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Post-poststructuralism: Gender, race, class, and literary theory

Anderson, Kristi S., Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1992

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POST-POSTSTRUCTURALISM: GENDER, RACE, CLASS, AND LITERARY THEORY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of
the Ohio State University

By
Kristi S. Anderson, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University
1992

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Barbara Hill Rigney
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1992
To
My Mother,
Roberta Paulson Anderson
and
My Mother's Mother,
Olga Gulbranson Paulson,
who first taught me the potential beauty and power
of language.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee: Jessica Prinz and Jeredith Merrin for taking me on sight unseen and bearing with me through some trying times, and especially Barbara Rigney, whose patience and faith has endured over what has proven to be a much longer and meandering journey than either of us bargained for. And to Patrice Caldwell and Margie Willen at Eastern New Mexico University and Sharon Robinson and Sybille Colby at Russell Sage College, who have alternately pushed, prodded, nagged, cajoled, supported, and cheered me: thanks, I needed that. To Liz Stefanics, for all of the above and then some, muy muchas gracias. Special thanks to Carole Heath, who helped me more than she realizes to locate the light at the end of the tunnel, to trust that it was not an oncoming train, and to make the final lunge for it. Finally, to Cartha Sexton, who single-handedly, ever cheerfully, and unerringly, charted my course through the OSU bureaucratic maze, I promise my first-born.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the last twenty years, theory has, for a variety of reasons, become one of the "glamour" fields in academic literary study . . . Not to be aware of one's theoretical assumptions is to be a mere practitioner, slogging along in the routines of scholarship and interpretation.

W. J. T. Mitchell

The world of "theorization" is a grim one, haunted by mad scientists breeding monsters through hybridization, the hunted ghosts of a hundred isms, and the massive shadow of the subject surging up at every turn. Feminine writing lures with an invitation to license, gaiety, laughter, desire, and dissolution, a fluid exchange of partners of indefinite identity . . . . Women are not welcome here garbed in the durable gear of men; men, instead, get up in drag. Lacan reigns here not as lawgiver, but as queen.

Meaghan Morris

The profession is in horrible shape, and we must begin addressing the situation seriously. If you were a graduate student now . . . would you willingly choose to belong to a profession that appears to be openly and irremediably nihilistic. Whoever did enter the profession would help to turn it into a haven for the hopelessly neurotic, at best, or, at worst, an asylum for the purely pathological.

Daniel T. O'Hara
1.

Anyone who has checked *Books in Print*, a course catalogue, or the MLA Job List lately knows that the literary profession has become obsessed with critical theory. In order to practice literary criticism these days, one must be ready and able to identify and defend one's underlying theoretical assumptions. Graduate students must have courses in critical theory on their transcripts; departments must have at least one specialist in critical theory on their faculty; academic presses must have a series on theory to tout in their brochures. Just to be able to carry on a conversation at a cocktail party, one needs, at the very least, to be able to pronounce, if not altogether understand, some of the more popular names and phrases in the contemporary critical jargon.

Americans have imported a smörgåsbord of European critical concepts and vocabularies, and we are revelling in our new-found sophistication and *savoir faire*. One might well have hoped and expected that the effect of all these new and exotic ideas would be—as Edward Said claims it is—"a new sense of freedom and speculation in the production of criticism" (*Literature & Society* viii). Quite the opposite is, however, the case. All this talk about "difference" has begun to sound much the same. The lines dividing the various critical approaches have blurred and ultimately disappeared. Critical identities are all hyphenated now: "feminist-Marxist-deconstructivist," "materialist-poststructuralist-Africanist," etc. The configurations vary, but the common denominator is poststructuralism.

Contemporary critical theory has become virtually synonymous with poststructuralism. Rushing in to fill the spiritual vacuum of late twentieth century
American culture, poststructuralism has become the unrivalled religion of the academy; Lacan, Barthes, and Foucault reign as its gods. Choosing a critical approach has become analogous to voting in a Nicaraguan election: viable alternatives to poststructuralism have been eliminated from the ballot; the only choice offered is whether to be for or against poststructuralism. The critical establishment has come to function like a "junta" or a "mafia."

