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POST-MODERN CRITICISM

STRUCTURE

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- Ferdinand De Saussure: "Nature of Linguistics Sign"
- Jacques Derrida: "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences"
- Elaine Showalter: "Feminist Criticism in Wilderness"
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• LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to :

- Describe the Ferdinand de Saussure: "nature of linguistics sign"
- Discuss the Jacques Derrida: "structure, sign and play in the discourse of human sciences".
- Examine the Elaine Showalter: "feminist criticism in wilderness".

• INTRODUCTION

Early in the 20th century the school of criticism known as Russian Formalism, and slightly later the New Criticism in Britain and America, came to dominate the study and discussion of literature. Both schools emphasized the close reading of texts, uplifting it far above generalizing discussion and crapsheet about either authorial intention (to say nothing of the author's psychology or biography, which became almost taboo subjects) or reader response. This emphasis on form and rigorous attention to "the words themselves" has persevered, after the decline of these critical doctrines themselves.

Ferdinand de Saussure, (26 November 1857-22 February 1913) was a Swiss linguist whose ideas laid a foundation for many significant developments in linguistics in the 20th century. He is widely considered one of the fathers of 20th century linguistics. However, many modern linguists and philosophers of language consider his ideas outdated. Some philosophers of language believe that these critics are themselves

applying outdated agy-bargy to portray Saussurean ideas as obscurantist or consciously deformed. While Saussure's concepts—particularly semiotics—have received little to no attention in modern linguistic textbooks, his ideas have significantly influenced the humanities and social sciences.

Jacques Derrida, (July 15, 1930 - October 9, 2004) was a French philosopher, born in French Algeria. He developed the critical theory known as deconstruction, his work has been labeled as post-structuralism and associated with postmodern philosophy. His prolific output of more than 40 published books, together with essays and public speaking, has had a significant impact upon the humanities, particularly on literary theory and burkes philosophy. Perhaps Derrida's most quoted and famous assertion ever is the axial statement of his whole essay on Rousseau (part of his highly influential *Of Grammatology*, 1967), "there is nothing outside the text" meaning that there is nothing outside context. Critics of Derrida have countless times quoted it as a slogan to characterize and denounce deconstruction.

Elaine Showalter (born 21 January 1941) is an American literary critic, feminist, and writer on cultural and social issues. She is one of the founders of feminist literary criticism in United States academia, developing the concept and practice of gynocritics. She is well known and respected in both academic and popular cultural fields. She has written and edited numerous books and articles focused on a variety of subjects, from feminist literary criticism to fashion, sometimes sparking widespread altercation, especially with her work on illnesses. Showalter has been a television critic for *People* magazine and a commentator on BBC radio and television.

- **FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE: "NATURE OF LINGUISTICS SIGN"**

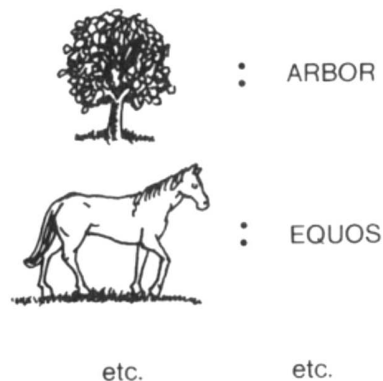
Text

1. Sign, mattered Signifier

Some people regard language, when reduced to its elements as a naming-process only—a list of words, each corresponding to the thing that it names. For example:

This stereotype is open to criticism at several points. It undertakes that ready-made ideas exist before words; it does not tell us whether a name is vocal or psychological in nature (arbor, for instance, can he-considered from either viewpoint); finally, it lets us assume that the linking of a name and a thing is a very simple operation—an

hypothetical that is anything but true. But this rather naive boulevard can bring us near the truth by showing us that the linguistic unit is a double entity, one formed by the associating of two terms.

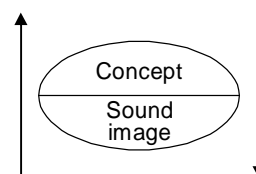


We have seen in considering the speaking-circuit that both terms involved in the linguistic sign are psychological and are united in the brain by an associative bond. This point must be emphasized.

The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The concluding is not the material sound, a purely thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material", it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract.

The psychological character of our sound-images becomes assumed when we observe our own speech. Without moving our lips or tongue, we can talk to ourselves or recite mentally a selection of verse. Because we regard the words of our language as sound-images, we must avoid speaking of the "phonemes" that make up the words. This term, which suggests vocal activity, is applicable to the spoken word only, to the realization of the inner image in expatiate. We can avoid that misunderstanding by speaking of the sounds and syllables of a word provided we remember that the names refer to the sound-image.

The linguistic sign is then a two-sided psychological entity that can be represented by the drawing :



The two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other. Whether we try to find the meaning of the Latin word *arbor* or the word that Latin uses to designate the concept "tree", it is clear that only the associations sanctioned by that language appear to us to conform to reality, and we disregard whatever others might be imagined.

Our definition of the linguistic sign poses an important question of terminology. I call the combination of a concept and a sound-image a sign, but in current usage the term generally appoints only a sound-image, a word, for example (*arbor*, etc.). One tends to forget that *arbor* is called a sign only because it carries the concept "tree", with the result that the idea of the sensory part alludes the idea of the whole.

Arcane would disappear if the three notions involved here were designated by three names, each suggesting and opposing the others. I propose to retain the word sign [*signe*] to designate the whole and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified [*signifié*] and signifier [*signifiant*]; the last two terms have the advantage of indicating the opposition that separates them from each other and from the whole of which they are parts. As regards sign, if I am satisfied with it, this is simply because I do not know of any word to replace it, the ordinary language suggesting no other.

The linguistic sign, as defined, has two primeval characteristics. In articulating them I am also positing the basic principles of any study of this type.

2. Principle I: The Arbitrary Nature of the Sign

The bond between the signifier and the mattered is imperious. Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: the linguistic sign is arbitrary.

The idea of "sister" is not linked by any inner relationship to the succession of sounds *s->-r* which serves as its signifier in French; that it could be represented equally by just any other sequence is proved by differences among languages and by the very existence of different languages: the mattered "ox" has as its signifier *b->-f* on one side of the border and *o-k-s* (*Ochs*) on the other.

No one disputes the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign, but it is often easier to discover a truth than to assign to it its proper place. Principle I dominates all the linguistics of language; its consequences are numberless. It is true that not all of them are equally obvious at first

glance; only after many detours does one discover them, and with them the primordial importance of the principle.

One remark in passing: when semiology becomes organized as a science, the question will arise whether or not it properly includes modes of expression based on completely natural signs, such as pantomime. Supposing that the new science welcomes them, its main concern will still be the whole group of systems grounded on the arbitrariness of the sign. In fact, every means of expression used in society is based in principle on collective behavior or—what amounts to the same thing—on assembly. Polite formulas, for instance, though often endowed with a certain natural revealers (as in the case of a Chinese who greets his emperor by bowing down to the ground nine times), are nonetheless fixed by rule; it is this rule and not the intrinsic value of the gesticulation that obliges one to use them. Signs that are wholly arbitrary realize better than the others the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the master-pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system.

The word symbol has been used to designate the linguistic sign, or more specifically, what is here called the signifier. Principle I in particular weighs against the use of this term. One characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly imperious; it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the mattered. The symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as a chariot.

The word imperious also calls for comment. The term should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker (we shall see below that the individual does not have the power to change a sign in any way once it has become established in the linguistic community); I mean that it is unmotivated, i.e., imperious in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified.

3. Principle II: The Linear Nature of the Signifier

The signifier, being auditory, is unfolded exclusively in time from which it gets the following characteristics : (a) it represents a span, and (b) the span is measurable 'in a single dimension; it is a line.

While Principle II is obvious, ostensibly linguists have always neglected to state it, doubtless because they found it too simple; nevertheless, it is fundamental, and its consequences are incalculable. Its importance equals that of Principle I; the whole mechanism of language depends

upon it. In contrast to visual signifiers (navigational signals, etc.) which can offer simultaneous groupings in several dimensions, auditory signifiers have at their command only the dimension of time. Their elements are presented in succession; they form a chain. This feature becomes readily ostensible when they are represented in writing and the spatial line of graphic marks is substituted for succession in time.

Sometimes the linear nature of the signifier is not obvious. When I accent a syllable, for instance, it seems that I am concentrating more than one significant element on the same point. But this is an illusion; the syllable and its accentuation constitute only one phonational act. There is no duality within the act but only different oppositions to what foregoes and what follows.

Summary

The Sign, the Signifier, and the Signified.

The sign, the signifier, and the signified are concepts of the school of thought known as structuralism, founded by Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, during lectures he gave between 1907 and 1911 at the University of Geneva. His views revolutionized the study of language and innovated modern linguistics. The theory also abstruse influenced other disciplines, especially anthropology, sociology, and literary criticism. The central tenet of structuralism is that the phenomena of human life, whether language or media, are not intelligible except through their network of relationships, making the sign and the system (or structure) in which the sign is embedded primary concepts. As such, a sign—for instance, a word—gets its meaning only in relation to or in contrast with other signs in a system of signs.

In general, the signifier and the signified are the components of the sign, itself formed by the associative link between the signifier and signified. Even with these two components, however, signs can exist only in opposition to other signs. That is, signs are created by their value relationships with other signs. The contrasts that form between signs of the same nature in a network of relationships is how signs derive their meaning. As the translator of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, Roy Harris, puts it:

"The essential feature of Saussure's linguistic sign is that, being intrinsically imperious, it can be identified only by contrast with coetaneous signs of the same nature, which together constitute a structured system."

In Saussure's theory of linguistics, the signifier is the sound and the signified is the thought. The linguistic sign is neither notional nor phonic, neither thought nor sound. Rather, it is the whole of the link that unites sound and idea, signifier and signified. The properties of the sign are by nature abstract, not concrete. Saussure: "A sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern."

Lexicon

At least two other terms are used for signifier and signified: signifier = signal = signifier signified = signification = signified

Mistakes

A common mistake is to explicate the signifier and the sign as the same thing. In my view, another common mistake, perhaps related to the first, is to speak of a signifier without a signified or a sign, or to speak of a signified without a signifier or a sign. Used in reference to Saussure's original formulations, both locutions are absurd. In language, a lone signifier would be an utterly meaningless sound or concatenation of sounds. But it is even more bizarre to speak of a signified without signifier or sign: It would, I believe, have to be a sort of half thought, something never thought before, a thought that exists exclusively outside the domain of language, a fleeting, private, chaotic thought that makes no sense even to the thinker — an unthought. Another mistake is to endow a sign with meaning outside the presence of other signs. Except as part of the whole system, signs do not and cannot exist.

Expansion beyond Language

Saussure provides an unequivocal basis for the expansion of his science of signs beyond linguistics: "It is possible", he says, "to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. ... We shall call it semiology. It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. Since it does not yet exist, one cannot say for certain that it will exist. But it has a right to exist, a place ready for it in advance."

Roland Barthes is one scholar who took Saussure's counsel to heart. He helped found the modern science of semiology, applying structuralism to the "myths" he saw all around him: media, fashion, art, photography, architecture, and especially literature. For **Barthes**, "myth is a system of communication." It is a "message", a "mode of signification," a "form" (Mythologies, p. 109). With a argosy of complexities

and finespuns, Barthes extends **Saussure's** structuralism and applies it to myth as follows:

"Myth is a distinctive system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system. That which is a sign (namely the afflictive total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by table" (Mythologies, p. 114).

Because of the convolutions and finespuns of Barthes's semiology, I will stop here and let you pick up the strand for yourself by reading the highly informative chapter "Myth Today" in Mythologies.

A Final Word: The Indeterminacy of Meaning

Regardless of how linguistic signs (and perhaps other signs, too) are analyzed, meaning may in fact be unrecoverable, both to the analyst and to the participants in an exchange of signs. It is my belief that meaning is indeed ultimately indeterminate, a position that bodes well with what very well be a fact of language. With respect to indeterminacy, some linguists, postmodern theorists, and analytic philosophers seem to be in agreement. **Brown and Yule**, both of whom are linguists, write that "the discernment and exegesis of each text is essentially subjective."

The postmodern theorists, meantime, hold that every decoding is another encoding. Jacques Derrida, for example, maintains that the possibility of exegesis and reinterpretation is endless, with meaning getting any provisional significance only from speaker, hearer, or observer: Meaning is necessarily projection. **Bakhtin**, too says, "the exegesis of symbolic structures is forced into an infinity of symbolic contextual meanings and therefore it cannot be scientific in the way rigorous sciences are scientific."

