CONNECTING THE FRENCH CONNECTION:

EMILY DICKINSON AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

WRITING THE (FEMALE) BODY

DISSERTATION

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By

Roseanne L. Hoefel, B.A., M.A.

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The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee: Approved by

Barbara Rigney

Jeredith Merrin

Judith Mayne

Adviser
Department of English
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1990
For Emily and Virginia,
companions in the journey
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VITA

April 8, 1962 . . . . . . . . . . . . Born--Akron, Ohio

1983 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Dual B.A., University of Akron, Ohio

1983-1985 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . M.A., University of Akron, Teaching Associate

1985-1987 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . French and English Teacher, Akron Public Schools

1987-1990 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Ph.D., Ohio State University/Columbus, Ohio, Teaching Associate

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A basic conflict in feminist literary scholarship exists between French feminist discourse and Anglo-American feminist discourse. But rather than take sides in the conflict surrounding the alleged "gap" between French feminist "theory" and Anglo-American feminist "practice," I suggest that these are not exclusive alternatives and articulate a move beyond the conceptual and practical limitations of both frameworks. First, regarding the myth of separation between theory and practice, I submit that no practice is without theory, regardless of how suppressed, unformulated, or perceived as obvious that theory may be. Subscribing to the oft-cited and assumed dichotomy between the intellectualizing French and the pragmatic English and/or American feminisms is itself both non-dialectic and dualistic; thus, it perpetuates those very binary oppositions against which women chafe and by which women are inscribed in a patriarchal system.

Dismissing, say, Derridean deconstruction or French feminist formulations of ecriture féminine or woman's writing of the body is as problematic as
divorcing one’s theories from the experience or
existence in which they are grounded. Both dismissals
bespeak an anxiety or insecurity on the part of
activist-oriented and more theory-bound feminists,
respectively. Separately, each represents a mistakenly
exclusive approach which would better serve the
integral and multiple goals of feminist scholarship if
seen in an interrelated fashion that is mutually
interrogating, informative, and instructive.

Such a context is provided by Walter Davis’s
incisive reshaping of dialectic, his explanation of
which largely informs my own use of the term,
particularly in its ability to demonstrate how contexts
which seem fundamentally incompatible can function
interdependently. In such a setting, neither the
French of Anglo-American framework would hold a
"privileged" position, but rather contribute to "an
evolving theory which is greater than the sum of its
parts" ("Introduction" to Inwardness and Existence, 6).
"Another word for that relationship," Davis claims in
the sentence which follows the previous, "is
dialectic." In Inwardness and Existence, Davis
reconstitutes dialectical method in a modern form and
context such that the integration of experience and
conceptual thought enables "growth beyond the narrow
parameters" of any given single position. For my part, it is the necessary jointure of the values placed upon experiential gains and upon intellectual strides by Anglo-American and French feminisms that will create the larger dialectic project which is greater than the sum of its variant feminist emphases.

Perhaps it is this dynamism and openness which puts dialectic at odds with Anglo-American analytic thought, for the latter deems the whole no greater than the sum of its parts. Its concern is reduction to components (for example, disciplines), rather than establishment of encompassing contexts and connections. Its use of dualistic and binary categories should not be confused with dialectic opposites, however. Davis lists the differences clearly and in such a way that we can easily see why dialectic is the preferable mode of thinking about the differences between, and within, Anglo-American and French feminisms:

Dualistic oppositions separate distinct orders of being, experience, and value in such a way that conflicts are resolved by establishing the "purity" of one term while loading all ill onto the other. Dialectical opposites, in contrast, are inseparable, mutually determining, and vitally in need of one another for their very being. (I&E, 327-28)

With a dialectic approach, then, the tension between the two is not dissolved or cancelled, but rather
preserved, developed and extended to a wider experience.

Going beyond the structuralist logic of binary oppositions, Davis’s dialectic liberates the search for symmetry in ideological realms by grounding a previously detached abstraction in experience; it makes the necessary connection between hyposstatization and acting/active agents. Davis’s formulation of a true dialectic which grounds itself in "the whole of things" does not fall prey—as most other accounts of dialectic unfortunately do—to the "fallacy of premature concreteness" (I&E, 316); that is, becoming formalistic and losing touch with its base in human experience.¹ The primacy of the whole, that is, the assertion that the whole—or the unity of experience—"is all there is" necessitates the forging of a way into that entity. In my view, dialectic enables the way to discerning connections among seemingly opposed approaches to feminist theory and practice by setting as its main goal the evolution of concepts which progressively expand their meaning and implications. As such, it rejects univocal definitions for the more likely interdependence of constantly interrogated, continually modified reformulations. Thus, only terms which can

¹ See I&E, 315-16, for a more elaborate delineation of the progression of dialectic’s definitions.
withstand the continuous expanse of meaning are viable in a world of acts and things defined by a weave of interrelationships. In such a context only can the variant forms of feminist consciousness move beyond or overcome their own limitations; and they can do so precisely through the pervasive movement which dialectic of this sort envisions.

A genuinely dialectic approach as the one Davis advocates would enable feminists to examine the very important questions for feminist and other discourses that, for instance, Derrida's work raises: How is subjectivity related to itself "subjectively"? Objectively? If subjectivity is constituted by the various ways one lives a relationship to oneself and the anxieties therein, how is it, or can it be, foregrounded in a literary text? Equally important in terms of feminist literary scholarship and the debate between pluralism and dialectic, for example, is the following question: In what ways does a particular kind of self-reference present or hide itself in the development of a literary theory or critical approach? Another way of thinking about this is to consider how any theory, including pluralism, is most revealed—as Derridean deconstruction would have it—by what it marginalizes. What does pluralism, for example, omit
from the agenda, and is "pure tolerance" (Marcuse's term) enough?

What pluralism, ironically, closes out is a principled interrogation of our multiplicity, the motives and reasons behind/beneath our theories, that is, a movement toward what Davis calls a hermeneutics of engagement. Dialectic, when seen as a form of philosophic pluralism, is not a pluralisms in which contending voices persist in isolation and "friendly inability to relate to one another" (Davis, 344), but rather one in which they contribute to a larger vision.

Ideally, a dialectical study of Anglo-American and French feminist theory and practice will both prove and provide a more (re)con-structive enterprise for feminist scholarship today and in the future by focusing not on a rigid set of differences which maintain an antagonistic separation and remain, thus, non-productive and even destructive; instead, it will concentrate on how the two can and, in fact, do inform one another and illuminate the writings of women across time (in the case of this study, Nineteenth and Twentieth century) and space (here, across the Atlantic). Its aim is not to alter a relationship of "unyielding apposition into a contact between... differences," to use Juliet Mitchell's phrasing in her
review of Jane Gallop’s *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter’s Seduction* ("The Bisexual Idyll," *TLS* (Jan. 14, 1983): 39). That, indeed, could lead to a utopianism which is, ultimately, regressive. Instead, comparative, mutually informative study of the traditions from which Dickinson’s, Woolf’s, and French theoreticians/philosophers’ works derive will illustrate how the contributions of French and Anglo-American feminists interact with each other, often in complementary fashion, to offer more complete understanding of literature, literary practice, theory, and criticism by women.

On some level, then, the question is no longer one of subjectivity, but becomes more honestly one of intersubjectivity. Psychoanalysis serves to demonstrate, then, the need to reconstruct the history of one’s/theory’s conflicts and desires, through trauma/breakdown/collapse (deconstruction?), all of which are "regressive" movements that attempt to recover one’s/theory’s own activity or complicity (in, for example, denial, repression, lies). Because the unconscious problematizes the relation of writer, reader, and critic to the text, the text is not stable,
not absolutely in control of itself, and often can unravel (or at least "read") itself.²

An overview of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory will help elucidate this problematic interrelationship between the text, its creator, its reader, and its critic. In her "Introduction" to Lacan's Feminine Sexuality, Juliet Mitchell focuses on Lacan's view of

² In "Turning the Screw of Literary Interpretation," Shoshana Felman demonstrates the undecidability of a text and its refusal of resolution. Textuality exceeds the frameworks to which we try to relegate it, which is true as well of sexuality (in post-Lacanian terms). Reading and interpreting, like be-ing, are co-created, intersubjective transactions in which the subjectivity of the subject (for example, the reader) intends and is intended by the subjectivity of another. Ideally, feminisms could employ the same interactive productivity by acknowledging their own instability as texts and delving into their multiple subtexts.

Again, examining pluralism's philosophical roots, as Davis suggests, might show that in its true, original conception, it is closer to a dialectic enterprise: Richard McKeon, who first evolved philosophical pluralism, discovered that "every philosophy is a 'cathartic' exposure of what is absurd and a systematic preservation of what is sound in other philosophies." Truth is fundamentally plural; differences are preserved fundamentally. In R.S. Crane, philosophical monism vs. dualism moves us toward a plural understanding of literature, which Wayne Booth "rhetoricizes" in his pluralism; the problem of the latter might be that it does not allow other critics to impinge upon, or raise questions at the level of, one's own methodology. Booth's pluralism, though, is grounded in a social rhetorical theory of coherent selfhood and humanistic critical theory. As Davis's elucidating outline illustrates, psychoanalysis is absent in such a framework. For a true dialectician (Plato, Marx, Sartre), "the whole is all there is"; making connections in an indivisible totality is the prime purpose of textual, critical, theoretical engagement.
both the unconscious and sexuality as, necessarily, construct(ion)s (that is, not givens). She makes accessible Lacan’s concepts of splitting of the subject, loss of the object, and the history of the fractured sexual subject; she is able to claim a reconstruction of the subject in all its splits as the main project of Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the second part of the introduction, Jacqueline Rose sustains her priority that the unconscious undermines the subject, male or female, and displaces it from any position of certainty, since the idea of subjectivity is a fiction vis-à-vis the mirror-stage. She clarifies that, unlike Freud, Lacan stresses the resistance of the Drive to any biological definition, and that the Law of the Father/Phallus is normative, not natural. Rose is adept in qualifying what has often been misconstrued in Lacan as a denial of woman’s existence: it is, Rose points out, "woman" as category within language, Woman as the Object, status as the woman (and guarantor of fantasy) that does not exist. According to Lacan, because the unconscious severs the subject from any unmediated (non-linguistic?) relation to the body, and because femininity is constituted as a division within language, there is no "feminine" outside language; for language constructs such an entity.
What Lacan has done, as Mitchell and Rose indicate, is to put the entire notion of a smoothness or totality of self into the realm of myth. The "mirror stage" reveals a mis-recognition of one’s reflection; the ego and its identity (that is, the fantasy of wholeness) thus reside in the Imaginary (Freud’s pre-Oedipal), while the constitution of one’s subjectivity occurs only through language (that is, the Symbolic, or Freud’s Oedipal); and since words stand for objects only once an object is lost or missing, symbolization turns upon the object as absence. Such a line of reason would "logically" posit that The Woman as object is an absence, who thus comes to stand for difference and loss within the Symbolic Order. The phallus, then, as signifier of loss and separation is the moment or locus of rupture. Rose is quick to point out what many feminists who dismiss Lacan either overlook or deny: the phallus—because it indicates a reduction of difference to an instance of visible perception (of "seeming" value, to use Rose’s words)—is a fraud, "standing in" at its own expense as imposture. In the cases of both "the woman" and "the phallus," then, the symbolic is indicted for the imaginary unity its most persistent myths perpetuate.
Even so, a major problem with Lacan remains for many feminists and colors their entire view of, say, Lacanian psychoanalysis' worth to feminism: "femininity" is constituted as a division within language, and this division produces the feminine as its negative term. Feminists like Gallop and Burke use this Lacanian premise as a point of departure for their analysis of the radical potential of Lacanian psychoanalysis. First they trace the development of the psyche in Freud's truly subversive view of the unconscious, which undermines the subject's coherence as a self-determined actor in its own affairs, and this undercuts psychoanalysis' own authority. Realizing that otherness is constructed differently for men than for women during the mirror stage or state of alienation leads to the recognition that there is no such creature as "total identity." While such a realization may initially seem de-stabilizing, the liberating potential of the indeterminacy of the self or subject may be useful to feminisms. The inevitability of fragmentation, and thus the impossibility of perfection, puts into question the central issues of feminist inquiry--for example, the notion of the autonomous, androgynous whole.
As with Derridean deconstruction, how such indeterminacy of self functions in relation to feminism can best be explored by tracing some of its philosophical and theoretical roots. Lacan, for instance, was greatly influenced by the Swiss linguist, Saussure, who posited language as relations between binary oppositions (that is, that we can only know or define something by what it is not). But, Saussure claimed, language could not be the relation of words and things. By examining the relation between signifier (the literal or visual sign whose referent/object has been displaced) and signified (the concept), Saussure proposed the arbitrary nature of meaning, which constantly shifts, depending upon context. Lacan thus determined that language as a relative or differential system only co-occurs with the knowledge of sexual differential; that is, we can understand entry into the first only through entry into the second. The notion of the differential explains why we always deem Other-ness significant.

Luce Irigaray, in Speculum de l’Autre Femme, examines the possibilities raised by such contexts. She interrogates the way in which Lacan—though his name is not mentioned, itself a telling illustration of the absence-presence reversal—denies subjectivity to
woman specifically because woman is irreducibly constituted as an object--of repression, of discourse, of desire. She suggests that the viewing of woman as ontologically incomplete and incompletable, as not existing yet, rests upon imagining that woman does not imagine. Implicit in her analysis, too, is the significance of the philosophical and historical situatedness of ideas, and she traces the suppression of the feminine through its roots to its present manifestations, originating in Platonic idealism, and moving from Hegel to Freud and Levi-Strauss, and of course Lacan. Its many shapes have included woman as irrational, Other, a negativity to be transcended, an object of exchange, a man lacking, and finally, as an absence, both from the powerful discourses of philosophy and psychoanalysis, and from the Symbolic.

Irigaray, thus, takes advantage of the arbitrary, differential, infinite nature of language in an attempt to create a discourse women can call their own, an écriture feminine, inclusive (though not prescriptive) of the following practices, as Ann Rosalind Jones concisely states: opposing the authoritative subject/object positions of standard syntax; suppressing verbs; posing questions rather than writing assertions; using telegraphic and exclamatory
phrases. Having syntax is broken, voices are multiple, and discourse is repetitive and cumulative rather than linear. Within this context, Irigaray posits the female imaginary as mobile and fluid, never fixed, unlike the male imaginary that governs Western rationality (inclusive of values placed upon quantity, ownership, non-contradiction, and binarism). In her theory, then, Irigaray undertakes an implicit critique of the unconscious of Western logic, often undermining the constraining power of the pair by privileging the subordinate/absent element (that is, the feminine or woman). As such, Irigaray's work may be seen as a Derridean deconstruction.

Margaret Whitford, whom Irigaray claims as the most insightful about her work, offers an interesting perspective on Irigaray as a political philosopher, in so far as she is dealing with the issue of "change: How to alter women's status in Western society" ("Luce Irigaray's Critique of Rationality," 110). She views Irigaray's aim as setting a process in motion, rather than formulating a program:

From Irigaray's point of view, she is not prescribing what the female should be, but describing how it functions within Western imaginary and symbolic operations, in order

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3 "Feminine" has no equivalent in English; it refers to anything pertaining to the female, but does not carry with it the negative connotations that haunt it (or women) in English.
to show how what is taken to be the unalterable order of reality (discursive or otherwise) is in fact imaginary and therefore susceptible to change (120).

This is an appealing feminist agenda, though Irigaray, perhaps in an effort to go beyond Lacan, seems to conflate the Imaginary and the Symbolic, between which Lacan had made an essential distinction. The thesis of **écriture féminine**, then, seems to be that a woman must write with her body in order to deconstruct the phallogocentrism of male discourse. Irigaray categorises rationality as male, then, not in order to oppose it, the exclusionary model being a self-defeating one; but in order to suggest a more adequate conceptualization in which the male acknowledges and integrates, rather than represses, the female/the unconscious.4

Monique Wittig objects to such a _pratique_ as a regressive "neo-feminine" move informed by the same ideology (biologism) with which men have kept women in a "natural" state of powerlessness. Wittig insists upon a radical discourse which both is distinct from and challenges what she claims to be the hegemony of

4 In _Gender Trouble_, Judith Butler critiques Irigaray's failure to address specific manifestations of the monolithic/monologic masculinist economy she posits (for instance, in varied cultural and historical settings), and deems this globalizing genster an "epistemological imperialism" (13).
the biologically deterministic *écriture féminine*. She does not see (particularly Cixous’s *pratique*) of *écriture féminine* as addressing itself to social change, the women’s movement, political feminism, or lesbianism, but instead, as focusing on woman as "eternal essence." Wittig overlooks, perhaps, Irigaray’s indictment of phallocentric discourse for equating woman with motherhood and, in fact, her reformulation of the mother-daughter relationship in terms of lesbianism (see, for example, "Le Coeur a Coeur"). If Irigaray seems reluctant to promote lesbianism, that is due to its threat of reversion to an economy of sameness, which Irigaray associates with patriarchal domination, suppression, repression, and oppression. Further, Irigaray explores the

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5 Wittig wants to overthrow the entire discourse on "fictive" sex, which imposes a false or anti-unity, a restrictive fragmentation and the subordination/domination duality. Sex is one of language’s reality-effects misperceived as "fact," according to Wittig. As Butler points out, language’s plasticity "resists the fixing of the subject position as masculine" (117) and thus clarifies the universal as an appropriated domain by men, not a given. Thus, for Wittig, universalizing woman’s point of view will destroy artificial divisions.

Yet, as Butler correctly claims, Wittig’s straight/gay disjunction suplicates the binarism away from which it radically turns, and posits a univocalism that does not allow for optional heterosexuality. Granted, Wittig wants to reveal the "natural" as constructed and to challenge heterosexual power; but, as Butler offers, perhaps it is the compulsoriness, not the heterosexuality, that we should be wary of (126). Separatist prescriptivism is what we want to avoid,
possibility of women no longer being restricted to reproduction and posits the placenta, in its symbolism of flux, as a metaphor for woman. While in Speculum, Irigaray is concerned with the ways Western philosophy ignores difference between the sexes and reduces woman to sameness, in Ce Sexe Qui N’En Est pas Un, she wonders about feminism’s double-bind of equality and difference.

Wittig would also do well to acknowledge that Cixous does deem woman’s different thought/writing as capable of transforming social and cultural institutions. In The Newly Born Woman, Cixous writes: "Societies do not succeed in offering everyone the same way of fitting into the symbolic order; those who are...in between sign systems, in the interstices, offside, are the ones who are afflicted with a dangerous symbolic mobility" (7). Women embody this potentially mobile and thus free group of anomalies. And as Patricia Yaeger has offered, Cixous’s carnivization of language in "The Laugh of the Medusa" reveals its sensuality and materiality as allied with our physical being (208-11). Thus is Cixous able to collapse central hierarchies or gender especially when totalizing lesbianism, determined through its exclusions, would consolidate heterosexuality and its oppressions.
myths (transcendence/immanence; artifice/bios; masculine/feminine). Women, Cixous suggests, can give "patriarchal" language a new dimension by bringing it down to earth and making it playful. In fact, complex cultural determinations of sexual difference make Cixous repudiate the myth of persistent or consistent sexual essence. *Ecriture feminine* then is a political strategy by which the rights of nature are revalidated and, in turn, can redress the wrongs of culture. True: both Irigaray and Cixous locate female representation in women's reproductive organs; but they do so precisely because their reproductive organs constitute the sites of *differance* and, thus, of cultural repression. A dialectic relationship, as Davis describes, between Wittig's radical separatism, Cixous's ideologizing biological "givens," and Irigaray's feminine economy of fluids can be constructed, a place where--rather than promoting sexual difference or sameness--we can focus on originality in confronting the socio-historical and cultural roots of difference, and in invoking what Judith Butler regards as a strategy to "articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses" in order to foster perpetual problemation (128).
Both Cixous and Wittig, for example, are in the business of deconstructing magisterial texts and traditions (though Wittig advocates appropriation of male-derived genres, for example, Bildung), and attention to silences (what is repressed in women’s texts). Because Cixous rejects Freud and Lacan—though not advisable if it means rejecting the unconscious and its implications—she does not subscribe to the theory of woman as lack; she instead calls for an assertion of the female body as plenitude, positive force, the source of multiple physical capacities, erotics, multivocality, and liberatory texts. Further, she necessitates, as Yaeger claims, a feminist theory of play (HMW, 21!). Cixous claims woman’s psychosexual specificity as that which empowers woman to overthrow masculist ideology and to create a new female discourse. She demonstrates that, since "masters" produce oppositions which make economy and thought run, woman—shut out of man’s space—is "the repressed" which ensures the system’s functioning. Cixous illustrates that, because desire comes from a mixture of difference and inequality, only the force of such conflict creates movement; that is, without the struggle for appropriation, there is inertia (a view similar to Davis’s claims regarding the necessary
dynamism and preservation of differences within a dialectic schema). In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous posits woman's imaginary as inexhaustible and offers it as an avenue to undo the greatest crime against women in patriarchy: leading women to hate each other. Similarly, Wittig argues that, when women subscribe to patriarchal modes, they also destroy the myth within and outside themselves.

To establish further connections, then, both Cixous and Wittig, it seems, want to guard against internalized gynephobia. Both—though in different ways—show that the Hegelian schema allows no space for an equal Other—a whole living woman. And both anticipate a Kristevan decoding of feminine/semiotic modes of writing and close reading of the politics of style. Though Kristeva assaults écriture feminine as (in Ann R. Jones's terms) "warmed-over Romanticism and manic depressive narcissism," in her notion of semiotic Kristeva implicitly acknowledges the possibility that woman’s psychosomatic specificity might deform and transform language. She establishes a dialectic between the explosive energies of the semiotic and the structures of official discourse (the latter, perhaps, being one reason she works almost exclusively with male-authored texts). Kristeva’s conceptualization of
the semiotic includes the gestural, rhythmic, preferential language of artists like Joyce and Mallarme, who re-experience jouissance subconsciously by constructing texts against rules and regulations of conventional language. Kristeva does not want an alternative discourse, but a negative function of rejection from potenti(ally) liberatory margins.

Elaborating upon Lacan, Kristeva asserts that the Symbolic originates in the infant's need to deal with absence, representation, and abstraction—the uses of language. Semiotic voices of the unconscious break through and disrupt these symbolic uses of language. In Polylogue, Kristeva writes: "semiotics is a distinctive, non-expressive articulation. . . . We imagine it in infants' cries, vocalizing, and gestures; it functions in adult discourse as rhythm, prosody, word plays, the non-sense of sense, laughter" (14). Following Freud, she suggests a theoretical bisexuality of the unconscious ("Oscillation between Power and Denial"), which is linked with the Maternal, while the Symbolic is clearly Paternal. Thus is she able to account for a dialectic functioning between these two modalities in texts written by men or women, as it (wo)manifests its pre-Oedipal residue in contradiction, meaninglessness, silence, absence, tone, and so on.
Associated with the maternal (because the most pure form of split symbolization is giving birth), and thus the pre-Oedipal/pre-Symbolic/pre-verbal, semiotics focuses on differentiation, stratification, and confrontation; it is prior to the mirror stage with its corresponding situatedness in grammatical structural chains. Unlike the Anglo-American tradition's rootedness in concepts of intentionality, ego, and sexual identity, Kristeva posits a subject in process and in question which is independent of the ideology of the sign, but elaborated in theories of the unconscious. Coded in French culture as feminine, this relational, non-mediated zone is often idealized.

The distinction one must make here is that the semiotic is not an alternative to the Symbolic, without which Kristeva sees only madness or psychosis (two of the few options she leaves open to women); but rather, it is a process within conventional sign-systems, the limits of which it questions and transgresses. Though her argument is uncomfortably formalistic, the possibility for revolution or anarchy within Kristeva's schema can not be overstated, especially if combined with more attention to the political content of a text.
and the historical situatedness of interpretation and revolution.\(^6\)

6 Nonetheless, Kristeva is problematic on various levels. First and foremost is that she seems to collapse feminism and psychoanalysis and, like Cixous and many Anglo-American feminists, she collapses lesbianism into the category of non-differentiation. Perhaps it is a structuring absence in her work; that is, in her covert, implicit dealing with that which she avoids. Or, perhaps as with Irigaray, lesbianism for Kristeva is in the realm of metaphysics. Teresa de Lauretis, in her critique of the essays collected in Susan Rubin Suleiman's *The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives*, criticizes Kristeva's defense of heterosexuality and the phallus and her Freudian/Lacanian denial of any possible desire between women. In fact, de Lauretis writes, Kristeva discusses lesbianism as the "(postmodern and postfeminist) female disease," the result of which is a "theoretical death sentence" (271-72). And, as Butler points out, the return to the maternal in homosexuality—if based upon an internal negation of the maternal, and the loss, privation, or the lack which accompany it—is also "psychotic," since it is ultimately founded upon the structuralist presumption of heterosexuality in the Symbolic. Thus is maternity a mandatory defense against chaos; lesbianism is il(l)-legitimate. Multiplicity, in turn, becomes a univocal signifier. Further, Kristeva does not challenge canonicity and she overlooks women as agents, even in the semiotic process. Pre-occupied with psychic liberation, she privileges the individual psyche in isolation, rather than the community or group. While I give Kristeva credit for her project and would not want us to dismiss her, she leaves me with the question: how does one enact political change, when the only terms that one has belong to the system needing change? She also leaves me unable to dismiss de Lauretis's claim regarding Kristeva's anti-feminist subtext, particularly in "Stabat Mater." In this piece, de Lauretis argues, Kristeva valorizes Freud's view of the feminine as motherhood as it provides woman, in the case of male offspring, the phallic she lacks; Kristeva also condemns women's rejection of the other sex as psychotic, as evidence of "female paranoia." See "The Female Body and Heterosexual Presumption" for fuller discussion.
Nevertheless, one cannot deny that, for Kristeva, the Symbolic is possible only after/upon repudiating the primary relationship to the maternal body. Yet, as Judith Butler points out, her theory depends upon "the stability and reproduction of precisely the paternal law she seeks to displace" (80). That is, the semiotic is subordinate to the Symbolic in a fixed hierarchical relation. Butler asks a very important question: What meanings can semiotic disruptions, displacements, and subversions have, if "the Symbolic always re-asserts its hegemony"? Moreover, according to Butler, if sustained subversion leads to psychosis and cultural breakdown—as is the case in Kristeva’s schema—Kristeva alternately offers and denies the semiotic’s emancipatory potential: disruption can never become a sustained political practice if it is constantly "over-ruled" (and I use the legal terms advisedly here). Butler invokes the following crucial rethinking: "Can we...understand this semiotic economy as a production of a prior discourse?" (91) Only such questions will clarify the illusion of inevitability of necessary maternity which Kristeva’s theories posit, and explore the "unexpected permutations" (93) which—rather than amplifying and proliferating the paternal law—emancipate the oppressed, not the oppressor.
Because many French women theorists see "woman" as a metaphysical concept, they are reluctant to call themselves feminist due to the unacceptable theoretical implications of this term. In fact, they are only, or at least primarily deemed feminist within the context of American feminism. Where then do feminists go for theories of subjectivity? Is woman's subjectivity in the deconstructive psychoanalytic enterprise? If so, once we reveal how a text leaves bare the mechanisms for desire, where do we go from there?

These are questions which can best be explored by a dialectic between the foregoing emphases (and omissions) of French feminism(s) and those of Anglo-American feminism(s). A major difference between the two regarding psychoanalysis is that American feminists deem the unconscious knowable, whereas the French feel that it can only be uncovered through its symptoms and can never be raised to full awareness; that is, for the French theorists, it is ultimately unknowable, a process of resistance to totalizing knowledge. While American feminisms, then, would like to use a knowable unconscious as a tool in knowing oneself and claiming identity, the French problematize the entire concept of identity with the claim that it is not a useful concept since there is no self.
Alice Jardine creates a space to find out what is productive about French theory and American feminism in her impressive analysis, *Gynesis*, which looks at the constructive tension between the two without necessarily integrating them. In addition to the above differences, Jardine posits that American feminists are more interested in the recovery of texts and in the empirical and experiential, while the French thrive upon constant examination of assumptions and upon the intellectual and theoretical. Her premises include three narratives in the Franco-American disconnection (as Donna Stanton refers to it): the French challenge to assumptions taken for granted by "naive" Americans; variations in theories of representation as they relate to political and social realities; and most definitely, different traditions informing the two feminisms. Regarding the latter, the French derive from an existentialist tradition, which sees the whole world as a fiction that one creates every day. Their theory, then, is often perceived as masculinist and anti-feminist by critics like Showalter, for instance, due to its alienating of the personal. The Americans, however, painfully remember new critical formalism, which was divorced from cultural and authorial considerations and was not open to any kind of political criticism,
especially feminism. Now, there is a skepticism of anything formalist in flavor, for which French feminism is often mistaken. This is coupled with the assumption that Anglo-American critical discourse is more explicitly political in its scope. The relationship between French and Anglo-American discourse can best be understood in light of the difference between the French psychoanalytic emphases, and the American feminist emphases: psychoanalysis is a perspective, not a movement, which challenges and reminds us of the unconscious and notions of identity/autonomy. It is a lens which gives feminism the "long view" of culture and the past as a whole. Psychoanalysis and feminism, thus, are not precisely congruent and, therefore, cannot be collapsed.  

Jane Gallop suggests that the emphasis on the "reading of Freud" differentiates psychoanalytic literary criticism in France and America. In France, the Freudian text is apprehended in its materiality and cannot be reduced to a univocal system of ideas to be applied to texts as a grid for meaning. Gallop claims that "French Freud" elucidates, analyzes, and reads the repressed/domesticated/co-opted symptoms of the psyche.

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7 Juliet Mitchell argues a similar claim in her critique of Gallop’s The Daughter’s Seduction.
(DG, 115). Shoshana Felman suggests that in America, Freud's authority is viewed as suppressing literary plurality and otherness in favor of a unified theoretical discourse. Throughout her examination of the woman-as-effect, Jardine points out the problems of trying to read French theory out of context. For instance, Lacan's unconscious, Derrida's écriture, Deleuze's "machines," Foucault's "madness" can only be understood within the context of our Oedipal Western culture. Deleuze and Guatarri, for example, support feminism and the notion that binary dialectic renders everyone a slave. They want both to separate opposition from difference and to develop a theory of affirmation that does not depend on two negations. Here, again, dialectic as elaborated by Davis, rather than dualism, is the enabling route. While Deleuze and Guatarri are perceived as reactionary in France, they receive an active political and pragmatic reading in the United States. Through such examples, Jardine concludes that with few exceptions the French and Anglo-American feminists are not perceiving the same world and texts; thus, gynesis (which Jardine defines as the putting into discourse of woman or the feminine as problemation) in France is externalized and thematized, while in England and America, it is
internalized and practiced. The last sentence of her book offers a point of departure for my own project:

The most important work by feminist theorists convinced of modernity's importance thus remains yet to be undertaken. It is henceforth in the dialogue between these texts by women in France and those by feminists in the United States that the future of gynesis might begin to be decided—-for women.

Simone de Beauvoir was perhaps one of the first and most profound feminists to undertake such a task in her analysis of how different notions of difference are put into play against one another. In her landmark text, *The Second Sex*, she recounts the socio-historical, bicultural, biological, psychoanalytic, institutional, and philosophical situatedness of femininity and what it means, has meant, and will mean to be a woman—in body, in mind, and in spirit. In a philosophical context, for example, she cites Merleau-Ponty’s notion that man is not a natural species, but an historical idea, while woman is not a complete reality, but rather a becoming such that only her possibilities can be defined (SS, 38).