2.

After the stuffiness of New Criticism, which dominated American literary studies from the 1940s to the 1950s, (post)structuralism seemed, to many, like a breath of intellectual fresh air. New Critics, who had broken from the "Great Man" theory of literature and declared the biographies of writers, readers, and critics irrelevant to literary interpretation, had emphasized "practical" criticism, which consisted of "objective," close readings. The text was isolated from other texts and from its socio-historical contexts, and the content was bracketed off in order to study its form. To the New Critics, meaning was public and objective; Truth (always spelled with a capital "T") was universal.

During the 1950s, it was still possible for many to believe in the homogeneity of the literary community, and, in fact, to a large extent, the academy had, up until World War II, managed to maintain itself as a homogeneous elite. But increasingly in the years since the War—with the GI Bill, scholarship programs for the economically disadvantaged, and special programs for racial
minorities and returning women—a process of democratization radically altered the demographics, and ultimately the identity, of the academy. The Civil Rights, Anti-War, and Women's Movements of the 1960s raised the consciousnesses and the voices of these academic interlopers, and ethnic and women's studies programs were born. New readers and new writers challenged the "universal" truths of the literary and critical traditions. Ethnic critics, feminist critics, and Marxist critics defined themselves in opposition to the Arnoldian "distinterestedness" of New Criticism: all criticism, they argued, is political; theirs differed from traditional approaches only in that their political agendas were explicit rather than implicit. The socio-historical contexts of author, text, and reader are not irrelevant, they insisted, but crucial to the study of literature.

When, in the 1970s, structuralism—which emphasized the cultural codes embedded in literature—gained prominence in American universities, and especially when, in the 1980s, poststructuralism—which emphasized decoding and decentering the self by releasing the subversive potential of the repressed "Other"—those critics who defined their work as cultural revolution sat up and took notice. Despite the incredible energy and activity of ethnic and women's studies, they had remained ghettoized and largely invisible within literary studies. Poststructuralism, which seemed finally to legitimate discussions of "difference" as well as to provide entry into the mainstream of literary studies, was obviously very appealing to those critics who themselves had been cast as other and relegated to the margins of culture.
Poststructuralism has made strange bedfellows of leftists and neo-conservatives, both of whom it has attracted. Although deconstruction has been construed by some to be a radical methodology, in practice it has often been decidedly reactionary. The "New New Criticism" has turned out to be suspiciously like the old New Criticism: reality is defined as textuality. The world outside the text, like the world inside it, is 'fictional'; distinctions between texts and contexts, then, become meaningless. The social, political, and historical differences of gender, race, and class have been de(con)structed and reconstructed as the textual phenomenon of "differance." Feminist, ethnic, and Marxist criticisms, which began as reactions against both New Criticism and psychoanalysis, have ended up embracing both in the reconstituted form of poststructuralism. The poststructuralist conversion has amounted to cooptation.

Even its biggest supporters are not oblivious to the dangers of poststructuralism. Jane Gallop, who has perhaps done more than any other single American feminist critic to proselytize French critical theory, attributes the phenomenal spread of deconstruction in American departments of English to feminist critical backlash: "At a moment when it was no longer possible to ignore feminist criticism's challenge to the critical establishment, deconstruction appeared offering a perspective that was not in opposition to but rather beyond feminism, offering to sublate feminism into something supposedly 'more radical'" ("Reading the Mother Tongue" 315).
"Why is it," Nancy Hartsock has asked, that "just at the moment in Western history when previously silenced populations have begun to speak for themselves and on behalf of their subjectivities, that the concept of the subject and the possibility of discovering/creating a liberating 'truth' become suspect?" White, Western men, who have already had their Enlightenment and have enjoyed the status of selfhood for centuries, are now ready and willing, according to Christine Di Stefano, to subject that legacy to critical scrutiny (75). White middle-class males can afford to put their subjectivity under erasure at this point in history; the rest of us cannot.