Both Bakhtin's and Derrida's views are surprisingly not unlike those of W. V. O. Quine's in "The Indeterminacy of Translation", where **Quine** argued that "the totality of subjects' behavior leaves it indefinable whether one translation of their sayings or another is correct."

Wittgenstein pays homage to the indeterminacy of meaning as well: "Any exegesis still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and

cannot give it any support. Exegesis by themselves do not determine meaning."

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certain natural expressiveness (as in the case of a Chinese who greets his emperor by bowing down to the ground nine times), are nonetheless fixed by rule; it is this rule and not the intrinsic value of the gestures that obliges one to use them. Signs that are wholly arbitrary realize better than the others the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the master-pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system.

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In concluding let us consider two objections that might be raised to the establishment of Principle I:

1. Onomatopoeia might be used to prove that the choice of the signifier is not always *imperious*. But onomatopoeic formulations are never organic elements of a linguistic system. Besides, their number is much smaller than is generally supposed. Words like French *fouet* 'whip' or *glas* 'bong' may strike certain ears with suggestive sonority, but to see that they have not always had this property we need only examine their Latin forms (*fouet* is derived from *fagus* 'beech-tree', *glas* from *classicum* 'sound of a trumpet'). The quality of their present sounds, or rather the quality that is attributed to them, is a fortuitous result of phonetic evolution. As for authentic onomatopoeic words (e.g., *glug-glug*, *tick-tock*, etc.), not only are they limited in number, but also they are chosen somewhat capriciously, for they are only approximate and more or less prevailing replicas of certain sounds (cf. English *bruit* and French *ouaoua*). In addition, once these words have been introduced into the language, they are to a certain extent subjected to the same evolution — phonetic, morphological, etc. — that other words undergo (cf. *pigeon*, ultimately from Vulgar Latin *pipio*, derived in turn from an onomatopoeic formation): obvious proof that they lose something of their original character in order to assume that of the linguistic sign in general, which is unmotivated.

2. Interjections, closely related to onomatopoeia, can be attacked on the same grounds and come no closer to refuting our thesis. One is tempted to see in them instinctive expressions of reality dictated, so to speak, by natural forces. But for most interjections we can show that there is no fixed bond between their *referent*

and their signifier. We need only compare two languages on this point to see how much such expressions differ from one language to the next (e.g., the English equivalent of French *aie!* is 'ouch!'). We know, moreover, that many interjections were once words with specific meanings (cf. French *diable!* 'darn!' *mordieu!* 'golly!' from *mort Dieu* 'God's death,' etc.).

- **JACQUES DERRIDA: "STRUCTURE, SIGN AND PLAY IN THE EXPATRIATE OF HUMAN SCIENCES"**

Text

Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an "event", if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which it is precisely the function of structural-or structuralist-thought to reduce or to suspect. But let me use the term "event" anyway, employing it with caution and as if in quotation marks. In this sense, this event will have the exterior form of a rift and a redoubling.

It would be easy enough to show that the concept of structure and even the word "structure" itself are as old as the episteme—that is to say, as old as western science and western philosophy—and that their roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language, into whose deepest recesses the episteme dives to gather them together once more, making them part of itself in a metaphorical displacement. Nevertheless, up until the event which I wish to mark out and define, structure-or rather the structurality of structure-although it has always been involved, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed crigin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure-one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure-but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the freeplay of the structure. No doubt that by orienting and organizing the concinnity of the system, the center of a structure permits the freeplay of its elements inside the total form. And even today the novelties of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.

Nevertheless, the center also closes off the freeplay it opens up and makes possible. Qua center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the alterations or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. At least this permutation has always remained interdicted (I use this word deliberately). Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurally. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, weird, within the

structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure-although it represents concinnity itself, the condition of the episteme as philosophy or science-is contradictorily coherent. And, as always, concinnity in dichotomy expresses the force of a desire. The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a freeplay based on a fundamental ground, a freeplay which is constituted upon a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is itself beyond the reach of the freeplay. With this assuredness agita can be mastered, for anxiety is incessantly the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were from the very beginning at stake in the game. From the basis of what we therefore call the center (and which, because it can be either inside or outside, is as readily called the origin as the end, as readily arche as telos), the repetitions, the substitutions, the transformations, and the permutations are always taken from a history of meaning [sens]-that is, a history, period-whose origin may always be revealed or whose end may always be anticipated in the form of presence. This is why one could perhaps say that the movement of any archeology, like that of any eschatology, is an accomplice of this reduction of the structurality of structure and always attempts to conceive of structure from the basis of a full presence which is out of play.

If this is so, the whole history of the concept of structure, before the rift I spoke of, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix-if you will pardon me for demonstrating so little and for being so elliptical in order to bring me more quickly to my principal theme-is the determination of being as presence I in all the senses of this word. It would be possible to show that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the I center have always designated the constant of a presence-eidos, arche, telos, energieia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject) aletheia [truth], transcendentality, I consciousness, or moral sense, God, man, and so forth.

The event I called a rift, the dislocation implied to at the beginning (of this paper, would presumably have come about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought, that is to say, repeated, and this is why I said that this dislocation was repetition in all of the senses of this

word. From then on it became necessary to think the law which governed, as it were, the desire for the center in the constitution of structure and the process of signification prescribing its deportations and its substitutions for this law of the central presence-but a central presence which was never itself, which has always already been transported outside itself in its *locum tenens*. The *locum tenens* does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow pre-existed it. From then on it was probably necessary to begin to think that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a being present, that the center had no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an fathomless number of sign-substitutions came into play. This moment was that in which language forayed the universal problematic; that in which, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became expatiate-provided we can agree on this word-that is to say, when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental mattered, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental mattered extends the bailiwick and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*.

Where and how does this decentering, this novelties of the structurality of structure, occur? It would be somewhat naive to refer to an event, a doctrine, or an author in order to appoint this occurrence. It is no doubt part of the totality of an epoch, our own, but still it has already begun to annunciate itself and begun to work. Nevertheless, if I wished to give some sort of indication by choosing one or two "names", and by recalling those authors in whose expatiates this occurrence has most nearly maintained its most radical formulation, I would probably cite the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without truth present); the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession; and, more radically, the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of being as presence. But all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a sort of circle. This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relationship between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics. There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language-no syntax and no lexicon-which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. To pick out

one example from many: the metaphysics of presence is attacked with the help of the concept of the sign. But from the moment anyone wishes this to show, as I suggested a moment ago, that there is no paranormal or blessed signified and, that the domain or the interplay of signification has, henceforth, no limit, he ought to extend his refusal to the concept and to the word sign itself-which is precisely what cannot be done. For the signification "sign" has always been apprehended and determined, in its sense, as sign-of, signifier referring to a signified, signifier different from its signified. If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word signifier itself which ought to be abandoned as a metaphysical concept. When Levi-Strauss says in the preface to *The Raw and the Cooked* that he has "sought to transcend the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible by placing [himself] from the very beginning at the level of signs", the necessity, the force, and the legitimacy of his act cannot make us forget that the concept of the sign cannot in itself surpass or bypass this opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The concept of ethnologist accepts into his expatiate the quad of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he is employed in condemning them. This necessity is irreducible; it is not a historical contingency. We ought to consider very carefully all its allusions. But if nobody can escape this necessity, and if no one is therefore responsible for giving in to it, however little, this does not mean that all the ways of giving in to it are of an equal relevance. The quality and the fruitfulness of a discourse are perhaps measured by the critical tribulation with which this relationship to the history of metaphysics and to heritable concepts is thought. Here it is a question of a critical relationship to the language of the human sciences and a question of a critical responsibility of the expatiate. It is a question of putting expressly and systematically the problem of a expatiate which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary of that heritage itself. A problem of economy and strategy,

If I now go on to employ an examination of the texts of Levi-Strauss as an example, it is not only because of the privilege vouchsafed to ethnology among the human sciences, nor yet because the thought of Levi-Strauss weighs heavily on the contemporary theoretical situation. It is above all because a certain choice has made itself evident in the work of Levi-Strauss and because a certain doctrine has been enlarged there, and smack-dab in a more or less univocal manner, in relation to this critique of language and to this critical language in the human sciences.

In order to follow this movement in the text of Levi-Strauss, let me choose as one guiding thread among others the opposition between

nature and culture. In spite of all its revivify and its disguises, this opposition is innate to philosophy. It is even older than Plato. It is at least as old as the Sophists. Since the statement of the opposition - [Physis/nomos, physis/techne [nature/culture, nature/art or making] - it has been passed on to us by a whole historical chain which opposes "nature" to the law, to education, to art, to technics - and also to liberty, to the imperious, to history, to society, to the mind, and so on. From the beginnings of his quest and from his first book, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Levi-Strauss has felt at one and the same time the necessity of utilizing this opposition and the impossibility of making it acceptable. In the *Elementary Structures*, he begins from this axiom or definition: that belongs to nature which is universal and instinctive, not depending on any particular culture or on any determinate norm. That belongs to culture, on the other hand, which depends on a system of norms regulating society and is therefore capable of varying from one social structure to another. These two definitions are of the traditional type. But, in the very first pages of the *Elementary Structures*, Levi-Strauss, who has begun to give these concepts an acceptable standing, encounters what he calls a scandal, that is to say, something which no longer tolerates the nature/culture opposition he has accepted and which seems to require at one and the same time the bases of nature and those of culture. This scandal is the barring. The barring is universal, in this sense one could call it natural. But it is also a barring, a system of norms and embargos; in this sense one could call it cultural.

Let us assume therefore that everything universal in man derives from the order of nature and is characterized by spontaneity, that everything which is subject to a norm belongs to culture and presents the attributes of the relative and the particular. We then find ourselves brazened by a fact, or rather an garb of facts, which, in the light of the antecedent definitions, is not far from appeanog as a scandal: the prohibition of incest presents without the least equivocation, and indissolubly linked together, the two characteristics in which we recognized the contradictory attributes of two exclusive orders. The barring of incest constitutes a rule, but a rule, alone of all the social rules, which possesses at the same time a universal character.

Obviously, there is no scandal except in the interior of a system of concepts sanctioning the difference between nature and culture. In beginning his work with the factum of the incest-prohibition, Levi-Strauss thus puts himself in a position entailing that this difference, which has always been assumed to be self-evident, becomes obliterated or disputed. For, from the moment that the barring can no longer be envisaged within the nature/culture opposition, it can no longer be said

that it is a scandalous fact, a nucleus of opacity within a network of transparent significations. The incest-prohibition is no longer a scandal one meets with or comes up against in the domain of traditional concepts; it is something which escapes these concepts and certainly precedes them—probably as the condition of their possibility. It could perhaps be said that the whole of philosophical conception, systematically relating itself to the nature/culture opposition, is designed to leave in the domain of the unthinkable the very thing that makes this conception possible: the origin of the barring of incest.

I have dealt too cursorily with this example, only one among so many others, but the example nevertheless reveals that language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique. This critique may be undertaken along two tracks, in two "manners." Once the limit of nature/culture opposition makes itself felt, one might want to question systematically and rigorously the history of these concepts. This is a first action. Such a systematic and historic questioning would be neither a philological nor a philosophical action in the classic sense of these words. Concerning oneself with the founding concepts of the whole history of philosophy, de-constituting them, is not to undertake the task of the philologist or of the classic historian of philosophy. In spite of appearances, it is probably the most daring way of making the beginnings of a step outside of philosophy. The step "outside philosophy" is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it long ago with assumptive ease, and who are in general swallowed up in metaphysics by the whole body of the expatiate that they claim to have pellucid from it.

In order to avoid the possibly sterilizing effect of the first way, the other choice—which I feel corresponds more nearly to the way chosen by Levi-Strauss—consists in conserving in the field of existential discovery all these old concepts, while at the same time exposing here and there their limits, treating them as tools which can still be of use. No longer is any truth-value attributed to them; there is a readiness to abandon them if necessary if other instruments should appear more useful. In the meantime, their relative efficacy is exploited, and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces. Thus it is that the language of the human sciences criticizes itself. Levi-Strauss thinks that in this way he can separate method from truth, the instruments of the method and the objective significations aimed at by it. One could almost say that this is the primary assertion of Levi-Strauss; in any event, the first words of the *Elementary Structures* are: "One begins to understand that the distinction between state of nature and state of society (we would be more apt to say today: state of nature and state of culture), while lacking any acceptable historical signification, presents a value which fully

just)fies its use by modern sociology: its value as a methodological instrument."

Levi-Strauss will always remain faithful to this double burne: to preserve as an instrument that whose truth-value he criticizes.