The contributions of Jardine and de Beauvoir are indispensable to the dialectic within French feminisms, within Anglo-American feminisms, and more importantly, between the two. They attempt to address numerous questions, many of which are too often overlooked (for
example, de Beauvoir deals explicitly with lesbianism and its implications, and implicitly addresses issues of race and class). Dona Stanton, Toril Moi, and Ann Rosalind Jones serve similar purposes. Stanton warns us regarding the shortcomings of American feminism, which has not fully achieved the inter- or transdisciplinary approach needed for women's studies and literary criticism, and which tends toward prescriptive criticism— all of which, in my view, can be overcome by commitment to a dialectic approach of the sort Davis offers. Mindful of Stanton's own critique, women can find goals and also feel confident to work within reasonable guidelines. Crucial to her aims is the following distinction: Stanton infers from Cixous that we should not mix/confuse a writer's sex with her/his sexuality or (en)gendering. Toril Moi analyzes further that, not only can the writing have its own "sex," but may—like every writer, every individual—have an "other bisexuality" (STP, 108-09). Taken together, these, I think, accurate claims de-essentialize and de-biologize writing.

While Jones is correct in claiming that women do share an oppression, one cannot generalize or universalize how that oppression is dealt with, internalized, resisted, and so on, across racial,
class, sexual orientation, and ethnic lines. To ignore such differentiation is analogous to staying in Lacan's Imaginary (as opposed to Real) stage of the pre-Oedipal, in that it minimalizes separateness. A dialectic approach, however, would recognize separateness. Dialectic is not merely additive, nor is it isolationist; rather, it is interrogative within a larger framework. Its goal is Hegel's Aufhebung—"to cancel, preserve, and uplift," possibly toward a transcendental signified (a concept based in turn in the Hegelian assertion that there is some absolute starting point of knowledge), but more likely toward a wider vision and experience.

Similar to Moi, I think that one element of the dialectic is the aim of a critical practice which combines political commitment with the subtle textual analysis of the post-structuralists. What Kristeva's semanalysis has taught us, for example, is of crucial importance when studying the texts of women writers such as Woolf and Dickinson. Both excluded from and forced to conform to the symbolic system—and, equally, both drawn towards and forced to repress attachment to the mother—these women write texts in which the tension between semiotic and symbolic spaces is heightened (as Jardine indicates is generally true of
women's texts; *Yale French Studies*, 229). This heightened tension may take the shape of decentering the subject. Multiplicity of the subject in process assumes polyvalence rather than anterior unity. Thus is the woman writer constantly both exterior to and inside of language.

In 1981, *Yale French Studies* published one of the first consciously dialectic collaborative exchanges between French and Anglo-American feminist literary theorists and critics, *Feminist Readings: French Texts/ American Contexts*. Those invited to participate in a conversation regarding responses to French feminist thought shared perspectives which both emphasize their distance and suggest points of interconnection. This dialectical conversation addresses three principle issues:

> the paucity of available translations of French feminists/ the desire to read them;
> the temptation to reject psychoanalysis/ the recognition that both the French and American psychoanalytic traditions might provide useful bases for feminist inquiry;
> the resistance to theory in the name of practical application/ the realization that theory can be used as a practical tool.

("Introduction," 6)

Crucially, this conversation posits the strength to be found in an alliance between French and Anglo-American feminists. But this dialectical alliance can work only in conjunction with the joint practice of re-reading
theory with literatures, re-reading texts within historical contexts (especially since literary history has been based on the premise of women’s marginality as both readers and writers). Such an integrated praxis enables feminists across the Atlantic consistently to forefront the following priorities: an understanding of how the feminine operates in culture; consideration of how writers and theorists are related to cultural production; and concentration upon the political implications of the inter-relatedness among these concepts, language, and sexual difference.

Eagleton astutely describes the implications of these priorities as they constitute a process (a body politic?) for feminism:

> Discourse in all its forms is an obvious concern for feminists, either as places where women’s oppression can be deciphered, or as places where it can be challenged. In any politics which puts identity and relationship centrally at stake, renewing attention to lived experience and the discourse of the body, culture does not need to argue its way to political relevance. . . . The discourse of the body is. . . a politics of the body, a rediscovery of its sociality through an awareness of the forces which control and subordinate it. (LT, 215)

"Deciphering" and "challenging" oppressive discourse constitute the larger framework which includes both the theory and the practice of French and Anglo-American feminisms.
Dickinson and Woolf's work pleads for and bespeaks this larger context, as a dialectical study will demonstrate through its interrogating, instructive, and (re)constructive impetus. One general example of the latter is Mary Jacobus's use of psychoanalytic theory within an historical framework. While acknowledging the extreme importance of how women inscribe themselves in writing, Jacobus foregrounds as well the historical situtatedness of women's subjectivity. Suppressing women's writing entails the suppression of their achievements, meanings, and values—as Dale Spender argues in "Women and Literary History"—and thus of the contribution to the preservation of life, and so on. Reinstating women's different meanings, values, visions in language, socio-cultural structures, history, political contexts (that is, the discourse-at-large) not only can make a difference for feminist goals, but as Woolf claims in Three Guineas, is necessary for women's—and perhaps everyone's—survival.

Another more specific example of the reconstructive impulse of dialectical study is Dickinson's enactment of the fantasy of female linguistic empowering not only of one's verse but of voices of those women poets who precede and follow one (for instance, Elizabeth Barrett Browning is among those for
whom Dickinson sanctions conversions of the mind or "Divine Insanity"; #593). In this sense, Dickinson claimed—as did Woolf—hysteria, with its root from the Greek word for uterus, as woman's prerogative in patriarchal culture. 8

Such poems imply that the inscription of women's consciousness, and the socio-history of that consciousness, may require words and phrases, codes and strategies that seem by standards of patriarchal language illegitimate, frivolous, undisciplined, or mad (babbling). Gilbert and Gubar succinctly claim such effect for Woolf, as well:

... throughout her oeuvre Woolf emphasises the fact that both the alienation from language her books describe and the revision of lexicography her books detail are functions of the dispossession of women, as well as of women's natural resources in the face of this dispossession, and she does this by presenting a dramatic succession of female figures whose ancient voices seem to endure from a time before the neat categories of culture restrained female energy. (FR, 90)

Revealing moments in which women writers shake structures and transgress literary boundaries, focus on the marginal enables us to see the disruption of

6 Gilbert and Gubar contend in "Sexual Linguistics" that Dickinson performs a "proto-Derridean ren renversement" by subversively celebrating the madness produced by Barrett Browning's "tomes of Solid Witchcraft," especially those which enable the woman poet to transform and metamorphose ordinary objects (The Feminist Reader, 85-86).
familiar stabilities; such re-vision demonstrates not only the otherness of the transgressive elements but the inherent instability of structures which necessarily try to silence them. In fact, Gilbert and Gubar question even the assumption that language is man-made and suggest instead that linguistic sexism/mysogyny is a consequence of the fear of female linguistic primacy (see "Sexual Linguistics"). Cixous would contend that *écriture féminine* enables the reclamation of this primacy: of the specificity of the female sex, the affirmation of difference, and the challenge to phallus-controlled discourse. As a liberatory act resisting patriarchal definitions of the feminine as lack or as negativity, it celebrates the power of a feminine sexual/textual aesthetic of difference (see "Sorties: Out and Out"). Unlike Irigaray’s "womanspeak" which is a "female language" of the body, *écriture féminine* is a "feminine" discourse and is thus accessible to men and women. According to Moi’s redefinitions of female (biological term), feminist (political), and feminine (cultural), the latter as characteristic of writing (*écriture*) indicates that "which seems to be marginalized (repressed, silenced) by the ruling social/linguistic
order" (132). As such, it neither entails nor excludes any specific political position. 9

Precisely because the feminine is not a "natural" or biological "essence" or fact, but rather a culturally manufactured non-centered relational position, a feminist politics committed to change may find fertile ground for growth and change there. It is not my intention, thus, by demonstrating how Dickinson and Woolf practice and prefigure French feminist theories, to conflate past and present. Rather, I wish to emphasize how the past and present clearly are moments in a continuous history of change and cannot be collapsed. I will demonstrate how Dickinson and Woolf's theoretical and practical applications constitute the experiential grounding of a dialectic interaction between Anglo-American and French feminisms. As does Orlando as a work of fiction, dialectic as critical interpretation and re-vision exposes the historical instability and cultural constitution of genre and gender categories. It allows us simultaneously to pursue the liberatory possibilities of an écriture feminine thus defined and

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7 Moi finds the term écriture feminine problematic in its overlap with modernist and avant-garde forms of writing, and suggests that "'marginality' cannot or should not only be a matter of form" (132).
to heed Kristeva's concern that *écriture féminine* is a reactionary mythologising of Woman, to combat which she suggests we affirm the socio-symbolic and polysemic internalization of difference as itself the base of identity. Affirming difference as subjectivity's foundation elucidates both the individual and multiple natures of identities and of feminist creative and theoretical discourses.

In addition to their representation of different centuries and traditions (British and American, respectively), both Woolf and Dickinson prefigure French post-structuralist theories, as is becoming increasingly evident in criticism of their works. Gayatri Spivak demonstrates how Woolf, for example, disrupts identity relations and unmakes the masculine subject through semantic innovations—an enterprise which prefigures Derrida ("Unmaking and Making in *To the Lighthouse*"). And Bill Martin suggests that Woolf not only decenters and deconstructs the subject, but also reconstitutes it by forging a discourse which is, thus, both postmodern and feminist (see, for example, his "*To the Lighthouse* and the Feminist Path to Postmodernity").

Also placing Woolf's work in a post-structuralist context is Makiko Minow-Pinkney's *Virginia Woolf and*
the Problem of the Subject, written from a feminist perspective. In the introductory chapter to her impressive study, Minow-Pinkney instructively delineates Woolf's pursuit and encouragement of poetry, as defined by her symbolist modernism, the goal of which is to create meaningful patterns by projecting artistic form on the alleged chaos of the phenomenal world (The Waves, of course, is its primary embodiment). In Woolf's claim that 1) "an unnamed variety of the novel" ("The Narrow Bridge of Art") will be an undetermined type of poetry, and in her speculation that 2) women writers would—with improved economic and educational opportunities—address the poet's concerns of destiny and life's meanings (Collected Essays, 2:147), a study which includes both Dickinson and Woolf is inevitable. Both writers, in their poetic literary practice, try to construct and present a new reality, a woman's reality, rather than represent the old, familiar, patriarchal one.

Thus in both Dickinson and Woolf do feminist and modernist aesthetics converge in the sometimes implicit but more often explicit challenge to phallocentrism. Dickinson's poetry anticipates one of the guiding principles of Woolf's art of poetic fiction and criticism: reshaping a literary form "made by men out
of their own needs and for their uses," women must create and offer "some new vehicle"; the "some" is indicative of Woolf's non-prescriptive, non-restrictive, non-exclusive view (ROO, 116). In fact, rather than determining what women writers should do, Woolf leaves the options wide by inviting women to transgress by trespassing "free and fearlessly," forging for themselves ways as women (Collected Essays, 2:181).

On this score, Minow-Pinkney cites both Kristeva and Cixous in relation to Woolf, the former in claiming sexual difference as a process of differentiation and the latter in positioning woman neither outside nor inside due to her bisexuality (see Minow-Pinkney, 9-11 and corresponding notes 11 and 13 for fuller explanation). While I don't disagree with Minow-Pinkney that such connections bespeak the jointure of Woolf's feminist and modernist aesthetics, I would like us to observe how it is within such a link that Dickinson's affinity with Woolf lies. Both writers, in their urgency to discover new poetic and fictional modes, claim the Imaginary, woman's imaginary, as alive and well; and both rehabilitate the lost mother by rescuing the maternal from its repression and, instead, giving it a voice, offering it an em-bodi-ment. Both
Dickinson and Woolf reverse the value judgments that would put the non-privileged member of the pair, that is, woman or the feminine, down (repressed/oppressed/suppressed) or out (on the margins, on the periphery of silence).

But, as Kristeva would caution us, this "femininity" is a psychical space rather than a biological essence. An "archaic phase of experience," in Minow-Pinkney's terms, available as a possibility, it is not an identity specific to women, situated as it is in the pre-Oedipal (before sexual difference appears) and thus containing, and accessible to, both masculinity and femininity. However, the responses to the pre-Oedipal semiotic ruptures (for example, nonsensical, maternal rhythms) may be different for women: ecstasy, nostalgia, and madness are the primary options for women when the Symbolic/Paternal order crumbles.

Not surprisingly, Woolf is one of a very few women Kristeva mentions, though even then with reservations, as practitioner of a poetic language in the interstices of semiotic and signification practices. Both Woolf and Dickinson's work inhabits what Kristeva calls the "threshold between the semiotic and the symbolic" (Revolution in Poetic Language, 48). In describing how
the novel of the future will resemble poetry, Woolf may as well be assessing the function of poems, at least Dickinson’s poems: "[poetry]... give[s] the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude" (Collected Essays, 2:225). Likewise, in both Dickinson’s "body" of poems and Woolf’s poetic novels like The Waves and Orlando, rhythmic organization and phonic or semantic repetition take precedence over conventional syntax; traditional syntagmatic associations of implication, subordination, and causality are overridden. The semiotic play that these characteristics bespeak indicates that in both Woolf and Dickinson, the unconscious (the repressed, the "feminine") permeates the discourse (for example, repetition, as Freud claimed, is "an ungovernable process of the unconscious"). As Kristeva has claimed, the "semiotisation of the symbolic... represents the flow of jouissance into language" (Revolution, 79); the Symbolic poses for both Woolf and Dickinson, then, 1) a framework to struggle against and 2) a subordination of the (pre-Oedipal) play and pleasure of the signifier to overcome.

The call of and for this maternal "phase" (that is, the pre-Oedipal), however, causes Kristeva—-in one of her few speculations about a woman writer--to
contemplate Woolf's suicide as a multiply haunted and hysterical one (About Chinese Women, 39). I would argue, instead, that part of the reason for the large body written by both artists, Dickinson and Woolf, may be found in their ceaseless effort to forge a discourse in which the retrieval (or resurrection?) of the Maternal and de(con)struction/crucifixion of the Paternal Order did not equal drowning or suffocation for woman. After all is said (or not) and done (or not), Dickinson and Woolf did not want to trade the ultimate, ill-logical end of patriarchal discourse--capitalistic, imperialistic,, militarist and fascist devastation (in the Civil War for Dickinson and in World War I for Woolf)--for an end which meant self-abnegation and annihilation.

Hence the tendency in both Dickinson and Woolf to create and gravitate toward a modernist poetics, an attraction which adumbrates Kristeva's later claim that modernist poetry paralleled and prefigured total social revolution since its very existence attested to the plausibility of transforming orthodox society's symbolic order from within. As Toril Moi summarizes in her "Introduction" to Sexual/Textual Politics:

The modernist poem, with its abrupt shifts, ellipses, breaks and apparent lack of logical construction is a kind of writing in which the rhythms of the body and the unconscious
have managed to break through the strict rational defences of conventional social meaning. (11)

I would like to discuss briefly why Woolf’s works can be viewed in a similar vein to that of modernist poetry. Robin Majumdar in her useful annotated bibliography states in her "Introduction" that "the central problem which engaged most critical attention was about her conception of the novel in terms of poetry. The point at issue was whether a subjective, lyrical approach to fiction such as Virginia Woolf’s was appropriate to the novel as an art-form" (xii-xiii). Bradbrook, Marcel, Swinnerton, Troy, Empson, and Peel are among the critics who condemned Woolf’s poetic tendencies, while E. M. Forster represented the few who, even early on, viewed—though apparently ambivalently—Woolf’s talents as those of "a poet who wants to write something as near to a novel as possible" (see "The Art of Virginia Woolf," The Atlantic Monthly; Boston, September 1942, 82-90).

Woolf was criticized, too, for her fragmentary structure, her "shapeless and amorphous" framework, her subordination of plots and incidents to a preoccupation with consciousness (see Leavis and Savage, for instance)—all of which characterize Dickinson’s poems. Not surprisingly, such were precisely the qualities admired by the French, even among well-known critics
Maurois and Blanche, who praised Woolf’s psychological insight and lyrical prose.

But by even a few French critics (for instance, Dottin), Woolf’s experimental techniques (fragmentation, refusal of conventions of the novel, etc.) met with attack. Because, as Kristeva claims, conventional meaning structures and sustains all social and cultural institutions, fragmenting and disrupting them as Dickinson and Woolf’s literary techniques do are precisely what incur for them the risk of madness—at the very least, the risk of that label, or one like it; fortunately, though, Dickinson knew such madness to be “divinest sense.” Catherine Clement and Cixous insist that women’s privileged relation to writing—since their Oedipal structure does not elicit the same “divestment” from the Imaginary—should be used to undo (and unlearn?) the cultural repression that induces madness.

Dickinson and Woolf both seemed to realize, as Cixous would theorize later, that in spite of its patriarchal substance, the symbolic as a signifying system was by necessity arbitrary, abstract, and fictional; hence, their active entry into it (via writing) gave Dickinson and Woolf access to participation as subjects rather than objects, active
rather than passive agents in the Real/unrepresentable. Thus is jouissance such a "coup" for women: simultaneously containing sexual, political, and economic implications, jouissance (because it includes the enjoyment of rights and property) encompasses total access, participation and ecstasy—in its totality, then, it is Real because/and unrepresentable. Hence the connection of jouissance with Bakhtin and Cixous's "carnivalesque": when the transcendental signified is put into question, the potential for revolutionary disruption (that is, carnival) becomes possible if not inevitable. As Kristeva puts it:

Carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law. ([*Desire in Language*, 65])

The consequent "poetic polyphony" as Temma Berg terms the resultant mode, presents itself in Dickinson and Woolf's work, where it is inscribed in refusal to be muted: through fictions,¹⁰ "lies" (for example,

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8 See, for example, McKinstry's "'How Lovely Are the Wiles of Words!'" *Engendering the Word*, 193–207), which illustrates Dickinson’s manipulation in her letters of language as self-empowerment, be the letters to the Master (from whom she is different yet whose difference she is also able to transcend) or to Higginson (with whom she assumes a child’s role yet/and is in control of his responses). In this essay, McKinstry in effect provides mimesis with a new definition that, I think,
Dickinson "telling it slant"; Mrs. Ramsay slanting almost all she tells to accommodate the listener), and circumlocution, Woolf and Dickinson claim the powers of articulation (see, for instance, Larsen's "Text and Matrix: Dickinson, H.D., and Woman's Voice," EW, 244-62). As deconstructionists of phallogocentric discourse and asserters of a new tongue, Dickinson and Woolf investigate connections between women's linguistic generativity, power, and voice. Mimesis enables women to break out of the ambivalent role ascribed them by the Patriarchal Symbolic, as Moi conveniently summarizes:

[I]f patriarchy sees women as occupying a marginal position within the symbolic order, then it can construe them as the limit or borderline of that order. From a phallic point of view, women will then come to represent the necessary frontier between man and chaos; but because of their very marginality they will also always seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside. Women seen as the limit of the symbolic order will in other words share in the disconcerting properties of all frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown. (S/TP, 167)

Certainly marginality can be more empowering than inclusion in and obedience to a debilitating center.

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would apply to Woolf as well as Dickinson's project: effective inversion of "female humility [such] that it conceals irony and reveals power in female disguises" (206).
But locating writers like Dickinson and Woolf on the margins assumes they are anomalies to some arbitrary center, rather than foremothers or originals in their own right—the latter a view which would elicit a revision of the very context which excludes or peripheralizes them.11 Thus does Cixous advise each woman to "...dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent of herself a language to get inside of" ("The Laugh of the Medusa," 257).12

Women must get "within" and do these things, for as French feminisms have variously offered, writing is the locus for change, with female identity located within writing as an act of creation. Creating another language, syntax, and grammar provides the vehicle to inventing another body (of discourse) and reclaiming position as politically active (and actively political)

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9 For an intriguing discussion of how to revise such a context through a "visionary" rather than "visual" "beholding [that] engenders female poetry" (91), see Gilmore's "The Gaze on the Other Woman: Beholding and Begetting in Dickinson, Moore, and Rich" (EW, 81-102).

10 See Jeanne Larsen's argument that Dickinson protected herself through the "difficulty" of her works and the fictions it enabled and the safety of womanspeak within them: "Text and Matrix: Dickinson, H.D., and Woman's Voice," EW, 244-62.
agents of history and the literature which both constitutes and reflects it. With the subject as an effect, a product (-in-process) of language and culture, as French philosophy would have it, revolution begins in language; and thus, *écriture féminine*—creating its own symbolism—is a space enabling the potent dive into language.

Rosalind Coward’s book, *Patriarchal Precedents*, because it aims to clarify the history of how we think about sexual relations, is helpful when considering the dive into discourse. In an interdisciplinary, interrogating, necessarily dialectical way, she writes that "Instead of light from the plenitude of discourses. . .what has been exposed are the absences, the questions not asked, and the answers not heard in these theoretical discourses" (2). With this multiple concern, she structures her study around three questions:

Why is it that the questions asked by feminism have revealed these absences? What are the terms in the fullness of some discourses within the social sciences which have long hidden the absences? And what are the areas of theoretical invisibility which must be made to appear if any discourse is to be constructed adequate to the gaze of feminism? (2)

Interestingly, and as she might have predicted, given her premises and given that interrogating any position
makes it part of a dialectic process, Coward’s own discourse and inquiry facilitate yet another set of questions which includes the following, certainly non-exhaustive list:

--How does one constitute difference without being essentialist? If essence is the dialogic Other of existence, how can the new "essence" be reconstructed culturally to close the gap between these two entities which are paradoxically present (and necessarily both)? How, more specifically, does this paradoxical presence present itself paradoxically in the writings of Dickinson and Woolf?

--Is it actually possible to escape binary thinking, if we keep the notion that language is representational, mimetic, referential? Are Dickinson and Woolf able to do so; and if so, how?

--If Kristeva is right about the semiotic/pre-Oedipal eruption, indicative of marginalized subversiveness in men and women, how does one find it? Is it universal? Where is it, beyond the theoretical? Is it what sets, for example, Emily Dickinson’s poetry apart from "conventional" poems (for instance, her repeated use of the dash; irregular capitalization, and so on)? Is it the impetus behind Woolf’s deliberately conscious use of bracketed or elliptical discourse? Is it also the
force which, in part, enabled these two writers to work out their own pre-Oedipal (or mother-daughter) conflicts?

--What are the problems, the advantages, of locating the power and subversion of patriarchy in the language of discourse, in its (phal)logocentrism? How, for instance, can crafters of language, such as Dickinson and Woolf, empower themselves, their texts, their readership?

--Have women been deprived of using other women as the Other? (Cixous and Irigaray both acknowledge women's complicity in the anti-love or anti-narcissism dynamic.) What is the usefulness of a notion of Other within self or in other women, rather than "woman as Other"? Particularly, how do both Dickinson and Woolf explore this possibility?

--How is, as Cixous posits, "Writing...the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling-place of the other in [woman]" (NBW, 85-86, 93)? Further, how and where does writing "realize" the uncensored relationship of woman to her sexuality? Is it in writing, from woman and toward woman, and in accepting the challenge of phallus-controlled discourse, that woman affirms herself somewhere other than in silence?
(the space reserved for her in the Symbolic)? Again, how do Dickinson and Woolf figure in?

--What are the implications, for literary representations, of placing women in the mirror stage? How do Dickinson and Woolf, in their figures and words, reflect upon this?

--Can we preserve the notion held by Anglo-American feminists (for example, Rich and, I would suggest, Dickinson and Woolf) that the drive to self-knowledge is more than a search for identity? That it is part of a refusal of a male-dominated society's self-destructiveness? And if so, how—if the concept of identity or self is a myth? Further, is it true that all that remains of patriarchy is the self-generating energy for destruction, as Woolf implies in her theoretical and literary works and as feminists like Rich claim in more practical terms? Is this part of the "truth," too, that Dickinson tells, but "tells it slant"?

--Have women, and in what ways, internalized gynephobia? What are the ramifications of this for women's literature, criticism, theory, practice? Women's feminisms? Their otherwise quite possible connections? (How) do poets, novelists, critics, and
theorists like Dickinson and Woolf address this notion in their respective practices?

--Has the institutionalization (in the academy) and intellectualization of feminism, particularly psychoanalytic feminism, cut us off from the political?13 What evidence, if any, is there to indicate that this was a concern of Dickinson (especially considering that she did not declare herself a feminist, nor would she have known the jargon of psychoanalysis)? of Woolf (who both was an avowed feminist and also knew the discourse of psychoanalysis)?

--If the lack of "identity" incurs identification with the neutral—which is itself phallocratic and based in lack—and if "gender neutral" actually means

11 Questioning whether academicization of feminism has cut us off from the larger feminist movement and struggle of the Left brings to mind Gayatri Spivak's claim that, for example, "First-World feminists must stop feeling privileged as women." Spivak's most redeeming contribution to feminist ethics and politics is that we need to consistently locate our excess(es). She criticizes French feminists, for example, for excluding material concerns, when our "surplus" is contingent solely upon another woman's lack. Spivak cautions the academic and intellectual enterprise, and is right to do so, on several counts: that we must critique the blind acceptance of cultural relativism which sanctions such practices as suttee, and expose its exploitation; that we must disrupt the major discourse, but not in terms of a checklist for the "universal" (for she fears that universal has become a reductive euphemism for the Third World); that we must realize and act upon the recognition that there is no such thing as a "safe" position.
"masculine," where does/can one (especially woman) find linguistic neutrality? Is it dis-qualified, just as she is? How do Dickinson and Woolf (attempt to) negotiate this?

--Finally, how can we reconcile the Anglo-American feminist focus on how women represent themselves in language with the French feminist arguments that language itself rules out that possibility? Obviously, the more specific question: How would (and do) Dickinson and Woolf implicitly (explicitly?) address this inquiry--decades in advance--in their respective arts?

There are no easy answers to the initial and more general parts of these questions; indeed, for them, answers may not even exist (yet). Certainly, though, the inquiry itself is impossible, without an acknowledgement and acceptance of the following, as Davis poignantly articulates:

Motives intersect not to force a choice... but to complicate our awareness by revealing the need to establish necessary dialectical connections. Reflection finds no privileged starting point, no one cause, no single context or principle of explanation... which underlies and determines all others. It discovers instead a multiplicity of factors and contexts that have necessary and intricate connections to one another. Reflection is not embarrassed by this fact because it is precisely the discovery it seeks. It welcomes the demonstration that there are [sic] a wealth of things it has not
reflected on because the chance to do so is precisely the experience that sustains and renews it (I&E, 177)

With this in mind, one can begin to explore the more specific components of the above questions—which dialectic will inevitably bring us back to in the "Conclusion"—by seeking how the generalized "theoretical" notions work themselves out more specifically in "practice," that is, quite particularly in the praxis of Emily Dickinson and Virginia Woolf.
CHAPTER II: VIRGINIA WOOLF PRESERVING A DISCOURSE OF
DIFFERENCE AND A DIFFERENCE OF DISCOURSE

Given that in so much of Virginia Woolf's writing
the most insufferable "moments of being" center around
the recognition that the male construction of the
feminine is the enemy,¹ it is not surprising that she
would search for self-generated expressions of the
feminine rather than outer/other-imposed constructions
of it in discourse and language. In her landmark
feminist theoretical text, *A Room of One's Own*, for
example, Woolf violates Aristotelian linear development
of argument by giving the conclusion first, which frees
her to focus on process, rather than product. This
shift in focus enables Woolf to offer a response,
thirty years prior, to Irigaray's claim that women do
not have access to a discourse of their own. The claim
that language is ultimately patriarchal makes language
a product rather than a process. Viewed as a process,
though, language is not so contained. While the
dominant discourse in our culture is patriarchal,

¹ It is not clear that Woolf ever resolved this power
struggle, tied in as it was to being a victim of
incest, and thus an abused female in a pathologically
patriarchal family which both obviously devalued her
and exposed her to intellectual nurturing (e.g., her
father's library) and to protection from poverty.
language does not have to be. Like other oppressed
groups, women can create their own languages.
Irigaray's "womanspeak" is a very real linguistic
possibility.

Doubtless, staking a claim of any sort--especially
to a language as well as a room of one's own within
patriarchal discourse and culture--necessitates tactic.
One of Woolf's primary strategies consists of a sort of
fake self-effacement, what Irigaray would later refer
to as "mimetisme," or mimicry, an interim strategy
whereby the woman deliberately assumes the feminine
style and posture assigned to her within the discourse
(the speaking subject of which is posited as masculine)
in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits
her. In A Room of One's Own, the reasons for such a
tactic are many: since it is the first book to deal
with women and creativity, Woolf almost has to be self-deprecating in order to be heard, liked, or accepted,
for she is challenging the fundamental principles of
her time. Radically undermining every platitude and
convention of her society necessitates the
fictionalization and division of her own character into
many personae, both as rhetorical defense and
protection. As she wrote in a letter to Dame Ethyl
Smith:
--well, I didn't write "A room" without considerable feeling even you will admit; I'm not cool on the subject. And I forced myself to keep my own figure fictitious, legendary. If I had said, Look, here I am uneducated because my brothers used all the family funds which is the fact--Well, they'd have said: she has an axe to grind; and no one would have taken me seriously, though I will agree I should have had many more of the wrong kind of reader; who will read you and go away and rejoice in the personalities, not because they are lively and easy reading; but because they prove once more how vain, how personal, so they will say, rubbing their hands with glee, women always are; I can hear them as I write (June 8, 1933).

Self-effacing mimesis allows Woolf to demonstrate that she has been deprived and thus enables her to establish an empathy motif. In this way, she diffuses antagonism and resentment toward her topic. She is aware, for example, that she speaks of her own project when she declares the necessity of women's inferiority to men; and that women must not only mime the constructions of the feminine as inferior, but must also reflect men at twice their size: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. . . . Whatever may be their use in civilised societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. . . . [And] if [woman] begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished" (ROO, 35-36). Men's self-confidence, their self-
assurance, indeed their very notion of self, literally banks upon their superiority never being interrogated, least of all by a woman.

Undoubtedly, Woolf was aware that the young women students she addresses would immediately relate to the need for a) a room, and b) money of their own. Strategically, then, as speaker/writer Woolf is able--and enables the listener/reader--to envision by a process of several plausible premises (that is, the innumerable "If"'s cited on page 88), that women writers--given the resources--can "light chambers" such as the one opened to her by the phrase, "Chloe likes Olivia." Through mimesis, Woolf hopes that her audience of students will, by connection, begin to know and understand the need for a means of self-expression, a language of their own. For instance, she is more interested in giving "the train of thought that led [her] to think this," that is, the process, than proferring the idea itself, that is, the product. And Woolf deliberately formulates the argument as story, "making use of all the liberties and licenses of a novelist" (R00, 4). Such a technique leads toward two very significant ends: storytelling puts theory (of women's writing of fiction) into practice--our literary foremother thus giving precedence to the union of these
two entities which I posit as an overall project; and deliberating the thought processes privileges process over product in the function of language.

The apologetic tone of *A Room of One's Own* is a luxury neither Woolf nor the world-at-large can afford ten years later, as indicated in Woolf's 1938 theoretical piece, *Three Guineas*.\(^2\) Nineteen thirty-eight was an adverse and troublesome time to write about pacifism: England was on the verge of being invaded by Nazis,\(^3\) and Woolf's nephew Julian Bell had been killed in the Spanish Civil War. Woolf's playfulness in *A Room of One's Own* is necessarily replaced by an urgency which is informed by her less-censored engagement with her anger. To a male audience, this time, Woolf presents a utopian alternative (feminist education), which she then has to withdraw (31-35), since such would set women up for failure within patriarchy. Here, Woolf's radicalism is in the argument (not in the solution, that is, to send

\(^2\) Heilbrun notes a transformation in Woolf's later works: "...with great works behind her, [Woolf] would no longer fear either expression of her anger or its effects on the men who overheard her" (see "Virginia Woolf in her Fifties," in *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*, 237-38). Thus was Woolf able to reverse the symbolist-modernist rejection of feminist anger, explicit polemics, and "self-consciousness."

