possessiveness and anxiety to get their way, but I will award joint custody to Stern and Whitehead. A joint custody decision will serve to acknowledge the facts of the case—both parties are forever stuck with each other—and to encourage cooperation and the cessation of hostility in the best interests of the child. People might fear that joint custody will create a confusing situation and an unstable environment for the child, but let me remind you that Baby M, who has been shuttled back and forth between both sets of parents for a year and has known no other sort of life, appears to be thriving—she is, according to all who have observed her, bright, happy, and healthy. If one family truly believes that this decision will confuse Baby M, then in the best interests of the child I recommend that they give the child to the other parents. It has been argued that joint custody should not be mandated when the parents do not have the same standard of living. This argument seems specious because child care providers for affluent parents almost always have both a different standard of living and different values from their employers; this economic reality does not seem to damage children.

“I also hereby serve notice that contracts such as these should involve equal risks to each party. At present the surrogate mother takes all the risks; henceforward no man shall have the contractual right to tell a woman what she may or may not eat and drink, whether she should or should not have amniocentesis or an abortion. The genetic mother should be awarded a grace period, as she is in adoption cases, to decide if she wants to



relinquish parental rights; in present surrogate arrangements we have come perilously close to baby selling. I hope that the increased risks in this new arrangement will hurt the business of such rapacious entrepreneurs as Noel Keane, owner of the infertility center employed by Sterns, but—a judge can't control everything. The law does not determine economic and social forces; rather, its rhetoric usually helps legitimate them."

Is this decision irrelevant utopian fantasy, or worse yet, old-fashioned liberalism? It is fantasy: the judge's ruling supported traditional familialism. Beneath the nurturing father, William Stern, we have the paternal authority who retains his privileges of ownership that do not necessarily entail the obligation of child care. As Senator Albert Gore remarked about the ruling, "What's really being transferred here is Mary Beth Whitehead's right to rear the child. And the person it's being transferred to is not the husband, not the father, but the father's wife."<sup>32</sup> In her book, Mothers on Trial, Phyllis Chesler argues against the practice of joint custody, saying that it represents the liberal hope to be generous to everyone. Yet, she doesn't theorize her own insistence that the mother is the child's natural guardian. In her view, women are being robbed of their domain in custody cases, but this is also the domain they are often eager to escape.

Surrogate motherhood, which simply involves artificial insemination, is not a new technology. What is new is that feminist theory has put into question an automatic deferral to the rights of the father or the mother. Joint custody is not so much a liberal position that is generous to both parents but a risky solution that asks both parties to assume responsibilities, to acknowledge that children are not simply possessions of either one party or the other. We are not suggesting that joint custody be the resolution for all disputed surrogacy cases; but in this case the ruling of joint custody highlights the risk involved in surrogacy contracts and acknowledges the complexity of family relations that are hidden by the ideology of familialism.<sup>33</sup> Rather than having to resort forever to joint custody in the case of dispute over surrogacy, we would hope to see some legislation that would make the risk to all parties more obvious and equal. Those whose money makes them comfortable with the dominant ideology of the family cannot protect themselves with that money; neither can those feminists who celebrate women's separate sphere be protected from the oppressiveness of the system their celebration works to support. The Baby M case provides an opportunity for feminists to study familialism, an oppressive system of representation. The trial—obviously about artificial families—makes us notice how the rhetoric of familialism attempts to create the family and the subjects who constitute it as privileged, natural unities. It is through the family and the identities which it presupposes that the subordination of women is secured in contemporary society. Feminist theory can begin to move outside familialism not by taking sides—for or against, nature or nurture—but by

deconstructing these polarities, a risky business.

Janice Doane, St. Mary's College  
Devon Hodges, George Mason University

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Excerpts From the Ruling on Baby M." The New York Times. 1 April 1987: A13.

<sup>2</sup>Paula Span, "'Baby M': A Feminist Rejoinder." The Washington Post. 11 March 1987: B1.

<sup>3</sup>Iver Peterson, "Feminists Start to Form Reaction on Surrogacy." The New York Times. 24 Feb. 1987: B1.

<sup>4</sup>Mary Gordon, "'Baby M'—New Questions About Biology and Destiny." Ms. June 1987: 25-28.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>6</sup>As Mary Gordon certainly knows. Her most recent novel, Men and Angels, dramatizes how a middle-class parent's attempt to protect her children, to provide them with a safe place, fails, ironically, in the very effort to do so.

<sup>7</sup>Qtd. by Paula Span, "'Baby M': A Feminist Rejoinder." The Washington Post. 11 March 1987: B15.

<sup>8</sup>For two such discussions see: Katha Pollitt, "Contracts and Apple Pie: The Strange Case of Baby M." The Nation, May 23, 1987, and Ellen Goodman, "The Law Won't Allow You to Sell Your Rights." Oakland Tribune. 24 March 1987: B7.

<sup>9</sup>James Barron. "Views on Surrogacy Harden After Baby M Ruling." The New York Times. 2 April 1987: B2.

<sup>10</sup>"Womb to Let." National Review. 24 April 1987: 30.

<sup>11</sup>"Excerpts From the Ruling on Baby M." The New York Times. 1 April 1987: A13.

<sup>12</sup>Qtd. by William Safire. "The Modifiers of Mother." The New York Times Magazine. 10 May 1987: 12.

<sup>13</sup>Qtd. by Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh. The Anti-Social Family. London: Verso Editions, 1982, p. 136.

<sup>14</sup>"Law and Sexual Difference." Oxford Literary Review. 8.1-2 (1986): 195.

<sup>15</sup>Robert Hanley. "Three Experts Say Baby M's Mother Is Unstable." The New York Times. 11 Feb. 1987: B4.

<sup>16</sup>"Who's Who in the Fight for Baby M." The New York Times. 1 April 1987: A13.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Hanley. "Experts Testify on Whitehead as a Parent." The New York Times. 24 Feb. 1987: B2.

<sup>18</sup>"The Law Won't Allow You to Sell Your Rights." Oakland Tribune. 24 March 1987: B7.



<sup>19</sup>This was the claim of Dr. Judith Brown Grief, an assistant professor of clinical psychiatry. "Three Experts Say Baby M's Mother is Unstable." The New York Times. 11 Feb. 1987: B4.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Hanley. "Characterization by Lawyers Called Important to Baby M's Custody Trial." The New York Times. 3 March 1987: B2.

<sup>21</sup>Barbara Katrowitz, et al. "Who Keeps 'Baby M'?" Newsweek. 19 Jan. 1987: 48.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>24</sup>"Details of the Decision." The Washington Post. 1 April 1987: A8.

<sup>25</sup>The Anti-Social Family, p. 21.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup>James Barron. "Views on Surrogacy Harden After Baby M Ruling." The New York Times. 2 April 1987: B2.

<sup>28</sup>"Contract Law as Ideology." The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique. Ed. David Kairys. New York: Pantheon, 1982, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, pp. 177-78.

<sup>30</sup>Andrea Dworkin. Right-Wing Women. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1983, p. 182.

<sup>31</sup>See our Nostalgia and Sexual Difference: The Resistance to Contemporary Feminism. New York: Methuen, 1987, especially pp. 117-34.

<sup>32</sup>"Baby M's Future." The New York Times. 5 April 1987: Section 4, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup>In "Rereading Contracts: A Feminist Analysis of a Contracts Casebook" (The American University Law Review, Vol. 34, no. 4 [Summer 1985], pp. 1065-1140), Mary Joe Frug argues that casebooks used in legal education strongly support separate sphere ideology. She suggests that the introduction into casebooks of disputes involving reproductive technology would raise important questions about notions of public and private, freedom of choice, and the organization of the family. Frug's article shows how critical legal studies have begun to place legal writing in the context of social relations.

**BABY M: PARENTAL PRIVILEGE**  
(Response to "The Baby M Case: A Risky Business"  
by Janice Doane and Devon Hodges)

Susan Jaret McKinstry

In their paper, Doane and Hodges discuss the major questions in the Baby M case: individual rights, legal rights, and familial rights. Clearly all of these rights are in conflict with one another. The case represents a "discourse of rights" indeed. And this case is apparently only the beginning: additional surrogate custody cases have been started in the United States and Europe, and the questions only proliferate with the cases. Doane and Hodges note that Judge Sorkow's ruling in the Baby M case upheld the model of the "idealized family," one that, as most of us recognize, does not exist. Chances are that the powerful model will continue to rule the future decisions even though, as Doane and Hodges recognize, "in the Baby M case, a powerful metaphoric of the idealized family is weirdly at odds with the facts of the case: surrogacy, custody battles, arguments about parental fitness are signs of the family as a site of tensions that reflect cultural change." The court case serves to illustrate a remarkable—and dangerous—aspect of the tension in such a traditional and seductive model due to the social changes in the family and in the males and females who comprise it.

The issues Doane and Hodges raise—dealing with the "fit" mother, the "provider" father, the child as object—are frighteningly present in the case. But I think there is a larger question about the cause for the complexity of these cases—the reason it is so hard to decide the rights and wrongs involved. These issues could be explored as a means of deconstructing the oppositions that the social system and the judge's ruling try to uphold. For if the case were decided on the basis of the model of the idealized family, there have been some odd changes in the roles required for men and women in that family model. As Doane and Hodges note, "A central issue in the case was not actual relationships between mothers and children but instead the ideological power of a very limited notion of what families are." Traditionally that ideology demands the fixed male provider/female caretaker roles, with child as object of devotion. The complexity comes in because the notion of familiarity is changing, as they imply. It is not so simple for males or females any longer.

The Whiteheads tried unsuccessfully to follow the traditional model of the nuclear family. Mary Beth Whitehead is clearly the devoted caretaker—but too devoted ("overinvested"). Her husband is clearly the family provider—but a mediocre provider. The Stern family, however, does not

imitate this traditional model of the ideal family. The caretaker role, in the Stern family, is erased. Elizabeth Stern, whose career as a pediatrician evidently proved her ability to mother the baby, was remarkably absent from the debate as both "mother" and "caretaker," although her health concern caused the Sterns to meet Mary Beth Whitehead in the first place. Stern claimed Whitehead as a "sister" and herself as a "psychological mother," and she has now legally adopted Baby M. Yet her role was not central to the judge's considerations, and an important question is why one woman's mothering should decide the case, another woman's be unessential to the case.

The answer lies initially in the direction that Doane and Hodges point. The case questions the rules for the idealized family and argues that the roles are not gender specific, but money specific. More precisely, the caretaker role and the provider role have been linked in a unique way that erases the differentiated roles for men and women in parenting. In the judge's vision, William Stern can provide everything for the baby. He is clearly the provider, with a good and stable income, but he is also the emotional support. This goes even beyond Doane and Hodges' claim that the case uses the "rhetoric of familialism" in order "to create the family and the subjects who constitute it as privileged, natural unities." What has happened, I think, is that Judge Sorkow and the media turned the case into a male against female battle in which there was a seeming backlash against feminist efforts to widen the roles of women: if women have been trying in the past years to do it all, to be career women and mothers and providers, then Sorkow essentially said that William Stern could do it all. That when he weighed Mary Beth Whitehead against William Stern, Stern won precisely because he could fulfill both the male and female roles—and Whitehead failed at both. (Her brief career as a dancer highlights this reading, as does her use of her body as childproducer for money—she cannot separate her femaleness from her other roles, and thus she is indeed, for Sorkow, a poor provider, a poor model, a poor mother.)

Hence the question is not finally one of paternal rights over maternal rights, the value of sperm over egg and uterus. The issue becomes, apparently, one of economic privilege over fertility. (Nicely ironic that the term for Mary Beth Whitehead's problem was "overinvestment"—she cannot spend wisely, either money or emotion.) Surrogating unites two sorts of privileges—money and fertility. A telling comment by a surrogate mother-to-be in a MacNeil-Lehrer debate on the subject was that of the eight women participating in the debate, those who were mothers (also, interestingly, financially and educationally privileged) were against surrogating; those for it either suffered from infertility or understood its pain and were surrogate mothers themselves. With one out of seven American couples infertile, fertility is indeed a privilege. Hence emotions run high; this is not precisely a legal situation, nor solely a moral one.

Yet in the current system, as Doane and Hodges note, women lose. To use one's body for pay is always a bad investment—as prostitute or

surrogate—because the risks are high, the rewards uncertain. Doane and Hodges' desire to equalize the risks for the man and woman in the contract overlooks the essential physical difference: men produce billions of sperm throughout a long reproductive life with no danger to themselves; women produce only a limited number of children during a relatively short reproductive life, and at great risk to their health—including the possibility of death. How do we measure the worth of such a risk? Apparently, at \$1.50 per hour—a price the buyers argue is generous for women who need the money and find childbearing a tolerable occupation. Yet their economic need dooms them to the same sort of loss as Mary Beth Whitehead suffered—selling their bodies, they sell their rights to reconsider their bargain. On the other hand, Stern's ability to buy the sort of life the judge deems best is his reward—the specific caretaker, the precise situation, is less important than the opportunities for investment that Stern's income provides.

Let me go beyond Doane and Hodges for a moment. Their analysis of the complexity of the case is excellent (and the similar cases being debated are caught in the same quagmires). But really there was never much question about the outcome. The media was behind Stern from the start. Feminists have long understood the power of naming—as terms like Ms. indicate—and this case reasserts it. The loaded nature of the terms "mother" and "father," in fact, is the central issue. Calling Mary Beth Whitehead the "surrogate mother," for example—an inaccurate term, since she is the biological mother—and calling Stern the father, or the "natural father," the media showed their belief in the rightness of his claims. More tellingly, Stern called the baby Melissa, and she was known throughout the case as Baby M. Since the Whiteheads called her Sara, they had lost the case before it even began, for Stern had the power of naming her. Whitehead's maternal pleas—her desperation, her tears, her weeping older daughter—were seen as proof of her inability to mother wisely and well. The overemotional mother—played too convincingly by Whitehead—lost. The rational Law of the Father—incarnated in Stern and Sorkow—won. Katha Pollitt comments on an ironically parallel case where "a man who provided a woman friend with sperm, no strings attached, changed his mind when the child was born and sued for visitation rights. He won. Curiously, no one suggested that the decision stigmatized all his sex as hyperemotional dirty-dealers" (*The Nation*, May 23 1987, 686).

What has happened is that women are being asked to be both emotional mothers and rational adults at the same time that they are being put into a totally irrational system that demands the wrong response at the wrong time. When she signs a contract, a surrogate mother-to-be is indeed capable of being rational, but the system asks that she predict the emotional future. When she experiences that emotional future, and perhaps changes her mind, she is reminded of her rational past and, indeed, reminded that she "promised not to fall in love with her child" (Pollitt 688). Certainly the process of conceiving a surrogate child in the

laboratory is about as rational as any act of conception could be. The love, here, is for the act of childbearing (not childrearing), the gift of life, the altruistic desire to give a childless couple the joy of a child. (Or perhaps it is love of money, though most surrogates claim that is not the primary reason for the job—and considering the low pay, it does seem an unlikely motivation.) The mother initially has no intention of mothering the child.

But the hypothetical child and the real child can feel quite different to the people involved—partly because of what Noel Keane, the self-styled “father of surrogating” who arranged the Sterns’ contract (as well as 155 others, with 180 pending), calls “the constitutional right to procreate”(!)—certainly another debated “right.” The social pressure to be a parent is intense; at the same time, both men and women are pressured to have careers, not jobs—and often parenting is delayed for too long. Hence surrogating, which tries to create a new symbiotic relationship from the privileges of money and fertility.

What of the solutions? As Doane and Hodges rightly point out, there is no easy way to resolve the conflicting “rights” and desires of all parties. Their wish to equalize the legal and emotional risks for the mother and the father (seller and buyer?) through more flexible contracts is appropriate, though several laws being considered attempt to move in the opposite direction by making the contracts more enforceable. Contract law is extended to cover the sale of the child as the object of exchange between two people who may, as in this case, finally hate one another but both claim rights—genetic, parental, legal. As Pollitt notes, Stern “wanted a perfect baby with his genes and a medically vetted mother who would get out of his life forever immediately after giving birth. That’s a tall order, and one no other class of father—natural, step-, adoptive—even claims to be entitled to. Why should the law bend itself into a pretzel to gratify it?” (688).

A good question, and one with which I would like to end. This case highlights a central problem for feminist scholarship: how to combine theory and practice. The academy looked with some scorn upon early, experientially-based feminist courses. When feminist theory entered the academy, it seemed the perfect answer. But the problem is still complicated, for part of feminism is based on personal and cultural experience, and to remove that entirely takes away the basis of the theory (rather like teaching Black Studies with no recognition of the legal and political battles that required its creation). The larger question here is how to balance the conflicting needs of experiential and theoretical fields. The Baby M case forces us to ask where our sympathies should lie in a case that decides between economic and maternal rights, between theory and practice. Theoretically easy. Unfortunately, Mary Beth Whitehead does not provide a model of female unity; rather, she emphasizes the divisions between women. That helped her lose the case. Indeed, the statement that problematized the issues and, perhaps, destroyed her emotional argument was the phone conversation in which she threatened to kill the baby and

herself. It is indeed difficult for me to understand a woman claiming that she will kill her child rather than let someone else have it—but it is also not easy for me to hear myself sometimes saying things to my two-year-old that I thought only terrible mothers said, and still try to believe in my abilities as a mother. In other words, desperation does make us say things we do not really mean. As Hodges and Doane recognize, the model of the ideal family demands an obedience to its laws even in their contradictions: “this symbiotic bond” of motherhood, “at once desired and denigrated, guarantees that a mother, if she is good, will never fully be herself, an autonomous individual” (my emphasis—the word marks out the power of the model: “And when she was bad, she was horrid.”). Whitehead’s statement cut both ways—showed her irrationality, on the one hand, and her lack of “real” (ideal) maternal feeling on the other—and she lost almost everyone’s sympathies. She became a dangerous symbol of the excesses of maternity—a woman out of control—while Stern was able to show emotion and keep his head—even responding rationally and gently to Whitehead’s threat.

So why should the law turn itself into a pretzel? Precisely because there is no easy answer; because the issues here—rights, roles, and rules—are increasingly twisted as we try to redefine the family without falling back into the old rational/irrational model, or simple economic answers to highly emotional issues. The financial and educational environment in the Stern home certainly helped them win the case, but essentially I think that Stern’s ability to be both emotional and rational—“female” and “male”—won the case in a system that increasingly rewards the male ability to be both things at once.

Perhaps Doane and Hodges’ solution—joint custody—is theoretically apt. But I think it is rather like sawing Solomon’s disputed child in half forever. Too many children of fighting parents are indeed split in two by the parents’ hatred and competition. Baby M—Melissa Stern, I should say—should not pay a price for that as well as for the oddity of her conception. Again, the problem is one of the conflict between theory and practice. There is no just solution here; economics won out in this case, and I think often will, but to create a system for that child whereby the struggle must go on forever—or until she can escape at 18—is too harsh a punishment of the person we want to protect. Solomon’s model is useful here: both parents felt they were doing the right thing in wanting Baby M, and social forces decreed that Stern’s money made the thing right. But Judge Sorkow was no Solomon; he did not have the perfect situation in which the more loving parent could give up the child, and he certainly did not have the option of threatening to kill her himself if the Sterns and Whiteheads did not come to some responsible decision themselves.

I think this case—and the others coming up—represents the scariest possible breakdown of the ideal family model. Because Stern could fulfill all of the baby’s needs and be both provider and caretaker, his wife became inessential, as did the baby’s mother. The father was deemed primary in

every sense of the term—as namer, provider, caretaker, owner. The question is not simply law, or rights, or love. The question is one of roles, although in the legal system financial privilege—again and again—is established as the right to all rights. If the media had not been able to highlight the differences between Whitehead and Stern, and turn this into a battle of the sexes in which Stern had all the male and female powers, and Whitehead only the female weaknesses, the case would not trouble us so much. But this “unholy alliance,” as one editorial called it, of “the law and technology” is also a confrontation with our most complicated feelings about maternity and paternity as responsibilities, and not “rights” of ownership and power. Forcing us to evaluate the privileges of money and fertility, the case is only part of a larger debate about the limits—and options—of maleness and femaleness and, perhaps, humanness.

Susan Jaret McKinstry  
Carleton College

### THE POLITICS OF READING: FEMINISM, THE NOVEL, AND THE COERCIONS OF “TRUTH”

Joanne S. Frye

“Trying to decide whether Libya is a feminist issue is gibberish that belongs in a women’s poli. sci. course, if it belongs anywhere.” I quote a student evaluation from a seminar on Virginia Woolf in the spring of 1986, the spring in which the President of the United States decided to bomb Libya in retaliation against that “madman,” Muammar el-Qaddafi. On the day of the bombing, the seminar was working with *Three Guineas*, had spent much of the semester exploring Woolf’s resistance to truth claims, and was prepared, I thought, to talk in very immediate terms about the intertwining of truth claims, patriarchal political power, and the uses of force by political figures that Woolf elsewhere labels “bullies.”<sup>1</sup> The discussion had the liveliness of immediate urgency: most of the students were extremely concerned about the implications of the bombing and were engaged in the effort to link the semester’s “literary” understandings to the more obviously “relevant” international politics of the moment.

But the student whose evaluation I’ve quoted was visibly distressed, though silent. Disposed toward a version of literary studies that still predominates in American education—that “high culture in America is assumed to be above politics” and that the “mission of the humanities is... to represent noninterference in the affairs of the everyday world”<sup>2</sup>—this particular student saw only “gibberish” where the other students saw connections. He wished to remain in the “purity” of verbal sophistication while I felt the urgency of relating literature to politics, language to power.<sup>3</sup>

The seminar was not, in fact, “trying to decide whether Libya is a feminist issue,” but this interpretation of the discussion is not irrelevant. For in seeking the connections between text and event, language and power, gender and war, we inevitably raised questions of “truth,” of the “right” feminist response; and with those questions we risked re-embracing values we were criticizing: not only the problem of “us vs. them” and the coercive claims of our own “truth”—as if single and unified—but also the problem of seeing women as somehow uniquely peace-loving, the preserve of special human values in a violent and hostile world of patriarchal bullying such as we had witnessed from both Reagan and Qaddafi.<sup>4</sup> As we correlated the use of force with patriarchal constructions of masculinity, we were, in effect, claiming that the bombing of Libya was a feminist issue. In seeking connections, we could not avoid becoming implicated in the apparent processes of truth-seeking. We could not avoid entanglement in the currently available political and linguistic constructions of human experience, premised on dualism, hierarchy, dominance.

The terrain of feminist analysis is, indeed, a mine-field, a wilderness,<sup>5</sup>

surrounded not only by patriarchal culture but also by the paradoxes and contradictions of its own thought. Answering the question, "What is feminism?", historian Nancy Cott asserts, "Feminism is nothing if not paradoxical," and goes on to identify the situational basis for the paradoxes of feminism: "It aims for individual freedoms by mobilizing sex solidarity. It acknowledges diversity among women while positing that women recognize their unity. It requires gender consciousness for its basis, yet calls for the elimination of prescribed gender roles."<sup>6</sup> Toril Moi identifies the same problem in the terms of linguistic analysis when she speaks of "a central paradox of feminism: given that there is no space outside patriarchy from which women can speak, how do we explain the existence of a feminist, anti-patriarchal discourse at all?"<sup>7</sup> Feminism is inherently paradoxical in both the situational constructions of social scientists and the linguistic constructions of literary critics—precisely because it is grounded in a commitment to "women" as a category of analysis at the same time that it disputes the weight of meaning borne by that very category, precisely because it can only be spoken through the languages and values of a patriarchal culture.