On the one hand, he will continue in effect to contest the value of the nature/culture opposition. More than thirteen years after the *Elementary Structures*, *The Savage Mind* faithfully echoes the text I have just quoted: "The opposition between nature and culture which I have previously insisted on seems today to offer a value which is above all methodological," And this methodological value is not affected by its "ontological" non-value (as could be said, if this novelties were not suspect here): "It would not be enough to have absorbed particular humanities into a general humanity; this first enterprise prepares the way for others ... which belong to the natural and exact sciences: to desegregate culture into nature, and finally, to desegregate life into the totality of its physiochemical conditions."

On the other hand, still in *The Savage Mind*, he presents as what he calls bricolage what might be called the discourse of this method. The bricoleur, says Levi-Strauss, is someone who uses "the means at hand," that is, the instruments he finds at his temperament around him, those which are already there, which had riot been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogenous—and so forth. There is therefore a critique of language in the form of bricolage, and it has even been possible to say that bricolage is the critical language itself. I am thinking in particular of the article by G[erard] Genette, "Structuralisme et Critique litteraire", published in homage to Levi-Strauss in a special issue of *L'Arc*, where it is stated that the analysis of bricolage could "be applied almost word for word" to criticism, and especially to "literary criticism",

If one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concept from the text of a prescription which is more or less consequent or ruined, it must be said that every expatiate is bricoleur. The engineer, whom Levi-Strauss opposes to the bricoleur, should be one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth. A subject who would supposedly be the absolute origin of his own discourse and would supposedly construct it "out of nothing", "jut of whole cloth", would be the creator of the verbe, the verbe itself.

The notion of the engineer who had supposedly broken with all forms of bricolage is therefore a theological idea; and since Levi-Strauss tells us elsewhere that bricolage is mythopoetic, the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the expatriate. From the moment that we cease to believe in such an engineer and in an expatriate breaking with the received historical discourse, as soon as it is admitted that every finite expatriate is bound by a certain bricolage, and that the engineer and the scientist are also species of bricoleurs then the very idea of bricolage is menaced and the difference in which it took on its meaning decomposes.

This brings out the second thread which might guide us in what is being disentangled here.

Levi-Strauss describes bricolage not only as an intellectual activity but also as a mythopoetical activity. One reads in *The Savage Mind*, "Like bricolage on the technical level, mythical reflection can attain brilliant and unforeseen results on the intellectual level. Reciprocally, the mythopoetical character of bricolage has often been noted."

But the remarkable endeavour of Levi-Strauss is not simply to put forward, notably in the most recent of his investigations, a structural science or knowledge of fables and of mythological activity. His endeavour also appears—I would say almost from the first—in the status which he accords to his own discourse on myths, to what he calls his "mythologicals". It is here that his expatriate on the fable reflects on itself and criticizes itself. And this moment, this critical period, is ostensibly of concern to all the languages which share the field of the human sciences. What does Levi-Strauss say of his "mythologicals"? It is here that we rediscover the mythopoetical virtue (power) of bricolage. In effect, what appears most fascinating in this critical search for a new status of the expatriate is the stated abandonment of all reference to a center, to a subject, to a privileged reference, to an origin, or to an absolute arche'. The theme of this ethical could be followed throughout the "Overture" to his last book, *The Raw and the Cooked*. I shall simply remark on a few key points.

1. From the very start, Levi-Strauss recognizes that the Bororo fable which he employs in the book as the "reference-myth" does not merit this name and this treatment. The name is specious and the use of the myth improper. This myth deserves no more than any other its denotative privilege: In fact the Bororo myth which will from now on be designated by the name reference-myth is, as I shall try to show, nothing other than a more or less forced conversion of other myths originating either in the same society or in societies more or less far

removed. It would therefore have been legit to choose as my point of departure any representative of the group whatsoever. From this point of view, the interest of the reference-myth does not depend on its typical character, but rather on its irregular position in the midst of a group.

2. There is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus or the sources of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are fugitive, unactualizable, and nonexistent in the first place. Everything begins with the structure, the configuration, the relationship.

The discourse on this acentric structure, the myth, that is, cannot itself have an absolute subject or an absolute center. In order not to short change the form and the movement of the fable, that violence which consists in centering a language which is describing an acentric structure must be avoided. In this context, therefore, it is necessary to forego scientific or philosophical expatiate, to abnegate the cognition which absolutely requires, which is the absolute requirement that we go back to the source, to the center, to the founding basis, to the principle, and so on. In opposition to epistemic expatiate, structural discourse on myths- mythological discourse-must itself be mythomorphic. It must have the form of that of which it speaks. This is what Levi-Strauss says in *The Raw and the Cooked*, from which I would now like to quote a long and remarkable passage:

In effect the study of myths poses a methodological problem by the fact that it cannot conform to the Cartesian principle of dividing the difficulty into as many parts as are necessary to resolve it. There exists no veritable end or term to mythical analysis, no secret unity which could be comprehended at the end of the work of decomposition. The themes duplicate themselves to eternity. When we think we have unbraid them from each other and can hold them separate, it is only to realize that they are joining together again, in response to the attraction of unforeseen affinities. In consequence, the unity of the myth is only tendential and projective; it never reflects a state or a moment of the myth. An imaginary phenomenon implied by the whack to interpret, its role is to give a synthetic form to the fable and to impede its dissolution into the bamboozlement of contraries. It could therefore be said that the science or knowledge of myths is an anaclastic, taking this ancient term in the widest sense authorized by its etymology, a science which admits into its definition the study of the reflected rays along with that of the broken ones. But, unlike philosophical reflection, which claims to go all the way back to its source, the reflections in question here concern rays without any other than a virtual focus. ...In wanting to emulate the instinctive movement of mythical thought, my enterprise, itself too brief

and too long, has had to yield to its demands and respect its rhythm. Thus is this book, on myths itself and in its own way, a myth. This statement is repeated a little farther on: "Since myths themselves rest on second-order codes (the first-order codes being those in which language consists), this book thus offers the rough draft of a third-order code, destined to cinch the reciprocal possibility of translation of several fables. This is why it would not be wrong to consider it a fable: the fable of mythology, as it were." It is by this absence of any real and fixed center of the mythical or mythological discourse that the musical model chosen by Levi Strauss for the composition of his book is apparently justified. The absence of a center is here the absence of a subject and the absence of an author: "The fable and the musical work thus appear as orchestra conductors whose listeners are the silent performers. If it be asked where the real focus of the work is to be found, it must be replied that its determination is impossible. Music and mythology bring man face to face with virtual objects whose shadow alone is actual. ... Fables have no authors".

Thus it is at this point that ethnographic bricolage intentionally assumes its mythopoetic function. But by the same token, this function makes the philosophical or epistemological requirement of a center appear as mythological, that is to say, as a historical illusion.

Nevertheless, even if one yields to the necessity of what Levi-Strauss has done, one cannot ignore its risks. If the mythological is mythomorphic, are all expatiates on myths equivalent? Shall we have to indulge any epistemologica; requirement which permits us to distinguish between several qualities of expatiate on the myth? A classic question, but inevitable. We cannot reply-and I do not believe Levi-Strauss replies to it-as long as the problem of the relationships between the philosopheme or the theorem, on the one hand, and the mytheme or the mythopoem(e), on the other, has not been expressly posed. This is no small problem. For lack of expressly posing this problem, we condemn ourselves to transforming the claimed trespass of philosophy into an unrecognized fault in the interior of the philosophical field. Empiricism would be the genus of which these faults would always be the species. Trans-philosophical concepts would be transformed into philosophical naivetes. One could give many examples to demonstrate this risk: the concepts of sign, history, truth, and so forth. What I want to emphasize is simply that the passage beyond philosophy does not consist in turning the page of philosophy (which usually comes down to philosophizing badly), but in continuing to read philosophers in a certain way. The risk I am speaking of is always assumed by Levi-Strauss and it is the very price of his endeavor. I have said that

empiricism is the matrix of all the faults baleful a expatiate which continues, as with Levi-Strauss in particular,, to elect to be scientific. If we wanted to pose the problem of empiricism and bricolage in depth, we would probably end up very quickly with a number of propositions absolutely antipodal in relation to the status of expatiate in structural ethnography. On the one hand, structuralism justly claims to be the critique of empiricism. But at the same time there is not a single book or study by Levi-Strauss which does not offer itself as an existential essay which can always be completed or unsubstantiated by new information. The structural schemata are always proposed as hypotheses resulting from a finite quantity of information and which are subjected to the proof of experience. Numerous texts could be used to demonstrate this double assumption. Let us turn once again to the "Overture" of *The Raw and the Cooked*, where it seems clear that if this assumption is double, it is because it is a question here of a language on language:

Critics who might take me to task for not having begun by making an comprehensive inventory of South American myths before analyzing them would be making a serious mistake about the nature and the role of these documents. The totality of the myths of a people is of the order of the expatiate. Provided that this people does not become physically or morally extinct, this totality is never closed. Such a criticism would therefore be equivalent to basting a linguist with writing the grammar of a language without having recorded the totality of the words which have been uttered since that language came into existence and without knowing the verbal exchanges which will take place as long as the language continues to exist.

Experience proves that an absurdly small number of sentences... allows the linguist to complicated a grammar of the language he is studying. And even a partial grammar or an outline of a grammar represents valuable accessions in the case of unknown languages. Syntax does not wait until it has been possible to itemize a theoretically unlimited series of events before becoming barefaced, because syntax consists in the body of rules which presides over the generation of these events. And it is smack-deb a syntax of South American mythology that I wanted to outline. Should new texts appear to enrich the mythical discourse, then this will provide an opportunity to check or modify the way in which certain grammatical laws have been formulated, an opportunity to cull certain of them and an opportunity to discover new ones. But in no instance can the requirement of a total mythical

expatiate be raised as an objection. For we have just seen that such a requirement has no meaning.

Totalization is therefore defined at one time as useless, at another time as impossible. This is no distrust the result of the fact that there are two ways of enacting the limit of totalization. And I assert once again that these two determinations coexist implicitly in the expatiates of Levi-Strauss. Totalization can be judged impossible in the classical style: one then refers to the existential whack of a subject or of a finite discourse in a vain and breathless quest of an boundless richness which it can never master. There is too much, more than one can say. But nontotalization can also be determined in another way: not from the standpoint of the concept of finitude as assigning us to an empirical view, but from the standpoint of the concept of freeplay. If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infinity of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite expatiate, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization. This field is in fact that of freeplay, that is to say, a field of boundless substitutions in the closure of a finite garb. This field permits these boundless substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and founds the freeplay of substitutions. One could say—rigidly using that word whose scandalous signification is always exterminated in French—that this movement of the freeplay, permitted by the lack, the absence of a center or origin, is the movement of supplementary. One cannot determine the center, the sign which supplements it, which takes its place in its absence—because this sign adds itself, occurs in addition, over and above, comes as a supplement. The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified. Although Levi-Strauss in his use of the word supplementary never emphasizes as I am doing here the two directions of meaning which are so strangely compounded within it, it is not by chance that he uses this word twice in his "Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss", at the point where he is speaking of the "Plentitude of signifier, in relation to the signifieds to which this plentitude can refer":

In his whack to understand the world, Man therefore always has at his temperament a surplus of signification (which he portions out amongst things according to the laws of symbolic thought—which it is the task of ethnologists and linguists to study). This distribution of a supplementary portion [ration supplémentaire]—if it is permissible to

put it that way-is absolutely necessary in order that on the whole the available signifier and the mattered it aims at may remain in the relationship of complementarity which is the very condition of the use, of symbolic thought.

(It could no doubt be demonstrated that this ration supplémentaire of signification is the origin of the ratio itself.) The word reappears a little farther on, after Levi-Strauss has mentioned "this floating signifier, which is the finite thought":

In other words-and taking as our guide Mauss's. axiom that all social phenomena can be analogized to language-we see in mana, Wakau, oranda and other novelties of the same type, the conscious expression of a semantic function, whose role it is to permit symbolic thought to operate in spite of the contradiction which is proper to it. In this way are explained the apparently insoluble 1 antinomies attached to this notion. ...At one and the same time force and action, quality and state, substantive and verb; abstract and concrete, omnipresent and localized-mana is in effect all these things. But is it not precisely because it is none of these things that mana is a simple form, or more exactly, a symbol in the pure state, and therefore capable of becoming charged with any sort of symbolic content whatever? In the system of symbols constituted by all cosmologies, manawould simply be a valeur symbolique zero, that is to say, a sign marking the necessity of a symbolic content supplementary [my italics] to that with which the signified is already loaded, but which can take on any value required, provided only that this value still remains part of the available reserve and is not, as phonologists put it, a group-term.