\(^3\) Woolf and her Socialist and Jewish husband, Leonard, by this time had created a suicide plan.
three checks), for her focus is the painstaking task of a woman trying to come to grips with the contradictions inherent in a destructive patriarchal economy that is—as Irigaray would formulate again—proprietary and based on binary opposites: Irigaray describes male discourse, experience, desire, pleasure, and logic, as well as the structure and dynamics thereof, as solid, rigid, already formed/produced (that is, not evolutionary or in process). An economy of ownership, it is subordinate to a discursive, closed logic involving binary opposites, and to a phallic (monolithically unified and singular), sight-privileging pleasure. Woolf rejects collusion with or participation in such a system, especially if it means becoming a female man or if it requires objectifying woman; thus Woolf attempts to change the terms of the discourse by: a) prioritizing the establishment of institutions which preserve female difference, and b) giving women access to subjectivity, knowledge, and power.

Using a consciousness—rather than action-centered materialist logic, Woolf offers coalition as an alternative to either merging or separatism among men and women. She prefers to suspend the contradiction between the sexes and genders, and live
either in the contradiction between the two worlds, or at the margins, for she feels both that 1) being locked into patriarchal constructions and dualities is worse than being locked out (TG, 99-100); and 2) union is too total an effusion since it obliterates both. Rather than integration (which breeds likeness), difference, for Woolf, is a construction we can better use as a base for transforming the entire structure. Woolf is unsure whether or not "it is any use to try to speak across" the vast gulf which separates women and men (TG, 4). Woolf does not state what causes the gap between them, but rather indicates it by an absence--ellipses--which she presents and calls attention to: "But . . . those three dots mark a precipice, a gulf so deeply cut between us" (TG, 4). Significantly, Woolf gives the authority to articulate this difference to a woman she constructs, Mary Kingsley. Yet she concludes at the outset that the reasons for war would be "difficult to judge [since women] do not share [them]" (TG, 6). Woolf further undercuts the Law of the Father by first defying its injunction that "in some circumstances it is right to fight" (TG, 10), and second by denying (in anticipation of Derrida and post-structuralists) the existence of incontrovertible verities: "It is distressing, baffling, confusing, but
the fact must be faced; there is no certainty in heaven above or on earth below" (TG, 10).

Wanting to be a pacifist without being passive, Woolf is left with the dilemma that non-participation is the only way to help. When women have tried to help in the past, for example, by gaining suffrage in an effort collectively to effect some type of change, however slight, there has been a resounding difference in the consequences for them, in the price they have to pay merely for wanting to help:

Certainly the one great political achievement of the educated man's daughter cost her over a century of the most exhausting and menial labour; kept her trudging in processions, working in offices, speaking at street corners; finally, because she used force, sent her to prison, and would very likely still keep her there, had it not been, paradoxically enough, that the help she gave her brothers when they used force at last gave her the right to call herself, if not a full daughter, still a step-daughter of England (TG, 14).

That the "all vs. none" in terms of possessions (capital, land, valuables, patronage) makes for "very considerable differences in mind and body," Woolf claims, "no psychologist or biologist would deny" (TG, 18). One of the main differences is that women and men see the same world through different eyes. With the records preserved by Whitaker's Almanac (of 300 million pounds spent on arms a year; TG, 45) and Arthur's
Education Fund (which literally takes resources from the mouths of women to promote males-only education) as symptomatic and emblematic patriarchal erections, the very absurdity of the request--that women contribute to or help figure out the state of affairs--is itself part of the problem (102-03). Whitaker is the patriarchally authorized source of facts and figures regarding the tokenism of professions allegedly open to "the daughters of educated men" (45-47). Yet knowing the chain of self- and other-destruction inherent in patriarchally constructed professions, 4 absence from the system rather than presence in it becomes the most viable option:

4 Woolf contends that women are left to conclude the following:
if people are highly successful in their professions they lose their senses. Sight goes. They have no time to look at pictures. Sound goes. They have no time for conversation. They lose their sense of proportion--the relations between one thing and another. Humanity goes. Money making becomes so important that they must work by night as well as by day. Health goes. And so competitive do they become that they will not share their work with others though they have more than they can do themselves. What then remains of a human being who has lost sight, sound, and sense of proportion? Only a cripple in a cave (16, 72).
The image of cripples in a cave comes up again in The Years, when Eleanor imagines asking Nicholas when the New World would come: "When shall we be free? When shall we live adventurously, wholly, not like cripples in a cave?" (TY, 297)
Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. The one shunts us up like slaves in a harem; the other forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property. It is a choice of evils. Each is bad. Had we not better plunge off the bridge into the river; give up the game; declare that the whole of human life is a mistake and so end it? (TG, 74)

The layered contradictions in this at best poor and utterly defeating patriarchal system leaves no place, no space for "civilized human beings; human beings, that is, who wish to prevent war" (75). Again it is no coincidence that the most profound indictment of the patriarchal impasse presents itself literally in the center of the book (pages 72-74 of 144 pages), as it is central to the argument which determined Woolf's own life and death. She calls on women to resist what she deems the masculine values of militarism, hierarchy, and authoritarianism.

Woolf draws attention again to her later ellipses, which represent the doubt and hesitations surrounding becoming a member of patriarchal society; they represent "neither reason nor emotion" for the hesitation, "but something more profound and fundamental than either. . . difference" (103-04). Rachel Bowlby contends that, among other functions,
Woolf's ellipses suggest the "difficulty of concluding" (FD, 160). I would modify this slightly: they indicate, rather, an active resistance to closure and conclusions, connected as they are to absolutes and thus to the foundation of patriarchal hierarchy and discourse. She intentionally calls attention to the gaps in the discourse, the spaces women may choose to inhabit, providing an alternative to the straight line of linear logic. Ellipses, then, become a metaphor both for Woolf's relentlessly interrogating style and her refusal to position herself in any fixed, unequivocal space.

The need for an outsider society is "inevitable" (a word Woolf repeats thrice in three sentences, 105). Speaking for women, Woolf claims that social responsibility deems it "both wrong for us rationally and impossible for us emotionally to fill up your form and join your society. For by so doing we should merge our identity in yours; follow and repeat and score still deeper the old worn ruts" (105). Because there is no "just" war, women are left only to preserve their difference by staying outside the male economy of sameness, an economy which breeds itself, repeats the same mistakes with increasingly disastrous effects, leaving her to conclude--again in the first half of the
argument—that "It seems as if there were no progress in the human race, but only repetition" (66). 5

It is the patriarchal economy of sameness that Woolf refuses to join: "we can help you most effectively by refusing to join your society; by working for our common ends—justice and equality and liberty for all men and women—outside your society, not within" (106). This necessitates being outside patriarchal discourse and finding a language of woman's own. In forging this possibility, Woolf again draws attention to the silences or absences in language, the ellipses which "represent a gulf—of silence... inspired by fear" as well as the lack of skill with which to "explain it" (120). Here, Woolf prefigures Derridean deconstruction (in its search for meaning among absences), Kristevan semiotics (by using ellipses to represent the eruption of the unconscious, though Woolf is conscious of its implications), and Irigararian notions of women's inability to access the language of the fathers. 6

5 Woolf satirically suggests that if men continue with their contempt, women will gladly stay out of their system (TG, 82).

6 Nor can woman access the society of the fathers: Woolf states, "Society it seems was a father, and afflicted with the infantile fixation too" (TG, 135). Woolf began reading Freud December 2, 1939 (Diary of Virginia Woolf, 248), to give "[her] brain more scope," and thus was familiar with such terminology.
their lives (that is, to prevent war) is to preserve their difference, "not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods" (143). One of those new methods prefigures yet another basic Irigarian notion, the capacity "to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity," something an economy of sameness—based as it is in unity through lack of diversity, lack of multiplicity—would neither imagine or allow.7

7 In her review of Three Guineas, Theodora Bosanquet indicated the intersection of Woolf’s practice of fluid (feminine) prose and her feminist politics to create a poetics of female discourse:

... Like all Mrs [sic] Woolf’s works, [Three Guineas] carries its author’s signature on every page. It is made of vision translated by a subtle intelligence, passion lighted by wit, confident and easy control of words and phrases. It flows in a form which moves and gleams like the ripple of waves drawn by the irresistible magnetism of the moon. And as waves seem to return on themselves before each advance, so the movement of Mrs [sic] Woolf’s mind seems to glide back, to catch up an earlier thread of the argument, only to gather momentum for flowing over a new crest to a higher level.

Yet for all the shimmer of its surface, Three Guineas is a revolutionary bomb of a book, delicately aimed at the heart of our mad, armament ridden world. Or, if not precisely at the heart, at an even more vital if less physiologically localized centre, the dark womb of the unconscious (or subconscious, as you will) where various undesirable eggs hatch into monsters which thrust their way to the surface in fears and oppressions, dictators and mass murders... (Time and Tide, 4 June 1938, 788-89).
If, as Woolf claimed (A Writer's Diary; June 3, 1938), Three Guineas and The Years "indeed" constitute one book, perhaps we would do well to explore how this theory of woman's discourse, which privileges (over)flow and multiplicity over solidity and singularity, takes shape in the practice of her fiction. Wine and war work simultaneously to obscure meaning in The Years: "A little blur had come round the edges of things. It was the wine; it was the war" (287). And female perception, vis-a-vis Eleanor's thoughts, notes that "Things seemed to have lost their skins; to be freed from some surface hardness; even the chair with gilt claws, at which she was looking, seemed porous; it seemed to radiate out some warmth, some glamour, as she looked at it" (287). But the pleasant reminiscences which follow, shared by Maggie, Sara, and Eleanor, just as they are on the brink of finding a harmonious rhythm, are interrupted: "a long-drawn hollow sound wailed out...wailed again...the siren wailed again" (288). Eleanor is the first to protest, "No, No!"—for this was the "wrong note"; it represented the discord of war, a German air raid, which invokes from Renny, a male, "an exaggerated gesture of boredom," while for Eleanor, it constitutes an interruption to woman's attempt at an harmonious
language. Thus, it evokes the fading of color, the loss of a radiance and light Eleanor had happily observed only moments before (288). She continues to wonder (297) and feels not only "a new space of time, but new powers, something unknown within her."

Later in a conversation with Peggy, when Eleanor is trying to explain her continued belief in the need for freedom and justice, that "something unknown within her" is the logical organization, or lack thereof, among her thoughts: "She gave up the attempt to account for the order in which her thoughts came to her. There was an order, doubtless; but it took so long to find it, and this rambling, she knew, annoyed Peggy. . ." (332-33). While Eleanor seems to attribute this "rambling" to her age, other passages regarding her experience with language lead one to think otherwise. For example, Eleanor comes again to this question of order in her attempted and imagined interactions with Nicholas:

Does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern: a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? . . . a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible? The thought gave her extreme pleasure: that there was a pattern. But who makes it? Who thinks it? Her mind slipped. She could not finish her thought (369).
One is left to speculate why she can not finish her thought (because she is still in the initial, exploratory stages of forging a language that does fit her thought patterns?), and why, moreover, she invokes Nicholas's name, wanting "him to finish it; to take her thought and carry it out into the open unbroken; to make it whole, beautiful, entire" (369). Nicholas seems, to Eleanor and perhaps to Woolf, to be in a particularly apt position to achieve the satisfaction of the desire for wholeness in language because, as a male, he has direct access to patriarchal discourse; and, as a homosexual, he is on the margins, where his particular sensibility can offer Eleanor the authority of patriarchy, yet also the implicit critique of and difference from it that his distance (from the center) allows. Similar to Nicholas, Edward has limited access since he does not subscribe to some of the fundamental patriarchal institutions: to him, "ceremonies are suspect and religion's dead"; thus it is that he does not "fit in anywhere" (410). Consequently, though "he wanted to make other sentences," he is at a loss for how he can--unless "[he] kn[e]w what's solid" (410).

Woolf shows other women having contact with the language in ways that differ from those of the men. When North is reading verse to Sara--a visionary
involved in her own imagination and inventions—for example, his "words going out into the room seemed like actual presences, hard and independent; yet as she was listening they were changed by their contact with her" (339). When Peggy then is attempting to make sense out of "such complete nonsense" (351), she is totally and humorously misunderstood by her tall, old, hard-of-hearing uncle, the patriarch unable to distinguish whether his niece has asked about "hackets or hatchets" (352). Significantly, Uncle Patrick's long stories "kept breaking up the surface of her mind like oars dipping into water. Nothing could settle" (353), thus exemplifying the way in which male discourse—based as it is in solids—breaks the flow of female consciousness. Later, when she feels and sees a "state of being" (390), she is at a loss for how to express it: "But how could she say it?" She reaches an impasse, and what she says is twice over "not what she had meant to say" (390).

Yet what she does say sounds very close to Woolf's argument in *Three Guineas*: she accuses North of succumbing to the conventional outlets of marrying, propagating, making money (from books), rather than "living differently." Though she had not said exactly what she wanted, she "had tried to say it," and that in
itself relieves "some of the oppression" (391). It is through this simultaneously futile and successful attempt that she grasps the inevitable feature of fragmentation for a woman trying to articulate her thoughts in patriarchal language: "Directly something got together, it broke. She had a feeling of desolation. And then you have to pick up the pieces, and make something new, something different, she thought, and crossed the room" (392). North is clearly the voice of patriarchy Woolf confronts in *Three Guineas*: he damn women for being unimaginative, and concludes that their education amounts only to making them "critical, censorious" (396), and--threat of threats--elusive of definition (read confinement): "Old Eleanor, with all her rambling and stumbling, was worth a dozen of Peggy any day. She was neither one thing nor the other, he thought, glancing at her" (396). Peggy is aware of the pay-back for criticizing him, for "the vanity of men was immeasurable" (396).

And, again, Eleanor tries to determine the cause of feeling suffused with happiness, and concludes that her keen sensation had survived while the "other thing, the solid object--she saw an ink-corroded walrus--had vanished" (426); thus is she alive and "waking up."
Woolf confronts the patriarchal economy of sameness again in her fiction in *To the Lighthouse*, in which Lily Briscoe appears as one of the first women in British fiction neither to get married (or be assimilated to sameness) nor to die—the two options offered to women in patriarchy. In *Writing beyond the Ending*, Rachel Blau DuPlessis suggests that the rightful end of woman in novels, especially prior to the Twentieth century, was social: successful courtship and marriage, or social and sexual failure; in the latter case, death due to inability or improprieties in the social negotiation would often result. Woolf disrupts the narrative pattern of the romance plot since it stifles women's character, represses her quest, valorizes heterosexist paradigms, and incorporates the individual within a couple as sign of her personal and narrative success (*BTE*, 5). Woolf knew that—because literature, as a human institution, is organized by ideological scripts—writing beyond or outside the presupposed ending produces a narrative that denies and reconstructs patterns that, previously, had been culturally mandated, internally policed, and hegemonically poised. For example, Bankes views Mrs. Ramsay as a madonna in order to subordinate her to Christian denial of the mother's body. Unlike him,
Lily does not victimize Mrs. Ramsay through representation, as Margaret Homans has pointed out (283), nor does she treat her as an arbitrary, dispensable, replaceable part of a signifying chain (Woman), as Mr. Ramsay does. As the binary opposite of philosophy, Mrs. Ramsay (as fiction) is confined by the men around her because of her potential to dangerously reveal its own procedures (see Minow-Pinkney, 92)—that is, to deconstruct it. For Lily, no one else will do, and therefore any representation is inadequate (see ITL, 255-56). As such, Spivak labels Lily’s efforts an attempt to creatively articulate a “woman’s vision of a woman” (“Unmaking and Making,” 45).

Even when she does try, however, Lily is able to re-present Mrs. Ramsay and Woolf is able simultaneously to forge new options for women in fiction only after Woolf enacts her theory of “killing the angel in the house.” Beth Rigel Daugherty offers an enriching and opposing view in her “’There She Sat’: The Power of the Feminist Imagination in To the Lighthouse”: she contends that Woolf resolves the contradiction between killing the Angel in the house and rescuing a mother she can “think back through” by separating the role of Angel from the woman herself (see 2-4), and thus Woolf makes her own mother “real again, changing a haunting
Angel into an internalized ally" (13). Nevertheless, Mrs. Ramsay personifies the safest part of the construction of the feminine—which is to be ignorant of it, to feel safe in it and unaware of being constructed. In fact, she seduces precisely because she requires everyone to follow the (patriarchal) code. Perhaps for both of these reasons, Spivak is able to argue that Mrs. Ramsay, the subject of the text in form ("The Window") and content, inspires womb-envy.

Through Lily's creative predication of Mrs. Ramsay—that is, "Time Passes" serves as the copula and "The Lighthouse" as the predicate—the womb becomes a place of creative production, rather than a space of emptiness or mystery (44-45). Indeed, we learn at the outset that she is extremely uncomfortable with non-conformity: "Strife, divisions, difference of opinion, prejudices twisted into the very fibre of being, oh, that [her children] should begin so early, Mrs. Ramsay deplored. They were so critical, her children. . . . It seemed to her such nonsense—inventing differences, when people, heaven knows, were different enough without that. The real differences, she thought standing by the drawing-room window, are enough, quite enough" (17). We are left to wonder, with the awareness of class differences that follow this
passage, how Mrs. Ramsay could have been unaware of differences in sex/gender expectations; or, if on some level she was referring to these, as well, as undeniable, unchangeable, and certainly "enough," for shortly thereafter she discusses with Tansley the "greatness of man's intellect" and the (corresponding? consequent?) "subjection of all wives... to their husband's labours" (20).

Rather than being fatally injured by this gender code (as is Rachel in The Voyage Out and Septimus in Mrs. Dalloway), Lily transforms the threat to survival that Mrs. Ramsay poses into the muse, transforms what would otherwise be a ticket to destruction into creation and art. Mrs. Ramsay is the art of the feminine, which the "Time Passes" section distorts, for she dies of exhaustion trying to fulfill the prescription for sameness and order within her patriarchal household. It is not by chance that Andrew dies in the war, Prue dies in child-birth, and Mrs. Ramsay dies trying to keep these gendered forms of death and life in suspension. Nor is it a surprise that Lily sleeps through this section (ten years pass

8 Daugherty also offers an elucidating view of Mrs. Ramsay's tacit acknowledgment in her fascinating explication of Grimm's "The Fisherman and His Wife," in which Mrs. Ramsay reads to her son. See especially pp. 4-8.
between the time Mr. Carmichael turns out the light and Lily awakens), and awakens to feel renewed, reminiscent as it is of Eleanor’s refreshed awakening in The Years.

Mrs. Ramsay’s greatest destructiveness is her attempt to stop time through domestic order. Linear time is dangerous to Mrs. Ramsay, especially when she buys into it or when she wants to stop it. Both allow her a false sense of order, one which stifles creativity and upholds the system that oppresses her. Thus, we see that her creation and maintenance of this false sense of order, which is fleeting and transitory, requires shutting out nature and (the futile effort of) shutting out time: at the candlelight dinner, "the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterlily" (147). Ironically, it is this futile and fatal life project which undoes her. She is attempting to figure out the same thing Lily is; but Mrs. Ramsay, in order to do it, has to deny and repress any sense of self except that which she cultivates within patriarchal confines. When Mrs. Ramsay is no longer
physically present to sequence events, time runs
"shapelessly together" (203), and seemingly random
moments trigger important trains of thought and
directly challenge our ideas of history as "important
events" in the past. The absence of her femininity
powers of balancing and harmonizing can not temper what
Woolf deemed the large-scale aggressive militarism and
violence (in Three Guineas, Woolf suggests that these
represent extremes of the male ego), as found in war,
namely World War I. Linear time is inapplicable in
"Time Passes." Woolf’s theory of women’s prime
function for men in patriarchy—serving as mirrors
which reflect them at twice their size—presents itself
negatively when woman is absent:

That dream, of sharing, completing, of
finding in solitude on the beach an answer,
was then but a reflection in a mirror, and
the mirror, itself was but the surface
glassiness which forms in quiescence when the
nobler powers sleep beneath? Impatient,
despairing yet loth to go (for beauty offers
her lures, has her consolations), to pace the
beach was impossible; contemplation was
unendurable; the mirror was broken. (202)

And when Mrs. McNab—who, in Minow-Pinkney’s terms,
"brutalises" female work (WWPS, 102)—realizes that
trying to take up the slack is "too much for one woman,
too much, too much," that "it was beyond the strength
of one woman," she leaves the house, "alone, shut up,
locked" (206-07). The powerful clash of the public and
private ("Time Passes" brings the war, a public, masculine situation, along with the dearth of its post-war generation, into the Ramsay's summer house, a private, feminine domain of plenitude--) is more than any one woman, including Mrs. Ramsay, can hold in the balance.

Woolf does try to offer another way for Mrs. Ramsay to come into her own within patriarchy by suggesting or making available to her a more fluid economy, anticipating a female discourse which is fluid (that is, continuous, conductive, diffuse) and non-proprietary. The feminine--for Woolf as for Irigaray, then--is not subservient to a discursive logic of binary oppositions; rather, it is multiple and diffuse, as Irigaray would posit over thirty years later. Such a discourse might offer, among other advantages, an alternative to the "ugly academic jargon that rattled itself off so glibly," as we learn early in the novel (TML, 22). When Mrs. Ramsay, for instance, is arranging seats during the dinner party, she reflects upon the fluidity and merging for which she yearns, and she concludes that men will not achieve it on their own: "Nothing seemed to have merged. . . . And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her. Again she felt, as a fact without
hostility, the sterility of men, for if she did not do it nobody would do it. . . ." (126).

Later in the dinner, her very thoughts regarding the fruit dish enact a writing of the female body, which Irigaray would later describe as performing two important functions: inviting women readers to experience their own desire independently of the male economy in which they have been raised and inscribed; and enacting woman's independent desire through her associational, sexual, sensual, tactile language of textual erotics. The following lines, then, bespeak subconscious awareness or association of the shapes of the fruit with the contours of a woman's body:

Her eyes had been going in and out among the curves and shadows of the fruit, among the rich purples of the lowland grapes, then over the horny ridge of the shell putting a yellow against a round shape, without knowing why she did it, or why, every time she did it, she felt more and more serene. . . . (163)

For Mrs. Ramsay, such images surround her act of creation (the dinner party, for example). But too often her acts of creation are those which are most exhausting: restoring patriarchal belief in itself, in

9 Spivak deems Mrs. Ramsay "the protector, the manager, and the imperialist governor of men's sterility" ("Making and Unmaking," 33).

10 Spivak cites Mrs. Ramsay's knitting, especially of a "web" (that is, text) as a metaphor for female creation of an auto-erotic sexuality. Again, see "Making and Unmaking."
its infallibility; renewing Mr. Ramsay’s sense of self as success through sympathy and reassurance, leaving her "only strength enough to move her finger, in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion. . ." (61). This—as her own submission to patriarchal discourse has taught her—provides for women "the rapture of successful creation" (61). Such rapture, however, is fleeting at best, for even after another "successful creation," Mrs. Ramsay thinks, "But what have I done with my life?" (125). Yet she is always able to offer men sympathy, for "she pitied men always as if they lacked something—women never, as if they had something" (129). Perhaps this shifting of the locus of lack, from woman to man, is the only—or certainly, the most—defiant of Mrs. Ramsay’s acts.11

Yet, Mrs. Ramsay further succumbs to the Law of the Fathers, poignantly presented when we learn repeatedly that there "was nobody she reverenced more [than her husband]" (50). This is a law she surrenders to especially when damned by its representative—damned for what he deems "extraordinary irrationality," the enraged "folly of women’s minds" (50), based as they

11 Perhaps Derrida’s notion of supplementarity is instructive here: that is, in any hierarchical binary, the inferior element/entity always already inheres in the Other. But here, the twist is significant: Mrs. Ramsay acknowledges the absence of lack in women and the presence of it in men.
are in feeling (tactile) rather than in the relentless pursuit and imposition of "truth" (that is, facts; what can be seen and reasoned, rather than supposed or imagined (30-51)).

Mr. Tansley seconds this motion, claiming that, "It was the women's fault. Women made civilisation impossible with all their 'charm,' all their silliness" (129). Perhaps if women had a language of their own, Woolf here indirectly suggests, they could name and thus claim their desire. Since they do not, we learn that Mrs. Ramsay, for instance, "wanted something more, though she did not know, could not think what it was that she wanted" (176). Never having achieved one's desires in life or even the articulation of them, Woolf implies, means that one's death, one's absence is as bracketed as one's life: "[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]" (194; italics mine) The cycle repeats itself when Prue's marriage and death through childbirth are both bracketed as well (199 and 201).

But Lily, unlike Mrs. Ramsay and Prue, recognizes and claims for her own the possibilities of a woman's discourse as fluid. She refers to waves towering
higher above her, for example, and ideas spurting like a fountain when she contemplates the canvas before her (236, 238). Though initially, this sense of fluidity may seem rigid or phallic, Lily’s openness to and active pursuit of such a discourse enables her to recognize that she does not want to be inscribed, nor is what she desires to be found in man’s language: ". . .for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay’s knee” (79). Lily—like Mrs. Ramsay during the dinner party—longs to merge; and this desire again maintains the fluid imagery that informs her longing for creation and art:

What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? (79)

When Mrs. Ramsay is no longer present for Lily to lean on or against, Lily confronts the inability of the language in which she is inscribed to express her feelings: "For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing,
nothing—nothing that she could express at all" (217). And later she thinks that "if only she could put [the words become symbols] together... write them out in a sentence," (219) then she could get to the truth; that is, if she could articulate. Thus does she conclude that "she would paint that picture now" (220). Now that "the angel in the house" is gone, Lily can resist the pressures, the repeated, coercive, wanting sighs of patriarchy expressed by Mr. Ramsay (224-26), the agitation of which cause her to take up "the wrong brush" (235)).

Whereas Mrs. Ramsay experiences these masculine demands as an invitation to creative, domestic intercourse, to Lily they stop just a little short of the threat of rape. Lily transforms Mrs. Ramsay's impulse toward sympathy as touch and closeness into an artistic sympathy of vision and distance. Only when out from under the pall of patriarchy can Lily feel "a painful but exciting ecstasy" surrounding her defiant

12 Spivak suggests that when Lily asks, "Why not accept this, be content with this, acquiesce and resign?" (224), Woolf's "this" is the limits of language ("Making and Unmaking," 38). I would add here that the inaccessibility and insufficiency of patriarchal language are precisely what necessitate Lily's own creative language on the canvas.

13 For a view suggesting the differences between envelopment and penetration, and Irigararian notions of non-ownership, see Minow-Pinkney, 105.
and triumphant act of creation (235). It is exciting because, as Daugherty has suggested, Lily sees from a position outside patriarchal codes and myths; yet it is painful because—again, as Daugherty offers—"she must also give up the control and protection such habits of thinking provide" (10). This woman-centered and initiated act requires an exchange of fluidity which Woolf posits may be connected with woman’s nature or sex and is accompanied by (re)birth and the defiance of internalized patriarchal voices which say "she" could not paint, could not create ("...[she][c]an’t paint, can’t write"; 237).

Always (it was in her nature, or in her sex, she did not know which) before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt. (236-37)

Fluctuation between fluid and concentrated efforts demonstrates the flexibility and balance Lily, unlike most female characters, had achieved. She defies Tansley’s and Mr. Ramsay’s impeding indictments, then, by reflecting that she and Mrs. Ramsay both had “tried to make of the moment something permanent” (241), to preserve the “daily miracles, illuminations” (Woolf’s moments of being), wherein the nature of revelation found in the “midst of chaos... shape... (an)
eternal passing and flowing" (241). Lily’s growth as a character can be measured by her increasing ability to envision a solidarity with Mrs. Ramsay that does not, however, require adherence to patriarchal ideology. Like the other women (Mrs. Ramsay, Mrs. McNab, Cam), Lily experiences the constant tension of her intellectual capacities and the mundane domestic world they are expected to maintain. Lily, however, resists and defies this tense expectation through her creative impulses.

Efforts to capture time’s essence are either the undoing or the salvation of women in patriarchy, for the progression and repetition of time are those measures upon which patriarchy rests secure. As Kristeva tells us, because there is "no time without speech...there is no time without the Father," since the father "means sign and time" (About Chineses Women, 35). Mr. Ramsay, as unified subject, desires to master time and space through instituted philosophy and measures. These measures create meaning, and failure to understand or respect them is met with cruelty and impatience, as seen, for example, in Mr. Ramsay’s irritation with Cam for not knowing the points of the compass: "He wished she would try to be more accurate...half laughing at her, half scolding her, for he
could not understand the state of mind of any one, not absolutely imbecile, who did not know the points of the compass. Yet she did not know" (249). Yet he is ambivalent about whether to hate this deficiency in Cam--a daughter--or not, knowing as he does that such could be used to men's advantage:

He thought, women are always like that; the vagueness of their minds is hopeless; it was a thing he had never been able to understand; but so it was. It had been so with her--his wife. They could not keep anything clearly fixed in their minds. But he had been wrong to be angry with her; moreover, did he not rather like this vagueness in women? It was part of their extraordinary charm. (250)

Like Lily, Cam also perceives Ramsay's penetrating imposition as a threat to her integrity which her virginity simultaneously emblematizes and shields; thus she tries to resist the father's entreaties for reassurance of his control and her submission to it. Cam feels both love and hate toward her father--a "pressure and a vision... extraordinary temptation" which James, being a son, did not know (252-53).

Simultaneously to Cam's own struggle to resist her father and please her brother James, Lily is painting on the shore and recalling Mr. Bankes' detestation of women being out of order, a neurosis similar to Mr. Ramsay's discounting of Cam. Lily reminisces about Bankes' disgust at the hole in Minta Doyle's stocking:
It meant to him the annihilation of womanhood and dirt and disorder, and servants leaving and beds not made at mid-day--all the things he most abhorred. He had a way of shuddering and spreading his fingers out as if to cover an unsightly object which he did now--holding his hand in front of him. (257)

Significantly, Lily's response to such memories is to keep "tunnelling her way into her picture" (258), seeking a way into a discourse and creating a language of her vision. This vision--given that Lily finally draws the line down the center of the canvas--bespeaks Woolf's ongoing effort through Irigararian notions of multiperspectivism and simultaneity to contain the disorder, disproportion, and fragmentation which accompanied her mental instability.14 One of the ways to achieve this non-static stability is through centrism, Woolf's effort to find some sort of mean or proportion to offset and moderate polarities, which Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay exemplify. This centrism goes hand-in-hand with her dream of symmetry, which makes sense of seemingly infinite discord by preserving a space for genuine merger and communion in the midst of isolating difference (as could be achieved by the complimentarity

of the sexes, for example). The controlled conflict would both enable opposites to co-exist in suspension and, possibly, offer an intimacy—the problem of which Woolf explores through language. Lily’s terror at the white spaces on the canvas (236) parallels Woolf’s initial uneasiness with and use of gaps in the language; hollows between the waves. Woolf’s bracketing in "Time Passes" of the deaths which leave holes parallels Lily’s outlining of space as fluid, yet framed absence. Mrs. Ramsay’s gift is the fluidity of life, and only when Lily envisions this and her at the window (300) does she solve her compositional problems—she moves the "tree to the middle"—and, simultaneously, reconcile the "rhythms" of her mind with the fluid "current" of her body (246), hence breaking the confines of immobility that patriarchy would have her observe—for example, she decides she’d "need never marry anybody" (271).15

Also confined to a narrower space with much less mobility than that to which their male counterparts have access are Susan, Jinny, and Rhoda in The Waves. Their options within patriarchy consist of three

15. The reconstituted subject is not another masculine one as Bill Martin has argued: "This new subject does not want Space, but instead a space... does not want or expect Time ("To the Lighthouse" and the Feminist Path to Post-Modernity," 313).
stereotypes which they choose respectively: earthmother, whore, or insane/suicidal “hysteric.” Their prime function is to observe, whereas the male characters observe and act or re-act, making them more complex and complicated. For both the females and males, the notion of self is a patriarchal one, constructed as each is—a part of Bernard’s schema. The eternal paradox regarding the search for self and the lack thereof relegates the achievement of identity to an awareness of what one is not, of limitations.