No wonder, then, that deconstruction has a strong appeal to many feminist thinkers: the linguistic subversion of all dualisms offers an apparent escape from internal contradictions, and the rejection of logocentrism seems to escape the coercions of "truth" that ground patriarchal oppression of women and other claims to political certainty. But dangers lurk even here. For in deconstructing categories of meaning, we deconstruct not only patriarchal definitions of womanhood and "truth" but also the very categories of our own analysis—"women" and "feminism" and "oppression."<sup>8</sup> In doing so, we relinquish the claims to understanding our own gendered experience in the world as we live in it. We relinquish the possibility that literature can have meaning for women's lives—beyond linguistic disruption—and we relinquish the possibility that literary study might fruitfully relate feminism to such political crises as the bombing of Libya.

In the year and a half since that bombing, the American political context has become even more visibly fraught with the dangers of patriarchal/patriotic certainty, the coercions of presumed truth: American "right" to intervene in Nicaragua is defended by military notions of honor, manhood, and nation; and the Iran-Contra hearings repeatedly underlined the very real relationships among "certainty," power, patriotism, and masculinity—the very notions that Woolf so powerfully links to fascism in *Three Guineas*. At the same time, the hearings have reminded us of the equally real dangers of relinquishing the links between language and experience, of relinquishing distinctions between truth and falsehood:<sup>9</sup> the lies that surround governmental action in both Central America and the Middle East have real consequences, and the distinction between truth and falsehood is critical to any attempt to disentangle the dangers of secret governmental action, as it is to any attempt to falsify patriarchal construc-

tions of both masculinity and femininity.

In the same year and a half since Reagan bombed Libya, my own urgency to link language and power, literature and politics, has increased, as has my own understanding of the complexities of doing so. My urgency is framed by the recognitions of feminist analysis—that disciplinary divisions are often arbitrary and politically conservative, that both literature and politics have marginalized women and women's experiences, that patriarchal power is entangled with positivist notions of "truth" and with representational assumptions about language. I have not, however, reached a straightforward response to these recognitions. For when pursued, they lead inevitably back to paradox: feminist literary criticism requires that we claim the "truths" of women's experience without re-embracing the structures of gender we are criticizing. It requires that we resist complicity with the languages and "truths" of patriarchal thought, even as we actively politicize literature and the study of literature.

My commitment in this paper, then, is to re-examine these difficulties through responding to a recurrent question in my own work: why do we do feminist literary criticism? Why study or teach literature at all?<sup>10</sup> My tentative answer, which I want to explore in my remaining space, evolves from the essentially paradoxical nature of feminist analysis to a claim for the distinctive contribution of the novel to feminist thought processes.<sup>11</sup> In my view, the novel suggests a particular kind of understanding that can help us through these contradictions by facilitating a feminist epistemology and hence feminist political strategies as well.

Let me begin by identifying what I see as the needs of a feminist epistemology as they are shaped by the paradoxes of feminism. In general, we can only reach new knowledge about gender if we use "women" as a category of analysis while we continue to complicate and alter that category. We thus need to speak of "women" as a potential unity while striving to take into account the multiplicity of women's lives. We need to claim and value distinctive understandings grounded in women's experience even though that experience is only available to us as framed by patriarchal institutions, patriarchal ideology, patriarchal language. We need to gather information about women's lives without reinforcing the current limitations on those lives. We need to try to define—as does a recent contribution to feminist epistemology—"women's ways of knowing" without, in effect, essentializing "woman" within those patriarchal constructs.<sup>12</sup>

These, then, are the potential contradictions that frame an emerging feminist epistemology and suggest its primary criteria. Consider, first, the initial criterion of feminist epistemology that knowledge should be grounded experientially—that our claims to understanding should emerge from our lives and that subjective experience is an essential component of knowledge: "within feminist theoretical production, experience, the living participating 'I,' is seen as a dimension that must be included in an adequate analysis."<sup>13</sup> All knowledge claims must thus be examined against

our own experiences and against the subjective experiences of people's complex lives. This correlates with the recurrent feminist principle that "the personal is political," as well as with the understanding that we need to make visible the previously invisible experiences of women. But it also makes difficult the task of generalizing, which has been traditionally served by quantitative methods. For each woman's experience varies not only according to broad variables, such as race and class and sexual preference, but also according to minor differences which may or may not skew the interpretation that seeks general understanding through complex contextualized information. When we look at each woman's experience, we have difficulty discerning exactly what in that experience derives from gender, and we have further difficulty reaching an understanding of the category "women" beyond its current construction within patriarchal thought. Inevitably, the women in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, for example, "know" the way they do in part because they have been marginalized; their experience can only be constructed in patriarchal terms.<sup>14</sup> And yet new perspectives on women's experience are our best source of understanding gender in alternative ways. An experiential base, framed by contradiction, remains a central component of feminist epistemology.

A second primary concern in feminist epistemology is similarly framed by contradiction: the rejection of dualistic categories in both methods and definitions of knowledge. As the knower becomes intertwined with the known—a necessary effect of genuine experiential knowledge—the subject/object dualism that underpins Western science is shown to be inappropriate and damaging to the process of gaining knowledge, particularly about women's experiences.<sup>15</sup> Further dualisms also become inappropriate within the attempts at experiential understanding and constructed knowledge, as, for example, in the recognition that the public/private distinction is premised on categories inappropriate to women's lives or that the nature/culture distinction has been damaging to our understanding of women's contributions to social knowledge.<sup>16</sup> In short, an examination of women's distinctive experiences suggests that the dualistic categories of Western thought are both insufficient for understanding women's lives and damaging to the possibilities for cultural change.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, however, a feminist epistemology requires ways to validate the denigrated category of each of these dualistic pairs—to value the subjective, the private, the natural world—while simultaneously supporting women's legitimate participation in "objective" claims, in the public world and the shaping of culture. To reject dualisms is to risk reaffirming the currently dominant term in patriarchal patterns of thought by suppressing the "feminine" term of each duality. And yet to reject dualistic thought is to open most fully the possibility for resisting gender hierarchies and is thus a second vital component of a feminist epistemology.

Finally, feminist epistemologies redefine the very nature of knowledge as distinct from traditional empiricism and Enlightenment reason: knowledge is not a truth to be arrived at—and can never be given the coercive

force of patriarchal "Truth"—but is instead a working hypothesis, a construction, to be tested through intersubjective agreements and always to be held open to the possibility of new understandings. It is, in short, process rather than product, intersubjective understanding rather than Truth.<sup>18</sup> This view of knowledge again opens the danger of imposition by those who do make truth claims—by the bullying of patriarchal politics and the coercions of patriarchal "Truth"—so that feminist claims appear vulnerable to the powers of the status quo. Similarly, to explore the association of womanhood with non-truth, as a way to deconstruct truth claims, is to risk a renewed denigration of women as false.<sup>19</sup> And yet to claim "Truth" ourselves in the same terms as those of patriarchal discourse is to recapitulate false hierarchies, to submerge the complexity of understanding that is essential to feminist thought and to cultural change—essential, again, to a feminist epistemology.

These general understandings have much in common with postmodernist thought: indeed, many of the feminist epistemologies draw directly on such thinkers as Derrida, Rorty, and Lacan. And the connections specifically to deconstructionism are also evident in the rejection of dualisms and the instability of "truth" as a category. But the overt commitments to social change and to experiential understanding suggest important differences and point me toward the claims I wish to make for literature's contributions, particularly through the novel, to feminist epistemology and thence to feminist political strategies.<sup>20</sup> An understanding of novelistic discourse gives us, I think, one response to Sandra Harding's suggestion that "we should try to fashion conceptual schemes that are more alert to the complex and often beneficial ways in which the modernist world is falling apart."<sup>21</sup> It gives us one possible way to value the instabilities of the modern world—destabilized notions of Truth and Power and Self—without relinquishing the need for feminist knowledge of our own gendered experience.

This, then, suggests the potential value of literary understanding for feminist thought: literature, by virtue of its self-conscious textuality, is particularly able to embrace apparent contradictions, to explore unstable concepts, to refrain from an enforced univocal understanding of human experience. This capacity is especially evident in the novel with its "polyphonic" form, its capacity to embrace many different voices and set opposing views in interaction with each other.<sup>22</sup> As an example, consider a novel like *To the Lighthouse* with its rich explorations of gender and its resistance to a linear outcome: the "person-ideas"<sup>23</sup> of its three central characters—Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay, and Lily—are all actualized as world-views in a particular context, a gendered context; but none is exclusively validated. Rather, each is explored in relation to its experiential base, granted its experiential validity, and set in interaction with the others. By the end of the novel, then, readers have explored the complexities and contradictions of current gender constructions without being led to a univocal "truth," which would in fact be impossible. Instead, the novel has

helped to destabilize categories as it has explored contradictions and set them in dialogue, rather than suppressing them in search of a single-voiced and coercive "truth."

As literary form, the novel, in other words, has the distinctive capacity to embrace contradictions and thus to explore feminist understandings without becoming trapped with a falsifying knowledge construct. Not coincidentally, its ways of doing so are remarkably similar to the other requirements suggested by an emergent feminist epistemology. The experiential basis of knowledge, which I suggested was a first requisite for feminist epistemology, is also a first impetus for novelistic understanding. Novels by women are especially crucial here as they voice experiences that have been previously unvoiced, make public what the authors may have hitherto conceived as purely private experiences.<sup>24</sup> They are particularly able to do so because the novel as form makes no initial claim to generality, to the proclamation of public truths, and can thus voice individual perception and provide the contextual basis for that perception. Each perception—each "truth"—is experientially grounded and is entered into the novel's public discourse as a function of its particular context. Thus when Charles Tansley mutters, "Women can't paint, women can't write,"<sup>25</sup> we understand the assertion in its situational specificity—a function of Tansley's participation in patriarchal ideology as well as his own personal insecurity. When Lily Briscoe then assimilates and resists this patriarchal "truth," we experience her experiential understanding, her internal dialogue between the urgency of creation and the negations of her culture. The novelistic form itself, premised on the exploration of concrete human experience and the multiplicity of experiences, again enables Woolf's complex exploration of gender.

Through its distinctive linguistic capacities, then, the novel can elude the potential conservatism of representation without relinquishing the values of the experiential. The poststructuralists' rejection of experience—as in Jane Gallop's statement that the "politics of experience is inevitably a conservative politics for it cannot help but conserve traditional ideological constructs which are not recognized as such but are taken for the 'real'"<sup>26</sup>—reflects, at best, a partial understanding, which fails to take into account the necessarily paradoxical nature of feminist thought. Experience is inevitably framed by prevalent ideological constructs, but it can also be contextualized in such a way that those constructs are recognized. This, in fact, is precisely the gift of novelistic discourse in its dialogical capacity to explore contradictions and to set multiple perspectives in interaction.

Furthermore, this experiential basis also suggests ways to resist the false dualisms of Western thought. As feminist epistemologists have argued, the knowledge that derives from experience refutes the subject/object dualism. Similarly, the contextualized understanding that is evident in novels reveals the centrality of the perceiver to the perceived, precisely because the object world can only be presented to us as part of a constructed version of "reality."<sup>27</sup> This is the case in all novels but is doubly so

in novels that are structured through character consciousness, as are many twentieth-century novels. Woolf makes this philosophical concern overt in *To the Lighthouse* when she writes of Mr. Ramsay's inquiry into "subject and object and the nature of reality,"<sup>28</sup> but its most potent presence derives from the complexity of "reality" as seen through many different perspectives: the lighthouse is not "simply one thing" but many things,<sup>29</sup> and Mrs. Ramsay herself is protean and multiple because we understand her simultaneously through the perceptions of others and through her manifest subjectivity.

This same process of deriving knowledge from an interaction between subject and object, knower and known, yields an understanding of the intertwined categories of other apparent dualisms. As the perceiver is central to interpretive understanding in the novel, public and private are shown to be linguistically intertwined in novelistic discourse by the pervasive interactions between private perceptions and social meanings. The understanding that language is an intertwining of public and private is integral to novelistic form, but Woolf again makes this understanding explicit, as in Mrs. Ramsay's inability to escape the culture's cliché "We are in the hands of the Lord" even in her most private moment.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, other dualisms—most notably the male/female "dualism" itself—can be disrupted by self-conscious linguistic constructions that are integral to novelistic capacity and by the dialogical possibilities that derive from the presence of many kinds of social languages within one text.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, the novel as form suggests a definition of knowledge that is also congruent with the requirements of a feminist epistemology, for it is premised on a concern for ways of processing reality, for human knowledge as a construct. In their explorations of experiential understanding, as in the integral interactions between perceiver and perceived, novels explore hypotheses rather than offering truths; they raise questions rather than proposing answers.<sup>32</sup> Even when an authoritative narrator makes general assertions—as, for example, George Eliot does in her assessments of human character or the particular destinies of her protagonists—the experiential basis of these understandings and the integral presence of multiple perspectives contextualize the claims to truth and suggests that alternative understandings are possible. The knowledge to be derived is not the knowledge of the assertions themselves but the knowledge of how such generalizations are formed as hypotheses—the knowledge that knowledge itself is a construct and subject to further inquiry.<sup>33</sup>

What I have suggested, of course, are only some very general qualities of novelistic discourse—and no doubt each of us can think of many novels that seem to confirm patriarchal "truths" rather than to participate in a feminist epistemology. My claim, however, is not that every novel accomplishes alternative understandings but rather that the form of the novel has distinctive capacities for helping to shape alternative understandings. These capacities are not fully actualized in all novels; indeed, they are actively suppressed in many specific novels. But they are capacities of particular



interest to feminist thought and suggest intriguing possibilities in the expressions of a novelist like Woolf, who resists feminist polemic in her novels and instead activates feminist understanding through the epistemological capacities of the form.<sup>34</sup> Michele Barrett argues that Woolf felt “a deep-seated ambivalence as to the rival claims of art and politics.”<sup>35</sup> But in my view she went on to resist the notion that these are rival claims; she understood that the linguistic capacities of her chosen art form had profound political implications through the complex understandings inherent in the form itself.

Exploring epistemology through novelistic discourse, then, provides one possible response to the paradoxes of feminist thought. And from this correlation derives the most vital link in the politics of literature: the politics of reading. By this phrase, I do not mean the politics of what we read so much as the politics of how we read and how we teach our students to read. For only if we read with the understanding of language and knowledge and experience that are implicit in novelistic discourse are we then able to generate the necessarily complex and shifting understandings of gender that feminism requires. Through explorations of novelistic discourse we can go beyond seeking ways to read “as a woman” and reach toward more vital ways to read for feminist understanding.<sup>36</sup>

Briefly, what this kind of feminist reading involves is an active embracing of the epistemology implicit in novelistic discourse and an active exploring of issues of gender through epistemology. Feminist reading is thus necessarily committed to an experiential understanding, a contextualized understanding rather than the pursuit of general truths. This means not only testing understandings of gender against our own experience—which is a first and vital reader response, probably an inevitable one—but also taking into account the multiplicity of different experiences that we can gain from literary texts. And it means examining the ways in which the texts themselves contextualize gender through experiential complexities.

Feminist reading, informed by novelistic epistemology, also involves seeking omissions and contradictions as well as congruences of experience. The point, then, is not to identify and celebrate the coherence of a work of art but to recognize and explore the inevitable contradictions in the socio-linguistic construction of experience and hence of gender. The epistemological need to reject false dualisms become a part of the way we read as it is part of the novelistic capacity to set contradictions in dialogue with each other. In this way, reading itself facilitates the feminist project of both speaking of “women” as a category and disrupting the current constitution of that category.

The object of such reading cannot be seen as a univocal text nor can its goal be seen as “right” interpretations. The goal, instead, is to examine a text’s many voices and to develop intersubjective criteria of understanding.<sup>37</sup> One way of considering literature, then, is what Patrocínio Schweickart sees as a kind of dialogue between reader and writer, a search for relationship and connection rather than control and “the drive to get it

right”<sup>38</sup>—in particular, an exploration of commonalities as women between a feminist reader and a woman writer. But even in the reading of male writers, the task is legitimately one of dialogue and relationship rather than mastery: finding the inevitable contradictions among the multiple languages of the novelistic discourse, exploring the ideological disjunctions, seeking the commonalities across gender and the differences between differently gendered versions of human experience. This task will often require what Judith Fetterley has labeled “resisting” or what Jean Kennard has labeled “polar reading”—the ability to read against the models of understanding proposed within the text and to understand one’s own experience in opposition to rather than reflection of the text.<sup>39</sup> But the understanding to be claimed is, in any case, first an epistemological one that requires exploration of culture and context and both human specificity and human commonality before reaching any conclusions about gendered experience itself.

The concern for intersubjective understanding also suggests a further dimension of the politics of reading: the relationship among readers. As Schweickart says, “to read a text and then to write about it is to seek to connect not only with the author of the original text, but also with a community of readers.”<sup>40</sup> If we conceive of knowledge as intersubjective understanding, the wish to share perceptions with other readers takes on a special importance. Such sharing, as Schweickart suggests, is a powerful motivation for our written criticism. But it also suggests pedagogical processes: a classroom situation in which we refrain from seeking “correct” interpretations and seek instead to identify the kinds of hypotheses generated by a text and then the experiential understandings that might illuminate those hypotheses.<sup>41</sup> Students together testing perceptions of gendered experience, searching for intersubjective understandings, exploring the epistemological and experiential possibilities of a literary text, resisting univocal truths—this suggests to me a powerful contribution to the political strategies of academic feminism.

Much recent work in literary criticism has been concerned with the reader, but as yet we have no fully developed theory of reading. Barrett joins other commentators on reading when she says, “we still await a substantial account of consumption and reception of texts from the point of view of the ideology of gender (or from any other point of view, one could add). There has been a failure to develop a theory of reading.”<sup>42</sup> This is a complex project, indeed, involving analysis not only of discourse but also of psychology and social circumstance.<sup>43</sup> In my view, however, it may be even more important to work toward developing particular ways of reading. And to me, one of the most fruitful areas of exploration lies within the epistemological possibilities of novelistic discourse itself.<sup>44</sup>

This, then, is why I do feminist literary criticism, why I teach literature. Like other feminist critics, I see our efforts as part of a commitment “to change the world,” “to transform culture”<sup>45</sup>—to do so particularly with respect to current gender hierarchies, but also to recognize that the



complexity of thought required for this transformation encompasses all of culture. To my mind, the bombing of Libya was a feminist issue, as are all of the power dynamics of our social and political environment. For feminism requires that we seek ways to resist the bullying of a Qaddafi without responding in kind, that we seek to change our political context without participating in its negative versions of power. Like Alice Jardine, I believe that feminism "needs to be also about forming, encouraging, and protecting a certain shape of subjectivity that will be able to address the massive and urgent issues facing the entire planet"<sup>46</sup>—the issues of war and peace, of environmental destruction, of economic deprivation, of denials based on race and class. In my view, we can only generate this kind of subjectivity if we resist the coercions of "truth" while continuing to seek knowledge in the redefinitions of gender and power. Because novelistic discourse helps us to understand the embeddedness of current constructions of both gender and power as it simultaneously suggests ways to reassess the contradictions of feminism, I believe that it has a special contribution to make toward feminist political strategies. Like all politics, the politics of literature and the politics of reading are about power,<sup>47</sup> especially because language itself is a form of power. Used effectively, that power becomes not a reenactment of patriarchal power, but a transformative power, the power of new ways of knowing, the power of positive cultural change.

Joanne S. Frye  
College of Wooster

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See *The Years*, where Eleanor looks at a newspaper photograph "of a fat man gesticulating" and exclaims, "Damned— . . . bully!" (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1937), p. 330.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," *Critical Inquiry* 9, 1 (September 1982): 21, 22.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Jane Tompkins' call to make central the "perception that language is a form of power"; "The Reader in History," in *Reader Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 226.

<sup>4</sup>This is the risk that Sara Ruddick takes in "Preservative Love and Military Destruction: Some Reflections on Mothering and Peace," in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. Joyce Trebilcot (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984), pp. 231-62.

<sup>5</sup>For the use of these metaphors, see Annette Kolodny, "Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," *Feminist Studies* 6, 1 (Spring 1989): 1-25; and Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the

Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 8, 2 (Winter 1981): 179-205.

<sup>6</sup>Nancy Cott, "Feminist Theory and Feminist Movements: The Past Before Us," in *What is Feminism: A Re-Examination*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (New York: Pantheon, 1986), p. 49.

<sup>7</sup>Tori Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 81.

<sup>8</sup>See criticisms to this effect in Stephen Heath, "Male Feminism," p. 4, and Robert Scholes, "Reading Like a Man," p. 209, both in *Men in Feminism*, ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (New York: Methuen, 1987).

<sup>9</sup>See Alice Jardine's assertion that for French psychoanalysis and philosophy "truth and falsehood have been and must continue to be taken out of opposition," *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 149.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Lillian Robinson's statement that "the most important question we can ask ourselves as feminist critics is 'So what?'," cited by Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt in "Toward a Materialist-Feminist Criticism," in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*, ed. Newton and Rosenfelt (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. xv.

<sup>11</sup>Poetry also has a distinctive contribution to make to feminist analysis—probably more direct and less epistemological—as is suggested by Adrienne Rich's statement: "I felt more and more urgently the dynamic between poetry as language and poetry as a kind of action, probing, burning, stripping, placing itself in dialogue with others out beyond the self"; "Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: Norton, 1986), p. 181.

<sup>12</sup>See Mary Field Belenky, et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986)—a work of significant interest despite its susceptibility to a number of the problems I've suggested.

<sup>13</sup>Hilary Rose, "Hand, Brain and Heart: A Feminist Epistemology for the Natural Sciences," *Signs* 9, 1 (Autumn 1983): 88.

<sup>14</sup>This is, of course, the general criticism of "experience" raised by poststructuralist critics.

<sup>15</sup>See, for example, Evelyn Fox Keller, "Gender and Science," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 187-205.

<sup>16</sup>See, for example, Nancy C.M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality*, pp. 283-310; Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981); and Hilary Rose.

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) and Dorothy Smith, "A

Sociology for Women," in The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge, ed. Julia Sherman and Evelyn T. Beck (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), as well as Hartsock, O'Brien, Rose (n. 16).

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," Signs 12, 4 (Summer 1987): 621-43; Frances Maher, "Classroom Pedagogy and the New Scholarship on Women," in Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching, ed. Margo Culley and Catharine Portugese (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 29-48; and Marcia Westcott, "Feminist Criticism of the Social Sciences," Harvard Educational Review 49, 4: 422-30.

<sup>19</sup>See Nelly Furman's attribution to Derrida, "woman occupies the place of non-truth," "The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle?" in Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 75.

<sup>20</sup>See especially the work of Flax, Harding, and Jardine for fruitful efforts to mediate between these apparently opposing requirements of postmodern thought and feminist politics.

<sup>21</sup>Harding, p. 164.

<sup>22</sup>See Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the novel in, for example, The Dialogic Imagination, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>23</sup>I take the term from Don H. Bialostosky's assessment of Bakhtin, "Dialogics as an Art of Discourse in Literary Criticism," PMLA 101, 5 (October 1986): 789.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. women writers' references to drawing on private experience in writing novels: e.g., Doris Lessing in conversation with Kate Millet, quoted in Flying (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), p. 357, and Erica Jong, "Blood and Guts: The Tricky Problem of Being a Woman Writer in the Late Twentieth Century," in The Writer on Her Work, ed. Janet Sternburg (New York: Norton, 1980), p. 178.