Poststructuralism took hold of the literary profession at a time when, collectively, we were experiencing marginalization. In this electronic age, literature—and moreover, the authors, teachers, and critics of it—has ceased to command attention and respect. Poststructuralism is a response to this crisis of faith in the significance of our life's work, a self-justification for our lives, which we have chosen to revolve around texts. Just as the dominant culture has declared the reading and writing of texts irrelevant, the academic empire strikes back, broadening the definition of "text" to include all the activities and artifacts our culture does value. By a linguistic sleight of hand, we have turned the tables: where once our work was deigned as a minor subset of the world's work, now we
define the world—an array of texts which we are uniquely qualified to interpret
and evaluate—as a subset of literary studies.

(Post)structuralism has allowed humanists, tired of being regarded as
"soft," to appropriate some of the power and prestige normally reserved for the
"hard" sciences. The appeal of poststructuralism derives, according to Sebastiano
Timpanaro, from its blend of "abstract scientism and aestheticist spiritualism": the
"perfect solution," he claims, "for the needs of a bourgeoisie which at one and the
same time worships science and attempts to strip it of its demystificatory and
liberating force" (605). New Criticism, Terry Eagleton notes, evolved in the years
when literary criticism was struggling to become professionalized and accepted as
a respectable academic discipline. Competition with the hard sciences on their
own terms was necessary in a society where such science was the dominant
criterion of knowledge. Ironically, this is precisely the appeal of poststructuralism
for Eagleton: with deconstruction, he argues, literature can be "demystified"; it
"can be analyzed like the object of any other science" (Literary Theory 106).
Poststructuralist jargon is "more respectable and scientific than gush about
sunsets" (124).

5.

A decade ago, a few brave and lonely souls looked around in academe and
noted that all the other women were white and all the other blacks were men.6
The situation today is, unfortunately, not as different as we might have hoped and
predicted. Although we have begun to try to talk about the intersections of gender, race, and class, we still lack the language and the theoretical framework which would make this possible. Many of those who were genuinely interested in engaging in this sort of dialogue gravitated toward poststructuralism believing that this was the medium through which it might take place; but, as I shall show, this has not proven to be the case. Poststructuralism has failed to produce a criticism which integrates issues of gender, race, and class; one is always privileged at the expense of the others. In order to arrive at an integrated approach, we must transcend the binary oppositions and hierarchizations inherent in poststructuralist theory. We need a theory in which each of these issues is integral to the original design, rather than appended as an afterthought.

Race and class are no longer completely absent from feminist discourse; it is perhaps an ironic mark of our progress that, in Marianne Hirsch's and Evelyn Fox Keller's recent anthology of feminist theory, they have been elevated to the status of "conflicts in feminism." "Race" and "class" have become, according to Hirsch, "club words" among white middle-class feminists: "You say these words, people get defensive, and nothing further happens." Nancy K. Miller perceives race to be a "pressure on mainstream academic feminism" (353). The feelings Jane Gallop used to have about French men, she now has about African-American women: "[Deborah] McDowell has come to occupy the place of Lacan in my psyche" (364). Gallop's anxiety about lacking theoretical sophistication has been displaced by her anxiety "about being bad, about having a white, middle-class outlook" (353).
Just as it has been difficult for men to engage in discussions of gender without lapsing into guilt, defensiveness, and/or condescension, so has it been difficult for white middle-class critics to openly and honestly explore race and class. As Hirsch has observed, we lack a "mediating discourse" (350). Crucial to the progress of this work is a distinction like the one that Gallop makes between "a criticism that actually attends to something and a criticism that's really dismissive" (368). It is my hope that this project belongs to the former category.