Because this contradiction can never be resolved, only sustained or held in suspension, multiple consciousness is the most one can strive for. This recognition on Woolf’s part and simultaneously or consequently on the part of the characters enables the movement from diffusion in the first half of the book (inclusive of early childhood; going off to school; going separate ways according to sex and class (that is, Bernard and Neville to Cambridge, Louis to the city, Susan home to the country, Jinny and Rhoda to the West end); and the farewell dinner to Percival, accompanied by Bernard and Neville’s matriculation) to (e)mergence in the second half (inclusive of, in the fifth section, their reactions to Percival’s death; sixth, middle age and the solidifying or coalescing of
identities (a section in which Rhoda does not appear); seventh, nostalgia, complete with Bernard's anxieties about aging and the overall awareness of "identity" as oppressive because non-changing; eighth, the reunion dinner at court, followed by, ninth, Bernard's soliloquy).

Clearly, Woolf wants us to see Percival's death as the transition and transformation point, occurring as it does in the center of the book (that is, page 148 of 296 pages, HBJ reprint edition). Percival is the "other" who, much like Mrs. Ramsay, is envied, feared, loved, and worshipped by each, the latter precluding the possibility of knowing him, since the rule stands that one can not know what one worships. Ironically, he is the most known to us because of his absence; that is, we do not have access to his subjectivity, so he remains the unqualified construct, the ideological center. He represents absence, the center that is nothingness—emptiness: "This then is the world that Percival sees no longer... Now then is my chance to find out what is of great importance, and I must be careful, and tell no lies. About him my feeling was: he sat there in the centre. Now I go to that spot no longer. The place is empty" (TW, 153).
Not until Bernard’s soliloquy at the end does Woolf attempt to illustrate the differentiation of self in the midst of absent-presence or present absence: "I then first became aware of the presence of those enemies who change, but are always there; the forces we fight against. To let oneself be carried on passively is unthinkable. 'That's your course, world,' one says, 'mine is this'" (240). Being is born out of confrontation with the enemy. Identity and separateness occur only through such a process of making distinctions regarding what or who one is not. The construction of the self is in relation to the implacable authority of the other, or the world (240). And, much as the birds in the interchapters—who alternately collectivize and individuate and whose feeding habits (or nurturing of the self) are really quite violent—the process of differentiating self from other is painful:

'But we were all different. The wax—the virginal wax that coats the spine melted in different patches for each of us...--our white wax was streaked and stained by each of these differently. Louis was disgusted by the nature of human flesh; Rhoda by our cruelty; Susan could not share; Neville wanted order; Jimmy love; and so on. We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies' (241).

And separateness is, like the waves, a fluctuating process which remains blurred: "For this is not one
life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman,
Bernard or Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny or Rhoda—so
strange is the contact of one with another" (281).

The memory of the self realized as completion is
what generates the desire to go back to it. Both
chapters in life—infancy and adulthood—constitute a
struggle to survive chaos (though in infancy, that
chaos is more contained). In adulthood, the struggle
to defy random chaos, to defy what is trying to un-
create one, necessitates for Bernard, at least, the
military language of warfare and violence. He has a
special accessibility to language as he is a male in
the Symbolic Order. But Woolf does not hesitate in
showing the limits of the Symbolic, which points to but
does not achieve permanence, even for Bernard:

'A worthless servant,' I observed, 'laughs
upstairs in the attic,' and that little piece
of dramatization shows how incompletely we
are merged in our own experiences. On the
outskirts of every agony sits some observant
fellow who points; who whispers as he
whispered to me that summer morning in the
house where the corn comes up to the window,
'The willow grows on the turf by the river.
The gardeners sweep with great brooms and the
lady sits writing.' Thus he directed me to
that which is beyond and outside our own
predicament; to that which is symbolic, and
thus perhaps permanent, if there is any
permanence in our sleeping, eating,
breathing, so animal, so spiritual and
tumultuous lives. (248-49)
He has realized, though, what French theorists would claim as the only way out of a discourse based on dualism: striving for the "both-and" rather than the "either-or": ". . . you understand that I am only superficially represented by what I was saying tonight. Underneath, and, at the moment when I am most disparate, I am also integrated. I sympathize effusively. . . . In my case something remains floating, unattached" (77). That something which remains "floating" or "unattached" becomes more than once the "fin of a porpoise on the horizon," that is, a "bare visual impression . . . unattached to any line of reason" (189; emphasis added). Because "[v]isual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time to come uncover and coax into words," one "perpetually mak[es] notes in the margin" (199; italics mine), the place women occupy in patriarchy. Thus does Woolf through her character suggest that women's way in from the margins of discourse is impressionistic, that is, lacking in specific boundaries of the either-or chore.16

16 Minow-Pinkney deems The Waves a "feminist writing" at the difficult "between" of both "feminist realism (old form, new content) and schizophrenic modernism (new form, "no" content)" (155). As such, its writing maintains a dialectic between identity and its loss, between the symbolic and its un-representable Other.
As an alternative to the either-or duality, the both-and approach founds itself in the metamorphosis metaphor which serves as this novel's subtext. That is, the waves themselves would not exist without the contradictory mass of solid/land, or without the lunar pull. Not coincidentally, the separation of disparate and integrated selves is consistently accompanied by the loss of language:

This self now as I leant over the gate looking down over fields falling in waves of colour beneath me made no answer. He threw up no opposition. He attempted no phrase. His fist did not form. I waited. I listened. Nothing came, nothing. I cried then with a sudden conviction of complete desertion, Now there is nothing. No fin breaks the waste of this immeasurable sea. Life has destroyed me. No echo comes when I speak, no varied words. This is more truly death than the death of friends than the death of youth. (284)

The movement toward, or at least connection between, fluidity and the unconscious constitutes an interplay which manifests itself for the title through the closing line ("The waves broke on the shore"), for images, suggestions, and intimations permeate the text. A somewhat abbreviated conversation between Susan and Bernard sets in the opening pages the need for such a fluid discourse which enables all voices to participate. Susan states, "I am tied down with single words. But you wander off; you slip away; you rise up higher,
with words and words in phrases" (16). This bespeaks the crucial differences between the two regarding what and how they (are able to) speak. Significantly, it is Bernard who invites Susan to "explore" a new idyllic world of unshackled discourse (that is, as discoverers of an unknown land, Elvedon), where "the lady sits between the two long windows, writing" (17). As in the structure of To the Lighthouse, in which the "Time Passes" section serves as corridor between two windows, this woman writing is insulated between two reflective surfaces, perhaps again in the midst, the passageway between alternative discourses.17

Woolf herself enacts the "unshackled" discourse most purely in her interludes; in the first interlude, she writes: "Everything became softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid" (29). The fluidity of the formerly concrete object and liquidity of the formerly blunt or sharp one provide the metamorphosis-metaphor which sustains the text, indeed is its very subtext. These amorphous images, thus, occur again in a later interlude: "A plate was like a white lake. A knife looked like a dagger of ice" (110), repeating the

17 See Minow-Pinkney, 178-79, for an enlightening view of the reversals inherent in Elvedon as utopia of feminine writing.
transformation of the same solid objects into some fluid dimension. When the sun sinks, in a later interlude, the iron black boot becomes "a pool of deep blue," and the rocks "lose their hardness" (208).

Tellingly, Neville, who hates "dangling" or dampish things," is the most resistant to the disruption of discourse by such fluidity, such indeterminacy. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that his homosexuality is in its own way a threat to and a disruption of patriarchy, he insists that "there is an order in this world; there are distinctions, there are differences in this world, upon whose verge I step. For this is only a beginning" (21). He later complains that the "words of authority are corrupted by those who speak them" (35). This is what happens—as Irigaray claims—every time women speak, write, or read: they disrupt the patriarchal discourse by a method Irigaray calls mimetisme.

One cannot help but conclude that this is what occurs when Jinny—in her penultimate practice of mimesis, objectifying her self in the looking-glass, becoming an object of her own gaze, so to speak—reflects (both literally and figuratively) upon limitations of the language for her: "When I read, a purple rim runs round the black edge of the textbook.
Yet I cannot follow any word through its changes. I cannot follow any thought from present to past" (45).

Again, somewhat ironically, Neville is the spokesman for the powerless frustration felt when one is appropriated by (someone else's) language:

We are all phrases in Bernard's story, things he writes down in his notebook under A or under B. He tells our story with extraordinary understanding, except of what we most feel. For he does not need us. He is never at our mercy. (70)

Neville would rather not distinguish between or, as he says, discriminate among that which otherwise gives pleasure: "Nothing should be named lest by so doing we change it. Let it exist, this bank, this beauty, and I, for one instant, steeped in pleasure" (81).

It is Bernard, the appropriating/discriminating phrasemaker, who uses the language in ways that satisfy his ego. When describing how and what he will write to impress his woman friend—for he wants her to remember his profundity—we observe his acknowledgement of his ability to appropriate events and his recognition of the importance of fluidity and rhythm in doing so:

I must allude to talks we have had together—bring back some remembered scene. But I must seem to her (this is very important) to be passing from thing to thing with the greatest ease in the world. I shall pass from the service for the man who was drowned (I have a phrase for that) to Mrs. Moffat and her savings (I have a note of them) and so to some reflections apparently casual but full
of profundity (profound criticism is often written casually) about some book I have been reading, some out-of-the-way book. I want her to say as she brushes her hair or puts out the candle, 'Where did I read that? Oh, in Bernard's letter.' It is the speed, the hot, molten effect, the lava flow of sentence into sentence that I need. . . . the rhythm is the main thing in writing. (78-79)

He is, in other words, conscious of the need to communicate with her in and through a discourse with which she can identify, a language which she can recognize as close to her own fluid one.

After his discussion with Neville, which follows the above strategizing passage, Bernard alludes to the fluidity of self, the power to create and re-create the self, or selves, that constitute a presence:

I am Bernard; I am Byron; I am this, that and the other. They darken the air and enrich me, as of old with their antics, their comments, and cloud the fine simplicity of my moment of emotion. For I am more selves than Neville thinks. We are not simple as our friends would have us to meet their needs. (89)

Not surprisingly, Kristeva's notion of the semiotic as it relates to fluid ego boundaries is applicable here, and very well should be, for Woolf's idealistic vision of the androgynous self is possible only when the feminine permeates the realm of the masculine, and vice-versa. We experience this interpermeation in its most physical manifestation through the senses of the most body-oriented of the
characters, Jinny, who describes the dance with a "melancholy, romantic" man this way:

We yield to this slowflood. We go in and out of this hesitating music. Rocks break the current of the dance; it jars, it shivers. In and out, we are swept now into this large figure; it holds us together; we cannot step outside its sinuous, its hesitating, its abrupt, its perfectly encircling walls. Our bodies, his hard, mine flowing, are pressed together within its body; it holds us together; and then lengthening out, in smooth, in sinuous folds, rolls us between it, on and on. Suddenly the music breaks. My blood runs on but my body stands still. (103)

Again, we are not surprised that, after this, she feels dizzy and that the words crowd and cluster, that the language of anything, except the two gesticulating bodies, would be clumsy or inadequate. In order "to be admitted to the warmth and privacy of another soul" (104), Jinny must first be fluid. She says in the passage immediately preceding the dance), "I flutter. I ripple. I stream like a plant in the river, flowing this way, flowing that way, but rooted so that he may come to me. . . . And I am arch and fluent and capricious (102-03). Like the stream, self-identity is continuous, dispersed, diverse, and never fixed, again anticipating Kristeva's theory, and this time, of the subject-in-process.

Conversely, Rhoda expresses, indeed exemplifies, what happens when one is not fluid, or permeable, or
feels that she can not truly be so when—as Irigaray
would have it—she is, as a female, inscribed in and by
a language not her own:

What I say is perpetually contradicted. Each
time the door opens I am interrupted. I am
not yet twenty-one. I am to be broken. I am
to be derided all my life... The wave
breaks. I am the foam that sweeps and fills
the uttermost rims of the rocks with
whiteness; I am also a girl, here in this
room. (107; emphasis added).

As a girl confined to a certain definable space, both
her speech and her very existence/presence are subject
to contradiction. When the six arrive individually for
the dinner, she goes to great lengths to avoid being
recognized, totally opposite Jinny, who makes a grand,
"centering" entrance, and is herself a work of art (as
Barbara Rigney convincingly argues). Yet even she is
scolded for interrupting the discourse of the others,
namely the males.\(^{18}\)

Confined in a way different from Rhoda, Susan
makes it her ambition to "have more" than either Rhoda
or Jinny has, and will do so through her children who,
she claims, "will carry me on; their teething, their
crying, their going to school and their coming back
will be like the waves of the sea under me" (132). She

\(^{18}\text{Again, Minow-Pinkney offers a helpful view of Rhoda, as "non-symbolisable Other" who must be repressed (see 183), and the feminine realm which "nullifies all human values into chaos" (184).}
personifies what Irigaray and others have named and claimed as the cyclic nature of women's lives and realities: "I shall have children; I shall have maids in aprons; men with pitchforks; a kitchen where they bring the ailing lambs to warm in baskets, where the hams hang and the onions glisten. I shall be like my mother, silent in a blue apron locking up the cupboards" (99). As would be expected, she expresses an odd sort of ambivalence toward that about which she has "chosen" (?) to be passionate:

I shall be debased and hide-bound by the bestial and beautiful passion of maternity. I shall push the fortunes of my children unscrupulously. I shall hate those who see their faults. I shall lie basely to help them. I shall let them wall me away from you, from you and from you. (132)

Though relegated to this sphere by the dictates of biology, as Irigaray might argue, at least Susan imagines an odd sort of self-determination, a self-willed denial and isolation, as indicated by the repeated phrase: "I shall."

Louis, on the other hand, gives voice to the orderly hyper-linear reality of men's lives: "This is life; Mr. Prentice at four; Mr. Eyres at four-thirty" (169). He repeatedly refers to the stability and satisfaction he receives from having this definite schedule, while for Susan, such regularity (that is, a
regulated and relegated routine) translates into an
insufferable tedium:

Now I measure, I preserve. At night I sit in
the armchair and stretch my arm for my
sewing; and hear my husband snore; and look
up when the light from a passing car dazzles
the windows and feel the waves of my life
tossed, broken, round me who am rooted; and
hear cries, and see others' lives eddying
like straws round the piers of a bridge while
I push my needle in and out and draw my
thread through the calico. (192)

Regulation/relegation holds even more complex
ramifications for Neville. Even though his being a
poet places him in a position to order, or not to
order, life's elements as he sees fit, he feels that he
is beset with the gravest responsibilities: "My task,
my burden, has always been greater than other people's.
A pyramid has been set on my shoulders. I have tried
to do a collossal labour. I have driven a violent, an
unruly, a vicious team" (201). This hyper-
consciousness of one's duties, weights, obligations, he
echoes throughout (for example, 169), and it does not
subside until after middle age has set in or, rather,
until time has swept him swiftly on its torrent.

At this point, it is worth noting Bernard's
reflection that only in unconsciousness can one "attain
the utmost freedom from fiction" (216). Woolf was
familiar with Freud's work and his concept of the
unconscious—Hogarth Press being the first to publish
his works in English. Yet while the extent of her familiarity with Freud and psychoanalysis at the time she wrote this novel and the possible influence it might have had upon her writing (at least in terms of content) are not irrelevant, what is more important, from a feminist perspective, is how Woolf's own insights regarding, for instance, the androgynous psyche and her own (manic-depressive?) experiences put her directly in touch with the complex workings of the human mind and the continual ebb and flow--fluidity, if you will--of human existence. (Her book, after all, depicts the archetypal progression of an "individual" from childhood through maturity, eventual decline and death, and the gradual narrowing of freedom which accompanies this progression.) Moreover, of prime concern are the possible ways such revelations inform her writing, her choices in style, her co-existing form and content (within the text and sub-text), and finally, her emanations or embodiments (which one hesitates to call characters--given the knowledge she did not intend them as such). Dissatisfied with language's linearity--which has no room for polyvalent experience--Woolf sees plot, sequence, narrativity as the inadequate hallmarks of the Symbolic Order. Thus
does Woolf strive for a more adequate place and language. 19

In this (woman)"space" which is not a world of acts and things, but a consciousness-of-the-world, most of the soliloquies are thought, not spoken, so that what Woolf creates is, in Avrom Fleishman's terminology, "omni-percipience": a perception rather than an understanding or set knowledge of the soliloquist's inner experience. The most bodily, or embodied, of the soliloquists, Jinny--a nickname Woolf's father used for her--does not necessarily offer a conception of the unconscious: yet she reveals the constancy of one's fluid existence (on various levels) throughout life, even after the sun has "begun to sink": "so fluid has my body become, forming even at the touch of a finger into one full drop, which fills itself, which quivers, which flashes, which falls in ecstasy" (221). Bernard then combines Jinny’s image of the drop with, apparently, his notion of the unconscious as silence:

Drop upon drop... silence falls. It forms on the roof of the mind and falls into pools beneath. Forever alone, alone, alone,--hear

19 For a similar view which takes into account Woolf’s express desires--as found in A Writer’s Diary, 142-43--"to abolish story, naming, specificity of time and place" as they indicate a move toward a "beyond" of the Symbolic, see Minow-Pinkney, 163+.
silence fall and sweep its rings to the farthest edges. Gorged and replete, solid with middle-aged content, I, whom loneliness destroys, let silence fall, drop by drop. (224)

When Louis then states that "our separate drops are dissolved," he defines the unconscious as that place where one is "extinct, lost in the abysses of time, in the darkness" (225). It is somehow refreshing that it is poetic Neville who brings the intertwined concepts of the mind and of fluid being back to the mother:

We are in that passive and exhausted frame of mind when we only wish to rejoin the body of our mother from whom we have been severed. All else is distasteful, forced and fatiguing... We are scarcely to be distinguished from the river. (233)

Certainly Woolf was aware, even if subconsciously at this point, of the powerful symbol of the return to the mother, the return to the life source from whence one comes. Just as Neville acknowledges that they are scarcely to be distinguished from the river--from the life-source of creation--Woolf writes in the interlude which immediately follows that "sky and sea are themselves indistinguishable." Hence the ultimate permeability of boundaries between human existence and nature. Significantly, this climactic anti-climax, or anti-climactic climax, occurs only once the "sun had sunk," and thus, when darkness (clearly a metaphor for the unconscious) is able to flow: it washes down
streets, rolls its waves along grass, blows along slopes, envelopes, and engulfs.  

Even more significant to Woolf's awareness of unconscious forces is her portrayal of inherent contradictions in that this covering darkness, of necessity, takes precedence, that is, must come before one (namely, Bernard) can see the "light." His summation soliloquy epitomizes the eternal struggle of the mind to bring ideas to light (much as a moth gravitates toward a flame, one might surmise, given that the original title for this novel was *The Moths*). Bernard sifts the elements of life: sensation, subconscious, self-conscious, sex, and guilt—all of which lead to a sustained inquiry into the nature of self-hood. We learn here of the insufferable pain of denying permeability, that is, claiming boundaries when the bodies of the six became separated, and how that pain is absorbed in growth; how Bernard, too, had emerged from the drop into which he had fallen into an "I," not Byron, Shelley, Dostoevsky. In addition, we witness his increasing honor and love for the determination he finds in—what some may deem, although clearly Woolf does not judge them so—Jinny's otherwise  

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20 See Minow-Pinkney, 167, for a discussion of how Bernard's longing for the language of (and for) maternal presence is emblematic of Kristevan semiotics.
shallow or egotistic gestures. Only among themselves, Bernard reflects, is there a "body of the complete human being whom we have failed to be, but at the same time, cannot forget" (277). Thus can he speak of them in the first person plural (yet singular?) and collective (yet individual?): "our life... our identity."

The blurring of separate-ness manifests itself when Bernard contemplates the suicide of one of this body’s parts. As he imagines his own attempt to persuade Rhoda to wait, not to kill herself, he realizes that he was also persuading his own soul: "For this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman, Bernard or Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny or Rhoda--so strange is the contact of one with another" (281). Like Irigaray, who would theorize similarly three decades later, Woolf projects her own world view through Bernard, who sees wholes and unity as illusions, for he has sought throughout his life, through language, to find something unbroken--a perfect unity among phrases and fragments.21

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21 And, as Minow-Pinkney instructively points out, he associates linear order with "military progress" (The Waves, 181). See Minow-Pinkney, 167, for fuller discussion of the teleology of male aggression.
At several moments throughout this soliloquy, Bernard is able to see clearly that which differentiates the emanations one from another. He realizes, finally, that what they all have is a "rapture; their common feeling with death; something that stood them in their stead" (266). Bernard defies death, which he deems the enemy, and is able to do so only by his acceptance of and belief in the "eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again" (297). The oscillating waves which break on the shore in the final, one-line, italicized passage suggest the undercurrents of Woolf’s fiction, the undertow which pulls us in--into the extension of selves, the quickening of memory and the deepening of perception--and, intermittently, allows us to surface.

The increasingly fitting application of such prefixes as under- and sub- to Woolf’s work indicates, or at least implies, its surreal quality in both psychological and artistic senses, for The Waves might be, as Michael Payne contends, a search for order out of the chaos of the impressions and sensations of existence, a search which manifests itself in an existential, a psychological and an artistic quest. Or, given that among the early titles for this were "The Life of Anybody" or "Life in General," part of
Woolf's search may have been for a voiceless, characterless expression, perhaps one which would contribute to its profoundly surreal quality.

A complex part of that quest is, inevitably, an ongoing individuation of self while—almost antithetically—in communion with the other (or, in this case, others). Rhoda—who, moth-like, is a night-person closely identified with intuition and darkness—achieves this in the ultimate isolation (as Woolf, unfortunately, would later). Both the knowledge of reality and the creation of a work of art inform the quest of those attempting mystically to integrate the personality. In some ways, this book seems an effort to map life and reality completely with art, the novel itself becoming then a living organism, a sort of mind-body-feeling gestalt. Not surprisingly, then, the rhythm of its flow is analogous to our emotional, biological, and physical lives. In a letter, Woolf wrote: "I am writing to a rhythm and not to a plot. . . the rhythmical is more natural than the narrative to me. . . and is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction" (cited in Marcus, 156-57).22

22 It is significant that the attack on the falsity of words and inadequacy of language comes from Neville and Bernard, both of whom have chosen literary vocations. They, like Woolf, are writing (at least, at times) as "ministers of the interior."
Part of the novel's experimental appeal stems from Woolf's conscious effort to avoid, as she wrote in her diary, writing "exteriorly," which is one aspect of the "tradition of fiction." While she conceded that externality was good, she wished to "eliminate all waste" and the "apalling narrative business of the realist." Instead of a realistic narrative, she offers a surrealist, complicated assembly of reflections, the focus of which is the gulf between reality and language, and between identity and self. This personal and collective memory she creates is the result of a mystical, I-less vision (as Jane Marcus poignantly calls it) of a woman at the table writing. . . I-less, because the ego is diminished by the writer as minister of the interior. Identity, Woolf suggests, remains a kind of illusion, for undifferentiated sources of darkness dissolve the ego.

Jane Marcus suggests that these qualities constitute not necessarily a surrealism, but what she terms a feminine realism, the goal of which is to convey an all-encompassing, synthetic, fundamentally affirmative world view. This is in part due to The Waves' singular lack of concern with the public world of power and patriarchy, for example, it is one of Woolf's only works from which war, for the most part,
is absent. The "feminine realism" of the soliloquies, then, is more flexible, sensitive, and honestly representative of states of being rather than doing, of atmosphere and silence rather than concretes and sounds. Carolyn Heilbrun correctly claims that in such ways, Woolf exercised the fullest possible extent of her genius in *The Waves*. Woolf herself said, upon finishing, that this book represented her greatest stretch of mind; yet she conceded that it was full of holes. In her diary, she wrote "Never have I screwed my brain so tight over a book," and claimed further that she respected herself for writing it. Readers, doubtless, share both sentiments.

Indeed *The Waves* represents the ultimate refinement of Woolf’s subjective novels, perhaps because she was trying, through it, to transform the novel. Using a symbolizing imagination which can transform life into the poetic, Woolf portrays not just a consciousness or an existence, but a be-ing. Precisely because *The Waves* is about—as Bernard states—nothing less than the meaning of life, the voices suggest intimations of immortality: Woolf displays a need, sometimes compulsive, to cope with death (in order to affirm life?). Considering that *The Waves* was Woolf’s elegy to her deceased brother Thoby,
we can see Percival as Woolf's creation of a rare complete person who is the prime antagonist, though a victim of senseless death. Percival's death is a rupture in the lives and sensibilities of the six other parentless peers comprising one whole identity; yet simultaneously, it functions as their unifying core or nucleus. Death, then, is both a victory and a defeat, a loss of self, but at the same time an ecstatic embrace. For, it is during hypnotic moments that the apparent loss of personality and approach of death empowers one (namely, Bernard) to "see the world without a self."

Perhaps this novel bespeaks, then, the ontological optimism to which Simone de Beauvoir refers as the point from which women by necessity write. But in Woolf, there is a tension between this optimism (which is closely related to Marcus's "feminine realism") and the very real presence of absence, or absent presence, the "nothing-ness" to which Irigaray and others refer. For example, even as Woolf re-creates Percival/Thoby, he (like war) exists more as an absence than a presence. That tense interspace is replete with gaps, silences, holes in the discourse, producing a somewhat disorienting obscurity often referred to as "women's space," the lacuna, or the "wild zone." In 1934 Woolf
wrote in an essay entitled "Walter Sickert": "There is a zone of silence in the middle of every art. The artists themselves live in it" (cited in Hussey, 39).

 Appropriately, the ideas underlying the silence are conveyed to the reader only as she gathers fragments. The very reason for the silence and for the inability of it to be received directly is that it is outside and beyond language, or (as Irigaray maintains) outside patriarchal discourse. Understandably, Woolf necessarily resists closure and definition. Her writing is generative, rather than conclusive, recursive, rather than discursive. Hence the fluid prose that is her recourse, as it replaces or displaces the prohibitiveness of patriarchal discourse. She wrote in her diary on June 18, 1927:

Now the moths will I think fill out the skeleton which I dashed in here: the play of poem idea; the idea of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of a ship, the night, etc., all flowing together...

(italics mine)

Yet Woolf goes a step beyond Irigaray by demonstrating that--like the ever-oscillating, continual rise and fall of the waves--the experience of being in the world constitutes a perpetual process of constant creativity, of creation, re-creation, reclamation, and--when one finally does discover and enact a language of one's own--of celebration.
In *The Waves*, Woolf seems to propose a theory of self or identity based on the notion of a central core constructed by an early moment of satisfied desire (Bernard's "arrows of sensation" in the bath) around which the soul "grows rings" as a tree does. While the initial moment is random and determined, the personality seems to have some control over the construction of the "rings"; thus, the self is both determined and constructed, diffused and integrated around that core. In *The Years*, however, the initial moment and all those which follow are divided by parts into "years," as they are accompanied by the major structural device in this novel, repetition: of sounds (street music, hammering, pigeons cooing, city noises); descriptions of objects (the portrait of Rose Pargiter, the walrus brush, the gilt-clawed chair, the Italian mirror, the kettle that won't boil); experiences (bus and cab rides, crossing the Serpentine, one cousin/sibling visiting another). The effect again, though, is not random repetition, but rather reassuring continuity.23

23 Michael Rosenthal (*Virginia Woolf*, 170) has suggested the following: 
  
  . . . another way of approaching *The Years* is to think of it as *The Waves* turned inside out. That is, the intensely patterned texture of *The Waves* which tries to express the nature of 'real life' by artificially removing itself from it, turns in *The Years*
Similar to *The Waves*, however, the "poetic" preludes/interludes describing the weather and the natural world at the beginning of each section constitute Woolf's last addition, after the novel's proofs had been set. Also similarly, in *The Years*, too, the book follows the movement of the sun and the elements; but in this case the preludes or interludes—though not quite the interchapters found in *The Waves*—actually provide a stark contrast of impressions of the natural world which oppose, rather than reflect (for example, in the case of the beginning and ending war years) the events of the "real" (that is, human-inhabited) world. In 1914, the beginning of World War II, for example, "It was a brilliant spring; the day was radiant," an image Woolf uses to encourage us to interrogate/deconstruct the absences, as when she states, "There were pauses, silences. . . . Then the clocks struck again" (*TY*, 224).

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into another highly patterned texture that strives for the same end by the equally artificial guise of complete verisimilitude. The timeless internality of the one becomes the consciously time-ridden externality of the other, as the absence of any historical chronology in *The Waves* is replaced, in *The Years*, by explicitly dated chapters moving from 1880 to the present. The lack of concern in *The Waves* with social interaction develops, with *The Years*, into the appearance of an all-consuming obsession with it.
Likewise, the preface to 1918—significantly the shortest chapter in the book—emphasizes in its brevity that "the roar boomed and faded"; similarly, that "the guns went on booming and the sirens wailed" both before and after the end of the war is reported at the end of the chapter. Knowing that Woolf added the interludes last, after the novel's proofs had been set, gives one pause: does the reversal of how one would presumably feel at the beginning and end of war bespeak Woolf's notion that this destruction—even if nature operates independently of it—this inevitable extension of masculinity, as she perceives it and which she takes to task in Three Guineas, is everpresent, non-ending? In the latter novel, which her diary indicates is a sequel of sorts to The Years, Woolf assumes War and Art (that is, cultural independence) to be mutually exclusive;

24 In TG:
Is it not possible that if we knew the truth about war, the glory of war would be scratched and crushed where it lies curled up in the rotten cabbage leaves of our prostituted fact-purveyors; and if we knew the truth about art instead of shuffling and shambling through the smeared and dejected pages of those who must live by prostituting culture, the enjoyment and practice of art would become so desirable that by comparison the pursuit of war would be a tedious game for elderly dilettantes in search of a mildly sanitary amusement—the tossing of bombs instead of balls over frontiers instead of nets? In short, if newspapers were written by people whose sole object in writing was to tell the truth about politics and the truth
here, the significantly late but determined addition of the preludes about nature suggests that War and natural independence are exclusive, as well. Given, then, the connections Woolf makes again in *Three Guineas* and *A Room of One's Own* that money is what converts "nature" into "culture" and that women are more purely associated with nature than with its patriarchally instituted cultural manifestations, these interludes provide—though in a manner much different than the fluid discourse found in *The Waves*—a "woman-space," one which, since it is on the edges or margins of text, can interrogate and critique the center. By randomly selecting which years, for example, Woolf rescues us from the pattern and expectation of linearity, which in turn allows us to question history and who is included in it. Woolf destroys the past/present dichotomy (Rose feels like two people at two times, all in the same moment; Kitty tries to grasp the meaning of "now" while attempting to understand the chaotic pattern of memory). The novel's repetition suggests cyclic, continuous familiarity which sustains one through change over time. And "private" moments make up the greater family history, giving women important places

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about art we should not believe in war, and we should believe in art. (97)
in it and encouraging a redefinition of what and who should constitute "history." In this re-vision of history, facts and vision co-exist, because the facts necessitate the vision.