<sup>25</sup>Woolf, To the Lighthouse (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1927), p. 75.

<sup>26</sup>Gallop quoted in Jardine, Gynesis, p. 155. See also Furman's statement that "post-structuralist feminism challenges representation itself as already a patriarchal paradigm," p. 76.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Jerome Bruner's statement that "the humanist deals principally with the world as it changes with the position and stance of the viewer," Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 50.

<sup>28</sup>To the Lighthouse, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup>To the Lighthouse, p. 277.

<sup>30</sup>To the Lighthouse, p. 97.

<sup>31</sup>I am here, as throughout, indebted to Bakhtin's concept of "heteroglossia" and its centrality to the development of the novel; see, e.g., The Dialogic Imagination, p. 61.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Bruner's claim that the "humanities have as their implicit agenda

the cultivation of hypotheses, the art of hypothesis generating," p. 52.

<sup>33</sup>For a powerful analysis of how literature serves a cognitive function, see Henry D. Herring, "Literature, Concepts, and Knowledge," New Literary History 18, 1 (Autumn 1986): 171-90.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Toril Moi's assessment of Woolf's importance for feminist literary criticism, esp. pp. 2-18.

<sup>35</sup>Barrett, "Introduction" to Virginia Woolf, Women and Writing (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), p. 24.

<sup>36</sup>For differing considerations of "reading as a woman," see, e.g., David Bleich, "Gender Interests in Reading and Language," in Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts, ed. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 234-66; Jonathan Culler, "Reading as a Woman," On Deconstruction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 43-64; Mary Jacobus, "Reading Woman (Reading)," Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 3-24; and Patrocínio Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," in Gender and Reading, pp. 31-62.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Jean E. Kennard, "Convention Coverage or How to Read Your Own Life," New Literary History 13, 1 (Autumn 1981): 69-88; and Schweickart.

<sup>38</sup>See especially pp. 52 and 55.

<sup>39</sup>Judith Fetterley, The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978) and Kennard, "Ourselves behind Ourselves: A Theory for Lesbian Readers," in Gender and Reading, pp. 63-80.

<sup>40</sup>Schweickart, p. 56.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. the feminist pedagogical processes described in Maher.

<sup>42</sup>Barrett, "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," in Feminist Criticism and Social Change, pp. 65-85.

<sup>43</sup>For some initial efforts in this direction, see, e.g., Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin, "The Reader's Construction of Meaning: Cognitive Research on Gender and Comprehension," in Gender and Reading, pp. 3-30; Joanne S. Frye, Living Stories, Telling Lives: Women and the Novel in Contemporary Experience (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1986), pp. 189-203; and Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," New Literary History 11, 3 (1980): 451-67.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Bialostosky's development of dialogics as a particularly valuable way of approaching literary criticism.

<sup>45</sup>Newton and Rosenfelt, p. xv; Schweickart, p. 51.

<sup>46</sup>Alice Jardine and Paul Smith, "A Conversation," in Men in Feminism, p. 253.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Fetterley, "Power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics of anything else," p. xiii.

“IS TEACHING FEMINIST STRATEGIES  
OF READING ENOUGH?”

Ann Ardis

Let me begin by saying how much I liked your paper, and how grateful I am to you for laying out so clearly issues I struggle with day-to-day both in my scholarship and in my teaching—what you term the “central, inherent paradox” of feminism: the problem of avoiding the seductive coercions of “truth,” without, however, simply practising any kind of quietism in the face of the “patriarchal/patriotic certainty” symbolized in your paper by Reagan’s bombing of Libya; the problem of deconstructing categories of analysis such as “women,” “feminism,” and “oppression” even as we use them. I think you have done an excellent job in this essay of defending Anglo-American feminism against the common charge that it is “naive” in its, in our, privileging of the “authority of experience.” Instead of endorsing a referential theory of language, and an epistemology based on such a theory of language, you are claiming for Anglo-American feminism a kind of epistemological and theoretical “sophistication” (I use the binary opposition between naive/sophisticated advisedly, of course) that postmodernists and French feminists would perhaps prefer to ascribe only to themselves. In this regard, you are not only extending your own previous work, in Living Stories, Telling Lives. You are also doing what Elizabeth Meese calls crossing the double cross: that is, describing contemporary academic Anglo-American feminism in such a way as to collapse the conventional polarity between French and American feminisms—even as you thoroughly politicize the insights into language use gained from Derridean philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis. The similarity between your project and Meese’s comes home to me as I think of Meese’s comment in the introduction of her study: “I would like to provoke critical theory to be more radically political, and feminism to be more self-consciously polyvalent and destabilizing in its theory” (x). I realize, of course, that you have set up this whole discussion not to contrast Anglo-American and French feminism but to place Anglo-American literary feminism in the context of research on gender being done in the social and in the hard sciences. I am grateful to you for introducing me to this research and struck by the lengths you have taken to avoid drawing on deconstructive feminism, to distinguish what you are doing from (a) feminism(s) born of Derridean philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Leaving that whole question aside—your decision to cross the double-cross between literary and social science research, not that between French and Anglo-American literary studies—I have two kinds of

questions to ask of you today.

The first are not so much questions as requests for clarification of several points. To begin, could you elaborate on what you refer to again and again in this essay as “positive cultural change”? And could you talk a little bit about where there might be differences within feminism (feminisms) about this commitment to “change the world” and “transform culture”? A follow-up to these: in introducing the discussion of the novel’s feminist dialogics, you set up a cause-effect sequence. Literature, particularly the novel, you argue, contributes “to feminist epistemology and thence to feminist political strategies.” At the end of the discussion of the novel, you refer more specifically to “the political strategies of academic feminism,” arguing—quite persuasively, I think—that the resistance of univocality is an experience we want our students to have. My question is this: is the shift in terminology—from “feminist political strategies” to “strategies of academic feminism” an inconsistency or oversight? How do you conceive of the relationship between the politics of academic feminism and a politics that would take us beyond the academy, outside of our classrooms? To put this another way: is teaching in a feminist classroom, is teaching feminist ways of reading, enough?

These are my most important questions. What I’d like to do next, is to ask several questions about the generic definition of the novel you offer in the middle section of the paper. In other words, I’d like to focus on the local argument, the more minor claim, in your essay before returning to the frame argument.

First, if I can bring your attention to the transition between the first and second sections of your paper. After summarizing your discussion of feminist epistemologies, and contrasting them with postmodernist thought, you then define “the potential value of literary understanding for feminist thought” in the following way: “literature, by virtue of its self-conscious textuality, is particularly able to embrace apparent contradictions, to explore unstable concepts, to refrain from an enforced univocal understanding of human experience. This capacity is especially evident in the novel with its “polyphonic form” . . . [here you bring in Bakhtin directly for the first time]. Top of the next paragraph, you’ve altered slightly, though significantly, your position: the novel, you suggest here, has the “distinctive capacity to embrace contradictions.” This position is reiterated later: “through its distinctive linguistic capacities, then, the novel can elude the potential conservatism of representation without relinquishing the values of the experiential.” This change in terminology suggests to me that what you originally claimed for all literature you are now claiming as the special province of the novel. Which brings me to my first question. Are you participating here unnecessarily in the contemporary romanticization of the novel? The novel is contemporary theory’s darling, the chosen genre. In spite of your very persuasive argument that we need to think beyond dualism, without relying on dualisms, are you not reinforcing and

contributing to a hierarchical conceptualization of the novel's relation to poetry?

The above leads to a second question about the need to historicize your argument about novelistic dialogics. But before stating it, let me refer you to passages of the essay. You state: "the novel as form makes no initial claim to generality, to the proclamation of public truths, and can thus voice individual perception and provide the contextual basis for that perception." And: "novels explore hypotheses rather than offering truths; they raise questions rather than proposing answers." My question is this: how do you reconcile this view with the work that critics such as Nancy Armstrong, Jane Tompkins, and Elizabeth Emarth have done in establishing the very significant "cultural work" that the novel did, both in England and in America, in the nineteenth century? Rather than offering an overview here of these critics' work, let me simply move on to my third question, which is not so much a question as a suggestion.

Would your argument be better served by a feminist narratology like that proposed by Susan Lanser recently in *Style*? That is, rather than claiming a feminist epistemology for the novel as a genre—which requires you to argue that the capacity for contextualized understanding is "suppressed" or "not fully actualized" in all novels (6)—why not focus instead on the narrative strategies that a given writer avails herself of? To state this yet another way: instead of crediting the novel as a genre with a feminist dialogics, why not credit the writer herself with having created a certain kind of dialogical space in her writing? Why not credit the writer herself with having made possible what Virginia Woolf refers to in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" as "the more exciting intercourse of friendship" between writer and reader?

That question brings me to the last section of your paper, the discussion of feminist reading. I liked very much your summary remarks about where we are now and how inadequate our theories of reading are. I also liked the way you shift the discourse: from an emphasis on "reading as a woman" to reading for feminist understanding. And yet I have one last, very practical, pedagogical question, a question which returns us to the questions I posed initially: how do you handle that "silent, but visibly distressed student" in your class who objects to the class' concern for Libya as a feminist issue?

Ann Ardis  
Miami University

## POLITICS OF GENDER AND TEMPORALITY IN BEYOND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

James A. Winders

*Le désir est l'intelligence . . . Desir plus ou moins averti de l'ironie involontaire qu'il y a dans la formule de Spinoza: "Le désir est l'essence de l'être."* — Moustapha Safouan, *La Sexualité féminine dans la doctrine freudienne* (1976)

Whatever may be the inequalities between women, they all suffer, even unconsciously, the same oppression, the same exploitation of their body, the same denial of their desire." —Luce Irigaray, "Women's Exile: Interview with Luce Irigaray," *Ideology and Consciousness 1* (1977)

I started a landslide in my ego. —U2, "A Day Without Me," *Boy* (Island Records, 1980)

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* remains one of Sigmund Freud's most baffling, difficult, and contradictory texts, one in which he seems to alternate between confident scientific pronouncements and apologies for far-fetched speculation. Freud's investigations of the drives and their relation to the various agencies within what appears to be his topographic model of the unconscious carry him into the metapsychological dimension. Of course, the text is most notorious for introducing the concept of the death-drive (*Todestrieb*), borrowed, as Freud admits in a footnote, from Sabina Spielrein, an all-but-forgotten member of the early psychoanalytic movement.<sup>1</sup>

Today we are learning new ways to approach this text. Jacques Lacan inaugurated a return to Freud informed by a radical rereading of the master's work, a rereading that would unmask the acts of repression carried out by the psychoanalytic movement against the more uncomfortable or disturbing conclusions toward which many Freudian arguments advance. *BPP* was, for Lacan, a strategic text in his campaign against psychoanalytic orthodoxy. The Lacanian school is now in disarray, while Lacanian reading practices abound in contemporary criticism. In fact, "Lacanian psychoanalysis" exists largely as a terrain on which debates over interpretive strategies are enacted, particularly with regard to feminist criticism, across a spectrum that ranges from Juliet Mitchell to Luce Irigaray.<sup>2</sup>

Following from some points made by Lacan's reading of *BPP* and from the feminist corrections of Lacan that nevertheless appropriate much that is Lacanian, I will undertake in this paper a rereading that focuses

upon three key issues. I have been necessarily selective in the interest of time, since I treat these and other issues at greater length in another essay. First of all, I take to heart Lacan's formulation that Freud "temporalizes" the unconscious, i.e. bringing it into history.<sup>3</sup> This is crucial for a reading that seeks to combat the reification and static treatment often accorded Freudian studies of the unconscious, including by Freud himself.

Secondly, while feminine sexuality is not the subject of *BPP*, I insist on reading it against other texts where Freud handles that topic, with often disastrous results for women. I argue that the language with which Freud seeks to characterize the libidinal drives is far from neutral with regard to gender, and that generalized masculine concepts of desire are at work throughout the text.

The third area for discussion I wish my rereading to mark is the continuing problematic for contemporary theory of the autonomous subject, central to traditional Western humanism, including mainstream psychoanalysis.<sup>4</sup> Lacan shares with Foucault and Derrida a rejection of the automatic assumption of the conscious, fully present subject, and upholds Freud as one whose most radical (and, therefore, repressed) discovery was the fragmentation ("deconstruction") of this subject. To Lacan's influential critique can be added the relevance of this problematic category for a rereading that emphasizes gender and temporality. To put it another way, I hope to show that Lacan's somewhat related points about temporality and the problem of the subject can work hand-in-hand with necessary attempts to trace the social construction of gender.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than prolong this theoretical introduction, I propose to launch into an examination of Freud's text. While this procedure will account for a considerable non-linearity of argument, it will also potentially provide a number of specific, vivid textual examples that lead back into the interpretive controversies I have, up till now, only roughly sketched out.

The words "economic," "dynamic" and "topographic" catch our attention in the very first paragraph. In order to establish a metapsychological dimension for his work, Freud must introduce an "economic point of view"<sup>6</sup> to supplement the "dynamic" and "topographic." Already we are introduced to the multiple possibilities for reading *BPP*: from the static to the temporal. By analogy, the Marxist project sought both a structural and a dialectical understanding of capitalist society. We will return shortly to the possibility of a historical materialist reading of *BPP*, but first we must remark upon the somber scientific tone with which Freud begins his speculative exercise.

From the first sentence, Freud adopts the full phallic presence of a spokesman for science, or "the theory of psychoanalysis."<sup>7</sup> This prepares the reader for Freud's liberal use of scientific terms borrowed from 19th-century physics (Helmholtz, e.g.) and biology (Weissmann, e.g.) in order to lend added weight to his argument.<sup>8</sup> The scientific aura is essential for such a speculative exercise. In other contexts, Freud scorned speculation. Sarah Kofman points out the irony of Freud's indulging in specula-

tion here when elsewhere, particularly when addressing questions of feminine sexuality, he had warned against any departure from clinical observation.<sup>9</sup>

Any historical materialist (as well as feminist) reading runs up against the biologism of *BPP*, particularly once Freud begins to employ biologicistic explanations for the nature of unconscious drives, as opposed to the argument of Nancy Chodorow that all unconscious characteristics have social origins.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud wrote that

The character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and . . . it contains the history of those object cathexes.<sup>11</sup>

Does such a passage as this present us with a contradiction between biology and history? If so, it is one of many contradictions that guarantee the future of Freud's text as the site of conflicting interpretations.

Freud is not long in providing us with examples of language that lends support to those who would oppose biologism. On page 7 of the German text, in a paragraph devoted to discussion of unconscious forces (*Krafte*) that oppose the tendency toward the pleasure principle, we encounter the word *Verhältnisse* ("relations"). For some reason, translator James Strachey chose to render this rather blandly as "circumstances." No doubt it is due in part to the influence of such mistranslations that so many should assume the inherent antagonism of Marxism and psychoanalysis. The point I am making here is the opposite of Bruno Bettelheim's argument concerning the *Standard Edition* translation. Whereas he argued that Freud's essential humanism was obscured by difficult, forbidding jargon, I find here an instance of the substitution of the lackluster, unthreatening "circumstances" for the complex dynamism of the German word, a word whose import for Marxist theory Bertell Ollman explains admirably well in his *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*. I make this point about "relations" because I wish to replace the static (reified), topographical reading of the Freudian unconscious by one that honors process and shifting, fluctuating states of relatedness.

The point is to interrogate the seemingly stable unities of Freud's conceptual system. Jacques Lacan made it his reading practice to take very seriously those points in the Freudian text in which the splitting (*Spaltung*) of the unconscious ego is suggested. Such splits oppose the supposed unity of the ego (in the sense in which that term—*das Ich*—has come to be employed by the very psychoanalytic establishment with which Lacan fought). I want to suggest that the first appearance of this *Spaltung* in *BPP* not only supports a Lacanian reading, but also suggests a relationship with the critique by Marx (in the *EPM*) of the fragmentation of the subject in capitalist society.<sup>12</sup> There, Marx sees the human subject as divested (*enttaussert*) of essential human qualities by alienated conditions of capitalist labor. Compare with the relevant passage from *BPP*:

In the course of things it happens again and again that individual instincts or parts of instincts turn out to be incompatible in their aims or demands with the remaining ones, which are able to combine into the inclusive unity of the ego. The former are then split off [*abgespalten*]<sup>3</sup> from this unity by the process of repression, held back at lower levels of psychical development and cut off, to begin with, from the possibility of satisfaction.<sup>14</sup>

After some brief comments concerning the “traumatic neuroses” (“shellshock,” e.g.) suffered by World War I veterans and “anxiety,” to which he promises to return later, Freud moves on to a concept that accelerates the process of questioning and qualifying the role of the pleasure principle in unconscious mental activity. This is the “repetition compulsion” (*Wiederholungszwang*), which Freud announces as the result of his brooding upon the odd *fort/da* game repeated constantly by his infant nephew Ernst, son of Freud’s daughter Sophie, whose death was to cause Freud such profound grief. Space will not permit biographical background or description of the game here, but I cannot resist pointing out that Jacques Derrida, of all people, lavishes attention on the biographical and historical setting for this experience, including the commonplace observation that the Great War may be responsible in part for the dark tone of *BPP*. To be sure, Derrida also busies himself with demonstrating and describing the textual quirks that shape as well as distort Freud’s argument.<sup>15</sup>

In temporal terms, what is the *Wiederholungszwang*? A Nietzschean eternal recurrence? A repeating of history that denies active human agency? Or is it something more akin to what Marx, in *The 18th Brumaire*, saw as “men making their own history,” though not completely through free choice? Later in *BPP*, this concept is illuminated somewhat by what Freud will say about the conservative character of the drives as well as the notorious *Todestrieb*—the death instinct. According to Derrida, Ernst was driven in the *fort/da* game not just, as Freud argues, by his need to “abreact” or repeat the trauma of his mother’s abandonment, but by what Serge Leclair, a Lacanian psychoanalyst, has described as the “primary narcissism”<sup>16</sup> that must be related to the death drive.<sup>17</sup>

As Jane Gallop points out, Freud doesn’t so much explain the repetition compulsion as act it out.<sup>18</sup> He treats the spectacle of the game as one in which the child, through abreaction, repeats the primal trauma, but, through the agency of the game, exercises a measure of control over the situation that lessens its pain with each repetition, as the child’s passivity in the face of his mother’s departure becomes less total. In addition, Freud attributes a kind of satisfaction to the child, resulting from its partial sense of mastery,<sup>19</sup> that is similar to the jubilation Lacan assigns to the child in the mirror-stage recognition scene. From a feminist psychoanalytic standpoint, both Freud and Lacan in these respective interpretations exhibit signs of countertransference, Freud in particular failing to entertain

the alternative explanation: that the scene of *fort/da* reenacts the subject’s *Spaltung*/fragmentation. Freud is blind to his countertransference just as he was in his bungling of the “Dora” case, failing to see the reality of the fragmentation before him because it threatened his own anxieties and sexual uncertainties.<sup>20</sup> In a similar manner, Lacan was unable to see how his *trotte-bebe*<sup>21</sup> was, in his blissful hallucination of his erect posture and bodily wholeness a generalized male, one flattering Lacan’s own unconscious denial of castration.

But Lacan’s specific handling of the *fort/da* scenario contrasts fundamentally with Freud’s, for Lacan reads the ritual as the exact opposite of a celebration of mastery, however slight. Lacan argues that this episode has been grossly misunderstood, for the endless repetition in his view refers to and intensifies the subject’s alienation<sup>22</sup> and splitting into something that is both “gone” and “there,” *fort* because *da* and *da* because *fort*.<sup>23</sup> The Lacanian school of psychoanalysis came to see this primordial division in terms of “the subject in quest of its lost identity.”<sup>24</sup> If the game is at all celebratory, this is due to language, and this accounts for the repetition of the two words, which mark the entry into language prior to Lacan’s Oedipal-stage surrender to *le nom du pere*. The language signifies the subject’s radical vacillation, but that stark reality cannot be grasped directly or consciously. What speaks in the *fort/da* game is the unconscious, or in Lacan’s phrase: *le discours de l’autre*.<sup>25</sup>

We may say here in the spirit of Lacan that, if this is an example of Freud’s temporalizing of the unconscious, of its entry into history, it is a “history” understood as metonymy and displacement. The child experiences pleasure not simply from the motions of the game, but, more importantly, from the decisive uttering of the words (*fort! da!*). The scattering or deferral of meaning experienced unconsciously by the subject through its entering into language, into chains of trace-structures where *fort* is always already marked by a *da*, was a realization too terrible (on a conscious level) for a Freud but not for a Heidegger or a Derrida. But it takes on additional life in an other register, i.e. that of gender. The patriarchal Freud of the Dora case, the lecture on femininity, or the essay on the “uncanny” (*Das Unheimliche*)<sup>26</sup> distrusts the *differance*, dissemination, and implicit castration of meaning as full phallic mastery and presence that contemporary feminist criticism has taught us to associate with women’s writing and desire. And the metonymic flux and process of displacement operating in the unconscious for a Lacanian reading of Freud will be, for all Lacan’s failures with gender questions, friendlier to feminism than the Freud who was capable of quoting Napoleon’s “Biology is destiny” with approval.

As we continue through *BPP*, one senses that Freud continues to be haunted by the game precisely in terms of its temporal dimension of repetition and reenactment. This, perhaps, is what leads him to posit, against his emphasis on unconscious mental processes (*die unbewussten Seelenvorgänge*),<sup>27</sup> the “timeless” character of much of unconscious life. It



is as if Freud, in the Lacanian sense, approached a deeper understanding of unconscious time but withdrew, content to deny that "time" was anything more than an abstraction.

In fact, until the reader is confronted with the statements on death in Section V, Freud's tone is soberly cautious, as he explains the conservative nature of the drives and describes the reaction of the psyche to external excitation as if in reference to the twitchings of a Galvanic frog, though in his unique blend of language consisting of "cathexis," "binding," etc.

But once Freud begins to develop his discussion of the death drive, he reopens what for us become questions concerning dialectical processes, desire, and gender. How is the death drive experienced? Freud, of course, warns us that he was embarked upon another round of speculation, and, as with the *fort/da* game, he proceeds obliquely. From Freud's own text, as well as from the suggestions of such interpreters as Serge Leclair<sup>28</sup> and Samuel Weber<sup>29</sup>, we can begin to approach this hypothetical realm through the more commonplace experience of anxiety.

One of the most striking illustrations Freud employs, despite the disclaimers that soon follow, of the alternation within the organism of the death drive with life-preserving instincts, appears to be the very image of a dialectical process. "It is as though," Freud writes,

the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm. One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey.

Though Freud appears here to be describing a physiological process as if he were thinking of meshing gears, it might be best to consider it all as a dramatization of the agencies operating within the unconscious, with the unconscious understood here as the sum total of the *Strukturverhältnisse* (accent on the second half of that compound noun) in their shifting realignments and temporal displacements. Having begun Section V with discussion of the death drive, Freud closes affirmatively with "Eros," whose efforts "to combine organic substances into ever larger unities (*immer wrossenen Einheiten*)"<sup>30</sup> are noted. Whatever Freud is contemplating here, we are reminded of his own hysterical fear of fragmentation/division/castration acted out in other texts as well as in *BPP*.