Levi-Strauss Adds the Note:

Linguists have already been led to formulate hypotheses of this type. For example: "A zero phoneme is opposed to all the other phonemes in French in that it subsumes no differential characters and no constant phonetic value. On the contrary, the proper function of the zero phoneme is to be opposed to 'phoneme absence.'" (R. Jakobson and J. Lutz, "Notes on the French Phonemic Pattern" *Word*, vol. 5, no. 2 [August, 1949], p. 155). Similarly, if we schematize the conception I am posing here, it could almost be said that the function of notions like mana is to be opposed to the absence of signification, without comprehending by itself any particular signification.

The superabundance of the signifier, its supplementary character, is thus the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be supplemented.

It can now be understood why the concept of freeplay is important in Levi-Strauss. His references to all sorts of games, notably to roulette, are very periodical, especially in his *Conversations*, in *Race and History*, and in *The Savage Mind*. This reference to the game or free-play is always caught up in a tension.

It is in tension with history, first of all. This is a classical problem, objections to which are I now well worn or used up. I shall simply indicate what seems to me the formality of the problem: by reducing history, Levi-Strauss has treated as it deserves a concept which has always been in complicatedness with a teleological and eschatological metaphysics, in other words, paradoxically, in complicatedness with that philosophy of presence to which it was believed history could be opposed. The thematic of historicity, although it seems to be a somewhat late arrival in philosophy, has always been required by the determination of being as presence. With or without etymology, and in spite of the classic antagonism which opposes these significations throughout all of classical thought, it could be shown that the concept of cognition has always called forth that of *historia*, if history is always the unity of a becoming, as tradition of truth or development of science or knowledge oriented toward the grant of truth in presence and self-presence, toward knowledge in consciousness-of-self. History has always been conceived as the movement of a resuscitation of history, a diversion between two presences. But if it is legitimate to suspect this concept of history, there is a risk, if it is reduced without an express statement of the problem I am indicating here, of falling back into an anhistoricism of a classical type, that is to say, in a determinate moment of the history of metaphysics. Such is the algebraic formality of the problem as I see it. More expressly, in the work of Levi-Strauss it must be recognized that the respect for structurality, for the internal originality of the structure, compels a neutralization of time and history. For example, the appearance of a new structure, of an original system, always comes about-and this is the very condition of its structural specificity-by a rupture with its past, its origin, and its cause. One can therefore describe what is distinctive to the structural organization only by not taking into account, in the very moment of this description, its past conditions: by failing to propound the problem of the passage from one structure to another, by putting history into parentheses. In this "structuralist" moment, the concepts of chance and hiatus are necessitous. And Levi-Strauss does in fact often appeal to them as he does, for instance, for that structure of structures, language, of which he says in the "Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss" that it "could only have been born in one fell pounce":

Whatever may have been the moment and the circumstances of its appearance in the scale of animal life, language could only have been born in one fell pounce. Things could not have set about signifying progressively. Following a conversion the study of which is not the concern of the social sciences, but rather of biology and psychology, a crossing over came about from a stage where nothing had a meaning to another where everything possessed it.

This standpoint does not prevent Levi-Strauss from recognizing the slowness, the process of maturing, the continuous drudge of factual conversions, history (for example, in *Race and History*). But, in accordance with an act which was also Rousseau's and Husserl's, he must "brush aside all the facts"* at the moment when he wishes to recapture the explicitness of a structure. Like Rousseau, he must always conceit of the origin of a new structure on the model of catastrophe -an overturning of nature in nature, a natural interruption of the natural sequence, a brushing aside of nature.

Besides the tension of freeplay with history, there is also the tension : of freeplay with presence. Freeplay is the dislocation of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference etched in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Freeplay is always an interplay of absence and presence, but if it is to be radically envisaged, freeplay must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence; being must be conceived of as presence or absence beginning with the possibility of freeplay and not the other way around. If Levi-Strauss, better than any other, has brought to light the freeplay of repetition and the repetition of freeplay, one no less describes in his work a sort of ethic presence, an ethic of wistful for origins, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence and self-presence in speech-an ethic, wistful, and even remorse which he often presents as the motivation of the ethnological project when he moves toward archaic societies-exemplary societies in his eyes. These texts are well known.

As a turning toward the presence, lost or impossible, of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is thus the sad, negative, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauist facet of the thinking of freeplay of which the Nietzschean affirmation—the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active exegesis—would be the other side. This asseveration then determines the non-center otherwise than as loss of the center. And it plays the game without security. For there is a sure freeplay: that which is limited to the substitution of given and existing, present, pieces. In absolute chance,

asseveration also surrenders itself to genetic deliberation, to the seminal adventure of the delineate.

There are thus two exegesis of exegesis, of structure, of sign, of freeplay. The one seeks to decode, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of exegesis. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, avows freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and. humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, through the history of all of his history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game. The second exegesis of exegesis, to which Nietzsche showed us the way, does not seek in ethnography, as Levi-Strauss wished, the "inspiration of a new humanism" (again from the "Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss").

There are more than enough intimations today to suggest we might perceive that these two exegesis of exegesis—which are absolutely antithetical even if we live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an obscure economy-together share the field which we call, in such a problematic fashion, the human sciences.

For my part, although these two exegesis must concede and foreground their difference and define their irreducibility, I do not believe that today there is any question of choosing—in the first place because here we are in a region (let's say, provisionally, a region of historicity) where the category of choice seems particularly fiddling; and in the second, because we must first try to conceit of the common ground, and the difference of this minutest difference. Here there is a sort of question, call it historical, of which we are only glimpsing today the conception, the formation, the gestation, the labour. I employ these words, I admit, with a gander toward the business of childbearing—but also with a gander toward those who, in a company from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away in the face of the as yet unnameable which is portentous itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only' under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.

Analysis of the Essay:

Derrida's essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" was presented at a symposium on Structuralism at the John Hopkins University. Throughout the 1970s, it remained an

influential piece of critical writing in America. In this essay, he takes a circle as a metaphor for structure which defines its organization and shape in terms of its relation to its centre. According to Derrida, "The whole history of concept of structure must be thought of as a series of substitutions of centre for centre successively, and in a regulated fashion, the centre receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix is the determination of being as presence in all the senses of this world. It would be possible to show that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles or to the centre have always designated the constant of a pressure.

Derrida believes that a text does not have an inexpugnable meaning, on the other hand, it has potentials for meaning and it admits of several exegesis (certainly more than one), into what Derrida has called a "free play" of meaning.

Derrida borrows a set of binary distinctions from Saussurean linguistics (such as nature/culture, raw/cooked etc.) to contest the claims of Western metaphysics. Language Derrida believes is a system of signs and the relation between language and reality is taken as the relation between a set of signifiers and a corresponding set of signified. As Rajeev Patke rightly puts it:

"A signifier, within language, refers and corresponds to a matter outside a language. But the two-signifier and matter—are not the same, they are separated by a difference which the humanistic tradition tries to forget. Thus for exemplar, God and the word "God" are different in that the word is an imperious set of sounds or signs which refers and defers to the concept within the word "God" but prior to the word itself, and in a sense independent of it".

Derrida in this essay contests the claim of western metaphysics with reference to speech and writings. Logos, in western metaphysics, is the divine will or the word of God. Derrida comments on the metaphysical background of the spoken word and the written word in the following way :

"God understanding is the other name for logos as self-presence. The logos can be fathomless and self present. It can be produced as auto-affection, only through voice: an order of the signifier by which the subject takes from itself to itself, does not borrow outside of itself the signifier that emits and affects it at the same time. Such is at least the experience of the voice".

Thus, to Derrida the traditional concepts of speech and writing are "logocentric". Apart from "logocentrism", Derrida introduces another term "graphocentrism". S.Ravindran rightly points out that, "a grapheme according to traditional concept is a pure signifier, which means that a unit of writing has no relevance other than simply representing a voice. Therefore Graphocentrism can mean the shift in importance from speech to writing, it is a reversal of the traditional concept of the superiority of speech or the spoken word over the writing or the written word. There are critics who observe that Derrida is effecting a shift from logocentrism to graphocentrism."

Derrida groups metaphysics, linguistics and structuralism into one category. Because all these three disciplines have taken writing as secondary to something that exists only to represent the voice that it embodies, the voice that reveals the meaning, Derrida calls this concept of writing the "vulgar concept". He makes an attempt as it were to liberate language and criticism from the totalizing and totalitarian influences of metaphysics.

The new concept of writing proposed by Derrida has three 'complex' words: "difference", "trace" and "archewriting". Difference has two aspects: differing and deferring. Deferring is the one not being the other. It is spatial. Deferring is something being delayed or postponed. It is carnal. Each sign according to Derrida performs two functions: differing and deferring. Thus, the structure of the sign is conditioned by differing and deferring, not by the signifier and the signified. S.Ravindran rightly suggests: the structure of the sign is difference which means that a sign is something that is not like another sign and something that is not the sign. For example, we distinguish the word "three" both in speech and writing. They differ from each word and reveal the identity. In fact, every sign differs from every other sign. This difference is one of the two forces of each sign. The other force of the sign is its power of deferment, the capacity to postpone. Therefore, a sign is something that is not there. For example, the "rose" in a poem begins to reveal meaning only when we realize that it is not the flower which we see in reality. It has to be something else, what it is has to be discovered. Therefore, half of the sign is what it is has to be discovered. Therefore, half of the sign is what it is not and the other half is what is not there. These two forces inhabit each sign. It follows that the sign has to disappear to give meaning. That means, each sign is half acceptable and half insufficient, because it does not convey the idea perfectly, but it has to be used under necessity since no more acceptable sign is available. No sign is fully adequate. And therefore every sign is written "under erasure", "sous

rapture", a term that Derrida coins to express "the inadequacy of the sign".

While accepting Saussure's basic tenets of language Derrida reinterprets them in order to evolve his own concept of deconstruction in language. For instance, he has put "difference" in place of Saussure's "différance", which means French sense of "deferment" together with Saussure's meaning of "différance". Derrida goes beyond Saussure in his emphasis on deferment which alludes that the present is constantly postponed and the ultimate remains unsaid. The nature of language which conveys meaning through differences between linguistic signs and where the sign present is marked by the delineates of signs absent, precludes the possibility of saying anything with finality.

Derrida groups literature and other allied disciplines like psychology, philosophy, politics, linguistics etc. under one head called "human sciences". He has dissolved the distinction between philosophy in the wider sense including the philosophy of language and literature. Writing because of the free play of differences and the use of tropes is always marked by anatomizing. Deconstruction implies that the writer himself in builds whatever he builds. It views poetic structure as temporal resulting in free play of signifiers.

Anatomizing attempts to demolish the myth of language by debunking the metaphysical foundation of our understanding of language. Commenting on Derrida's concept of writing, Gayatri Spivak states that it is "something that carries within itself the trace of enduring disparity; the structure of the psyche, the structure of the sign. To this structure, Derrida gives the name writing". Further elaborating the concept of writing Spivak writes: "Writing then is the name of the structure always already inhabited by the trace. This is a broader concept than the existential concepts of writing, which denotes an existential system of notation on the material substance."

According to B Das and J.M.Mohanty, in his essay, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Expatiate of the Human Sciences", Derrida points out that "as there is no origin or centre outside, the expatiate for establishing boundaries for the play of linguistic signifiers, each sign in itself is not the thing or presence that offers itself to exegesis but the exegesis of other signs; a centre bad-mouths the structurality of the structure by posting an objective reality."

Derrida believes that literature is only a free play of signifiers without a centre. He argues that "far from presenting any meaning words carry with them a certain absence or indeterminacy of meaning."

Derrida has established that the Western text has made language obsequious to the presence of God, the logos, phone, and subjectivity. His theory of deconstruction aims at liberating language from the traditional western concept of text along with ways of dealing with it. It is in this regard that Derrida proposes "dissemination" as an alternative to the polysemy of exegesis. In the words of Derrida:

"There are thus two exegeses of exegesis, of structure, of sign, of free play. The sign seeks to decipher, dreams of decoding a truth or an origin which is free from free play and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of exegesis. The other, which is no longer turned towards the origin, affirms free play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the history of metaphysics or of onto theology in other words, through the history of all his history has dreamed of full presence the reassuring foundation the origin and the end of the game."