In *The Years*, Woolf's formal techniques (inconsequential interludes, unfinished conversations, repetition of the same phrases by different characters) undermine concepts of fixed subjectivity and suggest a more fluid, social, relational view of identity. And, in *The Waves*, Woolf fictionally embodies a recognition she had accepted in theory: differentiation is not necessarily distance, separateness, alienation, but rather a means of connection. While in other cases the collective concept of identity was a way to kill the "angel in the house," here its prime function is to avoid embracing an identity articulated through an ideal of contained, coherent subjectivity, that is, the dominant cultural norm of masculinity. The invention of a communal protagonist and collective language centers the group rather than the individual and as Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues, "suggests the structures of social change in the structures of language" (163).

As in both *The Years* and *The Waves*, Woolf also interrogates the notion of coherent subjectivity and explores the concept of fluid identity in *Orlando*. 
This novel looks forward to both *The Waves* and *The Years* in its central preoccupations with Time, Self, and Language. In a comical context, Woolf tests her feminist content; that is, like all satire, *Orlando* has a distinct political agenda: Woolf 1) sets Orlando’s sex change in the middle of a revolution and 2) leaves a rather significant gap between the sex change and the gender change. Retrieving women’s laughter, as Cixous would have it, through a work Woolf herself referred to variously as “a farce,” “a joke,” “an escapade” (*Writer’s Diary, 117, 105, 124*), Woolf calls our attention to the underlying truth of (the) matter. Completed at a time when Virginia, Leonard, Vanessa, Vita, and the rest of Bloomsbury were preparing to testify in the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, the defense of sapphism, though more coded, is also present.25 Equally important,

25 In “’If I Saw You Would You Kiss Me?’: Sapphism and Subversion in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*,” *PMLA* 103, 1 (1988), Sherron E. Knopp offers the following description:

Orlando’s change of sex...allows Virginia to place herself and her readers at the very core of Orlando’s sapphic ‘nature’—and to see that it is good. Also funny. As funny in its collisions with conventional thinking and acting as Rosalind’s excursion into male privilege is in *As You Like It*, where the Forest of Arden, like Virginia’s fantasy, obliterates the significance of ordinary time and actual events, where the boundaries of sexual identities are blurred beyond conventional sorting out, where a male actor
Orlando is a novel simultaneously about the failure of discourse (for example, one must stop reading it, since it never ends itself) and about the history of sex (as portrayed in the movements from Orlando as Elizabethan nobleman to modern woman of the Twentieth century). Destabilizing sexuality de-stabilizes everything else: time, nature, history, geography; for sex is the category which makes all other categories necessary. But Woolf debunks this categorical imperative in her first sentence, which brackets or puts into doubt the entire novel. Her placement of the sex change on the last night of the Seventeenth century is a conscious choice, for women had just begun to exist as civil beings and thus, Woolf suggests, had become the new subjects and agents of history.

Of course, once Orlando is a woman, one cannot write a biography of her: if she is not in love and/or not having children, Woolf chuckles—for she privileges play, formerly the subordinate element—there’s nothing left to write about her. Woolf herein criticizes both playing a woman playing a man playing a woman tries on and casts off and tries on again all the stereotypical poses and conventional gestures of Petrarchan love, where the prejudices and injustices of a more strictly ordered world are temporarily held at bay, and where laughter is the route to wisdom and compassion.
clock time—for we have many selves present in us at one time—and the chaotic nature of memory. Thus is she able to remove the limitations of time from her main character; and in the process, she ends up releasing Orlando from bonds of gender and history as well. In turn, Orlando is not subject to conventionally gendered death (war or childbirth) and thus has a seemingly endless life.

During her "writer’s holiday," another name she gives to the writing of Orlando (WP, 118), Woolf spoofs, too, both the inadequacy of language and the inadequacy of masculine descriptions of the feminine at the beginning of the novel when we get this catalogue of the courtly Renaissance love tradition, when Orlando would try to tell [Sasha]—plunging and splashing among a thousand images which had gone as stale as the women who inspired them—what she was like. Snow, cream, marble, cherries, alabaster, golden wire? None of these. She was like a fox, or an olive tree; like the waves of the sea when you look down upon them from a height; like an emerald; like the sun on a green hill which is yet clouded—like nothing he had seen or known in England. Ransack the language as he might, words failed him. He wanted another landscape, and another tongue. English was too frank, too candid, too honeyed a speech for Sasha. (C, 47)

Later, after he speculates on whether there is something "peasant-born" in her, and after, of course,
she praises him for "his love of beasts... gallantry. . . his legs," Orlando tells Sasha:

that he could find no words to praise her; yet instantly betrothed him how she was like the spring and green grass and rushing waters, and seizing her more tightly than ever, he swung her with him half across the river so that the gulls and the cormorants swung too. And halting at length, out of breath, she said, panting slightly, that he was like a million-candled Christmas tree (such as they have in Russia) hung with yellow globes; incandescent; enough to light a whole street by; (so one might translate it) for what with his glowing cheeks, his dark curls, his black and crimson cloak, he looked as if he were burning with his own radiance, from a lamp lit within. (54)

When he is inflicted with the disease, love-of-literature, and in his solitude reads six hours into the night (74), Orlando takes up its sister-affliction, writing—which, given his wealth and class, is deemed "piteable in the extreme" (75). After producing some 47 works in multiple genres before he was 25, Orlando—via Woolf's informed narration—thinks, significantly in the first person plural (perhaps the Royal "we"?), along the lines of deconstructive theory. He "paused" (after Woolf's parenthetical aside regarding Memory), and "still he paused," immediately followed by the insight: "It is these pauses that are our undoing" (80), acknowledging that it is the gaps and absences which unravel a text, be it literary, social, cultural, or otherwise. For Orlando was undone by love's entry
into the pause; now Ambition and Poetry—equated as they are with female stereotypes (witch, strumpet; 81)—enter in.

Also in keeping with the deconstructive subtext is the indeterminacy of time:

Some weeks added a century to his age, others no more than three seconds at most. Altogether, the task of estimating the length of human life (of the animals’ we presume not to speak) is beyond our capacity, for directly we say that it is ages long, we are reminded that it is briefer than the fall of a rose leaf to the ground (99).

Consistent with a deconstructive encoding, too, is the corresponding collapse of dualities: "Life seemed to him of prodigious length. Yet even so, it went like a flash" (100). The time that goes into thinking processes is also arbitrary: "'Why not say simply in so many words—' and then he would try to think for half an hour—or was it two years and a half?—how to say simply in so many words what love is" (101). And creating platitudes is what calls him to recognize how ridiculously keyed to gender and sex language is: "And if literature is not the Bride and Bedfellow of Truth, what is she? Confound it all,’ he cried, 'why say Bedfellow when one’s already said Bride? Why not simply say what one means and leave it?’" (101)

Significantly, Orlando’s deep dejection at not being
able to define or solidify Truth is soothed by positive thoughts associated with fluid imagery:

...the delight of having no name, but being like a wave which returns to the deep body of the sea; thinking how obscurity rids the mind of the irk of envy and spite; how it sets running in the veins the free waters of generosity and magnanimity; and allows giving and taking without thanks offered or praise given which must have been the way of all great poets...anonymously, needing no thanking or naming, but only their work in the daytime and a little ale perhaps at night... (105)

The inventory of patriarchal discourse the narrator claims outright as tedious; and, within the dashes that often interrupt syntax and interrogate semantics, s/he includes all of "us" in the effect lists—perhaps due to their particularly linear nature—produce (that is, inducing yawns, 109). Orlando’s mode of description, however, is quite different, as we witness when he first spies the Archduchess Harriett. The method, rather than linear, is compounded, concentric, and cyclic, returning to its initial note, as found in the final sentence of this passage:

Any other woman thus caught in a Lord’s private grounds would have been afraid; any other woman with that face, headdress, and aspect would have thrown her mantilla across her shoulders to hide it. For this lady resembled nothing so much as a hare; a hare startled, but obdurate; a hare whose timidity is overcome by an immense and foolish audacity; a hare that sits upright and glowers at its pursuer with great, bulging eyes; with ears erect by quivering, with
nose, pointed, but twitching. This hare, moreover, was six feet high and wore a headdress into the bargain of some antiquated kind which made her look still taller. (114)

Not surprisingly, dualities are blurred again in her return stare which "strangely combined" timidity and audacity.

This non-linear style is repeated shortly thereafter, within the lengthy digression regarding blame that, of course, is set off by dashes, simultaneously enhancing and disguising—depending on the reader’s view—its significance:

--any of these causes may have been to blame; for certainly blame there is on one side or another, when a Nobleman of Orlando’s breeding, entertaining a lady in his house, and she his elder by many years, with a face a yard long and staring eyes, dressed somewhat ridiculously too, in a mantle and riding cloak though the season was warm—blame there is. . . (116)

As in The Waves particularly and most of Woolf’s work in general, "it is with fragments" that we must try to put the puzzles of one’s life and history together (124). On the first page of the book, attention to the doubtlessness of Orlando’s sex cast doubt upon it; similarly, ascertainment of the "firm, if rather narrow, ground" of truth actually foregrounds the uncertainty and indeterminacy of knowledge (in this case, of what happened the night of Orlando’s second trance; 131).
Only in the midst of indeterminacy can one sex be transfigured into another, resulting in the model androgyne: "His form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace" (138). But here, androgyne does not "resolve" oppositions; rather, it places both sexes in what Minow-Pinkney brilliantly refers to as "a metonymic confusion of genders" (122). Importantly, sex does not equal identity, for "The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity" (118). Clearly, Woolf is satirizing her own project, for the statement which follows the transformation--"But let other pens treat of sex and sexuality; we quit such odious subjects as soon as we can" (139)--belies the very exploration that consumes much of her theoretical and fictional work. Such is the case when the narrator undercuts the moralities (for example, seeking "peace of mind and subserviency" rather than the triumph of truth and the exaltation of virtue," 149) which, the narrator claims, "should be left to the historian, since they are as dull as ditch water" (149).

Woolf is indeed concerned with the severe consequence elicited by differences of opinion: they are "enough to cause bloodshed and revolution" (149). The politics of the public sphere correspond to those
of the private, as demonstrated when Woolf questions which of the following is the greater ecstasy: to flee from a pursuer or to pursue; she deems that it is in the interplay of resistance and yielding that one knows the greatest pleasure (155). Subjectivity and objectivity become confused, as metonymy and metaphor become the vehicles for indeterminacy: things are at least "partly something else" and make odd "alliances and combinations" (290).26

Given such blurred boundaries, Woolf indicts, too, the myth that women have a "given nature" when Orlando as a woman

remembered how, as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled. 'Now I shall have to pay in my own person for those desires,' she reflected; 'for women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature. They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline. (156-57)

Hence is Orlando able to curse "the sacred responsibilities of womanhood"—keeping her beauty

26 Immediately prior to this statement, Woolf writes: For each was so surprised at the quickness of the other’s sympathy, and it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman, that they had to put the matter to the proof at once (258).
covered so as not to distract an "honest fellow"; to the hairdressing, the looking-glass, the lacing, the washing and powdering, the changing, the chastity, Orlando resounds, "A pox on them!" (157) Later, she decides she would rather be with the gypsies than in her homeland if being a woman there meant "conventionality, meant slavery, meant deceit, meant denying her love, fettering her limbs, pursing her lips, and restraining her tongue. . ." (163). What Woolf denies and defies, then, are not the differences between the sexes, but the ideology of biologicalism that constructs them.

Orlando, then, is able to censure both sexes equally, for she belongs to both and yet neither since "she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each" (158); hence the contrast of the countless options available to Orlando as a man—which Woolf cannot resist satirizing: swearing, cracking a man over the head, leading an army, displaying 72 medals, and so on—as opposed to pouring out tea. This strikes Orlando into the following reflection:

'To fall from a mast-head,' she thought, 'because you see a woman's ankles; to dress up like a Guy Fawkes and parade the streets, so that women may praise you; to deny a woman teaching lest she may laugh at you; to be the slave of the frailest chit in petticoats, and yet to go about as if you were the Lords of
creation.—Heavens! she thought, 'what fools they make of us—what fools we are!' (158)

Men falling from a masthead is a possibility she never quite gets over, for it comes up again, but the next time only to make her yawn and fall asleep:

'Ignorant and poor as we are compared with the other sex,' she thought, continuing the sentence which she had left unfinished the other day, 'armoured with every weapon as they are, while they debar us even from a knowledge of the alphabet' (and from these opening words it is plain that something had happened during the night to give her a push towards the female sex, for she was speaking more as a woman speaks than as a man, yet with a sort of content after all) 'still—they fall from the mast-head—' Here she gave a great yawn and fell asleep. (159)

Orlando has to stifle a yawn later, as well, when she suffers the tales of the Archduke’s bravery (18!).

Woolf parenthetically tells us that acknowledging ignorance and poverty ("Ignorant and poor as we are," 159) and being content in spite of these are components of the way women speak. And Woolf, in the sapphist subtext informing the book, suggests that the consciousness of being the same sex as ones you love "quickened and deepened those feelings," (161) since it erases the previous obscurity, the prime function of which is to divide the sexes. Yet she cautions us regarding the "extreme folly" of being proud of our sex (160). She does, however, after restraining her tears, remember that it is becoming in a woman to cry, and
thus lets the tears flow (165). And, although she knows from the experience of being a woman that men "cry as frequently and as unreasonably as women" (180), she has been socialized to show shock if a man cries in her presence. This fluctuation and momentary confusion reinforces the difficulty of assuming an androgynous view when one has been heavily socialized regarding rigid cultural differences between the sexes.

Woolf then addresses the legal rights of the sexes when she states the charges filed against her: "(1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounts to much the same thing..." (168). Nor is she within her rights to "cheat at Loo," which achieves her sought-after riddance of the Duke and, in turn—though she did not mind losing a fortune, a title, "the safety and circumstance of married life"—the loss of life and a lover (184-85), as most women are conditioned to feel when or if they reject men's offers. Such equations (for example, of men with life and love) indicate the transformation of her gender identity. Hiding her manuscripts and looking in mirrors are behaviors which indicate that she "was becoming a little more modest, as women are, of her brains, and a little more vain, as women are, of her person. Certain susceptibilities
were asserting themselves, and others were diminishing" (187). Woolf's narrator indicates the wish of the man-
womanly or woman-manly vacillation in spite of the
differences in actual mobility incurred by women's
dress (188-89). But because she defies gender
stereotypes (for a man, she was excessively tender-
hearted; for a woman, she hated household matters),
Orlando remains an anomaly, defying categorical
imperatives.

Perhaps this is why when he meets Marmaduke
Bonthrop Shelmerdine, they do not question whether the
other is male or female until after

they had guessed, as always happens between
lovers, everything of any importance about
each other in two seconds at the utmost, and
it now remained only to fill in such
unimportant details as what they were called; where they lived; and whether they were
beggars or people of substance (251).

Notions of identity based upon class and sex are
thereby debunked, thus putting into question all
notions of language and communication,27 the absence of
which is greater and says more than "the commonest
expressions" and "the most ordinary speech": "For it
has come about, by the wise economy of nature, that our

27 For a similar view which connects this "misty"-ness
with Kristevan semiotics and the "lapse into the
maternal realm of oceanic indifferentiation," see
Minow-Pinkney, 150-51.
modern spirit can almost dispense with language." (253).
Again putting theory into practice, Woolf writes (or
does not write?): "For which reasons we leave great
blank here, which must be taken to indicate that the
space is filled to repletion.

(253)

Only after revelations of non-sexed sympathy and
non-gendered style can Orlando and Shelmerdine go on,
rather than talking, "understanding, which has become
the main art of speech in an age when words are growing
daily so scanty in comparison with ideas." (258)28

Thus does Woolf drive home the absurdity of women
not being fit to write. When Orlando realizes the
"infinite delicacy" which inheres in the "transaction

28 Minow-Pinkney cautions us not to miss the point of
Orlando's lameness when she meets her mate in the moor:
her temporary incapacitation signifies her attempted
flight from patriarchy as well as what prevents her
from escaping it. Ironically, only as 1) dead (she
claims, "I'm dead, Sir") and 2) rescued by a man, is she
allotted legitimacy in Victorian patriarchy (see 136-
37). Thus, she deems further, of the two choices
surrounding drawing conclusions about Victorian
literature--"to write it out in sixty volumes octavo"
or "to squeeze it into six lines of the length of this
one" (290)--she chooses the second and further, opts to
omit her "final conclusion, which was of the highest
importance" (291)!
between the writer and the spirit of the age," that
indeed the "whole fortune" of one's works depends upon
a "nice arrangement between the two" (266), she claims
woman's everpresent outsider/insider position, being in
but not of the patriarchal world:

Orlando had so ordered it that she was in an
extremely happy position; she need neither
fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of
it, yet remained herself. Now, therefore,
she could write, and write she did. She
wrote. She wrote. She wrote. (266)

Only bearing in mind such a recognition can Orlando,
and perhaps Woolf, write.

But writing linearly, that is, in standard
chronological progression, Orlando admits is "a little
bare"; yet linearity--in all its absurdity\(^{29}\)--is all
that remains if one does not attribute significance to
a woman's thinking and writing, not even the minimal
significance assigned to love or childbearing/
childrearing. When "thought and imagination--are of no
importance whatsoever" (268), writing (unless trivial)

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\(^{29}\) The absurdity of linear progression Woolf
demonstrates in passages like the following:

It was now November. After November, comes
December. Then January, February, March, and
April. After April comes May. June, July,
August follow. Next is September. Then
October, and so, behold, here we are back at
November again, with a whole year
accomplished. (266)
and thinking (except focused on a man) can only be mere pretense in a woman:

Surely, since she is a woman, and a beautiful woman, and a woman in the prime of life, she will soon give over this pretense of writing and thinking and begin to think, at least of a gamekeeper (and as long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking). And then she will write him a little note (and as long as she writes little notes nobody objects to a woman writing either) . . . . (268)

She cannot write like Addison, or Lamb, or Sir Nicholas, who "never, never [said] what [they] thought," and made her feel that she "must always, always write like somebody else" (285). Such characteristics, she concludes, weeping bitterly, make them "all so manly" (286).30

It is only once she has critiqued and in a way, then, exempted herself from the historical recounting of a linearly arranged past—the "difficult business" of "time-keeping" (which contact with any of the arts necessarily distorts (306))—that the "terrifying revelation. . .that it is the present moment" (namely, October 11, 1928)) dawns on her. This is accompanied

30 As S. J. Kaplan has argued in Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel, two movements in the first quarter of Twentieth-century England climax and converged: 1) experimentation with modes of consciousness in the novel, and 2) feminist struggle for equality and independence. Thus did consciousness become a means of organizing the novel and analyzing the minds of women.
by the realization of indeterminacy: "Nothing is any longer one thing" (305). Even the self is made up of selves, up to 2,000 (314), with varying attachments, which in turn multiplies experience (308). The establishment of communication, which momentarily unifies the selves, obliterates its need. When everything is partly something else, the union of an itself and a not itself enables movement, the becoming of one thing into another (323). Such moments of being are what enable her to cry, "Ecstasy! ecstasy" (327), Woolf’s own rendition of what Irigaray would later call jouissance.31

In A Room of One’s Own androgyny was a transcendence while in Orlando—a good Shakespearean androgynous title and name—it is an embodiment wherein categories are annihilated. Indeed, it becomes a symbol of unity, as Kaplan proposes (77). Orlando is

31 Minow-Pinkney has claimed that herein lies Woolf’s attempted response to Kristeva’s dilemma of how to achieve the ‘masculine, paternal’ identification which supports time and symbol, in order to have one’s voice heard in politics and history, but simultaneously to preserve otherness, to summon ‘this timeless “truth”—formless, neither true nor false, echo of our jouissance, of our madness, of our pregnancies—into the order of speech and social symbolism.’ (130)
That is, Orlando enacts Kristeva’s "impossible dialectic" by having Orlando live alternation rather than resolution (see pp. 130-32 for fuller discussion).
healthy and ecstatic precisely because s/he does not participate in masculine/male, feminine/female dichotomies. Thus is she able to "Hail" the disruption of patriarchal discourse (for example, page 294), founded as it is upon this duality. Orlando inhabits a space beyond narrative conventions and sexual norms. Yet she does have to pay the consequences of articulating her jouissance in childbirth, a unique instance of such an event in Woolf's novels. Since, as Blau DuPlessis has claimed, lesbianism "extends and completes the heterosexusal couple," Woolf implies a critique of conventional romance and its social, psychic, and narrative limitations. On this count, Gilbert in her "Introduction" to Cixous's The Newly Born Woman posits Woolf as a "crucial feminist precursor of Cixous": "What is Orlando if not an elegantly elaborated fantasy of bi- (or pluri-) sexual liberation--creative 'hysteria' unleashed from the hyster and dedicated at last to 'the other history' which Cixous has called for?" (xv). Certainly part of the "hysteria" is due to Woolf's hyperbole and the linguistic pleasure upon which it is based and which, in turn, it elicits as it brings to the surface our false assumptions.
Perhaps, Woolf suggests, conflating or combining the categories is the same as, or at least a step toward, obliterating them. That is, the collapse of compliments leaves nothingness. As Kristeva reminds us regarding the constant alternation between "time and its 'truth,' identity and its loss," there is "never one without the other" (About Chinese Women, 38). Orlando is Woolf's response to women's exclusion from history and records and also, as Gillian Beer offers, constitutes "a joke about the pompous exaggeration of difference within patriarchal society" (Feminist Reader, 77). With such suggestions, Woolf puts the theory of A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas where it serves best: in praxis.

Because Woolf felt that one could not know something by naming it, she viewed patriarchal language as false and thus sought recourse in the non- or pre-verbal by exploring the unnamable. Her struggles against paternal metaphor for discourse are implicit as well as explicit. She accepts in order to transgress 1) representational forms (for example, The Waves, The

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32 Though simplistic, Ralph Samuelson's argument that Orlando shows Woolf's effort to truthfully represent the experience and feelings of her sex merits at least a cursory glance; see "Virginia Woolf, Orlando and the Feminist Spirit," The Western Humanities Review, Vol. XV, no.1 (Winter 1961): 51-58.
Years, and so on, are enclosed by or interspersed with literary conventions of poems in the interludes or frames; Orlando conflates biography and fantasy so as to interrogate categories and draw attention to contradiction which patriarchy seeks to camouflage; 2) symbols (for instance the tripartite structure of The Waves and To the Lighthouse); and 3) syntax (endless sentences focus on infinite predication which keeps the subject or referent in flux). And each of these disrupts the discourse. Each is an indirect exploration of why, "as a woman," Woolf had no country, prefiguring Cixous's own, "I look for myself throughout the centuries and don't see myself anywhere" (NBW, 75). 33

33 Paul Dottin claims this freeing of itself "most completely from classical molds and from the traditional rules" the prime reason Woolf's writing merits praise ("devotion, dedication and enthusiasm"), 556-57. Dottin continues:

...the novels of Mrs [sic] Woolf are as far as possible from the Latin habits of clarity, precision and order, in a word, from the Latin genius.

...reading a book by [her] will be an arduous, at times repellent task, even for those who love Giraudoux or Paul Morand. ... in her own country: only the admirers of Dorothy Richardson and Marcel Proust appreciate her--. ... As for the Americans, their impression of [her] and her works is summed up in the terse formula: 'a tough proposition.'

And yet [her] novels are worth the trouble involved in understanding them. ... her language is very beautiful, as sober and
Conscious of her position as woman within the language as a Symbolic system, Woolf questions and distrusts its power by writing about the need to change it. One of those changes entails the transformation of woman as absence into woman as present, plural, collective. A second is the ability to articulate woman's desire, disallowed by a Symbolic order constructed precisely upon its repression. Another is the use of an interrogative mode as an ethical and rhetorical tactic to show that discourse is opened, judgment suspended, and fixed answers eroded (as Blau DuPlessis summarizes; 50). Woolf is one of the first feminist writers to emphasize the danger and inauthenticity of woman trying to adhere to a "true" or "natural" self in an oppressive system. For example, she debunks such notions as romantic love which inform this oppression. Romantic love is idealized and criticized (To the Lighthouse), drastically redefined and closed as an issue (Orlando), and replaced by other empowering desires (The Years, The Waves). In order to achieve the scale and effect of ideological change Woolf thus proposes, her narratives focus on the mind and consciousness as the prime sites for activity, thus clear as the thought is complex and obscure.

...(557-58)
dramatizing the rupture from normal rules in both creating and closing (that is, providing closure in) fictions by emphasizing 1) the provisionality and positionality of identity; 2) the cultural/social/historical construction of gender; 3) the relational embeddedness of artistic production; and 4) its shape in woman's fiction as—to use J.K. Gardiner's terms—dissolution and mergence. 34

Woolf is among those Patricia Yaeger would claim as having shattered male plots and successfully called upon verbal resources unavailable to male contemporaries (see Honey-Mad Women). She lived and wrote at the center of a paradox: using patriarchal language to destroy patriarchy and the language it produces, a conflict and contradiction which she identified as a valuable source of energy. Frequently, Woolf uses this energy to assume what Kristeva calls a "negative function": "reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society. Such an attitude puts women on the side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary movements" (1974b, 166). It also enables

34 Challenging the dominant phallocentric discourse and its accompanying masculine socio-cultural order, Woolf pursues both a feminist and modernist goal, for in both ideologies the "infantile fixation" of the father destroys as it impedes freedom and justice.
her to "speak as a woman" (parler femme) as Irigaray advocates, in order to reproduce the doubleness, contiguity, and fluidity of woman's sexual morphology.

In Women and Writing, Woolf claims that women's not being able to write truthfully about their bodies makes of their bodies a present absence due to men's suppression (61-62). This, Woolf knew, necessitated the writing of the body (back) into language. Thus does Jinny, for instance, declare in The Waves, "My imagination is the body's..." (149). Further, by beginning A Room of One's Own with "But," as Rachel Bowlby has pointed out, Woolf assumes an ongoing debate regarding woman's writing and positions the woman's voice in contradiction (FD, 17). At the same time, she breaks the expected sequence, an interruption or breaking in (between) which serves as a feminist mode of questioning and deconstructing, and which sets the stage for syntactic interruptions through ellipses. In an astute analysis of Woolf's use of the genitive and the dative in the most-often quoted sentences a A Room of One's Own, Bowlby writes:

This discrepancy between the genitive and the dative, between the sentence 'of' the man and the sentence 'for' the woman, indicates a differential access to the medium of language use: we are dealing with quite different cases, grammatically and judicially. Something about the man's sentence causes it to take precedence, to take control, while
the woman's sentence simply does not exist, is nowhere 'current' or available for use. (FD, 29)

Bowlby argues that the "of" indicates man's active creation and ownership of a sentence which belongs to him, and woman's passive inability to appropriate it.

I think Woolf is indeed aware of the discrepancy in accessibility; further, this awareness served as the impetus for creating women's own languages made up of their own sentences. While I agree with Bowlby's ensuing conclusion that it was not necessarily a distinction between the sexes, but "between creative writers who make their own sentences, and the rest" (30), I would emphasize Woolf's implicit imperative that women scrutinize their own needs and styles and, rather than repeat the discourse of the fathers, create their own, not only in the literature they write and read but also--as the work she planned before death "Reading at Random" or "Turning Pages" indicates--in the literary history of which she hoped they would become agents and in the literary criticism in which they would become vital participants. Thus would

35 Bowlby bases this on Woolf's own counter-example of Jane Austen who opted not to use male sentence models (FD, 29).

36 In the drafts of this work, as Minow-Pinkney points out, Woolf advocates an exploration of the un- and subconscious and a new critical method that is, not surprisingly, more fluid, for she deems such will lend
Woolf have been able to look back through her mothers to Dickinson, to whom we turn, and to whom the semiotic impulse to retrieve the maternal--though certainly not in a regressive way--turns us now.

itself to a more truly human, rather than militarily devastated and devastating, subjectivity (See 194-96).
CHAPTER III: EMILY DICKINSON FLESHING OUT A NEW WORD

As a female literary genius born into a male writing and publishing world at a time when men made books and women, babies, in a place where late Calvinist and Puritan theology manifests itself in ideal conventional feminine behavior, Dickinson had few options. She could succumb to the dictates of this man’s world; or, she could take a course of action and thus defy the expectations of passivity. In this sense, her art expresses an attempt to transcend the largely patriarchally imposed limits, be they those of prose (#613), of heaven (#947), or of her own female sexual identity (#908)--limits which deprived her of purpose or place. An assessment of the shape her defiance of prose and even of poetry’s limits will demonstrate the ways--alluded to more fully in the analysis of #613--that French feminist theories elucidate our understanding of Dickinson’s work precisely because her poetry adumbrates and embodies these theories.

Because the forces of the unconscious, which can not be fully known, pervade Dickinson’s poems, her poems are perpetually elusive. Placing her in a pioneering experimental, modernist context informed by
feminist and psychoanalytic theories of being and of writing will, doubtless, prove most instructive. Such a project is inextricable from the one of showing how Dickinson's poetic practice and art adumbrate contemporary critical theories not articulated until a century later. Though, and perhaps because, Dickinson could not have known the work, they demonstrate that certain assumptions are held in common by a wide range of phallogocentric philosophies and economies, and across time and space.

In his Introduction to The Only Kangaroo among the Beauty, Karl Keller writes, "Certain works of genius can look across the centuries and whisper to one another--ideally existing in the mind" (3). While Keller's enterprise is to place Dickinson in the context of an American tradition (among, for example, Edward Taylor, Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe), I would like to use his insightful thesis as a point of departure for my own exploration of how literary, creative, and theoretical works can inform one another across barriers of time, space, and genre, and thus illuminate the elusivity of Dickinson's work. Dickinson scholarship is increasingly making such instructive connections, though--perhaps with a few exceptions--unbeknownst to
itself. Joanne Fiet Diehl, for example, focuses on Dickinson's connectedness to the Romantic poets, while the fundamental principle of her study—that being "outside" the tradition as a woman poet enabled her the freedom of radical experimentation—assumes that gender identity affects the course of poetic influence. In Diehl's comparative analysis between Dickinson and Emerson, we can infer other gendered differences, for example, that Emerson is consumed by what he can see, while Dickinson is absorbed in what she can not see. This implies that Emerson is more scopophilic, while Dickinson is more absence-oriented. Irigaray would theorize a century later about the difference between a sight-privileging, singular male economy in contrast to a woman's tactile, multiple one. As Diehl persuasively argues, only by subverting Romantic gestures was Dickinson able to redefine the dualism which governs the Romantic conception of the world and the imagination. I would add here that Dickinson attempted to thwart such dualism because she knew it to be the foundation of patriarchal discourse.

Margaret Homans offers an explanation of the need for such disruption of dualistic ruling. If hierarchy in language is at the heart of male supremacy, then challenging its oppression dismantles the very desire
to be at the center which generates hierarchical thinking in the first place. Dualistic opposition is just another means of hierarchy, for it inevitably privileges one term over the Other. Dickinson’s poetry, however, demonstrates that the female imagination can undo hierarchy in language. For instance, getting rid of regular punctuation, itself, denotes a break with finality and dogmatism. But impractical as it seemed even to Dickinson, Homans argues, this search for a non-dualistic language was more genuinely revolutionary and poetically suggestive than a "feminist" literal, alternative language. For the latter would be determinate and still have its origin in Adam’s speech. Homans shows that little would remain except silence and incomprehensibility—-as Dickinson discovers--if one departs from dualism wholly; I would add here that Dickinson nevertheless explores its limits and transgresses patriarchal bounds.