To open the next, and final long section, Freud poses the question of the role of "ego-instincts" (*Ichtrieben*) in exerting pressure toward death.<sup>31</sup> Even though Freud appears to back down from this opposition between ego and sexual drive, interesting questions are nevertheless raised: that "ego" is a fragile unity, in fact seeking obliteration, and that desire affirms life. This has the disadvantage of appearing to limit the range of sexual expression and drives Freud has indicated elsewhere, and it also serves to foster a crude topographical dualistic distinction between what

are then seen as exclusively two types of drives.<sup>32</sup> In the face of this reductionism, it becomes difficult to retain the subtler concept of "ego" as "agency" within a complicated unconscious world in process.

In this concluding section, let us relate the problems created by the positing of the death drive to larger questions of desire and gender. The problem, simply, is the tendency of *BPP*, for all its subtleties, to reduce discussion of libidinal drives to a crude dualism that too easily gets reworked into "masculine" and "feminine" categories. As usual, the latter is treated with denial, scorn, over-generalization, or a combination of all three. At first, it is difficult to see how the discussion of the drives in *BPP* is compromised by gender bias. But then we are forced to recognize a recurring motif borrowed from the much earlier text *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905): the dialectic of excitation and release. Freud uses this in relation to the death drive and to the supposed need for "the organism" to regain an earlier state devoid of excitation and external stimulus. But this is a pattern developed by Freud in his third *Essay on Sexuality*, notorious to feminist critics of Freud for its discussion of the clitoris as a little penis, inferior to though resembling the male organ in terms of sexual arousal.<sup>33</sup>

Once it becomes clear that the theory of the drives is tied to this exclusively masculine model of pleasure, into whose Procrustean bed feminine desire must be made to fit, it also becomes apparent that a relationship exists between this problem and the problem of the generalized subject, somehow always masculine despite its universal claims. The desire for wholeness, for integration, for resolution of all contradictions—all these we have remarked upon in Freud's text. For a text that promises to comment on "life" and "life forces," this far from exhausts the realm of possibilities for human experience of pleasure or gratification of desire. Feminist critique proceeds by combatting the essentialism of such limiting definitions and characterizations, as do the best of Freud's writings, even occasionally just pages away from the most unacceptable pronouncements.<sup>34</sup> *BPP*, e.g., abounds in Freud's own apologies and disclaimers, including this one:

Only believers, who demand that science shall be a substitute for the catechism they have given up, will blame an investigator for developing or even transforming his views.<sup>35</sup>

For some feminists, as well as for lesbians and gay men, alternative modes of desire can be theorized and affirmed within a corrected psychoanalytic tradition. For others, such as Luce Irigaray, Freud's text is far too compromised by the patriarchal logic, traceable at least to Plato, of which it partakes.<sup>36</sup> Her project calls for the construction of a new logic and language of desire. Along with other theorists, Irigaray has argued persuasively that woman's desire must be understood not in relation to its object, but in terms of relatedness to her own mother.<sup>37</sup> But, for some

other feminists, Irigaray's willingness to characterize woman's desire, indeed to dare to speak of something as general as "woman" condemns her as a kind of essentialist—patriarchal in spite of herself.<sup>38</sup> Whether or not this is true, those of us who wish to plead for multiplicity and difference within a newly emerging concept of gender as socially constructed would do well to maintain the delicate balance between articulating a feminist position too long excluded and silenced by our culture's master interpretive systems and guarding against a new kind of theoretical reification in the name of gender.

One argument perhaps worth considering is that advanced both by Jane Gallop and Shoshana Felman (albeit from different positions within a feminist spectrum), namely this: that what make Lacanian psychoanalysis enabling for critical theory is its fundamental refusal of mastery and its resistance to being enshrined as the new orthodoxy. For Gallop in particular, this translates as the basis for a new feminist style of argument that, taking its cues from Lacan, reveals that no one, not even men, "possess the phallus" when it comes to knowledge and authority.<sup>39</sup>

When reading Freud or other *maîtres penseurs*, we should learn to question our habit of searching for mastery and authority rather than an awareness of what the canonical texts of our tradition have been doing to us.

James A. Winders  
Appalachian State University

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 49. Cited hereafter as BPP. cf. Freud, "Jenseits des Lustprinzips," in *Gesammelte Werke: Chronologisch Geordnet, 13 Band* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1976), p. 59. Cited hereafter as JLP. For background on Spielrein see Aldo Carotenuto, *A Secret Symmetry: Sabina Spielrein Between Freud and Jung* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>cf. Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne, *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1985); Luce Irigaray, *Speculum: de l'autre femme* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1974), *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977); and Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup>Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," in *Écrits: A Selection* (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 3-4. cf. Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 137.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Bruno Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul* (New

York: Vintage Books, 1984).

<sup>5</sup>Here I have been most strongly influenced by Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) and *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975). For a recent critique of Chodorow's failure sufficiently to historicize her analysis of the cultural production of mothering, see Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 90.

<sup>6</sup>BPP, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 119-120.

<sup>9</sup>Sarah Kofman, *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 18. cf. Freud, "Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1965), pp. 99-119.

<sup>10</sup>Chodorow, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup>Freud, "The Ego and the Id," SE v. 19, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup>Karl Marx, "Die entfremdete Arbeit," in *Kononmisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844*, in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe, Erste Abteilung: Band 3* (Berlin: Marx-Engels Verlag, 1932), pp. 72 & 83-84. Cf. James A. Winders, "Foucault and Marx: A Critical Articulation of Two Theoretical Traditions," *New Orleans Review* 11:3/4 (Fall/Winter, 1984), pp. 134-148.

<sup>13</sup>Freud, JLP, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>Freud, BPP, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>Jacques Derrida, "Speculer—sur 'Freud,'" in *La Carte postale de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), pp. 327-349.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Serge Leclair, *On tue un enfant: Un Essai sur le narcissisme primaire et la pulsion de mort/suivi d'un texte de Nata Minor* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975).

<sup>18</sup>Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 102.

<sup>19</sup>Weber, *The Legend of Freud*, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup>Toril Moi, "Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora," in *In Dora's Case: Freud—Hysteria—Feminism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 181-199. Moi frames this and other arguments about Freud's failings in terms of the problem of fragment vs. whole (pp. 184-187). In a brilliant long passage on p. 198, she demonstrates Freud's use of "feminine" as a projection or negative opposite of "masculine."

<sup>21</sup>Lacan, "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je: telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique," in *Écrits I* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 90.

<sup>22</sup>Lacan, "Of the Subject Who is Supposed to Know," in *The Four*



Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 239.

<sup>23</sup>Lacan, "Tuche and Automaton," in *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>24</sup>Moustapha Safouan, La Sexualité féminine dans la doctrine freudienne (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1976), p. 143.

<sup>25</sup>Lacan, "Le séminaire sur 'La Lettre volée,'" in *Ecrits* I, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup>cf. Jane Marie Todd, "The Veiled Woman in Freud's '*Das Unheimliche*,'" Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 11:3 (1986), p. 520.

<sup>27</sup>Freud, JLP, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup>Leclair, p. 69.

<sup>29</sup>Weber, *passim*.

<sup>30</sup>Freud, JLP, p. 45/BPP, pp. 36-37.

<sup>31</sup>JLP, p. 46/BPP, p.38.

<sup>32</sup>BPP, p. 46.

<sup>33</sup>Freud, "The Transformations of Puberty," in Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (New York: Basic Books/Harper Colophon Books, 1968), pp. 85-87.

<sup>34</sup>Gallop, The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 3.

<sup>35</sup>BPP, p. 58.

<sup>36</sup>Luce Irigaray, "Women's Exile: Interview with Luce Irigaray," Ideology and Consciousness 1 (1977), p. 67.

<sup>37</sup>Irigaray, Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979). Cf. Chodorow, *passim*.

<sup>38</sup>Monique Plaza, "'Phallic Power' and the Psychology of 'Woman,'" Ideology and Consciousness 4 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 31-32, cited in Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 146-147.

<sup>39</sup>Shoshana Felman, "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable," Yale French Studies 63 (1982), pp. 21-44, and Gallop, Reading Lacan, *passim*.

## INTERPRETIVE FORCE

James J. Sosnoski

It is customary to speak of the "explanatory force" of scientific theorems. In scientific discourse, the term "force" usually refers to the capacity of a particular theorem to predict events. By predicting what will happen under specific conditions, scientists control our environment. Predictions allow them to avoid undesirable consequences and to promote desirable ones. The power to predict events constitutes the social efficacy of scientific knowledge. In contrast, textual study, as a form of knowledge, appears to have little power because it has no "explanatory force." It is not possible, for instance, to predict the writing or reading of texts and hence control a cultural environment. Consequently, some critics speak of the "interpretive force" of textual study, presumably by analogy with explanatory force. They assume that by interpreting a text, by identifying the conditions upon which it is meaningful, they can influence the direction cultural formations take.

The plausibility of such an enabling enterprise is presupposed in Winders's paper. In it, he suggests that, by rereading Freud, we can influence the social construction of gender. His paper takes the social efficacy of textual study for granted. But, in what sense is a "rereading" a precondition of social change? Specifically, in what sense can we change the "social construction of gender" by rereading Freud? I do not doubt that the conception of gender implied in traditional psychoanalytic accounts of its development has a masculine bias. What I do doubt is that, by changing this tightly circumscribed discursive formation, we can change the social construction of gender. At the same time, I would prefer not to doubt the social efficacy of textual study. Nonetheless, I find it difficult to understand how this might work, for example, in this case.

It is without doubt important to theorize the efficacy of textual study. In order to obtain a tactical advantage in university politics we need a theory of "interpretive force." However, there is a long and ineffectual tradition in literary studies of such attempts. The educational rationale of traditional humanism, to take one instance, depends upon an assumption about the efficacy of interpretation. Traditional humanists, for instance, have frequently but inauspiciously argued that by more and more adequate readings of the canonical works of western culture, we can become more and more humane. When Professor Winders speaks of the efficacy of a "corrected psychoanalytic tradition" (7), he seems to rely upon a similar rationale. But, even assuming that readings of non-literary texts are "correctable," it remains difficult to understand how a "corrected" reading of Beyond the Pleasure Principle "works hand-in-hand with necessary attempts to trace the social construction of gender"? Tracing gender construction in cultural formations seems designed to provide information

attempts to trace the social construction of gender"? Tracing gender construction in cultural formations seems designed to provide information that can be used in political campaigns to change the way gender is constructed in our culture. In this light, how will a "corrected" reading of Freud be disseminated to the culture at large by that portion of the psychoanalytic community that might embrace it? This hypothetical question assumes a positive answer to a logically prior question, namely that, even if the American psychoanalytic community accepted the notion that Beyond the Pleasure Principle was inscribed with a masculine "theory of the drives," would any theory of "drives" likely be a continuing concern of theirs? Winders presupposes that textual study already colludes with other contemporary uses of Freud's texts. But, even with the collaboration of the psychoanalytic community, how would such a rereading reach public spheres; and, if it did, how would it change the sense of gender among the persons within them?

Let me now turn to another aspect of the problem of interpretive force. If interpretive force is a name for a theory of the social efficacy of interpretation, then who is the agent of social change in this theory? Is it the rereader? Throughout his paper, Winders refers to agency, usually by way of problematizing it. For example, he describes Beyond the Pleasure Principle as a "dramatization of the agencies operating within the unconscious," remarking how Freud's own "hysterical fear of fragmentation/division/castration" is acted out in this text, concluding with the remark that "it becomes difficult to retain the subtler concept of "ego" as "agency" within a complicated unconscious world in process" (6). But, if this can be said of the writer, can it not be said of readers, and even rereaders? Rereaders would seem to have but the slightest control over changes in cultural formations in the logic of his view. If "articulatory practices" made practitioners agents of social change, then textual scholars would be the powerful figures in our culture that scientists have been for at least the last century. I find this possibility highly desirable but as yet unrealized. The difficulty I have in reading Winders's paper is that at the same time he seems to advocate the possibility of "articulatory agency," he seems to deny it, to suggest it will inevitably go awry as it has in Beyond the Pleasure Principle.

In summary, I will review the various formulations of the single question I have asked: in what way is an interpretation of an interpretation socially efficacious? Can an interpretation change a social formation? Is "interpretive force" in some way parallel to "explanatory force"? Is the study of history or literature, that is, is the rereading of cultural texts valuable because it has "interpretive force"? How is a rereading a precondition of "a new logic and language of desire"? Finally, from a political point of view, how can a rereading of Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle help feminists change undesirable social formations?

## WATCHING THE DETECTIVES

Nathalie F. Anderson

I was reflecting upon the irreducible enigma that women are; I was saying to myself that the duplicity of their minds often wanted nothing, to make them lead lives of serene criminality, but that magic auxiliary: a double body.

—unattributed epigraph to the final chapter of Thoughts for Flirts, Mary Dale, circa 1919

I recently attended a rather large dinner party where perhaps three quarters of the guests were women, and virtually every one of them was a mystery addict. One of the evening's most satisfying conversations—this will surprise few who are similarly addicted—involved our sharing of new titles, our speculations about why we—as individuals, as feminist scholars—read detective fiction so obsessively and with such pleasure. We made a provocative tableau: the garden lit by fireflies in the summer dusk, the ladies descanting on violence and repression, the gentlemen—to a man—silent.

That rather surprising masculine silence made me all the more amused to find our speculations again articulated in the introduction to The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory, an intriguing anthology edited by Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe and containing, so far as I can discern, only one essay by a woman. Most and Stowe explain the popularity of the genre through the aesthetic fascination with "narrativity" (xii), the sociological interest in "profounder truths about the societies in which such murders are performed or recounted" (xiii), the psychoanalytic inquiry into repression and recovery (xiv), the hermeneutic investigation of "the nature of knowing itself" (xv). They present these speculations without reference to gender, perhaps betraying their own assumptions in their omission, but also calling into question the gender specificity of our dinner party hypotheses.

Indeed, no one could seriously assert that the detective genre is either female-centered or feminist. Yet detective fiction is clearly significant for women, perhaps increasingly so. One might cite electric moments: the displacement and humanization of the effete Lord Peter Wimsey by the accused poisoner Harriet Vane in Dorothy Sayers' novels; the merging of professional integrity and personal obsession to motivate Cordelia Gray's detections in P. D. James' An Unsuitable Job for a Woman; Dorothy Dunnett's experiments in foregrounding the bystander through her Dolly series; Ruth Rendell's inquiries into neurosis and perversion; the resur-

gence of the hard-boiled genre through female sleuthing in novels by Liza Cody, Sarah Peretsky, and Sue Grafton; the parallels between detection and lesbian self-discovery in Barbara Wilson's Murder in the Collective. Women write mysteries about women who commit crimes and women who detect, and women read them. Does this rather straightforward fact disguise any mystery itself? Can we discern any feminist significance in the popularity of detective fiction among women?

I began this inquiry in a rather different context, in an NEH summer seminar on contemporary theory and feminism led by Jane Gallop in 1985. In that heady setting, the violent language I noted in Elizabeth Abel's Writing and Sexual Difference seemed to constitute a pervasive tendency, a case. Returning to that anthology today, I am more aware of its authors' explicit interests, more aware of the gaps between violent moments, more aware of the societal coercions that enact or elicit violence. Nevertheless, the violent configuration remains and seems to me significant to the way (some) feminist scholars see themselves. Moreover—although scarcely central to Abel's anthology—the figure of the detective seems to offer a paradigm useful to such scholars, both as warning and as model.

I would like in this essay to take advantage of the emphasis on process espoused by the Society for Critical Exchange, by embedding my earlier essay within this one, and then working from its assumptions in my final discussion of the detective paradigm. Here, then is my discussion of Writing and Sexual Difference, more or less as I wrote it for the seminar, but revised and slightly expanded for clarity.

\* \* \*

Crime, I confess, is on my mind. Thus my impulse to, shall we say, interrogate certain references to perpetration and investigation in Elizabeth Abel's Writing and Sexual Difference is itself suspect: do I perceive a mere chance conjunction of phrases another reader would find insignificant, or hard evidence—a trail of red herrings, or genuine clues? Fearful that I may be too like the self-deluded sleuth of Trent's Last Case—whose sympathy for the widow of a murdered tycoon leads him to suspect her of the crime—I hesitate at the onset of my investigation, uncertain whether the case is capable of solution, whether I am the one to solve it, whether it is a case. My uncertainty is intensified by the fact that in this volume crime constitutes only one focus for a surprisingly pervasive violence: within the frame established by Showalter's metaphor of wilderness in the first essay and Draupadi's armed (and unarmed) resistance in Mahasveta Devi's culminating story, what is the place of murder, of detection? Perhaps I will reach conviction through my investigation; perhaps not.

I pose my inquiry into this document of the 1980s against a kind of precedent, Cheri Register's 1975 "Bibliographical Introduction" to feminist criticism. Register grounds her discussion of feminist attitudes toward male writers in a provocative comparison with community assess-

ment of pornography, a comparison which enables a series of courtroom references: some men are "guilty" (6); "Do misogynistic writers abet...?" (7); "The verdict depends . . ." (7); "The assignation of guilt . . . remains uncertain" (8). While these legal terms imply due process, a fair hearing, trial by one's peers, however, the religious connotations of guilt allow a second implication to co-exist with the first: "If literary competence is a redeeming virtue," Register asks, playing on the censor's guideline of "redeeming social value," "can it absolve sexist authors of social guilt?" (7). More questions follow: "Are authors morally obligated . . . ? Are they culpable . . . ?" (8). Culpability, moral obligation, absolution, and redemption transform court into confessional, evoking disquieting memories of the Inquisition. "Assignation of guilt" in this second context implies an Inquisitor, one so pure as to stand as judge, one so clear-eyed as to perceive in others the sins that blind them, one so complacent as to condemn the blind to torture and the confessed to death. Heinous though the crimes of misogyny may be (or are), it seems dangerous—and too like the hubristic fanaticism of the New Right—to equate them with sin. Register's legal metaphor, then, warns me to examine the implications of more subtle tropes, to question the assumptions that determine similar references.

For a volume whose cover depicts a self-possessed woman sealing an envelope and a reflective man—Erasmus—pausing over his journal, Writing and Sexual Difference is astoundingly uncivilized in its vocabulary. Beyond the metaphors of imprisonment and escape so typical of feminist discourse—the most pertinent here is Stimpson's assertion that the lesbian novel of rebellion "has had to flee from the imaginative grip" of the punitive lesbian tradition—the essayists refer to danger (14, 19, 23, 63, 88, 164), to wounds (19, 78, 86, 88, 282), to poison (20), strangulation (119), rending (86), dismemberment (99, 167), severing (256), bloody attacks (119), bloodshed (173), exquisite lingering death (116). There are accomplices (75) and instigators (121); there is revenge (42), treachery (44), wrongdoing (61), assault (257), self-defense (256), rehabilitation (256), execution (84), and sacrifice (85 and elsewhere).

Of course, this ubiquitous violence is inevitable in Kolodny's discussion of "The Panther Captivity" where, after her beloved is "barbarously murdered" by Indians (164), the protagonist saves herself from "the inherent brutality of the wilderness itself" (168) through "her murder and dismemberment of her giant captor" (167); or in Spivak's presentation of Mahasveta Devi's "Draupadi" where the protagonist, a "notorious female" "wanted" by the authorities for "Murdering Surja Sahu and his son" (272), camouflages herself in "the ill-famed forest of Jharkani" (273)—clearly a political terrorist in resistance to an oppressive regime implicated in genocide—until she is "apprehended" (280) and brutalized: "Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts, two wounds" (282) [emphasis Spivak's, to indicate in her translation words originally in English in Mahasveta's Bengali manuscript].

But most of this language is metaphoric rather than literal. Wittig has "The women say" that "words . . . are killing you" (20). Jacobus sees Eliot's "killing off" of Maggie Tulliver as "the necessary sacrifice" (46) which allows the author to write, and further posits that "both Irigaray and Eliot kill off the woman engulfed by masculine logic and language" (51). Gubar describes women artists as "killed into art, . . . bleeding into print" (78), and applies this metaphor to Wharton's Lily Bart who "kills herself into art" through suicide (81). Auerbach warns that "the angel in the house . . . is too strong and interesting a creature for us to kill" (112). Gardiner finds that women writers "dispose of" their threatening mothers through vicarious murders: "Another tactic is for the author to kill the mother in the course of the narrative" (186).

Notice that guilt oscillates in this series: although the essayists indict objectifying male writers in particular and patriarchal language in general, women writers may find murder advantageous and even necessary to their creativity. As if to illustrate Gubar's contention that "one of the primary and most resonant metaphors provided by the female body is blood, and cultural forms of creativity are often experienced as a painful wounding" (78), Stimpson concludes her evocation of the mother "at the heart of the labyrinth of some lesbian texts" (256) with this intense (and only ambiguously textual) assertion: "A lesbian's jealousy, then, spurts like blood from the cut of terror at the possibility of losing again the intimacy that has at last been regained" (257). And Showalter stands in (ambivalent) awe of such "intimate, confessional" criticism as DuPlessis' "Washing Blood": "Such criticism makes itself defiantly vulnerable, virtually bares its throat to the knife" (19). What does such imagery imply?

First and most obviously, it implies that writing is a dangerous act, life-threatening, so much so that one may be forced to extreme measures in order to survive. Stimpson's figure suggests, further, that what motivates the act—here mother, the steady heart—may well out, expend itself, deplete the writer, in disturbingly ejaculatory gouts from wounds that inflict themselves at the mere thought of loss: terror cuts, blood spurts, intimacy dissipates in jealousy: the writer walks a thin line. Showalter's figure incorporates the critic into the danger, insists that such writing entails deliberate victimage, converts vulnerability into defiance—in an act seemingly analogous to Draupadi's defiance of Senanayak:

Come on, counter me—come on, counter me—? Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid. (282)

As Showalter implicitly challenges critics to such defiance even as she warns that "biocriticism can also become cruelly prescriptive" (19), Stimpson too challenges lesbians to follow Jill Johnston, "to legitimize ourselves as criminals" (255), even as she indicts "in wonder and in rage"

the "mystery" of "why people wish . . . to outlaw" lesbian passion (259). Defined as an outlaw, one must legitimate herself; one may do so by parlaying vulnerability into accusation, forcing the law to reveal its assumptions through opposition, inviting attack, baring one's throat, displaying one's wounds.

I mentioned earlier that violence frames this anthology, and the configuration I have noted—self-generated, self-inflicted violence bleeding into politically potent victimage—suggests a significant relation between the criminal imagery and other patterns. Draupadi's guerrilla activity echoes throughout the volume in references to oppression (20, 189, 195, 293, 300), dictatorship (21), forcible assimilation (33), covert collaboration (111), dispossession (114), complicity (263), colonizing (22, 27, 301) and, on the other hand, resistance (3, 11, 22, 58, 89, 124, 125) and subversion (2, 3, 56, 89, 90, 165, 249)—references complicated and intensified by a complementary focus on doubleness: duality (23, 121), duplicity (40, 48, 80), double talk (44), the double voiced (3, 31, 34), deceit (123). Subversion involves living "under cover" (71), wearing someone else's clothes (193-219), using the cipher, "forbidden in several places but still secretly deployed" (246). Justified duplicity makes for "serene criminality."