Talking about race has become, Bell Hooks has observed, a way of enhancing one's academic status, "the latest hip racism" (Yearning 133). In her "Conversation on Race and Class" with Mary Childers, Hooks noted that "a lot of white women are appropriating the discussion of 'race' and 'racism' to serve opportunistic ends, to serve the projection of themselves as politically correct or to engage in a kind of sterile discourse that is not connected to behavioral change" (69). Although I am not insensitive to criticisms like these, I believe very strongly that there must be room for white middle-class women and men, as well as for men and women of color, to sincerely enter into discussions of race and class. Because we have failed to do so in the past ought not to disqualify or excuse us from doing so in the present; rather, for that very reason, we are compelled to do so now. Feminist critics can no longer labor under the delusion that it is possible to say anything meaningful about "gender" without attending to other equally important categories of identity. "If we do not interrogate our motives, the direction of our work," Hooks warns, "we risk furthering a discourse on difference and otherness that not only marginalizes people of color but actively eliminates
the need for our presence" (132). It is precisely the interrogation of the motives and directions of literary critical theory—including my own—that is my purpose.

Mary Poovey—whose conclusion that poststructuralism is an essential tool for feminist analysis differs from my own—admits that, "in order for this double-edged blade not to reproduce the system it purports to cut apart, deconstruction itself must be historicized and subjected to the same kind of scrutiny with which it has dismantled Western metaphysics" (62). This work is, I hope, a contribution to that end.
CHAPTER I NOTES


2"The Pirate's Fiancée," 34.

3"Revisionary Madness," 46.

4See, for example, Hershel Parker, "Lost Authority: Non-sense, Skewed Meanings, and Intentionless Meanings," 73.

5Although she characterizes the notion as "peculiar," Janet Todd observes that Ivy League critics like Elaine Showalter, Margaret Homans, Barbara Johnson, and Sandra Gilbert are thought by many to constitute a feminist "establishment" or "mafia." Feminist Literary History, 3.

6Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds, All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies (1982).

CHAPTER II

POSTSTRUCTURALISM OR POSTFEMINISM?: FEMINIST CRITICS UNDER ANALYSIS

This is the oppressor's language / yet I need to talk to you.
Adrienne Rich¹

We have gravitated toward a critical language that is riddled with abstraction and is as distanced as possible from the creative work, and from pleasure . . . . Why, for example, does it appear that white feminist critics have abandoned their contemporary novelists? . . . . Are Freud, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida inevitably more appealing? Why are we so riveted on male thinkers, preferably dead or European?
Barbara Christian²

To some structuralism would be no more than one of those esoteric fads or periodic intellectual masturbations of Europe; to others, it might be seen as the prelude to a new bourgeois reactionary and neo-colonialist philosophy.
Anthony Appiah³
1.

"We think back through our mothers if we are women," Virginia Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own*. "It is useless [for women writers] to go to the great men writers for help . . . The weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully . . . . Perhaps the first thing she would find, setting pen to paper, was that there was no common sentence ready for her use" (79). Following Woolf's example, numerous twentieth century women writers have renounced the "oppressor's language" and set out to "dis-cover" the muted (M)other Tongue. "If we continue to speak the same language to each other, we will reproduce the same story," according to Luce Irigaray, "and we will continue to be violated by their words. Instead, let's reappropriate our mother and try to speak" ('Lips' 69-71).

If, as Jacques Lacan has argued, the operation of language is predicated upon female silence and women can only speak to the extent that they become phallic, e.g., identify with the (Law-of-the) Father, then, asks Julia Kristeva: "What can be our place in the symbolic contract?" ('Women's Time' 23). More and more women writers seem to believe that they have no legitimate place within existing systems of representation. "Women" are understood to occupy the space on the margins of discourse, and when they presume to appropriate "male language" to articulate female desire, they become, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have argued, "monsters" and/or "madwomen."

It has become almost tautological to describe women writers as trespassers on male territory, transgressors against patriarchal law; many feminists are revelling in this outlaw status. "Literature is no one's private ground," Virginia Woolf asserts. "Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our
own way for ourselves" ("Leaning Tower" 131). "How great a transgression it is for a woman to speak," proclaims Hélène Cixous. "Now, I-woman am going to blow up the Law . . . let it be done, right now, in language" ("Medusa" 880, 887).