In this vein, Homans too connects the French Connection:

Luce Irigaray arrives by way of psychoanalysis at a position quite close to Dickinson’s poetic sense of language’s limits, a hundred years later, when she says that there may well be a woman’s language, but that it sounds like babbling; free from dualism, it does not make any of even the
rudimentary distinctions upon which ordinary comprehensibility rests. (217)

Nondualistic language would be indeterminate and nonsyntactical—making linear readings, alas!, impossible, as is often the case in Dickinson's poems. Meanings are multiple, as Irigaray herself enacts in This Sex Which Is Not One, the book in which she strategizes to undermine dualism via a structure of mind and society based on two or more, rather than the privilege, domination, and solipsism of one. Like nondualistic language, multiplicity—particularly as it presents itself in Dickinson's poems—offers a more challenging direction and movement for thinking, especially feminist thinking. Whenever dualism is present, the question of the objectification of woman as the Other term is present as well. As I will contend, Dickinson was aware that transformations in language could cross dualistic boundaries.

In this regard, Christianne Miller's linguistic and other analyses prove quite instructive. She examines how Dickinson's desire for control within her own right takes the form primarily of linguistic violation, that is, the unconventional use of pronouns, which subverts our sense of a word's or poem's single associations, meanings, or references. Dickinson's unorthodox usage finds itself as well in uninflected verbs (unmarked for
tense or person); omission of adjectival suffixes or verbs and the "ly" of adverbs. In my view, such absences or gaps exemplify what Kristeva would term the eruption of the semiotic. In her introduction to Sexual/Textual Politics, Toril Moi writes:

The modernist poem, with its abrupt shifts, ellipses, breaks and apparent lack of logical construction is a kind of writing in which the rhythms of the body and the unconscious have managed to break through the strict rational defences of conventional social meaning. Since Kristeva sees such conventional meaning as the structure that sustains the whole of the symbolic order—that is, all human social and cultural institutions—the fragmentation of symbolic language in modernist poetry comes for her to parallel and prefigure a total social revolution. For Kristeva, that is to say, there is a specific practice of writing that is itself 'revolutionary,' analogous to sexual and political transformation, and that by its very existence testifies to the possibility of transforming the symbolic order of orthodox society from the inside. (11)

This multi-faceted approach, I will contend—though Moi does not refer to Dickinson—is exactly Dickinson's project.

Eruptions or absences, for example, are inevitable because Dickinson's language is so highly compressed and highly disjunctive. The compression accounts for the multiplicity of meaning and the often anomalous, riddling quality of her poems, whether her intention is to speak subversively, to disguise her power, or to
express through form her personal ethic of renunciation. Disjunction in punctuation, syntax, "plot," tone, disrupts the expected patterns of style and meaning and, as such (that is, in its revolutionary capacity), is valuable. Disjunctive poetry disallows a single "correct" interpretation, but instead opens itself up to multiple possibilities. As Miller has suggested, it is important to view the structural qualities of Dickinson's poems both in their text and subtext, that is, her surface features of often inexplicable punctuation, inverted and elliptical syntax, occasional metrical irregularity, off-rhyme, and ungrammaticality rest upon an underlying regularity of meter, rhyme, and stanza forms. This is a powerful paradox which bespeaks a tension between a seemingly incomparable control over her art and eruptions of the unconscious which her openness allows her to let flow freely and variously.

A similar interplay is found in the juxtaposition of singular nouns and plural verbs, and vice-versa, as well as in singular versions of plural reflexive pronouns (for example, "ourself"). While Dickinson primarily uses the lyric present tense, the subjunctive connotes conditionality or universality. Further, her repeated use of the negative links her at once with
Kristeva's concepts of negativity as the place allotted to women in patriarchal discourse and with the Derridean notions of difference and the absence of a center to meaning; hence, her affinity with deconstruction: Dickinson herself seems to believe that language is essentially fictitious and arbitrary and that, paradoxically, language's potential for meaning exceeds the individual's control of it, for it is simultaneously inadequate and too powerful. All nature and all language—which fluctuates between order and chaos—thus, is in constant flux.

Significantly, Dickinson's variant manifestations of "flux" correspond to features of language that have been associated with conventional notions of the "feminine," as summarized by Miller: irregular vocabulary, immediate intimacy, indirect claims for personal authority or grandeur, wide use of question marks and exclamation points (expressive of self-doubt and emotion, respectively), and the dash (112). The latter, I would claim, is emblematic of Dickinson's resistance to closure and definition/definiteness. Yet other features of her poems do not correspond to speculative descriptions of the "feminine," again as Miller conveniently lists: analogies that do not hold, subversively ironic tone, frequent negation/qualifi-
cation, contrastive conjunction "but," plots centered upon challenging authority, antagonistic stance of speaker, to name a few. Strategically and stylistically, then, in these respects, her poetry exemplifies more of a feminist or woman's writing, *écriture féminine*, in that each places woman's voice in the space of contra-diction—hence Dickinson's connection to Twentieth-century theories of women's writing. Again, French and American feminist theories of plurality/multiplicity (Irigaray), negativity/Other-ness (Kristeva), and of subversity (Gilbert and Gubar) complement each other and facilitate our more comprehensive understanding of Dickinson's art.

The cyclic, circular, and/or concentric rather than linear nature of woman's writing, its fragmentation rather than coherence, and its "irrational" and metaphorical progressions, its disruptive or marginal discourse—all of which have often been culturally labeled as "feminine" and thus seen pejoratively—has been claimed by women poets like Dickinson and Anglo-American and French feminist literary critics and theorists of language, as part of a conscious aesthetic. The gender-based alienation from language which has suppressed and repressed women's voices and ways of speaking/writing has been challenged
by techniques that are not inherently feminine; such strategies, then, are non-exclusive to women writers and non-prescriptive of them. For example, some elements have been claimed as specifically and primarily modernist: distrust of any defining order or fixed truth; the need to create new forms of language. So one can avoid the potential for prescriptiveness found in some female theoreticians like Cixous by seeing that, in the development of the techniques cited above, gender is not the determining factor, but rather the cohering factor of influence.

Miller astutely clarifies the significance of such a distinction when studying a poet like Dickinson:

Dickinson does not write as she does because she is a woman; this is not an argument for biological determinism. Nor is she a feminist poet in the political or social sense of the word... She is, however, conscious that gender affects ways of speaking, thus also the construction. (163)

Indeed, the central assumption of much feminist criticism of Dickinson is that gender informs the nature of art, of biography, and of the relationship between the two. Sandra Gilbert, for example, argues that since the primary transformation of (human) nature will take place through women, Dickinson must exploit language for its ambiguity and potential redeeming value. In Gilbert's repeated references to Dickinson
in her Introduction to Cixous's *The Newly Born Woman*, for instance, she deems Dickinson's hysteria and madness and witchcraft of sorts—survival mechanisms for women in patriarchy—the most revolutionary tools of transformation. And, as is evident from the title through its closing analysis, Mossberg's major study centers Dickinson's poetic identity in her gendered self, a woman and daughter whose consciousness is fragmented, disjointed, and capable of "surrealist ruptures of interior landscape" (31). Innovatively applying Cixous and Irigaray's theories of writing the (female) body, Mossberg explores how Dickinson wrote the body through an "aesthetic of anorexia," her only means of autonomy: Dickinson transformed lack and absence (of food, sustenance, etc.) into positivity, author-ity (for instance, poems #1109 and #1427).

Paula Bennett also deems the reality of self as woman pivotal to Dickinson's development as a poet, affecting her themes, style and voice. For Bennett, then, gender and individual identity are equally necessary in understanding poetry. In contrast to men, women writers' principal antagonistic voices are not those of female precursors, but the inhibiting voices (internalized social forces) within a woman poet. Such a view is closely related to Suzanne Juhasz's belief
that living in the mind as an actual and occupied place solved Dickinson’s dilemma of how to be both a poet and a woman. Juhasz claims that Dickinson used the imagination as a space—what feminists have called variously the "lacuna," "womanspace," or the "wild zone"—in which to create some life other than that of her external situation in patriarchy. According to both Bennett and Juhasz, women writers’ relation to any masculine tradition begins as that of the outsider, their sense of self deriving only from Other-ness. But Dickinson, I argue, rather than being debilitated by such outsider status, capitalized on her sense of otherness (as Eve, sinner, liar, and so on), in order to create a language that would articulate her subjectivity, anticipating as it does Irigaray’s dream of a language of woman’s own and Rich’s dream of a common language, apart from patriarchal discourse. Such a language is possible only if fluid, for only then can the mind expand and grow as in #556 ("The Brain, within its Groove"); the same is true for the soul, as in #1425:

The inundation of the Spring
Enlarges every soul—
It sweeps the tenement away
But leaves the Water whole—

In which the soul at first estranged—
Seeks faintly for its shore
But acclimated—pines no more
For that Peninsula--

Grief, a fundamental emotion and reaction to the imposition of patriarchy on women's lives and creativity, is similarly described in #252:

I can wade Grief--
Whole Pools of it--
I'm used to that--
But the least push of Joy
Breaks up my feet--
And I tip--drunken--
Let no Pebble--smile--
'Twas the New Liquor--
That was all!

Power is only Pain--
Stranded, thro' Discipline,
Till Weights--will hang--
Give Balm--to Giants--
And they'll wilt, like Men--
Give Himmaleh--
They'll Carry--Him!

Power is achieved fully only at the brink of fluidity, which frequently translates into the brink of indecipherability. Dickinson's poetic voice pursues the possibilities of internally generated meanings as it resists the confines of figuration, the potential clarities of signification. "My Life Had Stood a Loaded Gun," with its endless interpretations (Cody, Bennett, Howe, Sewall, Homans, etc.) is the example par excellence of Dickinson's art as it collapses meaning and shows meaning, at best, as multiple and indeterminate.

As Susan Howe addresses in My Emily Dickinson, negativity is everpresent: in #510 ("It was not Death,
for I stood up"), for instance, contradiction and difference are shown even to permeate potential similarities. Howe acknowledges that gender affects our use of language, and that we confront issues of difference, distance, and absence (especially woman as absence) when we write. According to Howe, poetry leads to a transfiguration of gender, but she cautions us on being prescriptive of women's voices. Indeed, Howe's book, in my view, exemplifies an écriture féminine in the critical realm, thus bridging the gap between critical and creative writing, as does Dickinson's modernist, experimental, anticipatory poetic art.

Forging a new discourse to which women had access and in which they could find author-ity required Dickinson to confront the restrictions of perhaps the most literally phallogocentric male-author(ized) institution: language itself. More specifically, as a woman poet, Dickinson needed to liberate herself from the restrictions of a male-dictated prose world—a reality she faced early in her career, given the approximate date, 1862, of poem #613:

They shut me up in Prose—
As when a little Girl
They put me in a Closet—
Because they liked me "still"—

Still! Could themself have peeped—
And seen my Brain--go round--
They might as wise have lodged a Bird
For Treason--in the Pound--

Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Abolish his Captivity--
And laugh--No more have I--

Clearly, Barbara Clarke Mossberg, by labeling the cover of her book, *Emily Dickinson: When a Writer Is a Daughter* with the first stanza of #613, realized the tremendous significance of such a verse. She is by no means alone in this realization. As I assess the various American feminist interpretations that have been applied to this poem so crucial to Dickinson's art of defiance of patriarchal dictates, I will demonstrate the missing links among the readings by offering the enriching interpretation of a French feminist perspective.

French feminist criticism assumes both that there is no realm of experience outside language (that is, experience takes place within a system of representation, for example, Lacan's Symbolic Order) and that language is constructed on presuppositions about gender that devalue woman (as silent object; as fictive or absent referent). Emily Dickinson, as a Nineteenth-century poet, experienced the collision (as Homans calls it), "articulated but not resolved" between the "urgent need to represent female experience and woman's
silencing within language and literary history"
(Homans, xiii).

Among the criticism regarding #613, a widely held position suggests that Dickinson's "they" refers to the forces that "militated against her being a poet" (Anderson, EDPSS). In Anderson's view, Dickinson lived in a fairly isolated community in a practical family, the father of which consistently encouraged "real life" portrayals in any type of literature. With the negative images suggested in the first line ("shut me up"), the reader can assume that prose was not an art Dickinson regarded highly. Anderson cites the fact that in a letter, Dickinson wrote "We please ourselves with the fancy that we're the only poets, everyone else is prose." Although to whom this comment is addressed remains uncertain, evidently she conceived prose as a lesser, more common, or as Anderson notes, a more limited activity. Stating that she had the madness of a poet who would not stay shut up in convention ("Still! Could themself have peeped--/And seen my Brain--go round--") , Anderson suggests that Dickinson--like the bird that by effort of will, breaks out of captivity--will break out of this outer-imposed prison and reveal the true singer. I would clarify that the very fact that this inhibition is Other-imposed, rather
than chosen, say, as mimetic strategy, is what leaves the persona speechless (that is, shut up). Only by creating her own, self-initiated and self-chosen discourse can she abolish her captivity. Like the bird as female explorer in poem #48, Dickinson wants her, even as "Patriarch's bird," to take "Courage":

Once more, my now bewildered Dove
Bestirs her puzzled wings
Once more her mistress, on the deep
Her troubled question flings--

Thrice to the floating casement
The Patriarch’s bird returned,
Courage! My brave Columba!
There may yet be Land!

The female mistress has troubled questions because this feminine version of Columbus as discoverer is imprisoned in a casement. The captive's dream of freedom found in #613 presents itself here as well, and also turns up in #661, when the bee escapes the authoritative chase of Police.1 As in a later poem,

1 Could I but ride indefinite
As doth the Meadow Bee
And visit only where I liked
And No one visit me

And flirt all Day with Buttercups
And marry whom I may
and dwell a little everywhere
Or better, run away

With no Police to follow
Or chase Him if He do
till he should jump Peninsulas
to get away from me--

I said "But just to be a Bee"
#657, the House of Poetry and Possibility provided more freedom than (the House) of prose.

Donald Thackrey, author of Emily Dickinson's Approach to Poetry, suggests that it was poetry's "fair possibilities" that made prose seem like a prison. Along with Norman Talbot, author of "The Child, The Actress, and Miss Emilie Dickinson," Thackrey deems that Dickinson's poetry could not be shut up in prose. But neither critic considers gender in his speculations about why this is the case. Even Sewall takes an ambivalent approach, commenting that the figure of the little girl in the closet is, without doubt, the poet asserting herself against the prosaic forces of the time. Yet, taking the middle-of-the-road approach as he often does, Sewall also proposes that, considering the time it was written (1862, when Dickinson was 31), her "they" could very well have been her literary advisors, like Higginson, who would not encourage her to write poetry, and who--although a self-proclaimed supporter of women's rights--told Dickinson to consider female poets more appropriately as their husbands' muse. The tone of this poem, then, for Sewall, is one

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Upon a Raft of Air
And row in Nowhere all Day long
And anchor "off the Bar"

What Liberty! so Captives deem
who tight in Dungeons are.
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of defiance since--according to the final line--Dickinson gets the last laugh.

First, I would like to suggest that prose, specifically as it was conventionally practiced at the time, was not a form of expression conducive to Dickinson’s art, for most of its forms would have required a plot--typically a romance plot, the ends of which restrict female characters (to either marriage or death); further, plot would have elicited linear progression of events. Obviously, Dickinson is aware that her mind does not follow such a path; instead, it "goes [] round." The cyclic, circular, and concentric rather than linear nature of her thinking constitutes the new aesthetic Dickinson is claiming as fundamental to her discourse. Second, Dickinson may have found the prose with which she was familiar--identified with confinement and oppression--to be static, final, lacking in affect. Its syntax and grammar represent the rational discourse she wishes to tear apart. In "Ransom a Voice," Joanne Fiet Diehl demonstrates how Dickinson challenges Western literary tradition’s assumptions regarding figurative language by shaping another language (Juhasz, 156–75). Thus does her escape from language’s bounds as a bird specifically imply connections with her quest to be like Christ:
saved and resurrected, but by her own force of will, as in #798. She rises beyond the estimate of men because she has chosen arced circumference, enabling inwardness over which she is the author-ity, as her route. If her business is circumference (Letters, 268), as McKinstry has noted), Dickinson is on the margins of a circle in which she inscribes the rest of the world (EW, 198). Thus does Dickinson prefigure Woolf’s claim in Three Guineas that it is better to be locked out of than locked into patriarchy. And similar to Woolf’s own privileging of process over product, Dickinson’s prime concern is the process of circumference (GW, 255).

Third, if we accept Sewall’s reading of the last line, then we might be reminded of Cixous’s discussion of the laugh of the Medusa, that is, the Medusa or creator’s ultimate subversive act is to laugh. Laughter, like so many other liberating factors in women’s writing, is often overlooked by masculist-oriented critics. Through laughter, Dickinson has transformed into success the futility she had felt even three years earlier (1859) regarding her imprisonment and attempts to escape it:

I never hear the word "escape"
Without a quicker blood,
A sudden expectation,
A flying attitude!

I never hear of prisons broad
By soldiers battered down,
But I tug childish at my bars
Only to fail again!

In her book, *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson*, Rebecca Patterson differs with Sewall in claiming that, rather than Higginson, Holland and Bowles failed to provide an outlet for the poet. In June, Dickinson wrote to Higginson that "two editors of journals...had asked her for a piece of her mind." These editors, Holland and Bowles, considered her poetry unsuitable for publication; more impressed with her letters, they had asked her to contribute prose essays. In her April letter to Higginson that same year, she asked if her verse was alive, perhaps needing positive reinforcement after having failed with two other prominent men. Patterson sees 1862, partly as a result of this interaction, as a year of profound change for Dickinson in many ways. Dickinson’s handwriting, for instance, went from small and delicate—which her mother had taught her to be—to bold and disconnected. She had also dropped the quite girlish "Emilie" for what Patterson calls an uncompromising "Emily." In addition, she began to wear the symbolic white clothes at this time. Curiously, then, such a study—which takes into account the personal and historical context—does not also posit, as I would add, that this poem, written during a year of self-initiated and symbolic
changes on Dickinson's part, is likewise indicative of her conscious affirmation of her own emancipatory art, an articulation in the mode of discourse she freely and determinedly chose—poetry—regardless of pressures from the male world and based upon her artistic independence and convictions.

In a slightly different approach concerning the forces against Dickinson's poetry, Jean McClure Mudge (Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home) argues that the "they" in #613 refers to parents Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson, who had enclosed Dickinson in her earthly existence, or as in Poem #538, "shut her in the cold."² Mudge claims that Dickinson's self-sequestration was, in reality, an extension of a punishment inflicted by them in her youth. The stern parental discipline under which, as Sewall tells us, the children were enclosed in separate rooms—perhaps even closets—may have created in Dickinson's psyche a need to relieve through chastisement the guilt she incurred by choosing a literary career.

Although I can understand Mudge's Freudian argument concerning self-imposed withdrawal, it is difficult to apply to this poem beyond the first

² Weisbuch's version of this possibility reads as follows: "The little girl shut up by the family's cold, deadening respectability" has become a "mature mental question thwarted by prosaic life."

stanza, and even then seems a little strained. Such a backdrop, while plausible, subsumes Dickinson's clearly defiant tone in the remainder of the poem and posits Dickinson again as a passive victim being acted upon, rather than an active force in her own life, by will and imagination transforming a lack of options allotted females in pathologically patriarchal families into a realm of possibilities. A French feminist reading of this poem, aware as it would be of the unconscious and its unknowableness and power, would provide a more workable psychoanalytic view by assuming that Dickinson's condensation of meanings and form defy complete explication. It would look to her subtle disruptions of patriarchal discourse (for example, her diverse formal and linguistic habits and turns of mind) and offer #613 as an expression of an escape from, rather than resignation to, sequestration. Or, perhaps it would call attention to the multiplicitous possibility that the imagination can enact simultaneously both needed sequestration and escape.

As Sewall clarifies in the "Introduction" to Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays, even if Dickinson did not feel a need for self-sequestration, she most certainly did feel, from her early years, the need for expression. Poem #613, in my view, most
emphatically articulates Dickinson's increasingly urgent need to express. According to Mossberg, Dickinson was struggling for a voice in a society that tried to shut her up in the prose of conventional feminine behavior. She is an intellectual and sexual refugee from an age in which she could not speak and could not be heard--a highly frustrating imprisonment for one who felt that through the voice of her poetry, she could escape at will from the Nineteenth-century patriarchal closet. She deplored women's submissiveness to the patriarchy, as exemplified in her mother, and hoped through words to avoid that destiny for herself by asserting autonomy and independence in her poems. Mossberg contends further that being treated like a child neutralized and neutered her, and kept her well-behaved and shut her up (see, for example, "Emily Dickinson's Nursery Rhymes"). Treating her like a child, like placing her in a closet or relegating her to prose, was a form of punishment and reprisal. I would emphasize, then, that Dickinson mocks social efforts to control and negate her adult liberating self-expression; Dickinson implies that there are so many restrictions she may as well be "shut up" in a closet. And if, as Karl Keller reports (166-87), her parents viewed poems as vain fictions, unholy of
purpose, #613 is a place where Dickinson is proving her voice and her talent, and asserting her self and her art. Most importantly, it is her place, a space whereby she can create a language which speaks more directly to her needs or, as Cixous would have it, addresses her desires. While Mossberg’s analysis approaches most closely my own feminist explication of this poem, it stops short of the fact that in order to have access to the words which would express her own sense of autonomy, Dickinson needed first to find a language which had room for such. For these reasons, Dickinson was a stylistic innovator and modern experimentalist (as will be elaborated upon later).

Weisbuch explicates further that if in the poem both girl and poet are compared to the bird jailed in a dog pound, then both discover that what has been chosen for them need not be accepted. Dickinson’s thought can soar free, like an independent star:

    Himself has but to will
    And easy as a Star
    Abolish his Captivity—
    And laugh—No more have I—

Weisbuch then claims that, ironically, as implied by "laugh" in the last line, the would-be captors have put only themselves in prosy captivity, while Dickinson has, in this poem, escaped to an uncensored fictional world, even if that world is the one of secrecy and
seclusion she chooses for herself. All the more thorough in his analysis, Weisbuch informs us that the House of Prose, a conventional conformity (especially, I would add, for women writers), has become the punitive closet. But the House of Possibility and imaginative freedom exists, wherever the mind is, regardless of outer influence—hence the speaker’s brain still goes "round." And it is the brain, or intellectual activity, that "they" wanted to silence. While I find his analysis itself brilliant and, from a feminist perspective, initially quite liberating, his premising of Dickinson’s female self-determination on a work by the most highly acclaimed male literary genius—Shakespeare (that is, King Lear)—somehow undercuts it almost from the beginning, for he has rooted Dickinson in the male literary tradition that, even he argues, she escapes.  

3 Insofar as the question of originality or the voicing of a specific literary artist is concerned, Robert Weisbuch, in Emily Dickinson’s Poetry, suggests that the origin lies in King Lear—when, late in the "domestic drama," the king—captured and about to be imprisoned with Cordelia—says, "Come, let’s away to prison/We two alone will sing like birds in the cage." But whereas in King Lear we sense resignation, Dickinson’s tone is more a rebellious affirmation. Meanwhile John Evangelist Walsh, author of The Hidden Life of Emily Dickinson, states that this poem is a direct borrowing from Chapter 7, paragraph 10 of Bronte’s Jane Eyre.
Susan Juhasz, however, in *Naked and Fiery Forms* as well as in "Emily Dickinson as Woman Poet," roots Dickinson's autonomy in her own experience. She maintains that the poet is referring to the childhood experience of the socialization and expectations of girls. Dickinson rejects the stillness inherent in the captivity of traditional roles and possesses the bird's incorruptible desire for freedom to soar, literally and, perhaps, spiritually. Coming from an age in which Western literature took for granted that primarily men made "serious" art and books, Dickinson knew that a woman's identity was defined by personal relations, rather than professions. Yet when women are traditionally conditioned to be sensitive, emotive, intuitive and empathetic, Juhasz continues, they are in a double-bind, for they possess the qualities of a poet. In Juhasz's eyes, then, much of Dickinson's art is a result of this conflict and tension. Juhasz rejects the (hetero)sexist misconceptions both that Dickinson was a frustrated spinster who wrote because she was unfulfilled as a woman, and that the force of her art was founded in her sexual yearning for some man. I would add here, given Weisbuch's otherwise elucidating interpretation, nor is her art founded in some man's verse or literary tradition. Her chosen
seclusion may in part be attributed to her crisis of identity and consequent urgency for a private life in which she created a symbolic extension of herself. The move to her room corresponded to the gradual move into her mind. Juhasz does not proceed, though, through the door her analysis opens—that is, into probing Dickinson's movement in her mind and more specifically how the movement within her mind is itself gendered. Again, this is where contemporary French feminist theories of women's writing the (female) body (Cixous and Irigaray) or enabling the semiotic (Kristeva) prove instructive.4

Considering the intensity and economy of Dickinson's verse, it is a disservice to disregard any part of a certain poem under scrutiny, even though explication, in definition and in theory, is the in-depth study of specific passages or lines. For instance, Thackrey and Talbot are concerned only with the narrow scope of the relation between Dickinson's prose and poetry. Further, while Anderson addresses the unknown "they," the dilemma of prose vs. poetry,  

4 But Juhasz does suggest that Dickinson has an unconscious fear of males: her father, brother, Higginson, and, if you will, God, all of whom at different points disappointed her. If fear seems too strong a label, one can not deny her resentment of their privileged status; for, as Mossberg convincingly argues, Dickinson craved the esteem of men or sons, be they her brother, Austin, or Christ.
and the images of bird and star as well as captivity, he makes no reference to the import of the last line. Who is laughing? Is it that Emily, unlike the bird, no longer can laugh? Or, is she alas able to laugh because she will have "no more" of patriarchy? Or does she have no more laughs because she, like the bird, has truly had the last laugh? French feminist criticism would stress the possibility that each line, phrase, word, punctuation, etc., contains a multitude of plausible disruptions of patriarchal discourse, embodying as they do eruptions of the unconscious, as found, for instance, in the frequency of certain words in the body of her poetry, the coding of gender, the use of quotation marks, and the multiplicity of word meanings. For example, we perceive the recurring theme of her smallness ("little" is a word she uses 226 times, according to Rosenbaum's A Concordance), or her assertion that she is not small; her identity crisis presents itself in numerous poems, such as those on wives or small creatures. Among the multiple interpretations is that perhaps Dickinson, as a remarkably talented woman in the Nineteenth century, felt overwhelmed by the dictates of a male-dominated literary and publishing world, to which she did not
want to conform or belong, nor to compromise her art or her self.

Notice, too, a point not noted by any of the critics: the bird which is lodged and escapes is gendered as masculine (ll. 9-11). Is Dickinson’s only model of freedom that possessed by males? As Mossoerg has posited, the daughter in the father’s house was as oppressed as the poet in the House of Prose. Thus, it is the male bird that has the power to will, hence bringing to the fore the consistent question of will, its repression or submission, whether it is one’s own, or someone else’s. Significantly, in the original manuscript, Dickinson had written beside “look down upon” the alternate phrase “abolish his”; she was aware that males had the prerogative both to disapprove—from some hierarchical position—of their own state and to abolish it, as well. Sandra Gilbert attributes this abolishing of captivity to women poets who—through transformations of vocabulary—debunk ordinary usage, and do so by expanding rather than annihilating meaning (see “The Wayward Nun beneath the Hill”). As Suzanne Juhasz has offered regarding Dickinson’s attempts in other contexts to restructure sexual “role associations” through unexpected pronoun usage (“’How Low Feet Stagger,’” 35), I think the gendering of the
imprisoned bird as male illustrates what Elfenbein has
called Dickinson’s "unsexing" language’s countless
gendered assumptions—in this case, of who is captive
and has potential for freedom.⁵

Further, as some critics have surmised regarding
other poems, Dickinson often used quotation marks as a
method of distancing; it seems that—although, again,
none of the criticism of #613 to date suggests it—the
quotes around "still" indicate that, just as the
exclamation point shows indignation, Dickinson did not
want to be identified with that stereotypical concept
of conventional woman’s "still"-ness—in her father’s
words, their "modest and unassuming" manner.
Christanne Miller, while not referring to the quotes,
offers a liberating interpretation: that "still"
disguises a more radical power; in her essay, "How Low
Feet Stagger," she contends that such confinement as
expressed in this poem does not ultimately confine.
Rather, Dickinson chooses secrecy and apparent
confinement to allow herself increased freedom.
Writing from the margins, I would emphasize, is the
very position which enables her to critique the center.

⁵ Gary Lee Stonum is short-sighted in his claim
that—except for #326, which he views as a "woman’s
vindication of her native artistic resources against
male cultural hegemony" (DS, 202n15)—Dickinson did
not imagine language or art as "to an important degree"
gendered" (32).
I would like to explore further the implications of this position of subversion. For example, it is curious that, except for Mossberg's note that the bird's singing instead of being still might be considered treasonous, critics have not really addressed the question of Treason (1.8), a word used only ten times in the body of her poetry. This infrequency makes its exploration that much more imperative. What has Dickinson, like the bird, betrayed? The confines perhaps of her parents, perhaps of her literary advisors, those imposed by the inhibiting and diminishing forces of sexist role indoctrination? Or, moreover, those she thwarts in phallogocentric language by swearing an allegiance to a language she creates as her own? Her poetic art is one of subverting the given, imprisoning forms. But while Miller concedes that it is an incomplete art because one can only write poetry through restrictive words of "their" prose, I think Dickinson transgresses beyond even that concession.

When considering, for example, multiple meanings for Dickinson's word choice, St. Armand suggests that the "Pound" could most likely refer--rather than to the modern dog pound--to the roofless fieldstone enclosure for wandering cattle and other strays, common to New
England villages a century ago. Is this then a mocking irony in the sense that Dickinson (though a woman) was bright enough to realize that the escape from sexist convention elicited an upward movement? Was she one "who still sits at the top of the stairs and laughs in the darkness, holding, like her greatest American [male] contemporaries, all creeds and schools in abeyance," as St. Armand argues (see his critique of, among others, Weisbuch's Emily Dickinson's Poetry in Michigan Quarterly Review).

In her final line, "No more have I," Dickinson affirms and confirms that she will have no more to do with such laughable restrictions. Recovering women's laughter, particularly as a means of overcoming confining restrictions, is certainly risky business, especially for a woman in the Nineteenth century. Any subject who attempted to disrupt the patriarchal, by emancipating women and by allowing unconscious forces to slip through symbolic repression, by laughing, risked what would be labeled by patriarchy as madness. But the cost of subscribing to patriarchy was more maddening to Dickinson. Gilbert and Gubar's work on the mad woman, as Patricia Yaeger concisely states in her "Emancipatory Strategies" chapter of Honey-Mad Women, "opened the question of the social efficacy of
women's hysteria, of how politically effective—and how inevitable—women's madness might be" (241). What patriarchy defines as madness enabled Dickinson to recover women's laughter, as Cixous advises all women do, to discover a "politics of pleasure," as Yaeger phrases it (242), inclusive of both struggle (Calvary, as will be discussed shortly) and ecstasy (escape from the House of Prose). My study addresses Yaeger's urging that feminist theorists recover a "dialectic of pleasure as well as of pain in women's texts" (HMW, 242-43). Clearly, Dickinson knew the necessity and inevitability of such a dialectic:

For each ecstatic instant
We must an anguish pay
In keen and quivering ratio
To the ecstasy.