In a like association, the forest where Draupadi hides herself "in a Neanderthal darkness" (272) is surely similar to the lady's wilderness refuge in "The Panther Captivity"; to the "trackless desert" of knowledge where Maggie Tulliver, "like a thirsty traveler," yearns for something more (48); to the "wild zone" (30), the "wilderness of theory" (10) or "of difference" (35) which Showalter posits; to the forest where Actaeon is dis-membered; to the "chaotic No Man's Land of unnatural, transvestite women" (205) which Gilbert explores. "No Man's Land": Showalter makes explicit the female claim implicit in these examples: "men do not know what is in the wild" (30).

The importance of this figure as a feminist icon is underscored when Carolyn Heilbrun mentions three times in her response to the volume how "Kate Stimpson and I . . . set out for Kentucky in 1973" (291), "made our way to Kentucky" (293), "went to Kentucky" (297). Kentucky is, of course, the site of the debate Heilbrun and Stimpson contributed to the 1975 Donovan anthology; it is also the goal of Daniel Boone, the American promised land, the wilderness framed by violence where, though menaced or embattled, a woman may wrest control.

So: writer as pioneer, writer as guerilla. Of course writing is dangerous: we know the names of those who have died for their words, who are even now in prison for their words; we know that a failure to speak, or to say what is acceptable to the community, can cost us our jobs; we know that, even among the "civilized," women starve, are brutalized. But how dangerous is the theoretical wilderness Showalter invites us to traverse? I cannot help thinking of the many well-known feminist theorists—Showalter is one—who have recently found positions at prestigious

institutions, positions which represent both a victory for the oppressed and an erasure of a single individual's marginality. "Life in the university, especially in the humanities," Showalter insists, "was in the 1970s, and will continue to be in the 1980s, a struggle for survival whose accompanying stresses can be matched against the most authentically bracing—or destructive—careers the society has to offer" (304). Scholarly careers are "bracing" here precisely because so much is at stake, precisely because they are "struggle[s] for survival." But does our struggle measure up to Draupadi's? Is the feminist critic in the wilderness?

Such questions, such invidious comparisons, may seem churlish, mean, or counter-productive when directed at figures so central to feminist scholarly achievement as those included in Abel's anthology. Indeed, to see our efforts as acts of resistance, as brave wounds bleeding our vitality onto the page, or as pioneering forays into a thrilling wilderness surely enables us, surely clarifies the significance of feminist work in a patriarchal culture. Yet—I say this cautiously, because I am not sure of alternatives—these metaphors of hardship, of resistance, and particularly of murder, convert scholarship into something more muscular, more active, more violent, more significant still, and perhaps allow scholars a righteous complacency which raises again the spectre of the Inquisitor, now clothed as Terrorist.

Spivak too finds feminist self-congratulation inadequately reflective. She begins her introduction to "Draupadi" with the provocative assertion that in the villainous Senanayak she has found "the closest approximation to the First World scholar in search of the Third World" (261), and her subsequent discussion identifies that scholar as feminist. Having made her accusation, Spivak tip-toes around it: "I will not go so far as to suggest that, in practice, the instruments of the First World life and investigation are complicity with such captures and such a degradation." Yet the "instruments" of scholarship shift toward torture here, as "investigation" shifts toward interrogation, and Spivak's careful negation implicitly asserts that which it denies. As a "pluralist aesthete," "Senanayak can identify with the enemy," indeed makes his capture through the thoroughness of his identification. Is our identification with Draupadi more than self-congratulation? Are we guerrillas? Or are we—how the taint of collaboration clings to the word—investigators?

Senanayak's investigation is of course a detection, a successful apprehension of a murderer—though Mahasveta Devi's story presents mysteries that Senanayak cannot solve. Where are the detectives in *Writing and Sexual Difference*? Though Showalter refers to investigation (14) and Kolodny uses terms like uncover (161), detect (169), and clue (172), such references are hardly commensurate with the pervasive violence one might wish to contain in the volume—though indeed my own investigation thus far suggests that violence is precisely a response to, an indictment of, containment. Auerbach couples Freud and Sherlock Holmes (124) to ground Steven Marcus' perception of Dora's case a "a quintessentially

modern document, great in its dogged truth to the impossibility of solution" (125), and although Auerbach shifts her emphasis away from that of Marcus, this insoluble case is clearly gratifying to her, a symbol of woman's resistance, of man's independence, of woman's protean multiplicity. Given the choice, would a woman prefer to detect?

Yes, sometimes. Heilbrun—whose second identity as mystery writer is well known—extends Stimpson's insights into lesbian novels with this curious addition: "Nor, if the detective novel is any indication, are all women who adopt male dress lesbians" (297). Though women in detective novels no doubt "adopt male dress"—I can think of perhaps two examples off-hand, both perpetrators rather than detectives—the trope is hardly a defining one, suggesting that Heilbrun conceives of detecting itself as "adopting male dress"—a strategy of disguise which allows imposture and infiltration in comparative safety. While I have trouble accepting either detection or scholarship as male dressing, a male role, Heilbrun's comment nevertheless allows a shift in the Senanayak model: if all scholars detect, perhaps feminist scholars do so duplicitously, criminally. "The underground,' 'the wrong side' of the law" (270): Spivak's equation of the two allows us to equate as well the subversive and the criminal—and not only to question societal definitions of crime.

Abel prefaces her introduction to *Writing and Sexual Difference* with a quotation from Barbara Johnson which concludes, "Literature is not only a thwarted investigator but also an incorrigible perpetrator of the problem of sexuality" (1). Leaving the issue of sexuality aside, the implicit identity of investigator and perpetrator seems right to me (and not just because of Martin Amis' *Other People* and Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*). Duplicity, complicity: I see the connection when I interrogate myself. I want to evade the law; I want to investigate ways in which others manage it. Conviction?

\* \* \*

In Alfred Hitchcock's 1919 film *Blackmail*, which I have not seen, a woman kills a would-be rapist, a man with whom she's flirted after a tiff with her policeman boyfriend. The policeman discovers evidence of her guilt, but shifts the blame to a blackmailer, who then conveniently falls to his death, "freeing" the guilty woman—guilty in both senses—for a future of sexual blackmail, of emotional imprisonment, with the policeman. As Tania Modleski notes in her fascinating discussion of the film, "Rape versus Mans/laughter: Hitchcock's *Blackmail* and Feminist Interpretation," the film ends as two policemen "laugh heartily at the thought of 'lady detectives' on the police force, of women usurping male roles and possessing masculine knowledge" (305). Where is the "duplicitous investigator" in this film?

This disingenuous question focuses on a disquieting aspect of the paradigm with which I ended my discussion of *Writing and Sexual*

Difference: we approve of duplicity, of conscious criminality, only when they work for us. The policeman here seems an oppressor, a Senanayak who keeps his Draupadi for himself. How differently we might feel if there were "lady detectives" in this film, if one of them understood the heroine's motivations and colluded with her, saved her or helped her to save herself. But—appealing as this alternative appears—policewomen are also capable of manipulation, of blackmail. What interrogation of the self can keep the criminal pure?

Modleski sums up the woman's position in this film thus:

Hitchcock's films have the merit of revealing woman's status as radically outside the law. On the one hand, she is not like the blackmailer, a criminal who can be readily named and identified as such. . . . On the other hand, patriarchal law can hardly consider her innocent, nor can it possibly offer her real justice, since its categories precisely exclude her experience. . . . (311).

This comment enriches and complicates the wilderness metaphor which pervades the Abel anthology. The woman falls between the law's rigidities, guilty but not culpable. She is "criminal" by no neat definition; the word "murder" does not adequately account for her "crime." If she is victim, she is victimized as much by the law, and the policeman who upholds it, as by those who break it. To quote Spivak again, "legislation seemed to have an eye to its own future circumvention" (265). The policeman's hold is legally termed not blackmail, but marriage.

I have used "policeman" to describe the investigator in Blackmail in order to emphasize the distinction between policemen and detectives. As women fall between cultural categories, so too do private investigators. Mythology has them harassed by the law, frequently bending it, operating by a private code. The detective doesn't want to enforce the law, though sometimes tainted by it, or by the seaminess or brutality of criminality. The detective works for the victim. The detective wants to find out.

When I returned to my study of Writing and Sexual Difference, four oxymorons pressed themselves on my attention: the "sinister tenderness" of the First World War nurses competently solicitous of their broken charges (211); the "defiantly vulnerable" intimacies of confessional critics (19); the "fortunate exclusion" of women from "patriarchal methodolatry" (11); the "enlarging transgressions" that Wordsworth experienced but George Eliot refused her young heroines (70). Each of these phrases parlays female marginality into strength through consciousness of that marginality—indeed, my final example, of Wordsworth's transgressions, does not work in Eliot's novels precisely because her heroines remain unaware, obey the law, serve as exempla for self-victimization. Can an awareness that one is "radically outside the law" transform one from object to agent, from victim to detective?

What might this mean in, so to speak, real life? I think for me it means

a deep distrust of conviction, in either sense: I would hesitate to indict, hesitate to trust in my own righteousness. The detective at best stands for radical ambiguity: an awareness of the stabilities of laws, a familiarity with the capabilities of crime, a distrust of both. Modleski points out that we need not view a film like Blackmail either as sadistic (male) voyeur or as masochistic (female) object, but as critical, analytical, angry observer (310). I would add quizzical, wry, tough, foul-mouthed, and disillusioned.

But I continue to have questions: Can one be a private eye in the (police) academy? And can one be duplicitous and not con oneself?

Nathalie F. Anderson  
Swarthmore College

\* \* \*

I titled this essay, "Watching the Detectives," after Elvis Costello's song of the same name, from the 1977 Columbia album My Aim Is True.

I am indebted to Jane Gallop and to Kristina Straub for suggestions that shaped my argument in this most recent draft.

#### WORKS CITED

- Elizabeth Abel, ed., Writing and Sexual Difference. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Josephine Donovan, ed., Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory. Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1975.
- Tania Modleski, "Rape versus Mans/laughter: Hitchcock's Blackmail and Feminist Interpretation," PMLA, 102, No. 3 (1987): 304-315.
- Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe, eds., The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory. New York: Harcourt, 1983.

## PRIVATE EYE/I'S

Colleen Kennedy

"Can one be a private eye in the (police) academy? And can one be duplicitous and not con oneself?" Nathalie Anderson ends with a crucial question for the feminist critic. This question entails others: I want to investigate these before returning to this last (impossible) one. I translate her questions into my own—and my motive must remain suspect.

"Can an awareness that one is radically outside the law transform one from object to agent, from victim to detective? What might this mean in, so to speak, real life?" What does it mean to be "outside" the law? And what law are we talking about? Anderson investigates the positions assumed by the writers in Writing and Sexual Difference: the victim (of sexual oppression) who would, like Draupadi, turn on her victimizer. The victim/criminal seems completely outside the law—outside because she is criminal, outside because the law renders her victim. This law forbids in order to exclude. The victim retaliates through crime in order to expose the illegality of the law.

The essays in the anthology take exclusion for granted; the woman writer's crime is breaking and entering—a forbidden act which places her further outside. However, as Anderson shows, when we write feminist criticism our position "outside" is not simple; nor is writing necessarily a crime. We are "outsiders" as members of a gender oppressed for centuries. But what are we outside, and how did we get there? As the anthology implies, and as Anderson makes explicit, the feminist critic exploits her exclusion, since from the outside she can, like Draupadi, attack the inside. I'll repeat Anderson's question: "can an awareness that one is radically outside the law transform one . . . from victim to detective?" I would argue that once one recognizes anything like a "radical" outside, and certainly once one becomes a detective, one is no longer radically outside. The law here is the law of the patriarchy, and it is one that we have been, under certain conditions, licensed to speak within. We've been paroled.

Thus Anderson asks: "Is our identification with Draupadi more than self-congratulation? Are we guerillas? Or are we—how the taint of collaboration clings to the word—investigators?" The feminist critic might find a model in Draupadi because Draupadi is a guerilla. But how effective is a guerilla who's been granted at least limited permission to attack? On whose side does that guerilla fight?

This is, to me, the most important indictment Anderson would bring against the writers in the anthology, and it's one she, like Gayatri Spivak, seems understandably reluctant to make. I do not want to seem "churlish, mean or counter-productive," either; nor do I want to diminish the importance of the work represented in the anthology. I am also reluctant to engage in the combative and unnecessarily divisive "dialogues" which

dominate literary and cultural criticism these days.

At the same time, I see certain dangers in the kind of criticism practiced in the anthology, dangers which both Anderson and Spivak expose and which I want to underscore. These are dangers not easily avoided—my response falls prey to them—because they are inherent to scholarship and to responses. They are the dangers posed by our need for law, by our insistence that we all conform to the same one. I say, with Anderson and Spivak, that the anthology reinscribes patriarchal law even in the act of defying it. I say that Anderson reinscribes that same law through the image of the private eye (or private I) who walks both sides of it. I say that I reinscribe it when I both chastise and indict her, serve as her Inquisitor. The answer—and that word is dangerous, too—is not pluralism; if I believed that, I wouldn't write this response to an essay I agree with more often than I disagree. The answer—or better, the response—is closer and closer scrutiny of Law, scrutiny provided only through response and counter-response, and by walking both sides.

Anderson carefully examines the language of violence which penetrates Writing and Sexual Difference. Much of that violence is self-inflicted as the writer/critic, like Draupadi, victimizes herself in order to attack. But two qualifications need to be made, or two sides of the same qualification need to be investigated. First, textual violence is not the same as the violence inflicted on Draupadi. Although any license carries conditions, we have been licensed to write. Draupadi has no such license, and to equate our plight with hers is criminal. It is also inevitable.

Spivak's indictment is clear enough—we, "First World" white collar academics, tend to create woman in our own image, consequently doing to "Third World" or "Postcolonial" women what "First World" men do to us—that is, negating their experience, their difference. Anderson points out that the violence in the anthology is violence we, like Antigone, inflict upon ourselves to foreground corruption in the patriarchy. But our sacrifice, if the "our" is that of women successful enough to be published in Critical Exchange, cannot be commensurate with Draupadi's sacrifice; and indeed, our success may implicate us in her maiming, because that success requires us to speak in a dominant discourse—a discourse in which unity, oneness, is everything. A further violence is done to women like Draupadi when their experience is made one with ours, is reduced to a metaphor for our "plight"—that is, when violence is rendered aesthetic.

I have spoken of Draupadi to this point as if she were "real"; Jane Gallop discusses the problems with this ruse in her response appended to the anthology. I am not concerned with comparing the experiences of "real" Draupadis to ours (there's little basis for comparison, and I have difficulty speaking of such experiences in the plural—each has its own particular terror); however, I am concerned with writers who make such experiences models for ours, render such experience aesthetically useful. Metaphorized, Draupadi loses her particularity, and the horror of her situation is mitigated as the critic makes her an emblem (as Senanayak



does). None of the writers in the anthology discusses Draupadi, of course, but several use victims of violence as emblems of “our” plight(s). Besides the image of the maimed Draupadi, one of the more “violent” images in the book is ironically the white sheet in Gubar’s “The Blank Page”—the lack of blood “becomes radically subversive, the result of one woman’s defiance which must have cost either her life or her honor” (Abel, 89). That white sheet signifies a greater violence done “off stage.” It’s this result—or the fact that Gubar praises the art work more than she investigates this result—which bothers me. To what extent are we implicated in the crime because we’re thrown off the track by a red herring?

The object of our attack should be the law—the law which maims Draupadi, the law which condemns Gubar’s subversive writer. But the law will not tolerate scrutiny; it would remain inscrutable. Or to put the problem another way, our attacks against the law are too easily transformed into attacks against ourselves. We self-destruct as we become Senanayaks, aestheticizing the vestiges of violent crime (perpetrated by the long arm of the law).

I will seem to contradict myself here, but I want to turn abruptly to the “other side” of my claim that textual violence is not the same as the violence inflicted on Draupadi. Some members of the institution would have us think otherwise; they would have us believe that we are Senanayaks, but in the perverse sense that both literary “works” and works of criticism are the “Draupadis” we maim. However, Jane Gallop insists that we can do “violence” to a text only if we accept “the myth of the book’s or the self’s or the body’s virginal wholeness.” This myth is one imposed and perpetuated by a patriarchy, and one which elicits violence: “As long as the fallacies of integrity and closure are upheld, a desire to penetrate becomes a desire for rape.” Thus, Gallop calls for “a different economy, one in which entry and interpenetration do not mean disrespect or violation” (Gallop, xiii). Draupadi’s violation results from the economy whose rules Gallop attacks. In an economy or a system in which “One” is not Deity (if one can call such a thing a system), Draupadi might not be forced into “crime” in the first place. “She” would not be written out. Such a system needs to be investigated (I will say that under threat of conviction); we comply with Senanayak to the extent that we refuse to indict it, don’t scrutinize it carefully enough.

But (how) can we scrutinize, investigate, detect our own position? Anderson suggests from the position of the private eye, because “mythology has them harassed by the law, frequently bending it, operating by a private code”. I’d like to insert a few definitions of private here: “Secluded from the sight. Of or confined to one person. Not available for public use, control, or participation. Belonging to a particular person or persons, as opposed to the public or the government. Not holding an official or public position. Not public; intimate, secret. fr. *privatus*, not belonging to the state, not in public life, deprived of office; from *privare*, to deprive, release; fr. *privus*, single, individual, deprived of” (*The American Heritage*

*Dictionary*). These various definitions suggest to me both the brilliance and the limitations of Anderson’s model. On the one hand, the private eye works privately, is a private “I,” works intimately, secretly, outside the public domain. Working outside, the private “I” is frequently privatized, deprived, harassed—a fitting image for a feminist critic (or for women in general). But then again, our status, like that of the private eye, is not entirely unofficial, and suffers too much from being in the public eye.

I’m therefore uncomfortable with the model of the private eye, perhaps because it too aptly describes our position. We must scrutinize our own stances, but from what vantage point? Who holds whom subject to what law? Private investigators may be harassed by the law, and they may bend the law, but the law in these contexts is small-I law. In other words, private investigators solve cases because the police are too stupid to; they do justice, fulfill the obligations of the capital-L Law when the small-I lawmen cannot. Consequently, the “private code” by which they operate is not really private, anymore than Antigone’s is—one might call it a “higher law,” and one that I suspect may be patriarchal. Their “private code” may not be “private”—there is always the danger that the private “I” is itself a creation of the higher law it serves.

Anderson refers to “sexual difference”—the ostensible point of departure for the anthology—only in order to dispute it: “Heilbrun conceives of detecting itself as ‘adopting male dress’—a strategy of disguise which allows imposture and infiltration in comparative safety. While I have trouble accepting either detection or scholarship as male dressing, a male role, Heilbrun’s comment nevertheless allows a shift in the Senanayak model: if all scholars detect, perhaps feminist scholars do so duplicitously, criminally”. I juxtapose this remark to another (on the violent language of the anthology): “These metaphors of hardship, of resistance, and particularly of murder, convert scholarship into something more muscular, more active, more violent, more significant still, and perhaps allow scholars a righteous complacency which raises again the spectre of the Inquisitor, now clothed as Terrorist”. Every time I’ve typed this second passage, I’ve typed “masculine” instead of “muscular,” and I wondered why “masculine” was left out of the catalog. The reason becomes explicit in the first passage—Anderson conceives neither detection nor scholarship to be exclusively masculine roles. I guess I do detect a certain “masculinity” in scholarship, at least as I’ve seen it practiced. It tends to be aggressive, single-minded, and totalizing (while paradoxically insisting on the integrity of the text). The conditions under which we write (and I include myself in this we) are the conditions of writing in male dress, holding certain laws sacred and, to employ the metaphor I find so perverse, becoming Senanayaks to each others’ Draupadis in the process. But we keep shutting our eyes, refusing to look.

Jane Gallop says something about riddles and solutions that focuses my problems with some scholarship: “A ‘solved’ riddle is the reduction of heterogenous material to logic, to the homogeneity of logical thought,



which produces a blind spot, the inability to see the otherness that gets lost in the reduction. Only the unsolved riddle, the process of riddle-work before its final completion, is a confrontation with otherness" (Gallop, 61). Such "reduction . . . to the homogeneity of logical thought" is the purpose of scholarship; Gallop links it to the solving of a riddle, the resolution of a "dilemma," the transformation of incongruity into congruence—detective work. Detection is (one of) the condition(s) under which we write; the laws of scholarship demand reduction to coherence, to unity, to identity. Anderson's model, like her essay, defies this insistence on unity—the private eye works the outside against the inside; the essay (written in two different times) refuses to come down in favor of one or the other. Yet the traditional image of the detective is too much with me—I can't help but see a figure doing what I do in this response: marshalling questions into order, interrogating suspects (and everyone is suspect) in order to reinscribe a (corrected) law. In the anthology, that law is an aesthetic one; rather than questioning the grounds of aesthetics and of canon formation, the writers expand the canon, leaving certain aesthetic criteria in place. They correct a mistake in the carrying out of the small-l law, while doing homage to a higher one.

This reminds me of a recent conversation with a senior member of my department, who, having discovered that I did not only deconstruction but feminism to boot, wondered if I wasn't bothered knowing that my work was "faddish" (and so of only temporary and apparent significance). His work, he hoped, would be of lasting import—would be, like the writers he writes about, aesthetic enough to speak to all generations. I realized—though was not bold enough to say—that if my work could be published the way I'd like it to be and have the effect I'd like it to have, it would ideally be of only temporary significance, but that it would condemn his to a similar fate. In the first piece in the anthology, Elaine Showalter claims that "the feminist obsession with correcting, modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing, or even attacking male critical theory keeps us dependent on it" (Abel, 13). How wonderful, I'm thinking, to lose that dependency rather than to ignore it. How wonderful to conceive of a generation to which my colleague's work would not speak—or would not be assumed to speak to everyone with a brain in his head. How wonderful to escape the tyranny of the aesthetic, the deification of the private "I," of that unity determining the artistic value of everything entering the institution.

We come full circle to that first, last, impossible question: (how) can one be a private eye in the (police) academy? What bothers me about feminist scholarship is what bothers me about this "case" I'm involved in now—one I nevertheless feel compelled to continue investigating. We make each other criminals in the face of (or under the gaze of) a law we erect, one that is not our own, but one which we hold each other subject to. The image of the detective, a carry over from the law, violates our privacy, compromises our difference. But like the woman in *Blackmail*, the

feminist critic "falls between the law's rigidities, guilty but not culpable". Forced to indict in order to speak in the first place, the critic cannot sustain any investigation of her position—because we cannot get outside, and because any thorough investigation would indict us, render us complicit.

Finally, I think Anderson's private eye is an apt model, but one I think we should resist, because it suggests a shoring up of some higher law that may not work to our benefit. That higher law is a law of unity, of sameness. The writers in the anthology tend to cling to established aesthetic criteria rather than to question them. Chief among those is an "I" who creates, originally, outside, like God the Father—an "I" reflected in Showalter's gynocentrism, in Gilbert's transvestites, in Jacobus's and Gubar's victimized artists. That "I's" creations take precedence over the violence producing the creation—a violence perpetrated in the "I's" self-interest, to take everything into itself.