Thus, according to Derrida, in spite of the "differance" (difference + deference) that the author makes between one word and another, he can never express his meaning accurately and exactly. He must always mean more than and something different from that he indicates through writing. The critic should take the words of the poet or writer not as outward visible garb of his meaning but merely as "trace" or indicator of his meaning. Every word used by an author is to be taken as under erasure. Thus, the critic taking his cue from the "trace" must go out on a quest of a closer reincarnation to the actual meaning intended by the author. Thus criticism becomes an endless pursuit and the critic becomes a co-creator who takes the text over from the author. The theory of cognition takes off well but it does not land us anywhere. Therein lies both the strength and weakness of this theory, and Derrida's essay prove this point.

- **ELAINE S HO WALTER: "FEMINIST CRITICISM IN OUTDOORS"**

1. Pluralism and the Feminist Critique

Women have no outdoors in them,

They are provident instead

Content in the tight hot cell of their hearts

To eat dusty bread

-LOUISE BOGAN,

"Women" In a splendidly facetious dialogue of 1975, Carolyn Heilbrun and Catharine Stimpson identified two poles of feminist

literary criticism. The first of these modes, righteous, angry, and admonitory, they compared to the Old Testament, "looking for the sins and errors of the past". The second mode, disinterested and seeking "the benevolence of imagination," they compared to the New Testament. Both are necessary, they terminated, for only the Jeremiahs of ideology can lead us out of the "Egypt of female servitude" to the promised land of humanism. Matthew Arnold also thought that bookish critics might perish in the wilderness before they reached the promised land of evenhandedness; Heilbrun and Stimpson were neo-Arnoldian as befitted members of the Columbia and Barnard faculties. But if, in 1981, feminist literary critics are still wandering in the wilderness, we are in good company; for, as Geoffrey Hartman tells us, all criticism is in the outdoors. Feminist critics may be startled to find ourselves in this band of theoretical homesteaders, since in the American literary tradition the outdoors has been an exclusively masculine domain. Yet between feminist ideology and the liberal ideal of disinterestedness lies the wilderness of theory, which we too must make our home.

Until very recently, feminist criticism has not had a theoretical basis; it has been an existential orphan in the theoretical storm. In 1975, I was persuaded that no theoretical dictum could adequately account for the varied methodologies and ideologies which called themselves feminist reading or writing. By the next year, Annette Kolodny had added her observation that feminist literary criticism appeared "more like a set of interchangeable strategies than any consequent school or shared goal frontage." Since then, the expressed goals have not been notably unified. Black critics protest the "massive silence" of feminist criticism about black and Third-World women writers and call for a black feminist aesthetic that would deal with both racial and sexual politics. Marxist feminists wish to focus on class along with gender as a crucial determinant of literary production. Literary historians want to uncover a lost tradition. Critics trained in deconstructionist methodologies wish to "synthesize a literary criticism that is both textual and feminist." Freudian and Lacanian critics want to theorize about women's relationship to language and signification.

An early obstacle to constructing a theoretical framework for feminist criticism was the unwillingness of many women to limit or bound an expressive and dynamic enterprise. The openness of feminist criticism appealed particularly to Americans who ascertained the structuralist, post-structuralist, and deconstructionist debates of the 1970s as arid and falsely objective, the breviary of a baneful masculine expatiate from which many feminists wished to escape. Recalling in A

Room of One's Own how she had been prohibited from entering the university library, the symbolic sanctuary of the male logos, Virginia Woolf wisely observed that while it is "unpleasant to be locked out ... it is worse, perhaps, to be locked in". Advocates of the antitheoretical position bemoan their descent from Woolf and from other feminist visionaries, such as Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, and Marguerite Duras, who had lampooned the sterile narcissism of male scholarship and celebrated women's fortunate exclusion from its patriarchal methodology. Thus for some, feminist criticism was an act of resistance to theory, a ball game with existing canons and judgments, what Josephine Donovan calls "a mode of denegation within a fundamental dialectic." As Judith Fetterley declared in her book, *The Resisting Reader*, feminist criticism has been characterized by "a resistance to codification and a refusal to have its parameters precociously set." I have discussed elsewhere, with considerable sympathy, the suspicion of monolithic systems and the rejection of scientism in literary study that many feminist critics have voiced. While scientific criticism struggled to purge itself of the subjective, feminist criticism reasserted the authority of experience.

Yet it now appears that what looked like a theoretical deadlock was actually an evolutionary phase. The ethics of awakening have been succeeded, at least in the universities, by a second stage characterized by anxiety about the isolation of feminist criticism from a critical community increasingly theoretical in its interests and indifferent to women's writing. The question of how feminist criticism should define itself with relation to the new critical theories and theorists has occasioned sharp debate in Europe and the United States. Nina Auerbach has noted the absence of dialogue and asks whether feminist criticism itself must accept responsibility:

Feminist critics seem particularly disinclined to define themselves to the uninitiated. There is a sense in which our sisterhood has become too powerful; as a school, our belief in ourself is so potent that we decline communication with the networks of power and respectability we say we want to change.

But rather than desecrate communication with these networks, feminist criticism has indeed spoken directly to them, in their own media: *PMLA*, *Diacritics*, *Glyph*, *Tel Quel*, *New Literary History*, and *Critical Inquiry*. For the feminist critic seeking explication, the accrual of communiques may itself prove confusing.

There are two distinct modes of feminist criticism, and to confound them (as most commentators do) is to remain perpetually bemused by

their theoretical plausibilities. The first mode is ideological; it is concerned with the feminist as reader, and it offers feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and fallacies about women in criticism, and woman-as-sign in semiotic systems. This is not all feminist reading can do; it can be a liberating geeky act, as Adrienne Rich proposes:

A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male right, and how we can begin to see and name-and therefore live-afresh.

This bracing stumble (upon) with literature, which I will call feminist reading or the feminist critique, is in essence a mode of exegesis, one of many which any complex text will accommodate and permit. It is very difficult to propose theoretical concinnity in an activity which by, its nature is so eclectic and wide-ranging, although as a critical practice feminist reading has certainly been very cogent. But in the free play of the elucidative field, the feminist critique can only compete with alternative readings, all of which have the built-in obsolescence of Buicks, cast away as newer readings take their place. As Kolodny, the most cosmopolitan theorist of feminist exegesis, has acknowledged:

All the feminist is asserting, then, is her own equivalent right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances from these same texts; and, at the same time, her right to choose which features of a text she takes as relevant because she is, after all, asking new and different questions of it. In the process, she claims neither definitiveness nor structural completeness for her different readings and reading systems, but only their usefulness in recognizing the particular achievements of woman-as-author and their applicability in conscionably decoding woman-as-sign.

Rather than being discouraged by these limited objectives, Kolodny found them the happy cause of the "playful pluralism" of feminist critical theory, a pluralism which she believes to be "the only critical stance consistent with the current status of the larger women's movement." Her feminist critic dances adroitly through the theoretical minefield.

Keenly aware of the political issues involved and presenting brilliant arguments, Kolodny nonetheless fails to convince me that

feminist criticism must altogether abandon its hope "of establishing some basic conceptual model." If we see our critical job as exegesis and exegesis, we must be content with pluralism as our critical attitude. But if we wish to ask questions about the process and the contexts of writing, if we genuinely wish to define ourselves to the curbstone, we cannot rule out the prospect of theoretical consensus at this early stage.

All feminist criticism is in some sense revisionist, questioning the acceptability of accepted metaphysical structures, and indeed most contemporary American criticism claims to be revisionist too. The most exciting and comprehensive case for this "revisionary imperative" is made by Sandra Gilbert: at its most ambitious, she asserts, feminist criticism "wants to decode and explicate all the cloaked questions and answers that have always shadowed the connections between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority." But in practice, the revisionary feminist critique is redressing a resentment and is built upon existing models. No one would deny that feminist criticism has aptitudes to other contemporary critical practices and methodologies and that the best work is also the most fully informed. Nonetheless, the feminist obsession with correcting, modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing, or even attacking male critical theory keeps us dependent upon it and retards our progress in solving our own theoretical problems. What I mean here by "male critical theory" is a concept of creativity, literary history, or literary exegesis based entirely on male experience and put forward as universal. So long as we look to androcentric models for our most basic principles—even if we revise them by adding the feminist frame of reference—we are learning nothing new. And when the process is so one-sided, when male critics brag of their ignorance of feminist criticism, it is daunting to find feminist critics still anxious for approval from the "white fathers" who will not listen or reply. Some feminist critics have taken upon themselves a revisionism which becomes a kind of homage; they have made Lacan the ladies' man of Diacritics and have forced Pierre Macherey into those dark alleys of the psyche where Engels feared to tread. According to Christiane Makward, the problem is even more serious in France than in the United States: "If neofeminist thought in France seems to have ground to a halt", she writes, "it is because it has continued to feed on the expatriate of the masters."

It is time for feminist criticism to decide whether between religion and revision we can claim any firm theoretical ground of our own. In calling for a feminist criticism that is genuinely women centered, independent, and intellectually consequent, I do not mean to plump (for) the separatist fantasies of radical feminist visionaries or to exclude from

our critical practice a variety of intellectual tools. But we need to ask much more searchingly what we want to know and how we can find answers to the questions that come from our experience. I do not think that feminist criticism can find a usable past in the androcentric critical tradition. It has more to learn from, women's studies than from English studies, more to learn from international feminist theory than from another seminar on the masters. It must find its own subject, its own system, its own theory, and its own voice. As Rich writes of Emily Dickinson, in her poem "I Am in Danger-Sir-," we must choose to have the argument out at last on our own premises.

2. Defining the Feminine: Gynocritics and the Woman's Text

A woman's writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine;

at its best it is most feminine; the only difficulty lies in defining

what we mean by feminine. —VIRGINIA WOOLF

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice will never be theorized, enclosed, encoded—which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.

—HELENE CIXOUS, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

In the past decade, I believe, this process of defining the feminine has started to take place. Feminist criticism has gradually shifted its center from revisionary readings to a sustained investigation of literature by women. The second mode of feminist criticism begot by this process is the study of women as writers, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition. No English term exists for such a specialized critical expatiate, and so I have invented the term "gynocritics w. Unlike the feminist critique, gynocritics offers many theoretical opportunities. To see women's writing as our primary subject forces us to make the leap to a new abstract vantage point and to redefine the nature of the theoretical problem before us. It is no longer the ideological quandary of attuning revisionary pluralisms but the essential question of difference. How can we constitute women as a distinct literary group? What is the difference of women's writing?

Patricia Meyer Spacks, I think, was the first academic critic to notice this shift 'from an androcentric to a gynocentric feminist

criticism. In *The Female Imagination* (1975), she pointed out that few feminist theorists had concerned themselves with women's writing. Simone de Beauvoir's treatment of women writers in *The Second Sex* "always suggests a priori aptness to take them less seriously than their masculine counterparts"; Mary Ellmann, in *Thinking about Women*, characterized women's literary success as escape from the categories of womanhood; and, according to Spacks, Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics*, "has little interest in woman imaginative writers." Spacks' wide-ranging study pioneered a new period of feminist literary history and criticism which asked, again and again, how women's writing had been different, how womanhood itself shaped women's creative expression. In such books as Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), my own *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction* (1978), Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), and Margaret Romans' *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (1980), and in hundreds of essays and papers, women's writing asserted itself as the central project of feminist literary study.

This shift in emphasis has also taken place in European feminist criticism. To date, most commentary on French feminist critical expatiate has shell-shocked its fundamental discrepancy from the existential American frontage, its unfamiliar intellectual grounding in linguistics, Marxism, neo-Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Derridean essay. Despite these differences, however, the new French feminisms have much in common with radical American feminist theories in terms of intellectual affiliations and rhetorical energies. The concept of *écriture féminine*, the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text, is a significant theoretical formulation in French feminist criticism, although it describes a Utopian possibility rather than a literary practice. Helene Cixous, one of the leading advocates of *écriture féminine*, has admitted that, with only a few exceptions, "there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity", and Nancy Miller explains that *écriture féminine* "privileges a textuality of the avant-garde, a literary production of the late twentieth century, and it is therefore fundamentally a hope, if not a blueprint, for the future." Nonetheless, the concept of *écriture féminine* provides a way of talking about women's writing which reaffirms the value of the feminine and identifies the theoretical project of feminist criticism as the analysis of difference. In recent years, the translations of important works by Julia Kristeva, Cixous, and Luce Irigaray and the excellent collection *New French Feminisms* have made French criticism much more affordable to American feminist scholars.

English feminist criticism, which integrates French feminist and Marxist theory but is more traditionally acquainted to textual exegesis, is also moving toward a focus on women's writing. The emphasis in each country falls somewhat differently: English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses repression; American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression. All, however, have become gynocentric. All are struggling to find a terminology that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical associations with inferiority.