For each beloved hour
Sharp pittances of years--
Bitter contested farthings--
And Coffers heaped with Tears! (#125)

Similarly in #165, Dickinson describes women's efforts to disguise pain:

A Wounded Deer--leaps highest--
I've heard the Hunter tell--
'Tis but the Ecstasy of death--
And then the Brake is still!

The Smitten Rock that gushes!
The trampled Steel that springs!
A Cheek is always redder
Just where the Hectic sings!

Mirth is the Mail of Anguish--
In which it Cautions Arm,
Lest anybody spy the blood
And "you're hurt" exclaim!

In another poem referring specifically to female deer,
Dickinson dissociates herself from women who would
derer to powerful patriarchal forces. That is, in #754
she defines her life as a "Loaded Gun" in search of the
Doe, perhaps Dickinson's version of Woolf's "angel in
the house." Identifying herself with a loaded gun,
Dickinson initiated the argument about the sorceress
and the hysterical, the witch and the madwoman, who
claims her anger and destructive capacities: for
instance, every time she speaks, "The Mountains
straight reply--," thus satisfying her desires to be
heard (for she incurs an echo) and to have, like a
bullet, an impact. Only then can she experience
pleasure, as we learn in stanza three:

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow--
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through--

Dickinson's persona in this poem is madly at play and
enjoying the pleasures that accompany play.

Even among her earliest poems, Dickinson
demonstrates the fun she has in play, particularly
word-play which reverses meaning:

If recollecting were forgetting,
Then I remember not.
And if forgetting, recollecting,
How near I had forgot.
And if to miss, were merry,
And to mourn, were gay,
How very blithe the fingers
That gathered this, Today! (#33)

And in #67, those who can define or know a thing, such
as success or victory, are those most removed from it:

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne’er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of Victory

As he defeated—dying—
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!

Dickinson again addresses both identification through
opposites and their disparate comparison, and the
duality of language as found, for example, in oxymorcn
saved for the final line, in #1695:

There is a solitude of space
A solitude of sea
A solitude of death, but these
Society shall be
Compared with that profounder site
That polar privacy
A soul admitted to itself--
Finite infinity.

In society, one experiences the loneliness of death and
of vastness; true solitude is that found by the soul
which admits (only?) itself but, strangely, has
limitless potential (infinity) within the bounds it
sets itself (finite).
Interestingly, in #303, the soul—significantly gendered as feminine—"selects her own Society--"

Then--shuts the Door--
To her divine Majority--
Present no more--

In her society of "One" (which she chooses, as we learn in the third stanza), the poet is free to exercise any choice, free to play with the dominant discourse, be it that of the language or of religion, custom, ceremony.

To demonstrate the former, for example, in #172, Dickinson realizes that concepts and words are just that: they have no power beyond themselves. Stanza two suggests the following:

Life is but Life! And Death, but Death!
Bliss is, but Bliss, and Breath but Breath!
And if indeed I fail,
At least to know the worst, is sweet!
Defeat means nothing but Defeat,
No drearier, can befall!

Even defeat and death lose their force; the only threat lies in what can be imagined, not in what simply is. Demonstrative of her play with language's dictates, too, are the repeated uses of the exclamation points in this poem and in others (such as #62). Women, upon discovering the limits of language, not only can (ex)claim their revelatory/revolutionary discoveries, but can sustain whatever degree of emphasis they choose.
Critics like Stonum and McKinstry have increasingly brought the instructive impact of Dickinson’s letters also to our attention. Dickinson knew, a century before Cixous’s treatise on the subject, about women’s need to bring patriarchy down to earth and “play” with it as well as retrieve women’s laughter, regardless of the consequences (for example, banishment) from patriarchy, as illustrated in her correspondence with Austin:

You say you don’t comprehend me, you want a simpler style. Gratitude indeed for all my fine philosophy! I strove to be exalted thinking I might reach you and while I pant and struggle and climb the nearest cloud, you walk out very leisurely in your slippers from Empyrean, and without the slightest notice request me to get down! (Letters, 11?)

Dickinson, clearly, does not intend to “get down.” In fact, another letter demonstrates her acknowledgement that she was forging a discourse more alien to men than to herself: “All men say ’What’ to me, but I thought it a fashion” (L, 415).

McKinstry notes further the fine line between biography (fact) and autobiography (fiction) in Dickinson’s letters and poems (EW, 194). Both concealing and revelatory, her letters enable a balance between silence and speech. Such suspension is why so often in her poems, meaning is found in the silences or gaps, to be retrieved by women only when they
womanspeak; womanspeak breaks the golden rule of silence at the same time it breaks with the language in which women had—until they went to the blank margins—been inscribed. Though the exploration of gaps and silences is certainly a feature of some male modernist writing as well, the primary difference, in my view, is that silence is a sphere to which women had previously been relegated; thus, women's exploitation of it seems more particularly subversive.

Dickinson's play with custom presents itself in her subverting of religious ceremonies. In "The Gentian weaves her fringes—" Dickinson reveres nature which pools her resources to memorialize "departing blossoms." She joins with Bobolink and bee, gentian and maple in this commemoration service, which she closes with a sacreligious play on the Trinity:

In the name of the Bee—
And of the Butterfly—
And of the Breeze—Amen! (#18)

Refreshingly, these are the entities with which she is most comfortable: in #19, the Bee and the Breeze enable transformation into a Rose; and in #111, we learn that her reverence of them is not based in fear, nor is it founded upon not knowing the Other. Rather, they share a mutual knowledge and comfortable relationship:
The Bee is not afraid of me.  
I know the Butterfly.  
The pretty people in the Woods  
Receive me cordially--

The Brooks laugh louder when I come--
The Breezes madder play;  
Wherefore mine eye thy silver mists,  
Wherefore, Oh Summer's Day?

Her communion with nature is a self-chosen ritual, a genuine connection which makes her misty-eyed. Equally significant, it is a relationship which mutually nurtures the other's laughter and play.

For such reasons, Dickinson resents the dominance of nature by predominantly male scientists and is "mad" about its co-optation:

"Arcturus" is his other name--
I'd rather call him "Star."
It's very mean of Science
To go and interfere!

I pull a flower from the woods--
A monster with a glass
Computes the stamens in a breath--
And has her in a "class"!

Whereas I took the Butterfly
Aforetime in may hat--
He sits erect in "Cabinets"--
The Clover bells forgot.

Clearly, she holds contempt for the scientists whom she mocks for thinking they can *objectively* know nature through detached analysis. She fears that such objectification of an entity which she reveres will destroy, or at least endanger the spiritual, as well:

What once was "Heaven"
Is "Zenith" now—
Where I proposed to go
When Time's brief masquerade was done
Is mapped and charted too.

Perhaps the "Kingdom of Heaven's" changed--
I hope the "children" there
Won't be "new fashioned when I come--
And laugh at me--and stare--

Poems #97, #108, and #185 are among the others which
indict science's "advances" and its preoccupation with
subduing nature and thus suppressing play.

Likewise, Dickinson makes a farce of militarism in
all its hypocrisy, camouflaging her satire at first
with question marks and then affirming her disgusted
sarcasm with exclamation points in #73:

Who never lost, are unprepared
A Coronet to find!

How many Legions overcome--
The Emperor will say?
How many Colors taken
On Revolution Day?

How many Bullets bearest?
Hast Thou the Royal scar?
Angels! Write "Promoted"
On this Soldier's brow!

Wolosky confirms that Dickinson refused to "regard
[war] as a moment in sacred history from which point of
view it would be retroactively just" (51). In fact,
Wolosky continues, Dickinson not only refuses to
"interpret actual events in terms of divine ordinance,"
but actually measures the divine/metaphysical by the
gauge of actual events. Dickinson's distaste for such
hypocrisy in others makes her unable to accept it in herself. In the last stanza of #103, for example, she expresses how difficult it is and how hypocritical and untrue to herself it would be to submit to God's will:

And if I don't [peep in parlors, shut by day]--the little Bird
Within the Orchard, is not heard,
And I omit to pray
"Father, thy will be done" today
For my will goes the other way,
And it were perjury!

Thus does she conclude that what makes "sense" to society is "Madness," and what society, with its un-discerning eye, would deem "mad" makes the most sense:

Much Madness is divinest Sense--
To a discerning Eye--
Much Sense--the starkest Madness--
'Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail--
Assent--and you are sane--
Demur--you're straightway dangerous--
And handled with a Chain-- (#435)

Dickinson knows the costs of being labeled mad in patriarchy, yet risks them anyway, for she can discern the value of her genius and--in a society of one--it matters not whether anyone else does, or can.

She is also able to discern the discontinuity of her thought in #937:

I felt a Cleaving in my Mind--
As if my Brain had split--
I tried to match it--Seam by Seam--
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind, I strove to join
Unto the thought before--
But Sequence ravelled out of Sound
Like Balls—upon a Floor.

Perhaps the split is a result of the agonistic relation between female language of the body and cultural language of the intellect. For, evidently, linear thinking will not do. Indeed, if she is going to tell the truth, especially if it is about a woman, she must tell it "slant," "in circuit":

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth’s superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind—

If woman speaks so, in a language true to her own experience and being, words will not perish—even though sequential thought decomposes and ruptures cognition. Incoherence, in the Lacanian sense of disrupt(ured) discourse, attests to Dickinson’s awareness of such language to contain her simultaneous desire for and fear of mastery.

Having suppressed the self she knew would be unaccepted (for example, the "mad" self in #435), and unable to distance herself—as is possible in fiction—Dickinson experiences a splitting which leads to loneliness and even insanity as indicated by the final two stanzas of #410:
My Brain--begun to laugh--
I mumbled--like a fool--
And tho' 'tis Years ago--that Day--
My Brain keeps giggling--still.

And Something's odd--within--
That person that I was--
And this One--do not feel the same--
Could it be Madness--this?

Again laughter accompanies this splitting and multiplicity, as it liberates one to the space of madness in which one can create as well as exercise considerable "poetic license." Bomb imagery provides a poignant metaphor for this splitting, since it borders on explosiveness. Dancing like a bomb abroad, for instance, enables Dickinson to transcend censorings and censurings of culture, allows free play, and engenders regeneration. In her attempts to dissociate self, mind, and world, Dickinson in her multiplicitous project tries to speak for those who do not have the language, see for those who are less conscious, create a poetry of extreme states which allows us to go further into our own awareness and consciousness, to take risks, and to dare.

Ambivalent about authorial mastery, as Gary Lee Stonum has noted (15), Dickinson found conventional forms of coherence an obstacle. Thus does the intra-linear dash, for example, literally, break up the line and consequently isolate words from their grammatical, linear, and metrical connections. In fact, Dickinson
deliberately rejects established metrical norms by avoiding, for instance, iambic pentameter (DS, 201n7). The "wild zone" in the center of Dickinson's art both focuses meaning and scatters, disperses, undoes, and disrupts it. Thus does the writer advise in her reader-based "Tell all the Truth" to tell it "slant," the audience presumably patriarchally-identified. Thus does the light, too, come in a "certain slant," the oxymoron again implying that the only certainty is uncertainty:

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons--
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes--

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us--
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are--

. . . . . . (#258)

Dickinson leaves us with all that is left to us: the "internal difference" or indeterminacy of "Meanings." Light, like meaning, when dispersed and diffused, is thought of as "lunatic," hence connecting women's attempts in this realm of light to be associated with madness/lunacy. Inverting the privileged pair dark/light again transgresses the limits of binary opposites, questioning the association of the feminine with the dark and confusing both the natural and divine
order. Perhaps the instant of telling the truth in women’s own language, which may seem lopsided to the male-identified reader, is comparable to Woolf’s moment of being. Stonum refers to Mary Arensburg’s summary of the sublime originating in Longinus’ *Peri hypos*; it includes affective and emotional response (joy and ecstasy) to power, authenticity, or authority, which is perceived momentarily (like a lightning flash) through language’s effects and is accompanied by disrupted consciousness. The latter is in turn restored to balance through simultaneous repression of and identification with power, the former often taking the form of *mimesis* as defense (*DG*, 77). Both this elaborate process and Woolf’s moment of being encompass an epiphany of sorts, when woman articulates her own truths; as such, they resemble French feminist notions of *jouissance*.

As keen as these moments to Dickinson is her awareness of the need to know internally the worth of one’s struggles, and of the corresponding need to struggle in private, even if the source of sorrow stems from the public sphere:

To fight aloud, is very brave--
But gallanter, I know
Who charge within the bosom
The Cavalry of Woe-- (*DG*, st. 1)
Silent suffering is the plight of women in patriarchy; for, who is to mourn their grief if, as Woolf claimed later and Dickinson fairly consistently implies, they have "no Country"? In #141, for example, those without a time or place find comfort in the grave; such an inversion of our expectations surrounding death (that is, death as undesirable) requires inverted syntax, as well:

Some, too fragile for winter winds
The thoughtful grave encloses--
Tenderly tucking them in from frost
Before their feet are cold.

Never the treasures in her nest
The cautious grave exposes,
Building where schoolboy dare not look,
And sportsman is not bold.

This covert have all the children
Early aged, and often cold,
Sparrows, unnoticed by the Father--
Lambs for whom time had not a fold.

It is the fact that the Father does not notice them
that brings the children to their anonymous death. In a strange twist in #153, the "Father" of death is the one who is unknown--implying in the first two stanzas Dickinson’s awareness that one (presumably male) is usually known by patrilineal descent and history of "Boy"-ish antics:

Dust is the only Secret--
Death, the only One
You cannot find out all about
In his "native town."
Nobody knew "his Father"—
Never was a Boy—
Hadn't any playmates,
Or "Early history"—

In contrast to these two poems in which the father can not or does not take notice, in #164, the mother "never forgets" and always "notices," even though removed ("above"): 

Mama never forgets her birds,
Though in another tree—
She looks down just as often
And just as tenderly
As when her little mortal nest
With cunning care she wove—
If either of her "sparrows fall,"
She "notices," above.

By and large, such qualities of noticing go unnoticed in patriarchy. In fact, Dickinson is astutely aware of the disregard surrounding those in conventional women's roles as mothers and housewives—the latter a referent she defers until the last stanza of #154:

Except to Heaven, she is nought.
Except for Angels—lone.
Except to some wide-wandering Bee
A flower superfluous blown.

Except for winds—provincial.
Except by Butterflies
Unnoticed as a single dew
That on the Acre lies.

The smallest Housewife in the grass,
Yet take her from the Lawn
And somebody has lost the face
That made Existence—Home!

These flowers provide an appropriate metaphor for women in traditional roles: they are dispensable
(superfluous), conformist (provincial), unassuming
(unnoticed), insignificant (nought), and inconsequential (smallest). Not until gone are the flowers' contributions to beauty or—in the case of the analogy to housewives—countless homemaking efforts even recognized. Thus does Dickinson feel the need to integrate and internalize an assertive (which Homans has noted as "masculine") self, one which will not subscribe to the wifely and thankless duties allotted her:

Title divine—is mine!
The Wife—without the Sign!

Betrothed—without the swoon
God sends us Women—
When you—hold—Garnet to Garnet
Gold—to Gold—
Born—Bridalled—Shrouded—
In a Day—
Tri Victory
"My Husband"—women say—
Stroking the Melody—
Is this—the way? (#1072)

Her indictment of those who do not make note of the disparities and inequities in treatment of women and men is evident in her disdainful tone. In this respect, John Cody is wise to acknowledge Dickinson as a pre-Freudian discoverer of her own psychopathology. Clearly, though Cody does not put it in this way in his psychoanalytic biography After Great Pain, Dickinson discovered the unconscious and its contradictions,
especially for women, before Freud did. She searched
for mother figures among those women writers she adored
(AGP, 101-03), yet she feared that to be a woman was to
resemble her own mother’s despised victim status. She
viewed her mother as a negative role model for a
powerful woman poet, and consequently associated her
mother’s emotional inaccessibility with her religious
dedication. While Cody attributes Dickinson’s
religious ambivalence to her fear that accepting her
mother’s religion would mean a regressive, precarious
dependence ("Epilogue"), I would add that accepting her
mother’s roles (wife, mother) in life would have the
same effect. Recognition as an Other to the male is
contingent upon not "growing new" and not "changing
fair"; that is, growth and change, though expected of
and encouraged in males, would make her unrecognizable
to him. In spite of how growth and change might be
positive for the speaker of the poem, they would
inhibit her being "perfect--in His sight--":

Fitter to see Him, I may be
For the long Hindrance--Grace--to Me--
With Summers, and with Winters, grow,
Some passing Year--A trait bestow

To make Me fairest of the Earth--
The Waiting--then--will seem so worth
I shall impute with half a pain
The blame that I was chosen--then--

Time to anticipate His Gaze--
It's first--Delight--and then--Surprise--
I only must not grow so new
That He'll mistake—and ask for me
I only must not change so fair
He'll sigh—"The Other--She--is Where?"
The Love, tho', will array me right
I shall be perfect—in His sight

Such deeming as perfection means that though she
"lacks," it is not in vain:

How sweet I shall not lack in Vain--
But gain—thro' loss—Through Grief—obtain--
The Beauty that reward Him best--
The Beauty of Demand—at Rest--

It is ambiguous whether the verb "lack" is transitive
or intransitive here; in either case, gaining (on this
lack?) is accompanied for the speaker by loss and
grief—both of which Dickinson negatively associated
with her mother's plight as a woman.

Mossberg also suggests that even Dickinson's
religious crisis at puberty was a way of rejecting her
mother, and that she stayed a daughter precisely in
order not to "become" her mother. Indeed, Dickinson's
teenage letters indicate she was torn between duty and
rebellion against the feminine world, against all that
restricted her with its authority. In order to prevent
becoming a woman, as Rich states and Gilbert and Gubar
claim, Dickinson may have at times enacted the part of
a child in order to prolong her own childhood. Despite
previous efforts to stake her own creative claims (that
is, changing "Emilie" to "Emily," wearing white), she
did not welcome the demands "femininity" would place on her as an adult. Perhaps in #657, then, the asexual possibility of childhood is better than the suffocating Prose of female adulthood. In her earlier poems especially, Dickinson plays the irresponsible part--ironically she is the old-fashioned little person in awe (for example, #70). Gilbert and Gubar suggest the quotes used in this particular poem are meant to question traditional phrases. In #101, Dickinson is a naive coquette, as implied by the six questions in the first two stanzas and the plea in this final one:

Oh some Scholar! Oh some Sailor!  
Oh some Wise Man from the skies!  
Please to tell a little Pilgrim  
Where the place called "Morning" lies!

Only as a bewildered child can she bring off unconventional stanzas and simultaneously demonstrate, by the weariness of the rejected child, the rejection by a male adult world to whose requirement she has obstinately refused to rise.

Dickinson is the invisible soul, the tiny self, hence transforming romantic self-assertion into and thus undercutting female service as servitude, as illustrated in her father/daughter, master/scholar relationships and the poems about them. In #61, for example, like a nine-year old Jane Eyre, Dickinson
identifies self as subhuman creature, addressing her father, the righteous patriarch:

Papa above!  
Regard a Mouse  
O'erpowered by the Cat!  
Reserve within thy kingdom  
A "Mansion" for the Rat!

Snug in seraphic Cupboards  
To nibble all the day,  
While unsuspecting Cycles  
Wheel solemnly away!

She wishes to overcome the internalized masochistic, self-annihilating passion for a mysterious master who incarnated the worldly and artistic amplitude she herself desired; he is the unmoved Mover of Women's Fates, imprisoning her contemporaries in romantic plots with patriarchal structures. She masks her own fear of being defeated by this Master by confronting the tension between the helpless, dependent childself (Daisy) and her "Adequate-Erect" queenly self, in a somewhat obscure triumph (for example, in #271). Even in poem #754 ("My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—"), the gun may be the ambitious poet determined to have the last word and destroy the "doe" that submits to or colludes with, and thus perpetuates, patriarchy.

Indeed, one of Dickinson's most taxing risks was daring the Master, the Papa, the entire patriarchal order by subverting and replacing the Symbolic Order, ruled as it is by the Law of the Father. She engages a
battle with the paternal metaphor which deprived her of purpose or place. In her effort to restructure a place and discourse for herself, she began to explore an identity which would release her both from the, at best, secondary status she felt as a woman, and from the restrictions placed upon her by paternal forces. One of the most consistent metaphors in her poetry for the paternal as patriarchal is religion—for Dickinson, a male-created institution:

The Bible is an antique Volume--
Written by faded Men
At the suggestion of Holy Spectres-- (1545)

She sought to write her own discourse, in part as a bible of poetry, if not to reverse faded male writing, at least to establish some semblance of equilibrium. Implicit in equilibrium is equal status, which Dickinson was denied, but determined to retrieve. It is not surprising, given her affinity for verbal expression, that she would begin with the Logos, the Word made Flesh—that is, Jesus Christ. She wanted, like Christ—who is the Logos, the Son of the Father, the bearer of a new Word, Law, and Testament—to possess direct access to the language and laws of the Father, an interim step—I will argue—to creating a discourse and laws of her own by subverting the dominant ones of her culture and time.
In her poems through 1861, including about the first 300, the controlling desire seems to be fulfillment, the main theme—as David Porter suggests (*AEDEP*, 20–21, 35)—aspiration. For instance, in #193, Dickinson alludes to the Christian tradition, suggesting that—after she ascends (perhaps as Christ did)—heaven will explain earthly suffering and answer the question of whether or not the reward is worth the price of anguish:

> I shall know why—when Time is over—
> And I have ceased to wonder why—
> Christ will explain each separate anguish
> In the fair schoolroom of the sky—

> He will tell me what “Peter” promised—
> And I— for wonder at his woe—
> I shall forget the drop of Anguish
> That scalds me now—that scalds me now!

Clearly, however, her wonderment in the second line of the second stanza reveals that she has not ceased to wonder (as she had claimed in the second line of the first stanza). More importantly, it is Peter’s denial of Christ, three times, that causes her to wonder. Peter was Christ’s chosen foundation (that is, the Rock upon which he would build his Church). Peter, the founding patriarch of Christianity, then, the first pope, created a gap in hierarchically institutionalized Christianity, by denying the Word—indeed the Son—
of God. It is Christ’s resulting sense of rejection with which Dickinson, as a woman writer, empathizes; in #85, too, she gains courage to tell of her rejection because Christ has done so:

"They have not chosen me," he said,
"But I have chosen them!"
Brave—Broken hearted statement—
Uttered in Bethlehem!

I could not have told it,
But since Jesus dared—
Sovereign! Know a Daisy
Thy dishonor shared!

A similar neglect of woman in Symbolic discourse is what she, in her poems, aspires to overcome, for example, by forgetting the anguish associated with patriarchal life. At the same time, though, that Peter’s breach of his promise to identify with Christ figures encourages Dickinson to do so, it also causes her to wonder about her own capacities to unravel patriarchally-sanctioned institutions which obligate her to a false sense of identity, as subordinate, inferior, lacking. While I disagree with Wolosky that Dickinson perceived "the world [as] a system of signs, issuing from the Godhead" (WW, 137), I concede the possibility that she viewed Christ’s coming as God’s self-revelation (143). Perhaps that is in part why, in #248, she seeks to trade places with the one in the White Robe, whom—given the other evidence I will
elaborate—quite plausibly represents Christ, for she
does not understand why Heaven has excluded her, and
she seeks another chance. Her plea is punctuated with
dashes, indicative of her stuttering tenseness:

Why—do they shut Me out of Heaven?
Did I sing—too loud?
But—I can say a little "Minor"
Timid as a Bird!

Wouldn't the Angels try me—
Just—once—more—
Just—see—if I troubled them—
But don't—shut the door!

Oh, if I—were the Gentleman
In the "White Robe"—
And they—were the little Hand—that knocked—
Could—I—forbid?

In #236, she is expelled from the "Jasper Gates" and
feels alienated by Christ's rejection, as implied in
the last four lines:

I'm banished—now—you know it—
How foreign that can be—
You'll know—Sir—when the Savior's face
Turns so—away from you—

Clearly, she knows she is not inferior, subordinate, or
lacking, and thus, in #231, for example, does have more
fun with those of higher status in the Chain of Being,
that is, "industrious angels":

God permits industrious Angels—
Afternoons—to play—
I met one—forgot my Schoolmates—
All—for Him—straightway—

God calls home—the Angels—promptly—
At the Setting Sun—
I missed mine--how dreary--Marbles--
After playing Crown!

Dickinson, by imagination and superhuman connection with those higher in the Chain of Being, is able to enter into a world of play, of pleasure, as Eixous would have it. Significantly, the industrious angel whose association provides access to this free play is male, suggesting Dickinson’s awareness of male privilege in the Symbolic, and in the Imaginary. Even in the realm of play, she is restricted to inconsequential marbles, while his touches upon royalty--the crown.

The closing image of the crown is also found in #232, another poem in which by contact with the Other (the Sun), the female entity (Morning) flutters and staggers:

The Sun--just touched the Morning--
The Morning. . .

. . . felt herself supreme--

. . . . . . .

The Morning--flattered--staggered--
Felt feebly--for Her Crown--
Her Unanointed forehead--
Henceforth--Her only One.

Even if in both cases the word "crown" had not been italicized, attention would have been drawn to it as among Dickinson’s first references to aspiration toward royalty, which translates for Dickinson into inclusion among the privileged, the males. The last two lines
suggest a degree of self-sufficiency (perhaps related to Dickinson's "Christly" aspirations), yet simultaneously reflect the unsanctioned place of the feminine even, or perhaps especially, on a cosmic level. The astounding connection between #232 and #506, written about a year later, merits consideration as well:

He touched me, so I live to know...

And now, I'm different from before,
As if I breathed superior air--
Or brushed a Royal Gown--
My feet too that had wandered so--
My Gypsy face--transfigured now--
To tenderer Renown--

Into this Port, if I might come,
Rebecca, to Jerusalem,
Would not so ravished turn--
Nor Persian, baffled at her shrine
Lift such a Crucifical sign
To her imperial Sun.

In both #232 and #506, the touch of the imperial and empowering male entity enables a transfiguration, much like the one Christ experienced. But the speaker of this poem would use this transfiguration to enable the inclusion and salvation of the female figures to whom she refers. Might Dickinson see herself, then, as the morning who--touched by the sun--has been transformed? She craves the crown and wants to be anointed, as is Christ (whose name means "the Anointed One"). Further, the "Crucifical sign" immediately evokes wonder about
the significant word play on "Sun," for it is "imperial." Intimate identity (touching) with the Sun (Son?) provides confidence to strive for the "inclusive" status she desires. Should she find a way (port) into the language or a discourse of her own in which to anchor herself, she could offer a refuge to other women who feel excluded. Dickinson has transformed the previously exclusionary theological metaphor into a poetry of inclusion, and specifically, a poetry and poetic practice which includes women and recognizes their value.

Clearly, Dickinson’s yearning for recognition and high regard "as a Son" by a "Father" (or Master?) is not only the foundation for her Christ imagery poems, but also bespeaks a resolution of the (ultimate) Oedipal conflict—a resolution she creates, for it gains women access to discourse and expression. Similarity with simply any son will not do: only likeness to God’s son would provide both the renown of religious figures and immediate access to the word/logos/language. Dickinson metaphorizes this desire to be Christ-like in order simultaneously to overcome dominance by males and by religion; such could be achieved by becoming, in the words of Michael Dressman, "a consort of the Deity" (South Atlantic
Bulletin 42, 1977: 39). Unlike Dressman—who sees this "consortium" as, variously, "total submission to the omniscient husband as the path to new maturity," or as invoking "utter gratitude for having been chosen as a bride," (40)—I argue conversely that through such metaphors, Dickinson can at once transfigure and emancipate herself and refuse to submit to patriarchy (a submission represented by the traditional self-sacrificing fate of her mother, from whom she disassociates herself and whose crippling destiny she determinedly circumvents). She does not, as Dressman would have it, achieve "fulfillment through total subjection" (42), but instead through self-emancipation.

Ingeniously, Dickinson subverts the Father's neglect and torture, normally signs of rejection, into evidence of election; for if, like Christ, she has suffered, it must mean that—like the Son—she is loved most. In fact, she begins to suggest parallels between her experience and Christ's. She could assure her triumph over rejection by claiming to share Christ's experiences of election. For instance, like Christ, Dickinson too is sent far from the father and into the hands of oppressors:

Far from Love the Heavenly Father
Leads the Chosen Child,
Oftener through Realm of Briar
Than the Meadow mild.

Oftener by the Claw of Dragon
Than the Hand of Friend
Guides the Little One predestined
To the Native Land.

The poignant word choice and the ironic juxtaposition
of associations that accentuate Calvinism (for example, fear, predestination, which are primarily negative in that they manipulate the victim's weaknesses) and Christ's vulnerability and naivete ("Chosen Child" sent away from Heavenly, mild meadows), suggest that if the poet is to be a religious person, she will pick and choose those tenets which best fit her needs and speak to her experiences, particularly as a woman.

Given the self-abnegation often required for women to be deemed "normal" within a patriarchal context, one of Dickinson's needs is to identify with Christ's self-sacrificing passion. She identifies with him further in #538 when she asks God to forgive those who reject and hurt her:

'Tis true--They shut me in the Cold--
But then--Themselves were warm
And could not know the feeling 'twas--
Forget it--Lord--of Them--

Let not my Witness hinder Them
In Heavenly esteem--
Nor Paradise could be--Conferrèd
Through Their beloved Blame--

The Harm They did--was short--And since
Myself--who bore it--do--
Forgive Them--Even as Myself--
Or else--forgive not me--

This poem echoes Christ's plea that God forgive his persecutors, who "know not what they" did. In #263, Dickinson refers indirectly to the passion of Christ in what may be one of her first attempts to establish a link with the Deity:

A single Screw of Flesh
Is all that pins the Soul
That stands for Deity, to Mine,
Upon my side the Veil--

Being pinned to Christ, the Word made Flesh, her soul has contact with and thereby access to the language which previously was off limits due to the veil of subordination, sub-stance. In addition, the metaphor for jointure (that is, in the screw of flesh) calls up the image of Christ's crucifixion. In #313, making what is probably her first specific reference to Calvary, she more fully begins to identify with the crucifixion:

I should have been too saved--I see--
That I could spell the prayer
I knew so perfect--yesterday--
That Scalding One--Sabachthani--
Recited fluent--here--

Earth would have been too much--I see--
And Heaven--not enough for me--
I should have had the Joy
Without the Fear--to justify
The Palm--without the Calvary--
So Savior--Crucify--

Defeat--sheds Victory--they say--
The Reefs--in old Gethsemane--
Endear the Coast--beyond!
'Tis Beggars--Banquets--can define--
'Tis Parching--vitalizes Wine--
"Faith" bleats--to understand!

Dickinson interrogates the passion as sign of salvation and, thus, Christ's suffering and victory as theological givens. She refers to "Sabachthani" ("Why hast Thou forsaken me?")
one of Christ's last words, as well as to "old Gesthsemane," as a gateway to the "Coast-Beyond" (perhaps Eternity?). Dickinson is aware of the dangers of reification in words when they are divorced from experience (she would not have been able, for example, to justify the Palm or the Joy without first having felt the Fear of Calvary). Her vision clarifies a previously clouded perspective: now she can "see" what is ("too") extreme. What she sees differs from what "they say" (emphasis mine): opposites--in her broader, clearer vision--offer an interspace where balance can be more readily achieved (Joy with fear; the interstices between Earth and heaven; too much and not enough). She is dreaming of a new discourse, here, one not based in binary opposites that "they" rely upon: one can be "defined" only by one's opposite, its negative, its lack (for example, banquets or plenty vs. beggars; vitality vs. parchment; victory vs. defeat). The dualities which pit the "haves" against the "have nots"; life against the dried-up, and which employ the language of warfare or
at least competition are exactly what necessitate a
heaven, and precisely why Dickinson seeks another mode
of expression.