But I'm avoiding the question. Can one be a private eye in the (police) academy? How much can one publish against the interests of her senior colleagues (or junior colleagues, for that matter)? And more pressingly, how much does one fool herself thinking she can think outside dominant categories—that she can be other than one? I have no ready answers to these questions; however, I also resist those who reject my criticisms because I do not have ready answers. In place of answers, I suggest questions of the sort Anderson poses; in place of answers, I suggest a method, borrowed from traditional critical practice—the investigation of not only our own positions, but especially of the positions determining them: the hidden laws sustaining an as yet patriarchal institution. For the future, I offer no program, but only Hélène Cixous's utopia:

Let us . . . imagine a general change in all the structures of training, education, supervision—hence in the structures of reproduction of ideological results. And let us imagine a real liberation of sexuality, that is to say, a transformation of each one's relationship to his or her body (and to the other body), an approximation to the vast, material, organic, sensuous universe that we are. This cannot be accomplished, of course, without political transformations that are equally radical. (Imagine!) Then 'femininity' and 'masculinity' would inscribe differently their effects of difference, their relationship to expenditure, to lack, to the gift. What today appears to be 'feminine' or 'masculine' would no longer amount to the same thing. No longer would the common logic of difference be organized with the opposition that remains dominant. Difference would be a bunch of new differences (Cixous, 83).

Colleen Kennedy  
College of William and Mary

\*\*\*\*\*

I want to thank Dale Bauer, Kristina Straub, and the Society for Critical Exchange for inviting me to participate in the panel. I am also grateful to Dale, and to Nathalie Anderson and Josephine Lee, for their encouragement and careful criticisms.

#### WORKS CITED

- Elizabeth Abel, ed. Writing and Sexual Difference. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Nathalie Anderson. "Watching the Detectives." Special Session on Feminism and Other Discourses, MMLA Convention, Columbus, 13 November 1987.
- Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément. The Newly Born Woman, Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 24. Trans. Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Jane Gallop. The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

#### THE DISCOURSE WITHIN: FEMINISM AND INTRADISCIPLINARY STUDY

Susan M. Griffin

In this paper, I want to bring the history of feminist theory and scholarship to bear on a specific problem in literary studies, a problem symptomatic of a larger pattern in academic discourse. In particular, I will argue that there is a relation between the structuring of the academic discipline of American literary studies and the way American literary texts are understood and valued.

Although feminism has become a part of academic discourse only in the last few decades, feminists have tried since their initial entry into the academy to change its structure. From its inception, feminist study has been interdisciplinary. The 1976 inaugural issue of Signs, for example, states that its first purpose "is to publish the new scholarship about women from both the United States and other countries" (Stimpson, et al. v). Having defined this comparativist task, the editors continue "Signs has a second purpose as well: to be interdisciplinary" (v). Women's histories, literature, culture, and lives had fallen between the cracks of traditional academic disciplines; interdisciplinary study would allow scholars to recapture them. In addition, an interdisciplinary perspective would foster new attention to, and critical evaluation of, the methodologies employed by various disciplines. This critique of methodology proved especially important in the humanities, where the very use of method was often unacknowledged. The results of the feminist call for a broad restructuring of traditional disciplines and approaches have been widespread. For example, the new literary history that has been recently embraced by American critics owes a real debt to feminism's program of historicizing our reading of literature and of tracing the workings of ideology in texts and their critical treatment.

I think that the interdisciplinary nature of feminist studies can be used to address a particular problem in American literary criticism. The specific case I wish to investigate is that of the nineteenth-century novel. Critical discussion of these texts has been structured around a dichotomy described by Nina Baym in an article which has been crucial to feminist understanding of both American literature and American literary studies, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood." Baym argues that for American literary critics "the quality of 'Americanness,' whatever it might be, constituted literary excellence for American authors" (126). Through a study of major critics and their influential works, Baym shows that this definition of literary excellence as "Americanness" is not only "subjective, circular, and in some

sense nonliterary or even antiliterary," but also excludes works by women writers from the literary canon (129). For what comes to count as "American" for these critics is the presence of a particular myth: "The myth narrates a confrontation of the American individual, the pure American self divorced from specific social circumstances, with the promise offered by the idea of America. . . . The myth also holds that, as something artificial and secondary to human nature, society exerts an unmitigatedly destructive pressure on individuality" (131-32). Further, and crucially for Baym, "In these stories, the encroaching, constricting, destroying society is represented with particular urgency in the figure of one or more women" (133). In this "melodrama of beset manhood," the entrapper is female, as is her unthreatening counterpart, the all-accepting, nurturing landscape. Critics assume that all serious American novels tell the story of this myth of escape and rebellion; other fictions are merely "popular" stories which replicate, and thus reinforce, prevailing societal values. Since to qualify as a great American novel, a fiction has to follow a misogynist pattern, it is, as Baym points out, no accident that no woman has written a "great American novel."

Recent feminist scholarship and criticism have helped to modify this paradigm of serious male novel of individual rebellion vs. popular conservative female fiction of society both by expanding the field of American literary study and by changing its methodology. Books like Freibert and White's critical anthology of the works of nineteenth-century women novelists, *Hidden Hands*, have made previously hard-to-find texts available. And, feminist analyses by critics like Baym, Fetterley, Kolodny, and Tompkins of both these texts and the historical circumstances in which they were written have altered our notions of both "women's fiction" and "society." Identifying what earlier critics ignored—the patriarchal structure of nineteenth-century America—has helped readers to recognize that women wrote subversively as well as conservatively. One salient example of this phenomenon is the way our knowledge of the social, medical, economic, political, and literary histories of nineteenth-century women has changed critical treatment of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Out-of-print for decades, this short story, now regarded as an important and representative work, is regularly anthologized.

It would be a mistake, however, merely to reverse the assumptions of the "classic" Americanist critics. To argue that a female writer who in the past was read as simply conservative can now be read as simply subversive, to re-read Harriet Beecher Stowe as an advocate of the powers of darkness, is to read simple-mindedly. Rather than seeing women as either society's villainous spokespersons or its sacrificial victims, the best recent scholarship has been informed by an understanding of how women simultaneously participate in and protest against the ideological structures of their times. For example, many feminist historians now regard the "woman's sphere" as neither a privileged arena nor a prison, but "as the basis for a subculture among women that formed a source of strength and identity and afforded

supportive sisterly relations; this view implice[s] that the ideology's tenacity owed as much to women's motives as to the imposition of men's or 'society's' wishes" (Cott 197).

In a similar manner, recent re-readings of canonic (that is to say, "male") American fictions have begun to undermine the univocality and unambiguousness of the male American novelist's "Everlasting Nay." As Sacvan Bercovitch has recently pointed out, it is nonsense to argue that Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville somehow abstracted themselves from the ideology of their time, that they criticized American culture from the outside. In describing his plan for a new *Cambridge History of American Literature*, Bercovitch states that

we will have to re-historicize the ideal Americas projected in our major texts—those fabled frontier republics of the soul and worlds elsewhere of endless (because self-generating) ambiguity, those romance lands of moral antinomies (Old Serpent and New Adam, Innocence and Experience)—we will have to re-see these fictions historically, in dynamic relations to the culture: neither as mirrors of their time, nor as lamps of the creative imagination, but as works of ideological mimesis, at once implicated in the society they resist, capable of overcoming the forces that compel their complicity, and nourished by the culture that they often seem to subvert (642).

Bercovitch ends by calling for "a forum where native Americanists . . . , scholars trained in the rhetoric and rituals of 'Americanness,' can learn from their colleagues abroad to re-see American literature in an international perspective" (652). Although a non-Americanist might regard this program as an innocuous appeal to common sense, it represents a radical departure from the practices of the past. Despite the progress that I have sketched above, the critical categories that Baym's article describes—serious male novel vs. popular female fiction—remain stubbornly long-lived in American studies. I would suggest that these divisions have their basis in the rigid isolationism and nationalism of American literary criticism. To put it bluntly, one can define the serious nineteenth-century novel as exclusively the psychological novel of male individualism only if one does not read British novels. When it comes to fiction, and, in particular, nineteenth-century fiction, the British literary canon is not defined exclusively by gender. Austen, the Brontes, and Eliot are universally regarded as major figures, and the novel of manners is treated as a serious form.

To argue that we should study Nathaniel Hawthorne's work in the context of Charlotte Bronte's is, of course, actually an argument for *intradisciplinary*, rather than interdisciplinary, study. After all, American literary and British literary critics can still be found with offices side-by-side in most English departments. Yet the narrowness with which the discipline of American literary studies has been conceived means that

for the Americanist to enter the office next door is, in effect, for her to cross disciplines<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, it is to learn a new critical language. The terms and patterns that structure the Americanist's dichotomous discourse cannot accommodate texts like *Shirley* and *North and South*, or, more conventionally, *Jane Eyre* and *Bleak House*. As a Jamesian, I have been repeatedly amazed to find that Americanists either reject Henry James' fiction out of hand as "not American" or read him exclusively as the literary descendent of Emerson and Hawthorne. James was, in fact, influenced by both these American writers, but he was influenced even more profoundly by George Eliot, as his own correspondence and criticism, as well as his fictions, make clear. To structure the critical discussion of *Portrait of a Lady* solely around the question of whether James uses Isabel Archer's story to support or to attack Emerson's philosophy is to miss the myriad ways that his novel is a recasting of *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*.

In reconstructing the historical context of the nineteenth-century American novel, we need to recall the fact that the context is transatlantic: American novelists read, and were read by, British writers. In particular, reading American novelists through their British literary mothers will allow us to perceive classic American texts in new ways. This literary influence has remained virtually invisible because its crossing of national as well as gender boundaries makes it critically unconventional.

An instructive example of the American male novelist's debt to a British female forebear can be found in the confessional scene in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*. After Hilda accidentally sees Miriam and Donatello's murder of the mysterious model, she is overcome with a "torpor" that blunts her ability to continue her work as a copyist. Without occupation, bereft of loved ones with whom she might share her secret, longing for her mother and her would-be lover, Kenyon, she wanders into Saint Peter's and, in Chapter XXXIX, succumbs to the temptation to confess to a Roman Catholic priest. Kenyon, who witnesses Hilda's exit from the confessional, is appalled.

There are two standard ways in which this scene is read. Those critics who regard Hilda as the moral center of the book see the scene as an exploration of her essential innocence—sinless, she is able to confess the sins of others and still remain a "daughter of the Puritans." However, most readings of *The Marble Faun* attempt uneasily to reclaim modernism's beloved "dark" Hawthorne by blaming Hilda. The confessional scene is read as proof of her smug, selfish, and self-righteous innocence. In short, she is relegated to the type of Snow Maiden, a female category that Americanists since Fiedler have ritually invoked (and despised).

It is hard not to find Hilda irritating, and I certainly do not wish to diminish the importance of the topic of innocence to this novel and Hawthorne's work in general. But I do want to demonstrate that Hilda's gender is not merely a mark of her irritating innocence. The failure to recognize this fact has to do with a failure to recognize both Hilda's and

Hawthorne's female predecessors. For the image of a young Protestant woman, facing adulthood and autonomy who is tempted to confess to a Roman Catholic priest, is one that occurs six years earlier in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*.<sup>2</sup> In Chapter XV, "The Long Vacation," Lucy Snowe, left alone at the Brussels school where she is employed during the long September vacation, is so overwhelmed by her solitary, empty existence that, physically and psychologically ill, she confesses to a Catholic priest.

The similarities between the two scenes are many. Both heroines are led to church by depression and loneliness; a kindly woman's example induces both young girls to enter the confessional; both actions are described as acts of obedience;<sup>3</sup> neither Lucy nor Hilda actually confesses her sins: the former tells her own story of loneliness, the latter, how the sins of others have made her lonely; the act of confessing puts both heroines in danger of confinement in a convent, but each escapes the priest's clutches. The general situations of the two women are also similar: parentless and unmarried, both are supporting themselves by living in exile in a Catholic country.<sup>4</sup>

Reading Hawthorne's novel in light of Brontë's allows us to focus on his "daughter of the Puritans" as a daughter. *Villette* is, as feminist critics have recently argued, like *The Professor*, *Shirley*, and *Jane Eyre*, a novel about power.<sup>5</sup> In telling Lucy Snowe's (and her own) life-story, Brontë describes the position of the female who needs to be autonomous, yet is tempted to submit to authority in order to obtain affection. Throughout the novel, Lucy's relationships with men reveal her simultaneous resistance and attraction to the obedience that Brontë shows to be love's price. These contradictory desires are brought together in the scene where she confesses to *Mon père* (226). Although Lucy describes herself as escaping unscathed from this encounter with the father, she immediately undergoes a deathlike swoon,<sup>6</sup> and awakens, weak and helpless, in her childhood home, the house of her godmother. That is, she dies and is born again as a child. Her dream of a care-less world of maternal comfort is, however, disrupted by the return of the beloved male (Doctor John, Graham Bretton).

Deprived of the mother, Lucy returns to the struggle to gain affection without sacrificing autonomy. Her paradoxical desires and situation are displayed by the novel's double ending: "M. Emmanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox?" (711) If M. Paul dies at the end of *Villette*, Lucy is happy because it is only for these three years that she is loved. If he lives, she is happy because it is only for these three years that she is her own mistress. Loved, but left to her own resources, Lucy can be a happy woman only through Brontë's clever construction of a suspended conclusion. The female author italicizes, to use Nancy K. Miller's term, the conventional happy ending, representing the female as simultaneously caught within, yet not fully captured by, the marriage plot. The final pages of *Villette* gesture towards an "elsewhere" for women that Brontë does not—cannot—describe.

describe.

Hawthorne's recognition of the forces at play in this picture, as well as his attempt to distance himself from the position of the female, can be traced in his rendering of the scene. Hilda winds up in the confessional because her search for a mother fails. "[W]hy should not there be a Woman to listen to the prayers of women, a Mother in Heaven for all motherless girls like me!" she laments (4:348). Instead of the perfect undemanding nurturance that Lucy finds, albeit only for a brief moment, at Mrs. Bretton's, Hilda faces a father who demands obedience from his daughter.<sup>7</sup> As Hilda's confessor angrily points out, the privilege of speaking, of being listened to, entails with it obligation. When Hilda refuses to accept the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, the priest demands, "on what ground, my daughter, have you sought to avail yourself of these blessed privileges (confined exclusively to members of the one true Church) of Confession and Absolution?" (4:359) Confessing, using the father's language, means obeying the father's law.

I cannot enter here into a full-fledged analysis of these scenes and their places in their respective novels. What I want to suggest is that Brontë's novel offered to Hawthorne an image, indeed, almost an icon. Like the pictures of the lady-mother presiding over the tea-table, the angelic death-bed nurse, and the pure, dying girl, too good for this world, the image of the young woman kneeling to confess displays the beliefs, assumptions, and fears of a culture. The confessional scene figures what was, for the nineteenth century, an emblematic moment in the life of the female. Suspended between the roles of obedient child and autonomous adult, of daughter and woman, she is imaged at the moment of marriageability. In order to be available for wifehood, she must be free of the father, independent, autonomous, capable of choosing. She cannot be her husband's if she is still her father's. But if the daughter refuses to obey the father, if she fails as a daughter, she may refuse to obey the husband and fail as a wife. Kenyon wants a "daughter of the Puritans," wants the paradox inherent in that epithet: an obedient (because a daughter), independent (because a Puritan) soul. These are precisely the contradictory male desires that structure Lucy Snowe's dilemma: both of the men that she loves repeatedly demand that she obey them by behaving independently. For example, at the fire in the theater, Dr. John can behave as though he had "no lady" (375) with him, no weak dependent who needs protection, because he knows that Lucy will do whatever he orders. But Dr. John loves only girls: first Ginevra, "fighting the battle of life by proxy" (691), and then Polly, that doll-like daughter. Paul does, finally, love the woman he calls "My little English Puritan" (713). Nonetheless, he leaves her alone as "the steward of his property"—supporting herself, yet accountable to him (712).

Brontë, in a desperate ploy to free her heroine from the entanglements of the female plot, constructs an impossible ending. Hawthorne, recognizing Brontë's anatomy of power in the confessional scene, rewrites

it in a way that chastises the female character—and perhaps her female author, his literary parent. He not only uses the words of the father to reprimand the woman for daring to speak, but also returns the woman to the confines of the marriage plot. Although Hilda appears to successfully resist the holy father's demand for obedience, Hawthorne's narrative subverts her independence. In the chapters immediately following the confessional scene, she admits Kenyon to the intimate friendship that leads to marriage, is kidnapped and held captive, and finally comes "down from her old tower, to be herself enshrined and worshipped as a household Saint, in the light of her husband's fireside" (4:461).

However, this household shrine contains not only the object of worship, but the worshipper as well. As critics have been quick to point out, the ending of *The Marble Faun* radically restricts Kenyon's possibilities. Having watched Hilda's confession, he shares her penance. Kenyon's guilty presence in the scene directs us to a second reason why the image of the young Protestant female at the confessional is iconic for nineteenth-century culture. The male watches the female's confession because he, too, longs to confess.

This desire to submit to authority has its basis in what cultural historians like Walter Houghton, T. J. Jackson Lears, and Stephen Mintz have shown to be a fundamental paradox in Victorian child-rearing. As Mintz points out:

There was a deep-seated tension in the Victorian middle-class home between a goal of cultivating self-government through the persuasive power of various kinds of influence and an opposing goal of deference to parental authority (38).

Parents wished to teach independence even as they demanded obedience. Self-rule was the ideal, but respect for authority was the basis of the familial hierarchy. What Brontë's and Hawthorne's novels show is that, faced with these impossible demands, the young adult is tempted to submit to paternal authority, to remain a child—a temptation emblemized as the desire to confess to a holy father. What comparison of the two texts reveals is that the Victorian male can only confront the confessional vicariously. Kenyon, Hawthorne's representative, can safely make Hilda the site of his anxiety because of the cultural contention that women's "nature" make her—and not him—finally incapable of self-rule.<sup>8</sup> In the Brontë novel the confessional scene is about being female; in Hawthorne, it is about watching the female—experiencing through her even while testing and judging her. Understood in this context, the critical complaint that Hilda is a symbol rather than a character has a new resonance. She is not only a symbolic female (the Snow Maiden), but she is also symbolic of the "female"—the desire to submit to authority, to be a child—in the male.

Through Hilda, Hawthorne encounters the problems posited by

Brontë's text. Recognizing that *The Marble Faun's* confessional scene is a reworking of *Villette's* reorients our reading of both the scene itself and of the structure of Hawthorne's story, focusing us on the problems of gender and power in the novel. While I have deliberately chosen a localized example to examine here, the implications of this American male novelist's debt to a British female author are neither anomalous nor isolated. Indeed, they reach so far as to alter the terms of a long-standing Americanist dogma—Hawthorne's influence on James. Unrecognized among James's debts to Hawthorne is the access to Charlotte Brontë. At the beginning of Book Seven of *The Ambassadors*, Lambert Strether, feeling guilty about his Parisian behavior, visits Notre Dame. Once there, he does not confess, does not even watch another confess. However, he does search the cathedral for a female visitor whom he can view as a penitent:

He had the habit, in these contemplations, of watching a fellow visitant, here and there, from a respectable distance, remarking some note of behaviour, of penitence, of prostration, of the absolved, relieved state; this was the manner in which his vague tenderness took its course, the degree of demonstration to which it naturally had to confine itself (XXII, vii, i, p. 6).

This time he watches Marie de Vionnet, allowing her to stand in for him as penitent. Although the woman that the middle-aged Strether chooses to watch is not a young maiden, the literary echoes ring clear in this cathedral scene. Like Kenyon, Strether knows the attractions, and the dangers of the woman who submits herself to the father in confession. Like Hawthorne, James knows that it is women who act out male guilt. Like *Villette*, *The Ambassadors* shows that the price of autonomy is isolation.

Susan M. Griffin  
University of Louisville

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In describing this Americanist practice, I, of course, do not wish to argue that American literary scholars never study the connections between American nineteenth-century novels and their British counterparts. Nonetheless, it is generally the case that these texts are treated critically first as "American" (a term defined in the ways that Baym describes) and only second, if at all, as nineteenth-century novels.

<sup>2</sup>Harry Levin notes that Hawthorne's scene "has an instructive parallel in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*," but does not go on to make anything of the connection (94).

<sup>3</sup>"Mechanically obedient, I rose and went," Lucy relates (145); "Hilda could not have responded with a more inevitable obedience" (4:257).

<sup>4</sup>Lucy Snowe's parents are dead; Hilda appears to be fatherless, and her mother is in America.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

<sup>6</sup>"Where my soul went during that swoon I cannot tell. Whatever she saw, or wherever she travelled in her trance on that strange night, she kept her own secret. . . . She may have gone upward, and come in sight of her eternal home, hoping for leave to rest now, and deeming that her painful union with matter was at last dissolved" (147).

<sup>7</sup>For a different reading of the parental structures in this scene, see Nina Baym, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career*. Baym argues that Hilda's "conflict is expressed as a polarity between concepts of art-mothers and church fathers" (242).

<sup>8</sup>For Hawthorne's own attraction to confession, see his comments in the *Italian Notebooks*: "If I had a murder on my conscience or any other great sin, I think I should have been inclined to kneel down there, and pour it into the safe secrecy of the confessional." See Raymona E. Hull for a brief discussion of this remark (148).

#### WORKS CITED

- Baym, Nina. "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors." *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 123-39.
- . *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976.
- . *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1978.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan. "The Problem of Ideology in American Literary History." *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1986): 631-53.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Villette*. Eds. Herbert Rosengarten & Margaret Smith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.
- Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1977.
- Fetterley, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978.
- Fielder, Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. New York: Stein & Day, 1966.
- Freibert, Lucy M. & Barbara A. White. *Hidden Hands: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1790-1870*. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1985.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. & Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *French and Italian Notebooks*. Vol. 14 of *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. Eds. William Charvat, et al. 17 vols. to date. Columbus: Ohio State

- Univ. Press, 1963.
- The Marble Faun: Or, the Romance of Monte Beni. Vol. 4 of The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Eds. William C. Charvat, et al. 17 vols. to date. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1963.
- Hull, Ramona E. Nathaniel Hawthorne: The English Experience, 1853-1864. Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1980.
- Houghton, Walter. The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957.
- James, Henry. The Ambassadors. Vols. 21 & 22 of The Novels and Tales of Henry James 1907-1909; rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971.
- Kolodny, Annette. The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.
- Levin, Harry. The Power of Blackness. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.
- Miller, Nancy K. "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction." *PMLA* 96 (1981): 36-48.
- Mintz, Steven. A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture. New York: New York Press, 1983.
- Stimpson, Catharine, et al., eds. "Editorial." *Signs* 1 (1975): v.
- Tompkins, Jane. Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985.

**SEXUAL DOUBLE CROSS:  
A RESPONSE TO SUSAN M. GRIFFIN'S "THE DISCOURSE  
WITHIN: FEMINISM AND INTRADISCIPLINARY STUDY"**

Patricia Sharpe

At this session designed to promote critical exchange between feminism and other discourses, it seems appropriate to focus my response on how we can shake those other discourses out of their smugness, how we get them to hear and understand, to do more than simply dismiss the insights of feminist criticism or perhaps cluck sympathetically before moving on to a new section of the card catalogue. I am aware that in making this complaint I may sound as pitiful and poignant as one of Shere Hite's sad informants, trapped in a dismal marriage with a callous brute who won't communicate with her or tend to her needs. Hite urges these women to have the courage to leave their insensitive husbands. Feminist critics have for some time done that; since our awakenings we have maintained only a marriage of convenience with the dominant critical discourse, while moving out into the pigeon house of gynocriticism. But once in a while one looks back over one's shoulder to see how devastated that rejected mate is, and the answer seems to be "not very." The public defenders of traditional humanistic study like Allan Bloom or E.D. Hirsch or William Bennett seem as eager as Edna Pontellier's husband to gloss over our gesture of taking up residence elsewhere; they pretend we have moved out simply because the house needs superficial redecorating, but that once the canon has been dusted off, it will provide quite comfortable and handsome accommodations for all of us.