"The very act of writing, of speech," according to Elizabeth Meese, "signals her defiance and requires that she transgress or (un)cross the double-cross of difference as constituted by phallocentrism" (120). French feminists have made "voleur"—exploiting its double meanings "to fly" and "to steal"—the emblem of écriteur féminine. Appropriating Claudine Hermann's term, "voleuses de langue," Alicia Ostriker pronounces women writers "thieves of language, female prometheus" (Stealing 211).

Increasingly regarded by many contemporary feminists with deep suspicion and profound alienation, language is conceived of as a patriarchal system which does violence to the female speaker, unless she is able to do violence to it first. "Women have no other choice than to be decapitated," according to Cixous. "If they don't actually lose their heads by the sword, they only keep them on condition that they lose them . . . to complete silence . . . . Their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks, and man doesn't hear the body" ("Castration" 49). For Margaret Atwood, too, words are "dangerous"; language is a "lethal weapon," a straight line that violates the curved space of nature, an instrument of amputation, severing body from head. When Adrienne Rich tries to speak, she finds that "my throat is cut / and, it seems by his hand" (FD 181). Sylvia Plath's tongue is ripped by her "Daddy's" language, which she describes as a "barb-wire snare" (Collected Poems 222). The paradigm of the feminist writer is, for Jane Marcus, Shakespeare's Lavinia—who, "gang raped, her tongue cut out and arms cut off to prevent her from telling the
tale," forges an alphabet out of bodily gestures and signs ("A/Wrested Alphabet" 80).

Rather than falling prey to the patriarchal sword, Mary Daly advocates arming ourselves with an Amazonian axe, the Labrys, and "castrating" language. Many women writers have engaged in "linguistic terrorism," doing violence to and with the very language with which they are paradoxically impelled to create. Plath swings an axe in her poem "Words" to prune away dead language and to start the sap rising in now reborn trees (CP 270). When Rich "dives into the wreck" of civilization "to see the damage that was done," she insulates herself in "the body-armor of black rubber" and wields a knife with which to dissect the "book of myths / in which / our names do not appear" (FD 164). Woman must dislocate the phallogocentric discourse, according to Cixous, by seizing the phallic signifier, "taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of" ("Medusa" 887).

"Thinking back through our mothers" has become in many minds synonymous with "thinking through the body." Many women writers are now attempting to pursue the impossible goal of transcending the word altogether. True communication is represented as possible only in a sub-societal, pre-historic, pre-oedipal space where "language" is wordless: "Not our syntax of chained pebbles," according to Atwood, "but liquid, made / by the first tribes, the fish / people" (SP 137). In an "ancient cave," Rich finds "another language . . . no longer personal." "The sounds I make are prehuman, radical," "maybe a hieroglyph for scream" (FD 181). Doris Lessing's Anna Wulf is "increasingly afflicted by vertigo
where words mean nothing . . . like the secretions of a caterpillar that are forced out in ribbons to harden in the air" (Golden Notebook 476).

Margaret Atwood shares Rich's "dream of a common language," but "our other dream," she reveals, is "to be mute," "a duet with two deaf singers" (Two-Headed Poems 74). After rejecting the masculine voice of reason, the protagonist of Atwood's Surfacing immerses herself in the "other language," the "rudimentary language" of animal noises and bird songs (47-8). Atwood's latest collection of poetry reflects her fascination with the snake who "alone among the animals / the snake does not sing" (Poems II 89). Atwood envies the snake who does not suffer from mind-body dualism; "to talk with the body / is what the snake does, letter / after letter formed on the grass, / itself a tongue, looping its earthy hieroglyphics" (95). "Dumb' animals are essential guides," too, for Daly's Websters. "In the beginning," the Scripture according to Mary Daly tells us, "was the Bird" (Wickedary 22).