She attempts to enact this dream or vision of a
different language that balances extremes in #364, in
which the litanies of the birds are heavy ("Lead") and
do not become harmonious until they moderate the "glee"
to blend in, perhaps, with the sorrow of the Cross. In
this poem,

The Birds declaim their Tunes--
Pronouncing every word
Like Hammers--Did they know they fell
Like Litanies of Lead--

On here and there--a creature--
They'd modify the Glee
To fit some Crucifixal Clef--
Some Key of Calvary

She is inconsolable, on "the Morning after Woe," and
"Nature did not care" (1.5). Yet, the stabilizing force
is the Crucifixal Clef--Some Key of Calvary--"Clef" and
"Key" both synonomous and ambiguous (for instance, in
extending the metaphor of tunes, this is the language
of music wherein both Clef and Key are based in
suffering). Such "tunes" remind one of the reality of
crucifixion—that all is not "utter jubilee" (1.4); yet, paradoxically, the end-rhyme in lines 6-8 (Glee
and Calvary) implies achieved harmony. Significantly,
this harmony is attained only through grave pain and sacrifice.

Again as a key in #501, crucifixion is one of many attempts, along with "philosophy" and "gestures from the pulpit" to find a conclusion or a key to the "Riddle" of the World. Perhaps it is precisely that men have borne this that troubles her most; male-organized religion, while shutting her up in convention, has attempted to solve such questions to no avail. She wants to try, as well, because the same riddles and questions intrigue and often bother her. She is willing to bear the crucifixion if that will provide some answers. As Sewall has noted, Dickinson was fascinated with Thomas a Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* (a Christmas gift from sister-in-law Susan in 1876) and in fact most heavily marked the chapter on the cross. In that section, Dickinson would have read: "And if you share his sufferings, you will share his glory."

In #225 she demands that through the crucifix, women (the "second face" and "smaller size") gain recognition:

Jesus! thy Crucifix
Enable thee to guess
The Smaller size!

Jesus! thy second face
Mind thee in Paradise
Of ours!

The urgency of her desire to belong to "ours" (women's) explains why in #508 she has "ceded...stopped being theirs" (men's). If through resurrection Christ retrieved free will and choice, the last stanza of #508 takes on tremendous significance:

    My second Rank--too small the first--
    Crowned--Crowning--on my Father's breast--
    A half unconscious Queen--
    But this time--Adequate--Erect,
    With will to Choose, or to reject,
    And I choose, just a Crown--

She is asserting herself, through choosing the crown, a symbol of her status as Queen, having been called to her full potential--"Called to my Full" (1.11). In #313 she bitter-sweetly triumphs over feelings of abandonment (that is, being forsaken) by assuming an identity of "Queen of Calvary," who has power even over nature (which eventually defers to her, as in #348).

    This is the royal status she wants to attain "by the Right of White Election...the Royal Seal," to which she alludes in #529. Her assumption of queenly status was well-known (that is, "the Queen Recluse," a title coined for her by Samuel Bowles in an 1863 letter to Austin: ". . .to the queen Recluse my especial sympathy--that she has overcome the world!""); cited in Sherwood, 56). Overcoming the world is exactly what Dickinson intended to do, not just by exploring the
identity of any Queen, but by assuming that of Queen of Calvary.

Joanne Fiet Diehl has suggested that, as with Keats and the laurel, Dickinson desires the diadem of authority. Both associated light (of the Sun) with the fulfillment of a poet who is imbued with religious authority and pagan energy. Thus the poetic self struggles for private divinity. Diehl argues elsewhere that the crown of Mary and of Christ are symbols anathema to the Protestant faith, and thus become symbols of secular and religious power which accrue to the poet. But with Dickinson (for example, in #1651) the poet’s word (Philology; study of love? or love of words?) replaces Christian Logos:

A Word made Flesh is seldom
And tremulously partook
Nor then perhaps reported
But have I not mistook
Each one of us has tasted
With ecstasies of stealth
The very food debated
To our specific strength-

A Word that breathes distinctly
Has not the power to die
Cohesive as the Spirit
It may expire if He-
"Made Flesh and dwelt among us"
Could condescension be
Like this consent of Language
This loved Philology.

Dickinson’s poems are best read, then, as a process of an inquiring, active woman writer whose study of the
Word and determination as a woman of high status in her own right (write?) has led to the discovery of a Logos and language of her own. Not surprisingly, Gilbert and Gubar cite this poem as Dickinson’s affirmation of “the mother tongue’s nurturing primacy, declaring that ‘a word made Flesh’ can be ‘tasted’ with ‘ecstasies of stealth’. . .” They claim further that, “For women writers in general, then, it may be this ‘consent’ ([their] emphasis) that constitutes a ‘loved Philology’” (Feminist Reader, 98, 99).

This new language (love based on inclusion) offers the possibility of immortality through association with Christ and Calvary, as seen in #549:

That I shall love alway--
I argue thee
That love is life--
And life hath Immortality--

This--dost thou doubt--Sweet--
Then have I
Nothing to show
But Calvary--

Christ revealed the magnitude of love by sacrificing on Calvary. Such enormous love is unending, Dickinson suggests, just as life and language—the immortality of the Word—has the potential to be. Dickinson’s link with Christ lies in the imitation of his infinite love and in self-development within one’s own Logos. She confirms Christ’s crucifixion in #553: “Our Lord
Indeed made Compound Witness," yet also affirms that others have been crucified, thus breaking—as such an assertion would—the "master/servant" boundaries that such divisions and worship states create and maintain:

One Crucifixion is recorded—only—
How many be
Is not affirmed of Mathematics—
Or History—

One Calvary—exhibited to Stranger—
As many be
As persons—. . .

If so, she too, having suffered Calvary, is eligible for "Christ-hood" as are countless and nameless others who suffer persecution or exclusion. The piercing truth in the look of agony was a daily experience for Dickinson. In what might have been considered blasphemous by the Puritans, she finds comfort for her own crosses in Christ's and others' calvary, thus employing the "misery loves company" motif as in #561:

And though I may not guess the kind—
Correctly—yet to me
A piercing Comfort it affords
In passing Calvary—

To note the fashions—of the Cross—
and how they're mostly worn—
Still fascinated to presume
That Some—are like My Own—

Perhaps #622 captures Dickinson's undeniable curiosity to know exactly what Christ felt during his last hours:

To know just how He suffered—would be dear—
To know if he was patient--
What was His furthest Mind--
And Wishes--Had He Any--
Was He Afraid...

She is eager to "compare notes," that is, examine her own feelings in relation to Christ's (did he also fear? What were his final wishes? Were they like hers? Was he as patient as she perhaps thought herself?), hoping thereby to sanction her own emotions, and more importantly, to reinforce her identity with him and her sense of survival by gauging that of an Other who suffered because of his origin. Her relationship with Christ focuses on his humanity, as found in #1487, where she assumes a masculine identity ("Boys"), in part perhaps to create the intimacy of brotherhood, but also in order to explore, again, the possibilities inherent in direct access to the discourse of patriarchy. In #1072, she gains possession--this time with a feminine identity--of the "Title divine."

Conquering Calvary, like the emperor Christ, she is the empress who has won "Tri-Victory" over death, salvation and, perhaps--as implied by the reference to "My Husband" as something other women say--over male barriers and institutions. Only such a feat would gain the persona equal status with Christ, who also
transcended the Laws and dictates of his persecutors and oppressors. Like him, she was "Born--Bridalled--Shrouded--," all stages of being wrapped in cloth, perhaps white, at birth, through life, and at death. She has rewritten the credo that Christ was "born, died, and was buried... and on the third day, He rose again..." Or perhaps, as indicated in the next line: "In a Day," she--like Christ, through his crucifixion and resurrection--experienced in one moment these variant stages of a similar state of rebirth. Her rebirth is made possible by founding a new language by which she can articulate and validate her own experience and being. Dickinson subverts patriarchal definitions and collapses the duality upon which they are based again, for through the development of these poems, Calvary is associated with victory, not defeat and not (only) anguish.

Because Dickinson could not accept the non-empirical, suppositional Christ when presented as fact, she uses the subjunctive in many of her poems about Christ. Through her will and intelligence, she tries to force verifiable data from the Christian myth and to humanize Christ. Thus in #1411 she is able to speak of an "uncertain certainty," again a conflation of opposites which puts all of institutionalized religious
"belief" into question. Analogy replaces certitude (as Weisbuch has argued about her poetry). And speculation becomes a way of knowing, a mental act which brings the profoundly unknown into embodiment of and with figurative language, more specifically a figurative logos of her own choosing and creation.

In her efforts to humanize Christ and/or deify herself—pursuits forbidden especially to women in patriarchal systems—Dickinson also attempts to establish a link between Christ's life work and purpose, and her own. Consider her emphasis on Christ's trade. He has the healing power over all-encompassing wounds for he is the "tender Carpenter" in #1123. Just as Christ's art of carpentry nails down the lid of her suffering (see #1123), so too her art of stitchery clears up dilemmas for others not as equipped with insight. Both, thus, provide metaphors conducive to surviving oppression and collusion with that oppression. As revealed in #617, much in the same manner that she stitched her fascicles together, she seems to sew her multiple selves together. By helping herself, she indirectly benefits her readers, for she can provide strength in times of difficulty and understanding and clarity to the "zigzagged" aspects of life. Though on a different scale and to a different
degree, Dickinson, the gentle seamstress—like Christ, the tender carpenter—is able to reduce the anguish felt by others through the metaphor of her art which, thus, has a restorative power.

Dancing, spinning, and weaving, even of webs, serve as metaphors for her poesis and mimesis: she is the performing artist and craftswoman in a sharply defined world. In this complex fiction of multiplicity, she artistically adopts several roles, but settles for none. Thus, sequinng fascicles together imitates the composite and "real" art of men. Whereas Browning and Rossetti renounced paradises of edenic aesthetic self-indulgence, Dickinson believed the female, like the male, poet would be able to dance; women should be free and fierce—hence, lillies and daisies dance, liberated from toil, in the ecstasy of "the female continent of light." For women particularly, then, that restorative power both offers the initiative and models the vision necessary to transcend patriarchal confines and discourse.

Of course, there is a cost to such redemptive abilities, for both Christ and Dickinson. Like Christ as stated in #772, one must paradoxically sacrifice all to gain all; and this requires striving to the summit, or the Calvary found in Dickinson’s poems. Sacrificing
in vain—as women are conditioned and expected to do in patriarchy—is no longer the only option:

The hallowing of Pain
Like hallowing of Heaven,
Obtains at a corporeal cost--
The Summit is not given

To Him who strives severe
At middle of the Hill--
But He who has achieved the Top--
All—is the price of All--

In her life endeavor, then, according to this poem, Dickinson too is totally devoted to going all the way, so that the pain she (like other, but silent, women) suffers will be rewarded. She—the empress of Calvary, the daughter (of God)—offers to women salvation through active pursuit of justice and a new language.

Perhaps the reward is symbolized by the crown. The crown she lacks in #1072 is meant for only one deified head, as shown in #1735. Christ was able to deify the crown of thorns, in spite of its original intent as a symbol of ridicule or stigma, the implicit reason no one seeks this "crown." Yet, identifying with the experience of derision or mockery, Dickinson sees herself as one who does seek it through her poetry, for she implies in #1736 that she will be humbled if not allowed to partake of Christ’s passion in her own life: "Not to partake thy passion, my humility."
In a letter of 1884 to Mrs. Henry Hills, Dickinson wrote:

When Jesus tells us about his Father, we distrust him. When he shows us his Home, we turn away, but when he confides to us that he is "acquainted with Grief," we listen, for that also is an Acquaintance of our own. (Sewall, 461).

Addressed to a woman as this letter is, the "we" and "our" may perhaps include women in general who distrust the notion of the "Father," since it removes women from direct access to and inclusion in the discourse. Women are not encouraged by his dwelling place, which excludes them again, including as it does only Father and son. But grief, which results from oppression, suppression, repression, is a sure and authentic link to woman's experience in patriarchy. Although Dickinson disliked paternally metaphorized doctrine, sensed a remoteness in the traditional Heaven, and was at times skeptical about the deity, nonetheless, she had a kindred feeling with the "suffering servant, Christ." The inflected grammar and syntax of these poems (as Elfentein claims of others) interrogates gender assumptions embedded in patriarchal discourse. Interrogating the "Word made Flesh" (that is, Christ) imparts an alterity and suggests an alternative gender, the feminine, as the center of a new (and loved) logos. In her (Empress of) Calvary poems, Dickinson encourages
us freely to imagine a womanspace/ place beyond a constraining phallogocentric tradition which excludes the feminine in human thought and emotion as well as in imaginations of the divine. By daringly rejecting, subverting, and revising patriarchal theology, Dickinson also rejects in advance the complicity between phallocentrism and logocentrism (as Derrida defines phallogocentrism), for such erects a paternal logos and privileges phallus as signifier (Lacan) and thus places transcendent author-ity and reference points of truth and reason in "man."

In Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War, Wolosky concludes her "Introduction" with the claim that Dickinson's poetry "registers, finally, the clash between [God's] language and her own" (xx). Yet she argues that Dickinson's dealing with contradictory elements are Christian paradoxes (for example, pain is gain) which ultimately reconcile themselves in unity. Doubtless, Dickinson is interested in paradoxes, but not as they lead to unity; rather, she explores how the exploding of binarism leads to multiplicity and disunity.

A Word made Flesh is seldom
And tremblingly partook
Nor then perhaps reported
But have I not mistook
Each one of us has tasted
With ecstasies of stealth
The very pod debated
To our specific strength--

A Word that breathes distinctly
Has not the power to die
Cohesive as the Spirit
It may expire if He--
"Made Flesh and dwelt among us"
Could condescension be
Like this consent of Language
This loved Philology. (#1651)

The language Dickinson loves consents to be accessible
to her in a way that the Logos does not. The
unresolved dissociation of language from the Word
represents a challenge of disjunction, especially since
both are limited (a limitation which she demonstrates
in poem #1700). In the forging of an alternative,
inclusive discourse, Dickinson offers a different type
of emancipation—through woman's writing of the body as
fleshing out the new Word.
CONCLUSION

What this study suggests is that, perhaps like Derrida with the text, we can open feminism up to the play of differences. Can his notion of *differance* as both temporal—that is, delay and meaning being forever deferred in the infinite regress—and spatial be an indication of connections for feminist theorists and practitioners across time and space? Can it be fruitfully applied, more specifically, to connections between Anglo-American women writers (Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson) who enacted writing of the female body in their literary practice decades before Cixous or Irigaray "theorized" it in France?\(^1\) Certainly, Derrida's concept of trace as the interplay of absence and presence might be the reference point through which post-structuralism and (Lacanian) psychoanalysis and, by association, feminism, can be found to intersect. Is there a way, for example, that we can interpret the absence of a center as something other than the loss of a center in each of the discourses? And what can we discover by interrogating the reasons for the

\(^1\) Although what Derrida's concept of *supplement* as the infinite and indefinite play of substitutions really means for the feminist literary and critical enterprise is less clear, that exploration, too, is compelling.
difficulty in articulating outside the system of patriarchal, phallocentric discourse: 1) language is arbitrary, hence no actual, inherent connection between sign and signified; 2) language is differential—relational, defined only in different or negative relation to the other; and 3) language is infinite—endless, with no single, grounded principle?

In his essay "Force and Signification," Derrida seems to claim philosophy as a starting point for answering these questions, for he posits a link between philosophy and writing. Examining, then, the philosophical underpinnings of Otherness (primarily through Hegel) and its current theoretical manifestations (primarily through Derrida and other deconstructionists) both provides the exploration of contexts as advocated by the Yale French Studies collaborators (see Chapter I) and enables a wider view of the everpresence of Otherness. For Hegel, self-consciousness is the return from Otherness, the process of constant fluctuation or interplay between the universal fluid medium and the ceaseless movement which consumes it; P5, 107). Since self-consciousness exists only in being acknowledged, it "achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (110). For feminism, this means that if one can only "be-for-
self" through an-other, difference and negation are necessary, but not fixed or absolute (except—in the case of the latter—in death). Perhaps recognizing (and even conceding?) such necessity would retrieve feminism from its own "unhappy," inwardly disrupted consciousness; that is, feminism has experienced what Hegel calls a "confused medley [and] the dizziness" which results, though it is not entirely clear if this is or has been "perpetually self-engendered" (125).

Consider what Hegel claims about the "skeptical" self-consciousness:

Its deeds and its words always belie one another and equally it has itself the doubly contradictory consciousness of unchangeableness and sameness, and of utter contingency and non-identity with itself. But it keeps the poles of this its self-contradiction apart, and adopts the same attitude to it as it does in its purely negative activity in general. Point out likeness or identity to it, and it will point out unlikeness or non-identity; and when it is now confronted with what it has just asserted, it turns round and points out likeness or identity. Its talk is in fact like the squabbling of self-willed children, one of whom says A if the other says B, and in turn says B if the other says A, and who by contradicting themselves have the pleasure of continually contradicting one another (PS, 125-26)

Not much is gained by an enterprise which unravels its core in perpetual self-deconstruction, unless (as Hegel claims about the unconscious, 131) "it feels itself as
agonizingly self-divid
ed." This recognition is crucial for feminisms not only to survive, but to achieve any real(izable) gains. Feminist theorists and scholars are not united in a struggle against an enemy (say, patriarchy), "to vanquish whom is really to suffer defeat, where victory in one consciousness is really lost in its opposite" (127). Recognizing the dangers of this philosophical "Catch-22" will temper feminism from its precarious extremes (for instance, separatism). Though the "bondsman" may initially achieve self-consciousness in opposition to otherness, he then discovers a self-consciousness not opposed to, but rather in otherness—hence the difference between binary and dialectic opposites, respectively.2

If we go beyond the naturalist logic that there is one underlying cause (again, say, patriarchy) or one underlying motive, we must also consider our own possible "causes" in previously submitting to such reductivism, and critique those "motives" which make us most anxious or those which we hold most dear.

According to Davis, the "academic" defenses of intellectualization, idealization, and isolation of

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2 Hegel suggests that a period of subjection to others is essential for a non-trivialized self-consciousness which transcends petty, finite interests.
affect from content are "the most difficult to dislodge" (272). They seem to me defenses which afflict feminists both here and across the Atlantic. What is the desire being disguised, displaced, supplanted by such "defenses" as, for instance, the intellectualized theory divorced from practice? of the idealization of woman or woman's writing or ecriture féminine? What conflicted positions do such defenses constitute? What could be gained by deciphering the repressed desire behind these prized "defenses," if they be such? Though specific answers are not clear, the need for feminisms' "close reading" of themselves, and each other, and the imperative of dialectic self examination are quite apparent.

If one's search for symmetry in ideological realms becomes too abstract, detaches itself from experience of active/acting agents; or conversely, if one's committment to experiential agency obliterates the perpetual intellectual speculation upon which the dialectical process thrives, we reduce if not deny the possibilities for growth. In another sense, then, Hegel's conceptualization of consciousness and his ideas on extremism can also be instructive for feminists trying to establish dialectic overarching connections between feminisms. For instance, if
"consciousness in its activity is... a relationship of two extremes... One side [standing] as actively present, while confronting it is passive actuality" (133), then the consciousness of feminism can contain multitudes; that is, it can have a mutually informative relationship between its active presence (for example, in more practical Anglo-American feminism(s)) and its "passive actuality" (for example, in more theoretical French (or) feminist formulations).

The latter context reveals the implications for feminism of Derrida's deconstructive theory as it relates to the concepts of self and subjectivity. Derrida names writing an inaugural, exploratory act—one which enregisters speech, has as its essential objective and takes as its fatal risk the "emancipation of meaning." To repress writing, then, as he argues in "Freud and the Scene of Writing," is to repress that which threatens presence and the mastery of absence. The repressed (or unconscious) text, consequently, is a weave of pure traces (the differences in which meaning and force are united and which mark the erasure of selfhood); and the repressed devises a method of protection to guard against itself (that is, against deconstruction). Drawing on Freud's analysis of sexuality as forbidden and inhibited, Derrida views
writing as a sexual act such that the coherence found in its contradictions expresses the force of a desire (more fully expounded in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"). (Free) play (of the signifier) disrupts the notion of presence, and hence, of self or of subjectivity as present or determinate.

In one of her many attempts to make Derrida accessible, Gayatri Spivak points out that human discourse articulates itself in this free play—that is to say, in the play of three shifting concepts: language, world, and consciousness ("Feminism and Critical Theory," 77); language simultaneously and continuously determines the other two and is determined by them. Exploring the dialectical connections between 1) Woolf and Dickinson's use of language in representations/expressions of the world and consciousness and 2) modern day feminist theories regarding language, illustrates the degree to which certain assumptions are held in common by a wide range of phallogocentric philosophies and economies and across time and space.³

³ At a recent talk on her work in translating contemporary Spanish poet Rosario Castellanos, Maureen Ahern pointed out the influence of both Dickinson and Woolf upon Castellanos: Castellanos herself had translated the former into Spanish in addition to having written a poem, "Ningunmeo" which Ahern translates as "Nobodying," thereby making connections
Both Dickinson and Woolf meet the challenges surrounding language which face women yet today, as Felman poignantly states:

The challenge facing the woman today is nothing less than to 're-invent' language, to re-learn how to speak: to speak not only against, but outside of the specular phallocentric structure, to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of masculine meaning. (FR, 153)

Yet Felski has surmised that "the multiplicity, indeterminacy, or negativity" of écriture féminine is not inherently specifically feminist; as such, the link between literature and feminism lies for her in the themes relevant to feminism which texts address (Beyond Feminist Aesthetics). I would add here that dialectic

between this poem and Dickinson's "I'm Nobody—Who are You?" Ahern herself traces Woolf's influence on such themes as silence, struggle, and suicide as radical acts in, for example, Castellanos's poem "Meditación en el Umbral," translated as "Meditation on the Brink" (that is, of disaster, desperation, self-annihilation). Ahern also cited Castellanos's diary entries which bespeak the need for a dialogic style. Clearly, Ahern's presentation provides further evidence of the connections to be made across time and space.

4 Felski lucidly summarizes the fundamental differences between the two paradigms informing Anglo-American and French feminist literary scholarship: American critics speak of creative self-expression and authenticity, French theories of the subversion of phallocentric discourse; American feminism valorizes female consciousness as inherently oppositional, French feminism tends to consider the notion of the unified subject a remnant of patriarchal ideology which needs to be deconstructed.
goes even further than *écriture féminine*, which—in its attempt to transcend biologism—theorizes the "feminine" as culturally repressed in males and females; that is, dialectic does not perpetuate, as does *écriture féminine*, the association between being female and being on the periphery, nor does it valorize that marginality as subversion; instead, it realizes both that what is perceived as marginal is contingent upon the position one occupies, and that such borderline status is what has enabled male culture to vilify or venerate women. In fact, dialectic guards against what Felski warns us about toward the end of her study: the "trend toward an increasingly conservative and quietist politics grounded in a romantic celebration of a feminine sphere" (181).5 It

deters the temptation to regulate and reify gender possibilities—both of which would be antithetical to feminist aims—even in seeking out a more particularly-suited woman’s discourse.

Felski’s own caution reminds us that, in the same way we are wary of Lacan’s curious notion that male sexual identity is fixed and stable while female sexuality is replete with disorders of desire, we do well to be cautious of thinking its inversion—say, in women’s writing of the body—will actually change the structures which inhibit all. I would think that French feminists who have articulated such theories would not wish to abridge (or distort) the experiential directions to which their investigations lead, and—considering Dickinson and Woolf’s adumbration of these theories decades in advance—which had lead to them in the first place. As such does the overarching context which includes both French and Anglo-American feminisms meet Hegel’s eight interdependent criteria of a dialectical system:

... dialectic is a comprehensive, self-contained and circular system that is self-moved in a necessary sequence by the single unconditioned principle which, in consonance with the instability that must characterize its "nature," demands the open-endedness of that system in its final form. (Davis, 353)
Since, according to Hegel, dialectic requires that self-critical thought examine all assumptions ("absolute skepticism"), I would not want the necessarily ambiguous and provisional nature of dialectical definitions to keep my own project from being called into question, least of all by myself. Does the search for a woman's language, to use Judith Butler's terminology, colonize "under the sign of the same those differences that might otherwise call that totalizing concept into question" (13)? If so, is it ultimately a deceptively (self-)protective mechanism? Feminist inquiry needs to consistently forefront not self-defense, but self-critique of its potentially totalizing efforts which duplicate the economy of the oppressor. If Butler is correct in that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (140), what exactly is the status, indeed the relevance, of gendered writing? Do its attributes reveal or express an ecriture feminine, or merely constitute it? And/or, has its repeated emphasis buried its fictionality in believability?6

6 Butler’s helpful concluding discussion regarding the distinction between expression and performativeness, especially p. 141, is quite instructive here.
Indeed, experiencing the questions this study raises as questions, and leaving them, thus, open as such, is the best one could hope for in a dialectical exploration. Yet as Davis claims at the end of his book, "Dialectic always ends by re-entering itself in the desire for a deepened interrogation" as prelude to something new (363). Thus, a return to the inquiry with which Chapter I concludes is not only helpful here, it also is in order; for, the preceding study—in addition to engendering new questions beyond the scope of the introductory chapter—has contributed to at least partial answers to those questions by bringing the theoretical speculations down to earth and grounding their exploration in practice and experience, as genuine dialectic discovery-in-process does.

In terms of whether Dickinson and Woolf are able to escape binary thinking, they do so precisely as they, too, seek and inhabit a dialectic positioning which grounds abstraction in experience and preserves differences between opposites so as to extend them to other developments. For example, Woolf in Three Guineas wishes to preserve cultural differences between men and women so as to find alternatives to mutual and other destruction. Dickinson's dialectic processing, as opposed to binary producing, of reality can clearly
be seen in her exploration of one term as inherent in its dialectic opposite: for example, much madness is divinest sense; much sense, divinest madness. Both writers, consequently, refuse to concretize definitions, refuse to posit exclusive and prescriptive ways of seeing, knowing, naming, and being; thus are they able to explore differences in a non-essentialist (that is, dialectically predisposed) way. Consequently, paradox presents itself in the work of both artists: Dickinson’s persona in #613 is at once "shut up," yet "beyond the pound"; Woolf’s Orlando is both male and female, of the past and in the present.

By interrogating patriarchal structures, metaphors, and phallogocentric discourse, Dickinson and Woolf enable themselves and, in turn, offer their readers a dialectic subtext (or "hidden logic," as Davis terms it), which underlies all questioning. In the dialectic position itself of being simultaneously inside and outside the major discourse, Woolf and Dickinson transform the problem of not having immediate access to the language and Law of the Fathers (that is, to the Symbolic Order) into empowerment due to the

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advantage both of the self and other critique and of the interrogation that being "on the margins" allows. Woolf’s prime example of the balance which can be achieved by women in such a position is Lily Briscoe, a woman who offers an alternative to the destruction inherent in patriarchally instituted definitions of masculinity and femininity. Dickinson’s major and pervasive demonstration of the subversion of male power in the (phal)logos presents itself in the new Word, the re-shaped metaphor of the Word Made Flesh to fit women’s needs, desires, capabilities, and articulation.

Likewise, both writers exemplify the critique that can be achieved when women become "mirrors" in patriarchal culture, when they are able to reflect upon men’s "twice-reflected size": they are able to reverse the male gaze by turning it back upon itself in a way that shows/objectifies its potential absurdity. Thus are both Dickinson and Woolf, for instance, able to attain the healthy distance on its extremes, which in turn allows them to retrieve women’s laughter, to give the incongruities they perceive and to which they are subjected a voice, a voice of self-preserving laughter that situates woman in a place other than the zone of silence reserved for her in the Symbolic. This laughter is not one of destructive ridicule, but of
constructive indictment, as is the case with Dickinson's persona in #613: she laughs, "No more" of patriarchal restrictions "have I"; and with Woolf's Orlando, who cannot, for example, figure out why a man would fall from a masthead upon sight of a woman's leg.

Significantly, in Orlando, too, we find one of Woolf's main illustrations of woman finding the Other in woman, the protagonist based as s/he is upon Vita Sackville-West. In To the Lighthouse, Woolf finds the Other in woman also, this time her mother, as played out in Lily's positing of Mrs. Ramsay as her Other. Dickinson, too, explores the possibility of woman as Other in her poems to Susan Gilbert and in her poetic constructions of the Other (Daughter, Mother/Wife/Queen) of God as Bearer of the Word. In such creations as a male/female Orlando and a female Christ figure, Woolf and Dickinson, respectively, attempt to negotiate the search for linguistic neutrality through the exploration of a consistently shifting sexuality, a "gynandrogyne"—or, a situated subjectivity that is at once neither and both.

Thus are we led to answer the final question of my initial inquiry: How can we reconcile the Anglo-American feminist focus on how women represent themselves in language with the French feminist
arguments that language itself rules out that possibility? Obviously, the more specific question: How would (and do) Dickinson and Woolf implicitly (explicitly?) address this inquiry—decades in advance—in their respective arts? Dickinson and Woolf’s work clearly adumbrates that of contemporary French feminists in such a way that feminist critical response is validated upon both experiential and theoretical grounds. Both the Anglo-American literary practice as exemplified by these writers and the French feminist philosophies stress the liberatory potential of female difference; both often associate the feminine with notions of fluidity, multiplicity, and openness—the female body, then, becomes a locus for poetic metaphors and analogies capable of challenging phallus-centered and patriarchally instituted and maintained myths.\(^8\)

One should speculate, along with Butler, whether the category of "women" as subject of feminism "is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought" (2). As a product of political and cultural intersections, can

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\(^8\) Teresa de Lauretis has pointed out the necessary dialectic between positivity and negativity as characteristic of feminism as a whole: the former as found in affirmation of woman as political and social subjects and the latter as it inheres in the "radical critique of patriarchal bourgeois culture" (cited in BFA, 22; see fn6, 200).
"gender" ever actually denote a common identity? And more specifically for this project, can the search for and examination of an allegedly broadly common practice of gendered writing lead beyond yet another actually "constituted," rather than expressive or revelatory, phenomena? In other words, is the claim to a discourse "representative of woman" finally a categorical fiction? Because, as Butler argues, differences among women do not coexist sequentielly nor can they be "summarily ranked, causally related," or distributed among degrees of origin and derivation (13), binary regulation/relegation along horizontal or vertical lines, respectively, denies the subversive multiplicity which is capable of disrupting hegemonic discourse and monolithic/monologic ways of thinking and perceiving. The task of feminist dialectic must be to consistently formulate and modify a critique of those structures it has itself engendered or "naturalized," constantly taking stock of its own constituted representational claims.

As Felski contends, dialectic insists that feminist literature, like feminisms, "be viewed not in isolation, but in relation to the social and ideological conditions within which it emerges and against which it defines itself" (182). The work of
both Dickinson and Woolf requires nothing short of that larger, interconnected context. As this study demonstrates, one of dialectic’s prime purposes is to recover a dynamic progression of fundamental contradictions and discover the continuously evolving and expanding relations and realities their interaction generates. Dickinson and Woolf were aware of the "illimitable et cetera" (that is, the never-ending process of signification in any effort to posit identity) to which Butler refers (143). They knew the necessary failures and various "incoherent configurations" (145) which resulted from the injunction to be a given gender. Thus, they offered their varied praxis, inclusive of examples of the complex reconfigurations generated by such discursive injunctions; hence, they enabled new departures for feminist critical and political theorizing and writing. Such contributions help to explain both why it is beneficial and how it is possible that we look back through our mothers, Dickinson and Woolf foremost among them—if we are women or men.


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