As Nancy Miller puts it, humanists of the old school "are going strong: they continue to resist, massively, feminism's fundamental understanding that the deployment of the universal is inherently, if paradoxically, partial and political" (115). Even our friends, sympathetic scholars, the gallant Robert Lebrun's to our Edna's, miss the point as surely as he did when he dreamt of asking Mr. Pontellier to release Edna long after she has made herself free. Even these sympathetic scholars, Miller says, seem to be saying "feminism is theoretically thin, or separatist. Girls, shape up" (115). Furthermore, she continues, these scholars "like the humanists have not begun to question the grounds on which they stand, their own relation to the sexual differential that inhabits every voice, their own difference from the universal, from the institution that houses them, and from which they speak" (115). A similar frustration with the imperturbability of the status quo lurks behind the telling comment of philosopher Elizabeth Minnich: "You don't simply add the realization that the world is round to the idea



that the world is flat. You have to go back and rethink the whole problem." (Related in a lecture by Joan Scott at Simon's Rock of Bard College, November 5, 1987.)

In her finely textured paper, Susan Griffin argues for just such a radical rethinking of the geography of American literature. Her call for intradisciplinary study, for transatlantic comparisons, for communication between the neighboring offices of scholars of American literature and of British literature, is, as she points out, at once an "innocuous appeal to common sense" and "a radical departure from the practices of the past" (83). I know how true that is. My dissertation was a comparison of *Middlemarch* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, pointing out similarities so striking it seemed impossible they had not been a focus of criticism. That topic which appeared so tame and reasonable turned out to make me almost unemployable; no department was able to decide which of those neighboring offices I belonged in. That all happened before the word "feminist" ever crossed my lips, so it would be easy for me simply to concur with Griffin and provide loads of further evidence of the fruitfulness of reading British and American nineteenth-century literature together.

However, in subsequent years I have come to see my graduate work as impoverished by the absence of feminist theory, so I would like to stress that we must see more in Griffin's paper than a case for the study of Anglo-American literary relations. Griffin grounds her claim in feminist theory's teaching that the intellectual frameworks which enable certain insights block our vision of others. I aim simply to underscore that those obscured other insights have been, and continue to be, ones which come into view when gender is admitted as a factor in analysis.

To dramatise the point, I will briefly contrast Griffin's argument with that of a powerful and thought-provoking recent book by Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson*. Like Griffin, Weisbuch argues that "The conventional habits by which departments of English and comparative literature organize themselves have made for a vacancy where a rigorous study of Anglo-American literary relations should have been occurring" (xx). Weisbuch proposes to "inaugurate a new field, or subfield, of literary study," one we might expect would answer to Griffin's call (xx). However, despite its innovative and subtle exploration of intradisciplinary and international relationships, Weisbuch's study leaves out crucial aspects of that new sub-field as Griffin envisions it: those having to do with gender.

Griffin draws on Nina Baym to show how the isolationism and nationalism of American literary study have produced the opposed critical categories: serious male novel versus popular female fiction, while the canon of great nineteenth-century British novels is not defined by gender, but includes women writers like Austen, the Brontës, and Eliot. With a bit of slippage, Griffin then reads the transatlantic debate as a female/male struggle. She proposes that reading "American novelists through their British literary mothers will allow us to perceive classic American texts in

new ways" (84). We should not, I think, let ourselves slip so easily into viewing a situation in which women are included as one subsumed by the feminine. It is just such a tendency which has made male firefighters or policemen fear even a few women on the force. Furthermore, to view the British tradition as female is to easily overlook the misogyny those included women writers had to contend with.

I do not intend that these cautions close the question; it needs further consideration. Baym has argued that in the American myth "the encroaching, constricting, destroying society is represented . . . in the figure of one or more women" (133). Resistance to the British domination of American letters, fear of the power of old world culture, and impatience with British literature's failure of nerve—all features of the transatlantic debate which Weisbuch identifies—might well result in a misogynist characterization of British literature as feminine. Yet that is a possibility which Weisbuch never entertains. His "procedure throughout is to pair a general discussion with a particular case—study of the relations between an American and a British writer" (xviii). These representative case studies deal exclusively with male writers, even though Weisbuch himself states that the "three British novels of the mid-century that arguably matter most" are *Wuthering Heights*, *Middlemarch* and *Bleak House* (114). Dickens is the only author of the three who figures in one of the case-studies. Weisbuch sets up pairs of rival males and fails to question how the antagonism he describes differed when one of the parties was female. Where that question seems unavoidable, in dealing with James, Weisbuch sees not rivalry but a treaty. He acknowledges that "James consistently refashions George Eliot" but claims that "James's idea of Eliot . . . displays none of the competitive turmoil marking the American attempt to cut loose from the British" (278). Can he really mean none? Rather than take such a surprising flat denial seriously in a book which in other cases is so sensitive to the nuance of rivalry and influence, I am tempted to turn to psychoanalytic theory, to wonder whether the male need to separate from foremothers is so strong that the struggle itself must be denied. Perhaps the isolationism of American literary criticism simply echoes that of its most celebrated writers, and both should be read, in part, as an effort to separate from powerful maternal images. Even Weisbuch's own study, apparently revolutionary as it is, would have to be read as part of the pattern. Only after turning the Anglo-American struggle into an all male one can he admit it to consciousness.

Weisbuch eschews such quasi-Freudian interpretation "because it reduces complications to a puerile paradigm" (xvi). The word "puerile" snags my attention: so Weisbuch wishes to avoid a criticism which might make him seem boyish. Isn't that just the fear I wanted to point out? As a feminist, I am drawn to Freudian theory, despite the many problems it poses, precisely because Freud is one powerful male theorist who does not erase gender to create a totalizing narrative in which the masculine masquerades as the norm. Does Freudianism really reduce to the puerile,

or does it simply reveal the timid little man manipulating the machinery that creates the illusion of the wizard of Oz?

Although seemingly unperturbed by his omissions, Weisbuch is not unaware of them. He confesses he is "using the adjective 'American' as if there is at present no furious debate over the relation of that adjective to women and minority writers" (xix). He defends his focus on canonical writers, whom he somewhat oddly refers to as "the usual suspects," with the claim that "these are the writers who most engage me and those who, I believe, will continue to engage intelligent readers whatever new figures join their company" (xix). In this naive claim that the world can be at once flat and round, that the new can simply be added to the old, Weisbuch fails to appreciate the very sort of "complication" he has claimed to value. Tensions like those he describes between British and American writers may well exist between high and popular art, or between the male and female traditions.

Weisbuch hypothesizes that if one did add minority and women writers to his study, "they would join in the American attempt to defend New World possibilities against British taunts . . ." (xx). Yet when Jane Tompkins looks at American women writers of the period, she discovers they were engaged in a different struggle. She shows that Uncle Tom's Cabin, for example, reproduces and extends not the tradition of the English novel, but that of typological narrative. Tompkins writes: Stowe's "novel does not simply quote the Bible, it rewrites the Bible as the story of a Negro slave. Formally and philosophically, it stands opposed to works like Middelmarch and The Portrait of a Lady" (134). It is because he is content to perpetuate the status of the writers who most engage him and believes the job of revising the canon, if it must be done at all, can be left to others, that Weisbuch makes this false hypothesis. More broadly, his failure to consider gender as an element in the Anglo-American "double cross" is a serious oversight, as Griffin's paper makes clear.

Has my concentrated attack on Bob Weisbuch seemed awkward or excessive? Do I seem to have an axe to grind? Have I falsely led you to believe his book is particularly flawed to a feminist eye? On the contrary, I pick it because it is written by one of my closest friends, and my title "Sexual Double Cross" applies as much to myself as to him. Am I betraying my friend Bob in using him to make this critique, or did I do it long ago? As the one woman, besides his wife, mentioned in Weisbuch's acknowledgements, I feel implicated in his book's particular flaw. Over the years, as I sensed his concern at my developing feminism, his unspoken conviction that I was narrowing my range, that a feminist perspective was "theoretically thin," I should more courageously have stood my ground and made my case. He would have had more to acknowledge. If I could not get him to understand that his omission of gender issues damages his work, his credibility and complexity, how can I hope to persuade men less receptive, less intellectually adventurous, less broad-minded, less my friends?

One of those most engaging and celebrated texts of the American canon opens: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself/ And what I assume you shall assume" (25). Certainly this is the voice of a totalizing narrative subject, but an energetic and fascinating one. Should we fall for its seductive appearance of inclusiveness, we will quickly be pulled up short when Whitman writes:

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,  
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,  
And I say there is nothing greater than the  
mother of men (44).

"Boys," I say, "Shape up."

Patricia Sharpe  
Simon's Rock of Bard College

## THE POLITICS OF THE "AUTHOR-FUNCTION" IN CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST CRITICISM

John Schilb

The phrase quoted in my title comes from Michel Foucault's essay "What Is an Author?"—the by-now legendary or notorious piece on "the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it" (115). Foucault makes numerous assertions about the "author-function" in his essay. The one I'm chiefly concerned with here is that the attributes we link to "the author" are actually "projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice" (127). For in suggesting that different ways of talking about the author reflect different ways of handling texts, which can be probed for their "exclusions" as much as for their designations of "pertinence" and "continuities," Foucault gives us a way of approaching a central issue posed by contemporary feminist criticism. The conflict I have in mind can be roughly described as follows. On the one hand, certain feminist critics identify women's texts with an authorial self and consider it politically necessary as well as cognitively responsible to claim some kind of access to that self. On the other hand, certain feminist critics disdain the search for the woman author as predicated on historically oppressive fallacies, and consider their political mission instead to be the questioning of human "identity" along with the affirmation of multiplicity in textual meaning. The first group calls for a politics aligned with at least some principles of classic Western humanism; the second puts its faith in various versions of poststructuralism. Because each associates its stance with feminist progress, and suspects the other group's position of being not only mistaken but also politically incorrect, there's been little sustained conversation between them.

It would be presumptuous of me, as an individual theorist and as a male theorist at that, to try decisively adjudicating these two conceptions of feminism here. Instead, I'll simply critique how a particular advocate of each links the potential of feminism to a certain notion of the woman author. For the more or less humanist view, I've chosen Patrocino P. Schweickart's essay "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," which won the 1984 Florence Howe Award for Outstanding Feminist Scholarship. For the poststructuralist stance, I've chosen Toril Moi's book *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, which has gained a wide audience since its publication in 1985. Focusing on particu-

lar sections of these works, I'll delineate their contrasting senses of the "author-function" and its politics, yet I'll suggest as well how they each could have reflected more on the nature of what Foucault would call "discourse" and what I'll call "rhetoric." More precisely, I'll claim that Schweickart and Moi should pay greater attention to (1) the rhetoric of their own writing (including its linguistic devices, its contradictions, and, yes, its "exclusions"); and (2) the rhetorical contexts in which feminist criticism circulates and seeks to have effects.

Schweickart's essay moves through a number of sections. She first calls for a fusion of reader-response criticism with feminist criticism, through a discussion of Wayne Booth, Jonathan Culler, and Elaine Showalter (the first criticized for neglecting issues of gender and race, the second praised for identifying certain problems that models of reading must confront, the third chided for emphasizing the woman writer at the expense of the woman reader). She then points out the androcentrism of the literary canon and proceeds to explain how feminists might read texts by men, ultimately stipulating "a dual hermeneutic: a negative hermeneutic that discloses their complicity with patriarchal ideology, and a positive hermeneutic that recuperates the utopian moment—the authentic kernel—from which they draw a significant portion of their emotional power" (43-44). Next, in the part most relevant to the concerns of this paper, she articulates how feminists might read texts by women, drawing her exemplar upon Adrienne Rich's essay "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson." Finally, she summarizes her preceding arguments, stressing her ideal of the feminist approach to women's writing.

As her remarks about Showalter and as her general orientation as a reader-response theorist indicate, Schweickart doesn't absolutely valorize the woman author as the sole repository of textual meaning. Moreover, in explicating what she takes to be Rich's method of reading Dickinson's texts, Schweickart at times acknowledges that the author isn't fully recoverable as an empirical human being who can rule on interpretations of her writing. She admits that "In reading, one encounters only a text, the trail of an absent author" (47); that "The subjectivity roused to life by reading, while it may be attributed to the author, is nevertheless not a separate subjectivity but a projection of the subjectivity of the reader" (53); that "Certainly it is useful to be reminded that the validity of an interpretation cannot be decided by appealing to what the author 'intended'" (56). All the same, she recurrently insinuates that contact of some sort with the woman author is a possible goal of feminist criticism and indeed one of the most urgent. Commenting on Rich's description of her visit to Dickinson's house, Schweickart notes that

The metaphor of visiting points to another feature of feminist readings of women's writing, namely, the tendency to construe the text not as an object, but as the manifestation of the subjectivity of the absent author—the 'voice' of another woman. Rich is not content to

revel in the textuality of Dickinson's poems and letters. For her, these are doorways to the 'mind' of a 'woman of genius' (47).

Schweickart's observation that the text is merely "the trail of an absent author" comes in the next paragraph, but her overriding desire to grasp the text as a display of that author's "subjectivity" is plain in this one. Later she reiterates that "Much of the rhetorical energy of Rich's essay is directed toward evoking the personality of Dickinson, toward making her live as the substantial, palpable presence animating her works" (51). She also declares that "feminist readings of female texts are motivated by the need 'to connect,' to recuperate, or to formulate—they come to the same thing—the context, the tradition, that would link women writers to one another, to women readers and critics, and to the larger community of women" (48). While she evidently believes there's a risk of the feminist critic's imposing her own thinking upon the woman author, she nevertheless holds that the contexts of the critic and the author can be clearly distinguished and then productively related. She praises Rich's essay, therefore, for its ability "to exhibit through its rhetoric the necessary subjectivity of reading coupled with the equally necessary commitment to reading the text as it was meant to be read" (54). Perhaps most indicative of her own tendency to equate text with author is her leitmotif use of phrases such as "the duality of reader and author (the subject of the work)" (53), "the relationship between the feminist reader and the female author/text" (55), "Rich's reading of Dickinson" (55), and "Rich's interpretation of Dickinson" (56).

Overall, Schweickart's essay proves troubling in several respects. For one thing, it doesn't sustainedly contemplate the relation of the figural to the literal in the interpretation of texts and the evocation of their authors. Even though she begins her analysis of Rich's essay by pointing out how Rich depends upon metaphors (of standing as a witness for Dickinson, of visiting Dickinson on her premises, and of trying to reach Dickinson through a screen), and even though she notes how for Rich one metaphor grows out of the inadequacy of another (the screen image resulting from the failure of Rich to find the living author at home), Schweickart doesn't proceed to consider what the role of metaphor in critical praxis might be said to be. Of course, the instability of the classic literal/figural opposition, and the consequences of that instability for claims of empirical truth, are favorite themes of deconstruction. But one doesn't have to be a deconstructionist to want the discussion of metaphor that Schweickart's own language points toward and yet ultimately refuses to deliver. Significantly, her preliminary remarks about Rich's use of metaphor are followed by her enthusiastically noting Rich's "use of the personal voice" as Rich's "most obvious rhetorical device" (47) (my emphasis), as if Rich's own "manifestation of subjectivity" couldn't be termed another metaphor and investigated as such. Shortly thereafter, Schweickart explicitly returns for a moment to the subject of metaphor and acknowledges that the "subjectivity"

ity" of the text "is only a projection of the subjectivity of the reader" (48). But given the readerly subjectivity Schweickart has in mind is Rich's textualized self-portrait, she can again be accused of dodging a confrontation with the omnipresence of figure in critical writing—including that practiced by feminists.

Despite her references to the woman author as a "subject" or "subjectivity," Schweickart never defines these terms—never, that is, makes the case for her implicit equation of them with a coherent, identifiable, clearly bounded self. That her equation warrants further study is best revealed when she claims, "The reader encounters not simply a text, but a 'subjectified object': the 'heart and mind' of another woman. She comes into close contact with an interiority—a power, a creativity, a suffering, a vision—that is not identical with her own" (52). Not only does Schweickart fail to dwell much upon the implications of her quotation marks, including the possibility that the woman author she conjures up beyond the text is actually a text as well. She also neglects to ponder how terms such as "heart," "mind," "interiority," "power," "creativity," "suffering," and "vision" aren't synonymous with one another and aren't automatically substitutable for the concept of full personhood implied by the phrase "another woman." Perhaps Schweickart could have justified her statement by arguing for the necessity and legitimacy of synecdoche in accounts of the woman author. But no such argument is forthcoming—even though poststructuralists have, in recent years, seriously challenged theorists' reliance on synecdoche and other tropes in the construction of supposedly bedrock principles. In "What Is an Author?," for example, Foucault studies the linguistic construction of "the subject" and contends that "we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what function does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse" (137-38). One doesn't have to endorse Foucault's research methodology, or share his utter suspicion of appeals to the truth, to consider the questions he raises here worth pondering—especially when remarks like Schweickart's easily generate them.

The need to question Schweickart's notion of the woman author-as-subject is exposed as well, I think, by Rich's language about Emily Dickinson. Contrary to the impression Schweickart gives of Rich's critical methods, Rich's essay contains several indications that the woman author is to be considered less a precisely defined, integrated self than an assemblage of faculties that might commune with one another; less a fixed ego reflected or expressed in her writing than an agent who actively explores and deploys in new ways the resources of language; less a single identity than numerous ones. Despite Schweickart's claim that Rich seeks to evoke Dickinson as a "substantial, palpable presence," Rich herself writes near the start of her essay that "For years I have been not so much

envisioning Emily Dickinson as trying to visit, to enter her mind" (159). Rich continually refers to "mind," as well as to other partial constituents of a self, as she analyzes what she takes to be the dynamics of Dickinson's poetry. She submits that Dickinson "had to . . . retranslate her own unorthodox, subversive, sometimes volcanic propensities into a dialect called metaphor" (161); that Dickinson confronted "what is under pressure in us" (162); that certain of Dickinson's poems "are about the poet's relationship to her own power, which is exteriorized in masculine form" (165); that Dickinson explored various "chambers of the self" (175). As the reference to "retranslation" suggests, Rich conceives of Dickinson's poetry as a form of action, not as a mere embodiment of "presence." Schweickart neglects to quote Rich's strongest declaration of this point: "the real question, given that the art of poetry is an art of transformation, is how this woman's mind and imagination may have used the masculine elements in the world at large, or those elements personified as masculine" (165). Rich associates such writing with going beyond a unitary self when she observes that Dickinson "had to possess the courage to enter, through language, states which most people deny or veil with silence" (176), and when she writes that "There are many more Emily Dickinsons than I have tried to call up here. Wherever you take hold of her, she proliferates" (185). In spotlighting these comments by Rich, I don't claim that they reveal her as a blazing poststructuralist, nor do I assume that she would necessarily challenge Schweickart's invocation of "the subject" in the way I do. But if Schweickart had given more attention to these parts of Rich's essay in her summary of it, her analysis of the woman author might have gained explicitness and nuance. Indeed, if Schweickart had worked through several of Dickinson's poems as Rich does, she might have wound up demonstrating that access to Dickinson's "subjectivity" is more problematic than she otherwise suggests. As things stand, however, Schweickart doesn't analyze any of Dickinson's poems in her essay and doesn't clearly indicate that the bulk of Rich's essay is devoted to citation and explication of several, including ones that pose great obstacles to the would-be interpreter.

Furthermore, Schweickart doesn't much explore, let alone resolve, a tension in her references to the woman author between epistemological pretensions and pragmatic sentiments. Alternately depicting the woman author's "subjectivity" as a datum of reality and as a politically useful hypothesis, she doesn't take the time either to prove the first or justify the second. Consider again, for example, her statement that "feminist readings of female texts are motivated by the need 'to connect,' to recuperate, or to formulate—they come to the same thing—the context, the tradition, that would link women writers to one another, to women readers and critics, and to the larger community of women" (48). Despite her assertion, she doesn't seem to be dealing here with "the same thing." To claim that one is "recuperating" a context or "tradition" is to claim that it existed in reality and that one has achieved access to it. To claim that one is "formu-

lating" a "context" or "tradition" is to allow considerably greater latitude for sheer fictiveness, although it is at the same time to imply that the fictiveness will definitely serve a purpose. Schweickart might say that to a pragmatist, truth and usefulness are indeed "the same thing," but my response would be that the word "recuperate" still doesn't fit in well with a thoroughly pragmatist vocabulary. In any event, Schweickart doesn't go on to explain and defend a method of literary-historical research that would unquestionably support claims of "recuperation," nor does she show why the "formulation" of "context" or "tradition" she has in mind would necessarily promote feminist progress better than other kinds of "formulation"—or better than projects which simply don't strive "to connect" woman writers with woman readers in the act of literary criticism. A similar problem appears near the end of the essay, when she writes of Rich that "In advancing her interpretation, Rich implicitly claims its validity. That is to say, to read a text and then to write about it is to seek to connect not only with the author of the original text, but also with a community of readers. To the extent that she succeeds and to the extent that the community is potentially all-embracing, her interpretation has that degree-of validity" (56). Once more, epistemology is mixed with pragmatism—"validity" is presented as a social construct, but the equation of author with text comes across as a given. And once more, the given isn't argued for at length and the ultimate political efficacy of Schweickart's own notion of "validity" not demonstrated. It's significant that Schweickart here refers her reader to an endnote in which she invokes Habermas' notion of "truth or validity as a claim ('implicit in the act of making assertions') that is redeemable through discourse—specifically, through the domination-free discourse of an 'ideal speech situation'" (62). As numerous critics of Habermas have pointed out, appealing to the norms of an "ideal speech situation" doesn't make the speech situations of this world ideal, and threatens to obscure the ways in which they're not. Because women rarely find themselves in "ideal speech situations," it's at least questionable whether concepts of political "validity" in discussions of the "author-function" should be predicated on them. I'm suggesting, in other words, that it would have been profitable for Schweickart to have analyzed at length the specific political circumstances in which texts of feminist criticism might travel, the reasons why her own idea of the "author-function" would have force in these circumstances, the reasons why other ideas of the "author-function" wouldn't, and the wide range of variables that would have to be pondered in attempting to build any coalition of women through any practice, especially one based at least for the moment in the academy. Still another way of putting all this is to say that Schweickart needs to examine differences more: the differences involved in her blend of epistemology and pragmatism; the differences involved in the reception of critical texts; and the differences that can appear among women, including differences between women inside the academy and women outside of it.

A significant repression of difference in Schweickart's text occurs in the case of another endnote. In the main body of her essay, she articulates what comes to be a main principle of it: "To read Dickinson, then, is to try to visit with her, to hear her voice, to make her live in oneself, and to feel her impressive 'personal dimensions'" (47). The reader is then referred to an endnote which brings up an essay by Mary Jacobus in the following way: "There is a strong counter-tendency, inspired by French poststructuralism, which privileges the appreciation of textuality over the imaginative recovery of the woman writer as subject of the work" (59). Yet mention of this "strong counter-tendency" basically remains in an endnote. For all of its "strength," for all of its status as something "counter" to Schweickart's position, she keeps it largely at the back of her text. I say "basically" and "largely" because she does briefly refer to deconstruction at her conclusion, simplistically equating it with "futility" (55) and "the proposition that reading is impossible" (56). Overall, her treatment of rival "author-functions" is regrettable because it buries the chance for a genuine debate that could mutually challenge and clarify the positions involved.