The alternative to the law of the father is, according to Gilbert and Gubar, "the lure of the mother" (No Man's Land 262), but if, as Kristeva has argued, "language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother" ( Desire in Language 136), how does a woman writer (or any writer for that matter) "think back" through the mother? How does one reclaim the Mother Tongue if the mother's tongue has been cut out, if she has been decapitated and reduced to a deaf and dumb body? Transgressors against the "Law of the Father," these rebellious "daughters of educated men" are nonetheless determined and defined by it.

The words and the texts wrested from their fathers' libraries "told us nothing, nothing / of origins, nothing we needed / to know, nothing that could re-
member us" (FD 267). And, like these writers' own biological mothers, the mythical Mother they dis-cover / invent is mute; she may hold the secrets to the universe, but she cannot speak them, not, at any rate, in a language her enculturated daughters understand. "When the one of us comes into the world, the other goes underground," writes Irigaray. "And what I wanted from you mother was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive" ("One Doesn't Stir" 67). The mother's bequest to the literary daughter is, Sandra Gilbert has argued, "the conundrum of the empty pack" ("Life's Empty Pack" 357). "We can't ask our mothers," Atwood says. "Between us and them is a gulf, an abyss, that goes down and down. It's filled with wordlessness" (Cat's Eye 98).

Despite their passionate desire to do otherwise, it is through their fathers that these writers think back. They "dream" of an alternative, but the only "common sentence" and "common language" available to them belong (or so it seems to them) to the Father, and so it is with his logic and his words that they conduct their argument with the Father. Throughout her life, Woolf saw herself through men's eyes and measured herself against male standards. The argument of Three Guineas, her most radically feminist work, is conducted with a Law-of-the-Father figure, and even in A Room of One's Own, ostensibly addressed to an audience of women, Woolf imagines an audience of male eavesdroppers. The death of her father, Woolf maintained, freed her to write fiction. But, although "the struggle with her own father was over . . . the struggle with fathers in general, with the patriarchy itself" did not end; it was merely "deferred to another time and place."25

Sylvia Plath's father died when she was only nine, but his godlike specter continued to haunt her for the rest of her life. Plath began mastering the
symbolic discourse at the age of two when her mother placated Sylvia with the newspaper while she nursed her brother Warren. "Words initially served quite literally," according to Barbara Mossberg, "for what the child then perceived and the adult still remembers as a substitute for lost maternal nurture" (185). "She is precocious both in language and filial sensibility," Mossberg notes; "they are revealed to be the same thing" (186). Evidence abounds in Letters Home that men were to Plath gods endowed with the divine authority of the sacred Word; in a 1949 diary entry, seventeen-year-old Sylvia guiltily confesses to being "The Girl Who Wanted to Be God."26 The anger that she felt, but characteristically repressed, about this seemingly irreconcilable contradiction volcanically erupts in the later poetry in the form of violence against the father.

Although Plath finally commits literary patricide, putting a stake through her monstrously characterized father's "fat black heart," she is unconvincing when she screeches in a little girl's voice: "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through" (CP 224).27 The words ring truer in "Colossus," where she writes: "I shall never get you put together entirely... Thirty years now I have labored / To dredge the silt from your throat. / I am none the wiser" (CP 129).

Adrienne Rich's father taught her, "at a very young age, the power of language and that I could share in it... It was a very difficult force field for a favored daughter to disengage from" ("Split at the Root" 113). "For years I struggled with you," she writes in "Sources." "For years all arguments I carried on in my head were with you. I saw myself, the eldest daughter raised as a son, taught to study but not to pray, taught to hold reading and writing sacred: the eldest daughter in a house with no son, she who must overthrow the father, take what he taught her and use it against him. After your death I met you again as
the face of patriarchy . . . as part of the system, the kingdom of the fathers."28

By finally being able (through feminism) to identify and analyze the ideology which her father and his language represented, Rich claims that she was able, at last, to "dispose of" her father (9). But she is still attempting to dispose of him in "Sources" (1983), which is addressed to her father. As in the cases of Woolf and Plath, the struggle is on-going. "The power of the fathers has been difficult to grasp because it permeates everything," Rich admits, "even the language in which we try to describe it" (Of Woman Born 41).