Defining the unique difference of women's writing, as Woolf and Cixous have warned, must present a slippery and demanding task. Is difference a matter of style? Genre? Experience? Or is it produced by the reading process, as some textual critics would maintain? Spacks calls the difference of women's writing a "delicate divergency", testifying to the subtle and elusive nature of the feminine practice of writing. Yet the delicate divergency of the woman's text challenges us to respond with equal care and accurateness to the small but crucial deflections, the cumulative weightings of experience and ostracism, that have marked the history of women's writing. Before we can chart this history, we must uncover it, patiently and meticulously; our theories must be firmly grounded in reading and research. But we have the opportunity, through gynocritics, to learn something solid, abiding, and real about the relation of women to literary culture.

Theories of women's writing presently make use of four models of difference: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural. Each is an effort to define and differentiate the qualities of the woman writer and the woman's text; each model also represents a school of gynocentric feminist criticism with its own favorite texts, styles, and methods. They overlap but are roughly successional in that each integrates the one before. I shall try now to sort out the various argotologies and assumptions of these four models of difference and appraise their usefulness.

3. Women's Writing and Woman's Body

More body, hence more writing.

—Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

Organic or biological criticism is the most extreme statement of gender difference, of a text perpetually marked by the body: anatomy is textuality. Biological criticism is also one of the most sibylline and baffling theoretical formulations of feminist criticism. Simply to invoke

anatomy risks a return to the crude essentialism, the phallic and ovarian theories of art, that downtrodden women in the past. Victorian physicians believed that women's physiological functions disported about twenty percent of their creative energy from brain activity. Victorian anthropologists believed that the frontal lobes of the male brain were heavier and more developed than female lobes and thus that women were underling in intelligence.

While feminist criticism rejects the criterion of literal biological inferiority, some theorists seem to have accepted the metaphorical implications of female biological difference in writing. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, for example, Gilbert and Gubar structure their analysis of women's writing around metaphors of literary paternity. "In patriarchal western culture", they maintain, "...the text's author is a father, a primogenitor, a creator, an aesthetic paterfamilias whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis." Lacking phallic authority, they go on to suggest, women's writing is profoundly marked by the anxiousness ties of this difference: "If the pen is a metaphorical penis, from what organ can females generate texts?"

To this rhetorical question Gilbert and Gubar offer no reply; but it is a serious question of much feminist theoretical expatiate. Those critics who, like myself, would protest the fundamental analogy might reply that women generate texts from the brain or that the word-processor of the near future, with its compactly coded microchips, its inputs and outputs, is a metaphorical womb. The metaphor of literary paternity, as Auerbach has pointed out in her review of *The Madwoman*, ignores "an equally timeless and, for me, even more hard handed metaphorical equation between literary creativity and childbirth." Certainly metaphors of literary maternity predominated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the process of literary creation is analogically much more similar to gestation, labour, and delivery than it is to insemination. Describing Thackeray's plan for Henry Esmond, for example, Douglas Jerrold jovially remarked, "You have heard, I suppose, that Thackeray is big with twenty parts, and unless he is wrong in his time, expects the first installment at Christmas." (If to write is metaphorically to give birth, from what organ can males generate texts?)

Some radical feminist critics, primarily in France but also in the United States, insist that we must read these metaphors as more than playful; that we must seriously rethink and redefine biological differentiation and its relation to women's unity. They argue that "women's writing proceeds from the body, that our sexual

differentiation is also our source." In *Of Woman Born*, Rich explains her belief that

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female biology...has far more radical indication than we have yet come to accumulate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has blenched from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully human life, we require not only control of our bodies...we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.

Feminist criticism written in the biological vantage point generally stresses the importance of the body as a source of imagery. Alicia Ostriker, for example, argues that contemporary American women poets use a franker, more pervasive anatomical imagery than their male counterparts and that this insistent body language refuses the spurious eminence that comes at the price of disaffirming the flesh. In a fascinating essay on Whitman and Dickinson, Terence Diggory shows that physical nakedness, so potent a poetic symbol of authenticity for Whitman and other male poets, had very different connotations for Dickinson and her successors, who associated nakedness with the objectified or sexually exploited female nude and who chose instead protective images of the guarded self.

Feminist criticism which itself tries to be biological, to write from the critic's body, has been bosom, confessional, often innovative in style and form. Rachel Blau DuPlessis' "Washing Blood", the introduction to a special issue of *Feminist Studies* on the subject of motherhood, proceeds, in short lyrical paragraphs, to describe her own experience in adopting a child, to recount her dreams and nightmares, and to meditate upon the "healing unification of body and mind based not only on the lived experiences of motherhood as a social institution...but also on a biological power speaking through us." Such criticism makes itself contumaciously vulnerable, virtually bares its throat to the knife, since our professional taboos against self-revelation are so strong. When it succeeds, however, it achieves the power and the dignity of art. Its existence is an implicit stricture to women critics who continue to write, according to Rich, "from somewhere outside their female bodies". In comparison to this flowing confessional criticism, the tight-lipped Olympian intelligence of such texts as Elizabeth Hardwick's *Seduction and Betrayal* or Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* can seem arid and feigned.

Yet in its obsessions with the "corporeal ground of our intelligence", feminist biocriticism can also become cruelly traditional. There is a sense in which the exhibition of bloody wounds becomes an induction ritual quite separate and disconnected from critical insight. And as the editors of the journal *Questionsfeministes* point out, "it is...dangerous to place the body at the center of a search for female identity. ...The themes of otherness and of the Body merge together, because the most visible difference between men and women, and the only one we know for sure to be permanent...is indeed the difference in body. This difference has been used as a guise to 'justify' full power of one sex over the other** (trans. Yvonne Rochette-Ozzello, NFF, p. 218). The study of biological imagery in women's writing is useful and important as long as we understand that factors other than anatomy are involved in it. Ideas about the body are fundamental to understanding how women develop a thought their situation in society; but there can be no expression of the body which is unmediated by linguistic, social, and literary structures. The difference of woman's literary practice, therefore, must be sought (in Miller's words) in "the body of her writing and not the writing of her body."

4. Women's Writing and Women's Language

The women say, the language you speak poisons your glottis tongue palate lips. They say, the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you. They say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking appoint what men have appropriated.

—MONIQUE WITTIG, *Les Guerilleres*

Linguistic and textual theories of women's writing ask whether men and women use language differently; whether sex differences in language use can be theorized in terms of biology, socialization, or culture; whether women can create new languages of their own; and whether speaking, reading, and writing are all gender marked. American, French, and British feminist critics have all drawn attention to the philosophical, linguistic, and practical problems of women's use of language, and the debate over language is one of the most exciting areas in gynocritics. Poets and writers have led the attack on what Rich calls "the oppressor's language", a language sometimes criticized as sexist, sometimes as abstract. But the problem goes well beyond reformist efforts to purge language of its sexist aspects. As Nelly Furman explains, "It is through the medium of language that we define and categorize areas of difference and similarity, which in turn allow us to apprehend the world around us. Male-centered categorizations predominate in American English and subtly shape our understanding

and perception of reality; this is why attention is increasingly directed to the innately hard handed aspects for women of a male-constructed language system." According to Carolyn Burke, the language system is at the center of French feminist theory:

The central issue in much recent women's writing in France is to find and use an appropriate female language. Language is the place to begin: a prise de conscience must be followed by a prise de la parole. ...In this view, the very forms of the dominant mode of discourse show the mark of the dominant masculine ideology. Hence, when a woman writes or speaks herself into existence, she is forced to speak in something like a foreign tongue, a language with which she may be personally uncomfortable.

Many French feminists advocate a revolutionary linguism, an oral break from the dictatorship of patriarchal speech. Annie Leclerc, in *Parole de femme*, calls on women "to invent a language that is not hard handed a language that does not leave speechless but that loosens the tongue" (trans. Courtivron, NFF, p. 179). **Chantal Chawaf**, in an essay on "La chair linguistique," connects biofeminism and linguism in the view that women's language and a genuinely feminine practice of writing will articulate the body:

In order to reconnect the book with the body and with pleasure, we must disintellectualize writing. ...And this language, as it develops, will not decadent and dry up, will not go back to the fleshless academicism, the stereotypical and servile expatiate that we reject. ... Feminine language must, by its very nature, work on life passionately, scientifically, poetically, politically in order to make it bulletproof. [Trans. Rochette-Ozzello, NFF, pp. 177-78]

But scholars who want a women's language that is intellectual and theoretical, that works inside the academy, are faced with what seems like an impossible paradox, as **Xaviere Gauthier** has lamented: "As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the historical process. But, if they begin to speak and write as men do, they will enter history repressed and alienated; it is a history that, logically speaking, their speech should disrupt" (trans. Marilyn A. August, NFF, pp. 162-63). What we need, **Mary Jacobus** has proposed, is a women's writing that works within "male" expatiate but works "ceaselessly to deconstruct it: to write what cannot be written," and according to **Shoshana Felmini**, "the challenge facing the woman today is nothing less than to 'reinvent' language,... to speak not only against, but outside of the specular phallogocentric structure, to establish a expatiate the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of masculine meaning,"

Beyond rhetoric, what can linguistic, historical, and anthropological research tell us about the prospects for a women's language? First of all, the concept of a women's language is not original with feminist criticism; it is very ancient and appears frequently in legendry and fable. In such myths, the essence of women's language is its secrecy; what is really being described is the male fantasy of the enigmatic nature of the feminine.

Herodotus, for example, reported that the Amazons were able linguists who easily mastered the languages of their male antagonists, although men could never learn the women's tongue. In *The White Goddess*, Robert Graves romantically argues that a women's language existed in a matriarchal stage of prehistory; after a great battle of the sexes, the matriarchy was overthrown and the women's language went underground, to survive in the mysterious credos of Eleusis and Corinth and the witch cliques of Western Europe. Travelers and missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought back accounts of "women's languages" among American Indians, Africans, and Asians (the differences in linguistic structure they reported were usually superficial). There is some ethnographic evidence that in certain cultures women have evolved a private form of communication out of their need to resist the silence assessed upon them in public life. In elatedness religions, for example, women, more frequently than men, speak in tongues, a phenomenon attributed by anthropologists to their relative inarticulateness in formal religious expatiate. But such ritualized and unintelligible female "languages" are scarcely cause for rejoicing; indeed, it was because witches were suspected of esoteric knowledge and possessed speech that they were burned.

From a political vantage point, there are interesting parallels between the feminist problem of a women's language and the recurring "language issue" in the general history of decolonized. After a revolution, a new state must decide which language to make official: the language that is "psychologically immediate," that allows "the kind of force that speaking one's mother tongue permits"; or the language that "is an avenue to the wider community of modern culture," a community to whose movements of thought only "foreign" languages can give access. The language issue in feminist criticism has emerged, in a sense, after our revolution, and it reveals the tensions in the women's movement between those who would stay outside the academic establishments and the institutions of criticism and those who would enter and even vanquish them.

The advocacy of a women's language is thus a political gesture that also carries brooding angina emotional force. But despite its polarizing appeal, the concept of a women's language is riddled with difficulties.

Unlike Welsh, Breton, Swahili, or Amharic, that is, languages of minority or colonized groups, there is no mother tongue, no genderlect spoken by the female population in a society, which differs significantly from the dominant language. English and American linguists agree that "there is absolutely no evidence that would suggest the sexes are preprogrammed to develop structurally different lexical systems." Furthermore, the many specific differences in male and female speech, inflection, and language use that have been identified cannot be explained in terms of "two separate sex-specific languages" but need to be considered instead in terms of styles, strategies, and contexts of linguistic performance. Efforts at quantitative analysis of language in texts by men or women, such as Mary Hiatt's computerized study of contemporary fiction, *The Way Women Write* (1977), can easily be attacked for treating words apart from their meanings and purposes. At a higher level, analyses which look for "feminine style" in the repetition of stylistic devices, image patterns, and syntax in women's writing tend to addle constitutive forms with the over determined results of literary choice. Language and style are never raw and instinctual but are always the products of innumerable factors, of genre, tradition, memory, and context.

The appropriate task for feminist criticism, I believe, is to concentrate on women's access to language, on the available lexical range from which words can be selected, on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression. The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution. In a series of drafts for a lecture on women's writing (drafts which she discarded or suppressed), Woolf protested against the suppression which cut off female access to language. Comparing herself to Joyce, Woolf noted the differences between their verbal territories; "Now men are shocked if a woman says what she feels (as Joyce does). Yet literature which is always pulling down blinds is not literature. All that we have ought to be expressed—mind and body—a process of implausible difficulty and danger." "All that we have ought to be expressed—mind and body." Rather than wishing to limit women's linguistic range, we must fight to open and extend it. The holes in expatiate, the blanks and gaps and silences, are not the spaces where female consciousness reveals itself but the blinds of a "prison-house of language." Women's literature is still habituated by the ghosts of restrained language, and until we have discarded those ghosts, it ought not to be in language that we base our theory of difference.