In critiquing Schweickart's essay, I've in effect proceeded from a deconstructive notion of "rhetoric" as the way that a text differs from itself, along with a more traditional notion of "rhetoric" as the way that a text interacts with society. And in criticizing Schweickart for minimizing the "strong counter-tendency . . . which privileges the appreciation of textuality over the imaginative recovery of the woman writer as subject of the work," I've suggested that any consideration of the politics of the "author-function" in feminist criticism should address deconstruction along with other forms of poststructuralism endorsed by certain feminists. In turning now to Moi's book, however, I want to point out how her blatantly poststructuralist remarks on the "author-function" and its politics also prove shaky when viewed from the dual perspective of rhetoric I've employed.

Sexual/Textual Politics surveys Anglo-American and French feminist theory. While the latter doesn't emerge thoroughly unscathed, the former repeatedly serves as a target for Moi's scorn. Her most emphatic statements on the role of the "author-function" that she associates with the Anglo-Americans come in her section on Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic. There she criticizes what she takes to be the book's "insistence on the female author as the instance that provides the only true meaning of the text" (62). She proceeds to declare that "if we are truly to reject the model of the author as God the Father of the text, it is surely not enough to reject the patriarchal ideology implied in the paternal metaphor. It is equally necessary to reject the critical practice it leads to, a critical practice that relies on the author as the transcendental signified of his or her text. For the patriarchal critic, the author is the source, origin and meaning of the text. If we are to undo this patriarchal practice of authority, we must take one further step and proclaim with

Roland Barthes the death of the author" (62-63). Rather than confer "presence" on the female author as Schweickart would, therefore, Moi would supposedly focus on the text as a text, replete with various possibilities for meaning that only a patriarchal critic would allegedly try to delimit.

In her introduction to the book, which is what I'll concentrate on here, Moi dramatizes her views toward the humanist esteem for the author by considering what several Anglo-American feminist critics have had to say about Virginia Woolf. Valuing herself "The steadily shifting, multiple perspectives" that she finds in A Room of One's Own and other writings by Woolf, Moi criticizes Elaine Showalter for finding Woolf evasive. Moi then attacks other feminists who, whether they're negative or even positive toward Woolf, still discuss her as if a woman writer should record her own experience as well as that of the woman reader. Throughout her discussion of such theorists, Moi sketches out and decries the assumptions behind "traditional bourgeois humanism of a liberal-individualist kind" (6). Showalter and Marcia Holly, according to her, "fail to grasp . . . that the traditional humanism they represent is in effect part of patriarchal ideology. At its centre is the seamlessly unified self—either individual or collective—which is commonly called 'Man.' As Luce Irigaray or Hélène Cixous would argue, this integrated self is in fact a phallic self, constructed on the model of the self-contained, powerful phallus. Gloriously autonomous, it banishes from itself all conflict, contradiction and ambiguity. In this humanist ideology the self is the sole author of history and of the literary text: the humanist creator is potent, phallic and male—God in relation to the world, the author in relation to his text" (8). Woolf, by contrast, "exposes the way in which language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning" (9). Furthermore, she reveals that "Conscious thought . . . must be seen as the 'overdetermined' manifestation of a multiplicity of structures that intersect to produce that unstable constellation the liberal humanists call the 'self'" (10). Woolf's writing thereby indicates to Moi that "the search for a unified, individual self, or gender identity or indeed 'textual identity' in the literary work must be seen as drastically reductive" (10).

But for all of her hostility toward the liberal humanist conception of the "author-function" she finds in Anglo-American feminist criticism, rhetorical features of Moi's own text appear to contradict her. Although, for example, she criticizes Marcia Holly for conducting "a search for the representation of strong, powerful women in literature" (8), Moi herself advocates at the start "a more positive feminist reading of Woolf" (1) as an important goal, as if the poststructuralist theorist differs from the humanist one merely in trying to find her positive images of women elsewhere. Later on, Moi criticizes Jane Marcus because Marcus "unproblematically evokes biographical evidence to sustain her thesis about the nature of Woolf's writing: the reader is to be convinced by appeals to biographical circumstances rather than to the texts" (17). But Moi herself refers to Woolf's encounter with Freud in tying Woolf to a psychoanalytic model of the



unstable self; "Woolf's own periodic attacks of mental illness" (12); and how "Woolf herself suffered acute patriarchal oppression at the hands of the psychiatric establishment" (12). The latter observation is made with reference to Mrs. Dalloway, and whatever Moi's professed discontent with representationalism, she praises the novel because it "contains not only a splendidly satirical attack on . . . [psychiatry] (as represented by Sir William Bradshaw), but also a superbly perspicacious representation of a mind that succumbs to 'imaginary' chaos in the character of Septimus Smith" (12). Moreover, despite her declared skepticism toward notions of "the author" and her endorsement of textual multiplicity, in her introduction and throughout the book, Moi constantly speaks of feminist critics as if definite intentions could be assigned to them and authoritative proclamations could be made about their writings.

Most important, Moi's comments about Woolf indicate that she thinks of Woolf as an identifiable and, indeed, valuable personage—one who is to be equated with her texts just as much as Schweickart equates Emily Dickinson with hers. Note that the subtitle of Moi's introduction is "Feminist readings of Woolf" (1), not "Feminist readings of Woolf's texts" or "Feminist readings of texts with the name 'Woolf' on them." Note as well that the two formal sub-sections of the introduction are entitled "The rejection of Woolf" and "Rescuing Woolf for feminist politics: some points towards an alternative reading" (2, 8). Even though Moi's "alternative reading" theoretically disdains attention to the author, Moi herself seems unable to stop referring to one. And, in fact, the scenario of "rescuing" the author suggested by these titles seems akin to Schweickart's and Rich's defense of Dickinson. Furthermore, Moi vigorously confers authority on Woolf when she makes her a veritable patron saint of multiplicity. Consider how she ends her introduction by affirming "Virginia Woolf as the progressive, feminist writer of genius she undoubtedly was" and by declaring that "A feminist criticism that would do both justice and homage to its great mother and sister: this, surely, should be our goal" (18). Reading such a statement, I'm reminded of Foucault's observation that the privileging of *écriture* "has merely transposed the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity" (120). Moi's Woolf may not be "anonymous," given Moi's use of biographical information, but she appears a "transcendental" author of the meanings that Moi discovers in her texts. Moi's deification of Woolf becomes troubling as well when she later criticizes Elaine Showalter's views on the canon. There she claims Showalter fails to see that "a new canon would not be intrinsically less oppressive than the old" (78).

Moi's arguments about the "author-function" and its politics lack cogency, too, precisely because they tend to attribute an intrinsic progressiveness to a particular theoretical position. Moi doesn't detail the circumstances in which theoretical texts circulate and doesn't demonstrate that a privileging of textual multiplicity would always take forms that feminists would welcome. Like Schweickart, she neglects the issues of rhetoric that

Foucault raises when he calls for "an historical analysis of discourse," one which studies "not only the expressive value and formal transformations of discourse, but its mode of existence: the modifications and variations, within any culture, of modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation" (137). "Discourse" here would include not just the "literary" writing of a Dickinson or a Woolf, but also the theoretical writing of a Schweickart or a Moi. And a chief assumption behind such a rhetorical analysis would be that no textual inscription of a theoretical stance could guarantee certain political effects, regardless of the various uses to which its various readers would put it. Admittedly, scattered throughout Moi's book are statements which do point to this kind of study. Even in the introduction, she notes that "The strength of Kristevan theory lies in its emphasis on the politics of language as a material and social structure, but it takes little or no account of other conflicting ideological and material structures that must be part of any radical social transformation" (15). Later, in criticizing Myra Jehlen, she declares that "the same aesthetic device can be politically polyvalent, varying with the historical, political and literary context in which it occurs" (85). In her eventual chapter on Julia Kristeva, she urges feminist critics "to take the whole of the utterance (the whole text) as one's object, which means studying its ideological, political and psychoanalytical articulations, its relations with society, with the psyche and—not least—with other texts" (155-56). But as her valorization of Woolf for "steadily shifting, multiple perspectives" indicates, and as her consistent dismissal of liberal humanists shows, Moi doesn't build on her recognition of how rhetorical contexts may shift, prove multiple, while texts move through them, so that particular effects of those texts and the positions they argue can't be absolutely assured.

Of course, one can easily think of certain theoretical texts that seem unquestionably pernicious, incapable of being redeemed except as exemplifications of pathology. *Mein Kampf* comes to mind. But the political itineraries of "humanist" and "poststructuralist" arguments seem much more difficult to predict—especially when a detailed analysis of rhetorical context isn't first attempted. Moi's unwillingness to undertake one is best illustrated in two places in her introduction. Near the end of it, she states that "We have seen that current Anglo-American feminist criticism tends to read Woolf through traditional aesthetic categories, relying largely on a liberal-humanist version of the Lukacsian aesthetic, against which Brecht so effectively polemicized" (17). What does "effectively" mean here? How is Brecht's "effectiveness" to be gauged? If it can be gauged in various ways, how would Moi justify privileging any particular one? As the statement indicates, Moi's introduction at times links certain feminist critics with Lukacs' attachment to mimesis. In one such instance, she accuses Patricia Stubbs and Elaine Showalter of "perilously echoing . . . Lukacs's Stalinist views of the 'reactionary' nature of modernist writing" (6). Moi doesn't explain how Lukacs' aesthetic necessarily supports



Stalinism, as she implies. While perhaps she could indeed point out how historically it was correlated with Stalinism, the case for an intrinsic association between the two would seem considerably more problematic. At any rate, Moi doesn't bother making that case. She might, to be sure, claim that she doesn't actually say that Stubbs and Showalter are Stalinists—only that they “perilously echo” Lukacs' “Stalinist” views. Yet the suggestion of guilt-by-association is strongly there, and all the more disturbing because it's insinuated rather than made outright. Again, I'm not saying that Stubbs's and Showalter's theories are immune from appropriation by Stalinists. One of my chief arguments has been that no feminist critical position can be assured the political fate its proponent might wish it to reap. For this very reason, though, Moi can be accused of unfairness in stigmatizing Stubbs and Showalter in the way she does. And she seems insufficiently self-reflective in her failure to consider at the same time how her own poststructuralist aesthetic might be appropriated by people she abhors.

As I indicated at the outset, I won't conclude with a self-confident proclamation about how all the contrasts among feminists concerning the “author-function” and its politics might be resolved. Frankly, I'm unable to muster such a pronouncement—the issues are just too complex for me at this point in my thinking. What I've basically tried to put forth instead is a way of looking at feminist criticism that attends to elements of rhetoric, with “rhetoric” defined in both deconstructive and more classical senses. In taking this approach to Schweickart's and Moi's texts, I've personally come to intuit merits in each of their positions. For me, Schweickart is partially vindicated in that even poststructuralists like Moi apparently can't help invoking the author somehow. And yet Moi seems partially vindicated in that even more or less humanist theorists like Schweickart can't prove that the author is a well-integrated subjectivity who encourages a particular connection of reader with text. Each theorist neglects, however, the extensive analysis of rhetorical situations that I believe any study of sexual/textual politics must involve. Admittedly, I'm not sure exactly how representative these works are of feminist positions on the “author-function.” The complex relation between theory and example, an emerging theme in literary studies, demands reflection here as well. I believe the texts I've examined are reasonably typical of the position they advocate, but the rhetorical activity of other texts by feminist critics ought to be studied before generalizations about feminist treatments of the author are firmly established—if they ever are. Meanwhile, I think feminists should be skeptical when, on the one hand, Schweickart criticizes deconstruction by saying “It is dangerous for feminists to be overly enamored with the theme of impossibility” (56) (my emphasis), and, on the other hand, Moi criticizes certain humanists for “perilously echoing” (my emphasis) particular ideas. I'm tempted to end by urging that feminists abandon the vocabulary of “danger” and “peril” altogether when evaluating theoretical positions, given that such language can obscure all that

remains to be considered before their legitimacy can actually be weighed. But then again, one of the special and most valuable characteristics of feminist criticism is that it recognizes how theories can have serious consequences, how reading can involve great stakes. And one of the most important challenges of feminist criticism is that to keep that recognition in mind while carefully acknowledging the differences among its practitioners.

John Schilb  
Associated Colleges of the Midwest

#### WORKS CITED

- Foucault, Michel. “What Is an Author?” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977. 113-38.
- Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen, 1985.
- Rich, Adrienne. “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson.” *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: Norton, 1979, 157-83.
- Schweickart, Patrocino P. “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading.” *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*. Ed. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Schweickart. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986, pp. 31-62.

"CONSISTENCY IS ALL WE ASK"; OR LEGAL RHETORIC  
AND THE APPEAL TO A HIGHER COURT

Judith Roof

I am so convinced by the mode of rhetorical cross-readings offered by John Schilb that I am barely able to resist the temptation to employ it myself. On John Schilb. But however fit a response or apt a punishment in a system of poetic (or should I say rhetorical) justice, I would be likely to replicate its appeal to a higher order.

Schilb offers a model for reading and critique based, presumably, on Foucault's questioning of the integrity and singularity of the "author-function." Focusing initially on Foucault's connection of authorial attributes to reader projection, Schilb proposes a rhetorical, deconstructive critique of two authors whom he identifies as feminist and whom he also designates as representative of two feminist factions. Tracing assumptions about the author function via a deconstruction of each author's rhetoric, Schilb hopes to connect the feminist writers' rhetorical "exclusions" to their theoretical positions *vis à vis* their notion of an author and then to connect these more or less unstated assumptions about the author function to the posture of their representative feminist positions. The point lies in what Schilb rightly declares to be presumptuous: an adjudication of "two conceptions of feminism."

If I were to undertake a "Schilbian" reading of Schilb's paper which would be done, of course, to uncover Schilb's own rhetorical slips in relation to the function of the critic/author, I might quickly point to his unquestioned adoption of binary models as a way of structuring—in fact creating—his entire inquiry, to his posing of Schweickart against Moi, traditional feminism against deconstructive feminism, American against French, pragmatic against "multiplicity in textual meaning," humanist against poststructuralist. I might also challenge his somewhat reductive definition of these "two conceptions" of feminism, as well as the authority under which he selects Patrocino Schweickart and Toril Moi as representative of these two groups. While it is obvious that Schilb selects works that treat at least implicitly the notion of author, it is interesting that his stated reasons for choosing these particular essays have to do with their winning awards or being popular, a kind of unstated trust in the value of popular acclaim—in an authority. Though one might argue that popular texts have a greater chance of affecting a larger number of readers, it would probably be useful to penetrate these notions of popularity and determine with whom these books are popular and why. And while one would probably find inconsistencies in the rhetoric of most critics, Schilb would certainly have less of an argument if he had posed a third feminist critic as a party

in the suit, say Jane Gallop, Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson or any one of a number of feminist critics who play quite consciously with their own assumptions about the author function. In other words, feminist criticism is not as simple as this, and Schweickart and Moi are not necessarily representative.

I would also read through another of Schilb's argumentative strategies—the displacement and slippage in authorial function that occurs because of the sheer number of authors present in the courtroom. The argument is not a question of one critic reading two authors, but rather of one critic, John Schilb, reading Patrocino Schweickart who reads Adrienne Rich who reads Emily Dickinson, and Toril Moi who reads Elaine Showalter *et al.* reading Virginia Woolf. In effect, we have a multiple party suit in which authorial function, like guilt, liability, or cause of action, is subrogated by or attributed to some other party in a kind of endless circulation which makes it difficult to determine whose assumptions are where, but makes it simple to merge authorial assumptions from reader to reader on each side of the controversy. The sheer number of authorial layers in these essays, as well as the choice of authors, tends to reinforce the notion of opposing schools, of a kind of unity of opposition, of complete cadres of opposing authors and critics, of Dickinson versus Woolf, American versus British, and so on. The scenario of readers reading readers reading writers is common in feminist criticism, but so is a consciousness of the tendency to project in the process. I guess where Schilb would like Schweickart to examine differences more, I would like to see Schilb recognize difference more, to recognize a multiplicity of critical voices, some of whom already employ versions of the reading strategies he proposes.

However, all of this is beside the point which is, I believe, to what good might all of this be used? What does this tell us about the project of feminist criticism and its varied use of critical strategies? If there is a relationship between notions of author-function and critical strategy that would tell us something about the project and assumptions of feminist criticism, might not that relation be as informative if explored in what the critic assumes to be his or her own function as reader/author? What would a rhetorical cross-reading of all of the authors in play here tell us about what the critics think their own authorial function is? Along these lines, then, what interests me and what I think is curious about Schilb's paper, as well as the essays it critiques, is a kind of juridical metaphor which betrays an underlying desire for wholeness, unity, and consistency reflected in Schweickart's introductory discussion of reading utopias, Rich's use of the witness metaphor referred to by Schweickart, and Moi's desire for critical "justice." In reading in a reverse direction, I am merely utilizing a long-standing feminist, perhaps psychoanalytic, perhaps deconstructive methodology. Accepting the notion of my reading of these papers as part projection, I am interested in the kind of peculiar affinity of their projections; and even though my choice of this metaphor has a kind of totalizing, unifying effect in itself, it is interesting to observe the unexamined

positioning of the critic as judge and texts as plaintiffs or defendants subject to a higher law.

Schilb begins or perhaps picks up the legal metaphor as he appears to slide away from it, positioning his binary oppositions as competing plaintiffs. He says: "It would be presumptuous of me, as an individual theorist and a male theorist at that, to try decisively adjudicating these two conceptions of feminism here. Instead, I'll simply critique how a particular advocate of each links the potential of feminism to a certain notion of the woman author." The superimposition of a legal metaphor here shifts Schweickart and Moi from practitioners of a particular criticism to advocates of a certain, perhaps undefined, feminist position and poses Schilb, as the critic between them, as judge, a role Schilb mentions, then pretends to abdicate. The shift from practitioner to advocate replicates the representative function Schilb has already assigned Schweickart and Moi; and in making them attorneys for causes, he unifies and consolidates the sides he has previously defined. The point, of course, as in any legal context is to find a compromise, a solution to competing claims, to create in Schilb's words, the "sustained conversation between them" that has been lacking.

This unacknowledged appeal to a solution, to a unified approach that would join critical practice and political praxis, is echoed in other metaphors Schilb employs, in his desire to "predict" the political itineraries of "humanist" and "poststructuralist" arguments, to the assurance of a "political fate" that is positioned as a wished for harvest to be "reaped." While Schilb ends by reaffirming the fact of difference, his conclusion is oddly posed as a court decision, in which he, as a scholarly Solomon, tries to put the child back together and duly determines that it can't yet be done. In his "findings" both sides are each partially "vindicated" and properly warned against using the words "danger" and "peril" when talking about critical approaches. In Schilb's scenario, the critic is both prosecutor and judge; the writer/reader is subject to the laws of rhetorical consistency.

This would not be at all remarkable if it weren't for the fact that both Schweickart and Moi appeal to the same metaphor. In her reading of Rich reading Dickinson, Schweickart discusses Rich's use of the "witness for the defense" metaphor in relation to Emily Dickinson. Schweickart's reading of Rich's metaphor poses a different trial altogether: she says, "the feminist reader speaks as a witness in defense of the woman writer. Here we see clearly that gender is crucial. The feminist reader takes the part of the woman writer against patriarchal misreadings that trivialize or distort her work" (46). While the trial Schweickart speaks about seems to be the trial of the woman writer by patriarchy, the metaphor fits neatly, in fact acquiesces, to an implied patriarchal judicial system where the male critic, like Schilb, is posed as the judge. The woman reader is witness where Schilb would make her advocate. Gender, as Schweickart declares, does seem to be crucial, but only in determining the role of the woman reader in patriarchy, the fact or hegemony of which is assumed. The role of

witness instead of advocate reflects Schweickart's notion of a reading utopia as a community of connections between writer and reader, of an egalitarian understanding among women in the face of the oppressive difference of patriarchy.

Toril Moi also appeals to a goal of unity in juridical terms; at the conclusion of her introduction, she urges a joinder of politics and critical methodology when she says: "A feminist criticism that would do both justice and homage to its great mother and sister [Virginia Woolf]: this, surely, should be our goal" (18). Her use of the words "justice" and "homage" again appeals to an otherwise apparently submerged patriarchal system, quiescent during Moi's sustained indictment of feminist criticism, an indictment, like Schilb's, made in the name of consistency. "Justice" as the end result of the critical courtroom battle means simply appropriate treatment in Moi's terms; justice as compromise and vindication also somewhat self-reflectively stands in as the result we want. "Homage," derived from "homo" or man, is a strange appeal for a lack of equality, for a kind of service, fealty, or reverence which implies a hierarchy of writer and reader, implicitly echoed in Moi's dual reference to Woolf as mother and sister. Moi's "goal," thus, is a strangely multiple exhortation, embodying contradictions which may nonetheless coexist. Her desire, however, seems to be to find a way to unify these differences, to subsume them in one politically correct goal to which we might all aspire.

This may seem to return right back to Foucault, who, in his detailing of the author-function overtly connects the author-function precisely to a legal system: "the author function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, articulates the universe of discourses" (Foucault 113). But while Foucault identifies the ideological location of authority by which the author-function is sustained, he also acknowledges the dominance of that system, of that higher law into which all difference is dissolved. If indeed the author-function is complicit with this juridical and institutional system, feminists might consider investigating the relation between juridical systems and the author-function, between the system that "encompasses, determines and articulates" all and the critics and authors who try to critique, subvert, or overthrow such hegemonic systems. Perhaps we ought not worry about the author-function but about the system which perpetuates it.

The point is this: the courtroom tactics and the legal metaphors reveal or emphasize a hidden desire or projection of a desire for consistency, for unity. What does studying the exclusions and contradictions in a text tell us except that we are not consistent, except that we slide back in our most deconstructive moments, to a belief in a logocentric universe where difference may be finally erased, to a subjection to this higher order? While we think it may tell us how that process occurs, our conclusions as critics simply form another deconstructable, readable drive for consistency as each layer of criticism appears to inch closer to that higher law. The impetus towards consistency which underlies Schilb's, Moi's, Schweickart's, and

now my approach in different ways is indeed a projection, as critic-readers attempt to wrench other critics' readings into their own projection of consistency. If Schilb's paper stands for anything, it illustrates this process from layer to layer, but to continue the metaphor, the jury is not yet in. Can feminist criticism allow difference and inconsistency for its own sake? Is attempting to "read" contradiction simply a way of appropriating and recuperating the inconsistent, of reworking it to match our own projections? Can we escape our allegiance to a higher law of logic, rhetoric, and justice, or in so doing, do we defeat ourselves, suffer a kind of lack-of-rigor mortis? While we dissect the notion of author, perhaps we ought simultaneously to dissolve the notion of text and question the origin of the impulse towards logical consistency and reliance upon this "higher order" upon which the entire project rests.

Judith Roof  
University of Delaware

#### WORKS CITED

- Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" The Foucault Reader. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984, 101-20.
- Moi, Toril. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory. London: Methuen, 1985.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson." On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978. New York: Norton, 1979, 157-83.
- Schweickart, Patrocino. "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading." Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts. Ed. Elizabeth Flynn and Schweickart. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986, 31-62.
- Schilb, John. "The Politics of the 'Author-Function' in Contemporary Feminist Criticism." Meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association, Columbus, Ohio, November 13, 1987.