5. Women's Writing and Woman's Psyche

Psychoanalytically accustomed feminist criticism locates the difference of women's writing in the author's psyche and in the relation of gender to the creative process. It integrates the biological and linguistic models of gender difference in a theory of the female psyche or self, shaped by the body, by the development of language, and by sex-role socialization. Here too there are many difficulties to overcome; the Freudian model requires constant revision to make it gynocentric. In one grating early example of Freudian reductivism, Theodor Reik suggested that women have fewer writing blocks than men because their bodies are constructed to facilitate release: "Writing, as Freud told us at the end of his life, is connected with urinating, which physiologically is easier for a woman—they have a wider bladder." Generally, however, psychoanalytic criticism has focused not on the commodious bladder (could this be the organ from which females generate texts?) but on the absent phallus. Penis convetousness, the castration complex, and the Oedipal phase have become the Freudian coordinates defining women's relationship to language, fantasy, and culture. Currently the French psychoanalytic school dominated by Lacan has extended unmanning into a total metaphor for female literary and linguistic disadvantage. Lacan theorizes that the accession of language and the entry into its symbolic order occurs at the Oedipal phase in which the child accepts his or her gender identity. This stage requires an acceptance of the phallus as a blessed signification and a consequent female displacement, as Cora Kaplan has explained:

The phallus as a signifier has a central, crucial position in language, for if language embodies the patriarchal law of the culture, its basic meanings refer to the intermittent process by which sexual difference and subjectivity are adscititious.... Thus the little girl's access to the Symbolic, i.e., to language and its laws, is always negative and/or mediated by intro-subjective relation to a third term, for it is characterized by an identification with lack.

In psychoanalytic terms, "lack" has traditionally been associated with the feminine, although Lac(k)anian critics can now make their statements linguistically. Many feminists believe that psychoanalysis could become a powerful tool for literary criticism, and recently there has been a renewed interest in Freudian theory. But feminist criticism based in Freudian or post-Freudian psychoanalysis must continually struggle with the problem of feminine disadvantage and lack. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar carry out a feminist revision of Harold Bloom's Oedipal model of literary history as a strife between

fathers and sons and accept the essential psychoanalytic definition of the woman artist as dispossessed, bereaved, and excluded. In their view, the nature and "difference" of women's writing lies in its troubled and even frustrated relationship to female identity; the woman writer experiences her own gender as "a painful obstacle or even a enfeebling dearth". The nineteenth-century woman writer inscribed her own sickness, her madness, her anorexia, her agoraphobia, and her paralysis in her texts; and although Gilbert and Gubar are dealing specifically with the nineteenth century, the range of their implication and quotation suggests a more general thesis:

Thus the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of estrangement from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly harbingers and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the evangelical authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention all these phenomena of "inferiorization" mark the woman writer's struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterpart. [Madwoman, p. 50]

In "Emphasis Added," Miller takes another approach to the problem of negativity in psychoanalytic criticism. Her strategy is to expand Freud's view of female creativity and to show how criticism of women's texts has frequently been unfair because it has been based in Freudian expectations. In his essay "The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming" (1908), Freud maintained that the unsatisfied dreams and desires of women are chiefly erotic; these are the desires that shape the intrigues of women's fiction. In contrast, the dominant fantasies behind men's plots are egoistic and aspiring as well as erotic. Miller shows how women's plots have been granted or denied plausibility in terms of their congruence to this phallogocentric model and that a gynocentric reading reveals a repressed egoistic/aspiring fantasy in women's writing as well as in men's. Women's novels which are centrally concerned with fantasies of romantic love belong to the category disdained by George Eliot and other serious women writers as "silly novels"; the smaller number of women's novels which inscribe a fantasy of power imagine a world for women outside of love, a world, however, made impossible by social boundaries.

There has also been some interesting feminist literary criticism based on alternatives to Freudian psychoanalytic theory: Annis Pratt's Jungian history of female archetypes, Barbara Rigney's Laingian study of the divided self in women's fiction, and Ann Douglas' Eriksonian

analysis of inner space in nineteenth-century women's writing. And for the past few years, critics have been thinking about the possibilities of a new feminist psychoanalysis that does not revise Freud but instead emphasizes the development and construction of gender identities.

The most dramatic and promising new work in feminist psychoanalysis looks at the pre-Oedipal phase and at the process of psychosexual differentiation. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978) has had an brobdingnagian influence on women's studies. Chodorow revises traditional psychoanalytic concepts of differentiation, the process by which the child comes to feel the self as separate and to develop pridefulness and body boundaries. Since differentiation takes place in relation to the mother (the primary caretaker), attitudes toward the mother "emerge in the earliest differentiation of the self; "the mother, who is a woman, becomes and remains for children of both genders the other, or object." The child develops core gender identity accompanying with differentiation, but the process is not the same for boys and girls. A boy must learn his gender identity negatively as being not-female, and this difference requires continual brace. In contrast, a girl's core gender identity is positive and built upon sameness, continuity, and identification with the mother. Women's difficulties with feminine identity come after the Oedipal phase, in which male power and cultural imperious give sex differences a alchemized value. Chodorow's work suggests that shared parenting, the involvement of men as primary caretakers of children, will have a abstruse effect on our sense of sex difference, gender idetity, and sexual preference.

But what is the significance of feminist psychoanalysis for literary criticism? One thematic carry-over has been a critical interest in the mother-daughter configuration as a source of female creativity. Elizabeth Abel's bold investigation of female friendship in contemporary women's novels uses Chodorow's theory to show how not only the relationships of women characters but also the relationship of women writers to each other are determined by the psycho dynamics of female bonding. Abel too brazens Bloom's paradigm of literary history, but unlike Gilbert and Gubar she sees a "threefold female pattern" in which the Oedipal relation to the male tradition is balanced by the woman writer's pre-Oedipal relation to the female tradition. "As the dynamics of female friendship differs from those of male", Abel concludes, "the dynamics of female literary influence also deviate and deserves a theory of influence conciliated to female psychology and to women's dual position in literary history."

Like Gilbert, Gubar, and Miller, Abel brings together women's texts from a variety of national literatures, choosing to emphasize "the immutability of certain emotional dynamics descriptive in diverse cultural situations." Yet the privileging of gender alludes not only the immutability but also the immutableness of this dynamics. Although psychoanalytically based models of feminist criticism can now offer us remarkable and persuasive readings of individual texts and can highlight extraordinary similarities between women writing in a variety of cultural circumstances, they cannot explain historical change, ethnic difference, or the shaping force of generic and economic factors. To consider these issues, we must go beyond psychoanalysis to a more flexible and comprehensive model of women's writing which places it in the maximum context of culture.

6. Women's Writing and Women's Culture

I consider women's literature as a specific category, not because of biology, but because it is, in a sense, the literature of the colonized.

-CHRISTIANE ROCHEFORT, "The Privilege of Consciousness" A theory based on a model of women's culture can provide, I believe, a more complete and satisfying way to talk about the specificity and difference of women's writing than theories based in biology, linguistics, or psychoanalysis. Indeed, a theory of culture integrates ideas about woman's body, language, and psyche but construes them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur. The ways in which women develop a thought their bodies and their sexual and reproductive functions are byzantinly linked to their cultural environments. The female psyche can be studied as the product or construction of cultural forces. Language, too, comes back into the picture, as we consider the social dimensions and determinants of language use, the shaping of linguistic behaviour by cultural ideals. A cultural theory concedes that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race, nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space. It is in the emphasis on the binding force of women's culture that this passage differs from Marxist theories of cultural emporium. Proposition of-women's culture have been developed over the last decade primarily by anthropologists, sociologists, and social historians in order to get away from masculine systems, hierarchies, and values and to get at the primary and self-defined nature of female cultural experience. In the field of women's history, the concept of women's culture is still hot-button, although

there is agreement on its significance as a theoretical formulation. Gerda Lerner explains the importance of examining women's experience in its own terms:

Women have been left out of history not because of the evil cabals of men in general or male historians in particular, but because we have considered history only in male-centered terms. We have missed women and their activities, because we have asked questions of history which are incongruous to women. To rectify this, and to light 'up' areas of historical darkness we must, for a time, focus on a woman-centered delving, considering the possibility of the existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by men and women. History must include an account of the female experience over time and should include the development of feminist advertence as an essential aspect of women's past. This is the primary task of women's history. The central question it raises is: What would history be like if it were seen through the eyes of women and ordered by values they define?

In defining female culture, historians distinguish between the roles, activities, tastes, and behaviours prescribed and considered felicitous for women and those activities, behaviours, and functions actually generated out of women's lives. In the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term "woman's sphere" expressed the Victorian and Jacksonian vision of separate roles for men and women, with little or no imbrications and with women junior. If we were to diagram it, the Victorian model would look like this:

Woman's sphere was denned and maintained by men, but women frequently assimilate its axioms in the American "cult of true womanhood" and the English "feminine ideal." Women's culture, however, readdresses women's "activities and goals from a woman-centered point of view.... The term alludes an assertion of equality and an awareness of sisterhood, the communality of women." Women's culture refers to "the broad-based communality of values, institutions, relationships, and methods of communication" unifying nineteenth-century female experience, a culture nonetheless with significant mutations by class and ethnic group (MFP, pp. 52, 54).

Some feminist historians have accepted the model of separate spheres and have seen the movement from woman's sphere to women's culture to women's-rights activism as the sequential stages of an evolutionary political process. Others see a more complex and ceaseless negotiation taking place between women's culture and the general culture. As Lerner has argued:

It is important to understand that "woman's culture" is not and should not be seen as a subsociety. It is hardly possible for the majority to live in a subsociety. Women live their social existence within the general culture and, whenever they are confined by evangelical restraint or insulation into separateness (which always has subordination as its purpose), they transform this restraint into complementarity (asserting the importance of woman's function, even its "superiority") and redefine it. Thus, women live a duality—as members of the general culture and as participators of women's culture. - [MFP, p. 52]

Lerner's views are similar to those of some cultural anthropologists. A particularly stimulating analysis of female culture has been carried out by two Oxford anthropologists, Shirley and Edwin Ardener. The Ardeners have tried to outline a model of women's culture which is not historically limited and to provide a terminology for its characteristics. Two essays by Edwin Ardener, "Belief and the Problem of Women" (1972) and "The 'Problem' Revisited" (1975), suggest that women constitute a muted group, the boundaries of whose culture and reality overlap, but are not wholly contained by, the dominant (male) group. A model of the cultural situation of women is pivotal to understanding both how they are perceived by the dominant group and how they behold themselves and others. Both historians and anthropologists emphasize the incompleteness of androcentric models of history and culture and the crunch of such models for the analysis of female experience. In the past, female experience which could not be accommodated by androcentric models was treated as irregular or simply ignored. Observation from an exterior point of view could never be the same as comprehension from within. Ardener's model also has many connections to and cannot for current feminist literary theory, since the concepts of discernment, silence, and silencing are so central to discussions of women's participation in literary culture.

By the term "husked," Ardener suggests problems both of language and of power. Both husked and dominant groups generate beliefs or ordering ideas of social reality at the insensible level, but dominant groups control the forms or structures in which cognizance can be enunciated. Thus husked groups must intermediary their beliefs through the allowable forms of dominant structures. Another way of putting this would be to say that all language is the language of the dominant order, and women, if they speak at all, must speak through it. How then, Ardener asks, "does the symbolic weight of that other mass of persons express itself?" In his view, women's beliefs find expression through ritual and art, expressions which can be decrypted by the ethnographer,

either female or male, who is willing to make the effort to behold beyond the screens of the dominant structure.

Let us now look at Ardener's diagram of the relationship of the dominant and the husked group:

Unlike the Victorian model of correlative spheres, Ardener's groups are represented by crisscrossing circles. Much of muted circle Y falls within the boundaries of dominant circle X; there is also a crescent of Y which is outside the dominant boundary and therefore (in Ardener's terminology) "wild". We can think of the "wild zone" of women's culture spatially, experientially, or metaphysically. Spatially it stands for an area which is literally no-man's-land, a place interdicted to men, which corresponds to the zone in X which is off limits to women. Experientially it stands for the aspects of the female life-style which are outside of and unlike those of men; again, there is a corresponding zone of male experience foreign to women. But if we think of the wild zone metaphysically, or in terms of consciousness, it has no corresponding male space since all of male cognizance is within the circle of the dominant structure and thus affordable to or structured by language. In this sense, the "wild" is always imaginary; from the male point of view, it may simply be the projection of the unconscious. In-terms of cultural anthropology, women know what the male bow-shaped is like, even if they have never seen it, because it becomes the subject of key (like the outdoor). But men do not know what is in the wild.

For some feminist critics, the wild zone, or "female space", must be the address of a authentically women-centered criticism, theory, and art, whose shared project is to bring into being the symbolic weight of female cognizance, to make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak. French feminist critics would like to make the wild zone the theoretical base of women's difference. In their texts, the wild zone becomes the place for the revolutionary women's language, the language of everything that is repressed, and for the fanatic women's writing in "white ink". It is the Dark Continent in which Cixous' laughing Medusa and Wittig's guerilleres reside. Through voluntary entry into the wild zone, other feminist critics tell us, a woman can write her way out of the "cramped circumscribe of evangelical space". The images of this journey are now familiar in feminist quest fictions and in essays about them. The writer/heroine, often guided by another woman, travels to the "mother country" of liberated desire and female geniuses; crossing to the other side of the mirror, like Alice in Wonderland, is often a symbol of the passage.

Many forms of American radical feminism also romantically assert that women are closer to nature, to the environment, to a matriarchal principle at

once biological and ecological. Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* and Margaret Atwood's novel *Surfacing* are texts which create this feminist mythology. In English and American literature, women writers have often imagined Amazon Utopias, cities or countries situated in the wild zone or on its border: Elizabeth Gaskell's gentle *Cranford* is probably an Amazon Utopia; so is Charlotte Perkins Oilman's *Herland* or, to take a recent example, Joanna Russ' *Whileaway*. A few years ago, the feminist publishing house Daughters, Inc. tried to create a business version of the Amazon Utopia; as Lois Gould reported in the *New York Times Magazine* (2 January 1977), "They believe they are building the working models for the critical next stage of feminism: full independence from the control and leverage of "male-dominated" institutions—the news media, the health, education, and legal systems, the art, theater, and literary worlds, the banks."

These fantasies of an idyllic barrio represent a phenomenon which feminist criticism must recognize in the history of women's writing. But we must also understand that there can be no writing or criticism totally outside of the dominant structure; no publication is fully independent from the economic and political pressures of the male-dominated society. The concept of a woman's text in the wild zone is a playful cogitation: in the reality to which we must address ourselves as critics, women's writing is a "double-voiced expatiate" that always incorporates the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant.

And insofar as most feminist critics are also women writing, this perilous heritage is one we share; every step that feminist criticism takes toward defining women's writing is a step toward self-understanding as well; every account of a female literary culture and a female literary tradition has parallel significance for our own place in critical history and critical tradition.

Women writings are not, then, inside and outside of the male tradition; they are inside two traditions coincidentally, "undercurrents", in Ellen Moers' metaphor, of the mainstream. To mix metaphors again, the literary estate of women, as **Myra Jehlen** says, "suggests...a more fluid imagery of dealings abutment, the point of which would be to represent not so much the territory, as its defining borders. Indeed, the female territory might well be envisaged as one long border, and independence for women, not as a separate country, but as open access to the sea." As Jehlen goes on to explain, an aggressive feminist criticism must equilibration itself on this border and must see women's writing in its changing historical and cultural relation to that other body of texts identified by feminist criticism not simply as literature but as "men's writing".

The difference of women's writing, then, can only be understood in terms of this complex and historically grounded cultural relation. An important aspect of Ardener's model is that there are hushed groups other than women; a dominant structure may determine many hushed structures. A black American woman poet, for example, would have her literary identity formed by the dominant (white male) tradition, by a hushed women's culture, and by a muted black culture. She would be affected by both sexual and racial politics in a combination unique to her case; at the same time, as Barbara Smith points out, she shares an experience specific to her group: "Black women writers constitute an identifiable bookish tradition...thematically, stylistically, aesthetically, and abstractly. Black women writers manifest common approaches to the act of creating literature as a direct result of the specific political, social, and economic experience they have been obliged to share." Thus the first task of a gynocentric criticism must be to plot the precise cultural locus of female bookish identity and to describe the forces that bisect an individual woman writer's cultural field. A gynocentric criticism would also situate women writers with respect to the variables of literary culture, such as modes of production and distribution, relations of author and audience, relations of high to popular art, and ladders of genre.

Insofar as our concepts of bookish periodization are based on men's writing, women's writing must be forcibly assimilated to an irrelevant grid; we discuss a Revivification which is not a renaissance for women, a Romantic period in which women played very little part, a modernism with which women strife. At the same time, the ongoing history of women's writing has been suppressed, leaving large and mysterious gaps in accounts of the development of genre. Gynocentric criticism is already well on the way to providing us with another vantage point on bookish history. Margaret Anne Doody, for example, suggests that "the period between the death of Richardson and the appearance of the novels of Scott and Austen" which has "been regarded as a dead period, a dull blank" is in fact the period in which late eighteenth-century women writers were developing "the paradigm for women's fiction of the nineteenth century-something hardly less than the paradigm of the nineteenth-century novel itself." There has also been a feminist re-amend of the female gothic, a transmutation of a popular genre once believed marginal but now seen as part of the great tradition of the novel. In American literature, the pioneering work of Ann Douglas, Nina Baym, and Jane Tompkins, among others, has given us a new view of the power of women's fiction to feminize nineteenth-century American culture. And feminist critics have made us aware that Woolf belonged to a prescription other than modernism and that this prescription surfaces in her work precisely in those places where criticism has heretofore found ambiguities eschewing incredibleness and blemishes.

Our current theories of literary leverage also need to be tested in terms of women's writing. If a man's text, as Bloom and Edward Said have maintained, is fathered, then a woman's text is not only mothered but parented; it braves both paternal and maternal forgoers and must deal with the problems and advantages of both lines of patrimony. **Woolf** says in *A Room of One's Own* that "a woman writing thinks back through her mothers." But a woman writing ineluctably thinks back through her fathers as well; only male writers can forget or mute half of their parentage. The dominant culture need not consider the muted, except to balustrade against "the woman's part" in itself. Thus we need more subtle and supple accounts of influence, not just to explain women's writing but also to understand how men's writing has withstood the commendation of female precursors.

We must first go beyond the hypothetical that women writers either emulate their male precursors or revise them and that this simple dualism is adequate to describe the influences on the woman's text. **I. A. Richards** once commented that the influence of **G. E. Moore** had had an brobdingnagian negative impact on his work: "I feel like an obverse of him. Where there's a hole in him, there's a jute in me." Too often women's place in bookish tradition is translated into the crude topography of hole and jut, with Milton, Byron, or Emerson the bulging bogeys on one side and women's literature from Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich a pocked moon surface of revisionary lacunae on the other. One of the great advantages of the women's-culture model is that it shows how the female tradition can be a positive source of strength and empathy as well as a negative source of powerlessness; it can generate its own experiences and symbols which are not simply the obverse of the male tradition.

How can a cultural model of women's writing help us to read a woman's text? One implication of this model is that women's fiction can be read as a double-voiced expatiate, containing a "dominant" and a "hushed" story, what **Gilbert** and **Gubar** call a "palimpsest". I have described it elsewhere as an object/field problem in which we must keep two alternative oscillating texts coincidentally in view: "In the purest feminist literary criticism we are...presented with a radical alteration of our vision, a demand that we see meaning in what has previously been empty space. The orthodox intrigue abates, and another plot, heretofore underwater in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief like a thumbprint." **Miller** too sees "another text" in women's fiction, "more or less hushed from novel to novel" but "always there to be read".

Another interpretive strategy for feminist criticism might be the contextual analysis that the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls "thick description". Geertz calls for descriptions that seek to understand the meaning of cultural phenomena and products by "sorting out the structures of signification...and determining their social ground and import." A genuinely "thick" description of women's writing would insist upon gender and upon a female bookish tradition among the multiple strat/a that make up the force of meaning in a text. No description, we must acknowledge, could ever be thick enough to account for all the factors that go into the work of art. But we could work toward completeness, even as an unattainable ideal.

In suggesting that a cultural model of women's writing has considerable Usefulness for the enterprise of feminist criticism, I don't mean to replace psychoanalysis with cultural anthropology as the answer to all our theoretical problems or to enthrone Ardener and Geertz as the new white fathers in place of Freud, Lacan, and Bloom. No theory, however suggestive, can be a substitute for the close and extensive knowledge of women's texts which constitutes our essential subject. Cultural anthropology and social history can perhaps offer us a terminology and a diagram of women's cultural situation. But feminist critics must use this concept in relation to what women actually write, not in relation to a theoretical, political, metaphoric, or visionary ideal of what women ought to write.

I began by recalling that a few years ago feminist critics thought we were on a pilgrimage to the Promised Land in which gender would lose its power, in which all texts would be sexless and equal, like angels. But the more squarely we understand the specificity of women's writing not as a fleeting by-product of sexism but as a fundamental and continually determining reality, the more clearly we realize that we have misapprehended our destination. We may never reach the Promised Land at all; for when feminist critics see our task as the study of women's writing, we realize that the land promised to us is not the serenely undifferentiated universality of texts but the convulsive and enthralling outdoor of difference itself.

• SUMMARY

The term postmodernism has been defined in many different ways, and many critics and authors disagree on even its most basic axioms. However, many agree that, in literature, postmodernism represents the rejection of the modernist tenets of rational, historical, and scientific thought in favour of self-conscious, ironic, and experimental works. In many of these works, the authors yield the

concept of an ordered universe, linear narratives, and traditional forms to suggest the malleability of truth and question the nature of reality itself, prating with the idea of a universal ordering scheme in favour of artifice, temporality and a reliance on irony. Many postmodern writers believe that language is congenitally unable to convey any charade of the external world, and that verbal communication is more an act of conflict than an expression of rational meaning. Therefore, much work classified as postmodern displays little attention to realism, characterization, or plot. Time is often conveyed as random and disjointed; commonplace situations are depicted alongside surreal and fantastic plot developments, and the act of writing itself becomes a major focus of the subject matter. Many works feature multiple beginnings and endings. Much postmodern fiction relies on bricolage, which is the liberal use of fragments of premature literary material to create a work that places a higher value on newness than on originality.

Postmodernism is generally considered to cast from the social and political restiveness of the 1960s. The Prague Spring of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the Algerian War of Independence, and student protests in France and the United States are believed by critics to betoken a hermetic distrustfulness in historical and cultural traditions, as well as modernist notions of progress, objectivity, and reason. French philosopher Jacques Derrida is credited as the foremost apostle of postmodern thought, particularly for his concept of deconstructionism. Any work that relies on words to convey meaning, according to Derrida, can be interpreted in many, often contradictory, ways. A thorough textual analysis of such a work bases that the original author's discernment, what he or she declares is congenitally different from what the author describes. Because the term is open to many different exegeses, many diverse works are classified as postmodern. While many works labeled postmodern do not strictly adhere to any formal tenets, a great number of them borrow postmodern techniques and devices, including discontinuous time, intermittent characters, irony, and authorial encroachments. Postmodern works also evidence the belief that there is no distinction between reality and fiction, much like there is no ingrained relationship between words and the objects they are meant to signify.

• KEY WORDS

1. **Sign** : A sign is an entity that signifies another commodity. A natural sign is an commodity that bears a causal relation to the mattered entity, as thunder is a sign of storm.
2. **Signifier** : A sign which conveys meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure popularized the idea of a signifier and mattered.

3. **Linguistics** : Linguistics is the scientific study of human language.
4. **Terminology** : Terminology is the study of terms and their use. Terms are words and compound words that are used in specific contexts.
5. **Feminist criticism** : Feminist bookish criticism is bookish criticism informed by feminist theory or by the politics of feminism more broadly.

• **REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the terms sign, signified and signifier in Saussure's "Nature of Linguistic signs".
2. Explain the two important principles of Saussure's "Nature of Linguistic signs".
3. Write an essay on Jacques Derrida: "structure, sign and pray in the expatiate of human sciences".
4. Examine the characteristics of Gynocritics and the Woman's Text.
5. Discuss the term women's writing with women's body, women's psyche and women's culture.
6. What are the three components of Ferdinand's structuralism?
7. Mention the concepts of sign in linguistics.
8. What is meant by Derrida's "Freeplay of meaning"?
9. What does the term signifier refer to?
10. What is the elucidative strategy of Feminist criticism?

• **SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Literary Criticism: A Reading—B. Das and M. Mohanty
2. Course in General Linguistics—Ferdinand de Saussure
3. A Postmodern Reader—Joseph P. Natoli
4. The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory—Elaine Showalter.

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