2.

If, as Jane Gallop has argued, Lacan is a "prick,"29 then surely feminist critics have gotten screwed, for Lacan has most definitely penetrated the body of feminist discourse. The correspondence between Lacanian theory and these writers' and critics' representations of the relationship between women and language is glaringly and rather disturbingly obvious.30 As a perusal of recent journals and anthologies reveals, it has become virtually impossible to read, let alone to write and publish, feminist criticism without a grounding in the concepts and the jargon of French psychoanalysis and post-structuralism.

Is Gallop right that feminists have been "seduced" into an unnatural relationship with Lacan the Father?31 In her history of feminist criticism, Janet Todd has noted the "extraordinary dominance" of psychoanalysis and compared it to the "the hold of Christianity in the Middle Ages" (14). Feminist "theory seems to stop," she observes, "with Lacan, who may be reinterpreted but never ignored" (77). "Lac(k)anian criticism" has, according to Elaine Showalter, bifurcated literary
studies into a two-tiered system of "hermeneutics" and "hismeneutics" ("Toward Feminist Poetics" 140).

Since its inception in the 1970s, feminist criticism has struggled to establish its identity and authority. Under siege from both men at home and women abroad, feminist critics in America have often been ignored or trivialized on the basis of a perceived lack of theoretical definition and sophistication. Unlike Marxist, Freudian, and archetypal critics, feminist critics, who swore allegiance to no god or bible, did not fit the paradigm of critical theory or praxis and were therefore largely invisible to the academy. At war with the critical establishment, feminist critics, according to Annette Kolodny, "have been forced to negotiate a minefield" ("Minefield" 149).

Because of feminist criticism's "methodological incoherence" and fondness for "underdetermined" theories and because the "female 'problematic'" had become "too important to be left in the hands of anti-intellectual feminists," K.K. Ruthven felt compelled in 1984 to take it upon himself to provide a theoretical overview of feminist literary criticism (5, 7). "Anglo-American feminist critics," according to Toril Moi, "have been mostly indifferent or even hostile towards literary theory, which they have often regarded as a hopelessly abstract 'male' activity" (70). Along with Mary Jacobus (3-13), Moi has criticized as naive the American belief in "reality," "experience," and "real women." "Such a view resolutely refuses to consider textual production as a highly complex, 'over-determined' process with many different and conflicting literary and non-literary determinants" (45). The future of feminist criticism, according to Moi, lies in "a combination of Derridean and Kristevan theory" (15).
"The daughter's seduction" by the psychoanalytic father, then, is not so mystifying: French critical theory has transported sexual difference into the mainstream of literary studies. Structuralism, with its emphasis on coding, and poststructuralism, with its emphasis on decoding, have provided feminists with a respectable, even chic, theoretical framework and vocabulary with which to discuss gender as a social fiction which can be either written or unwritten. When feminists learned to speak in the language of poststructuralism, they were heard and understood, or so it seemed, for the first time by the male literary establishment. By the mid-1980s, a decade after its rather inauspicious beginnings, feminist criticism, the dowdy spinster of the academy, had become positively sexy, and the boys were sitting up and taking notice.

Many feminists critics have learned to speak the "common language" of avant-garde literary criticism, but significant meaning has been lost in the translation. Gone from this new breed of "gyncritics" is the gritty materialism and "authority of experience" which characterized the feminist criticism of the early 1970s. Gone is the concern with the socio-historical-political contexts of writing and reading. Even Robert Scholes, champion of poststructuralism, admits that one of its risks is "that the semiotician's interest in collective structures-genres, discourses, codes, and the like--will cause the uniqueness of the literary text to be lost" (xi). Paradoxically, all this talk about "difference" seems to have precluded a discussion of difference(s). Poststructuralism has produced a homogenized, generic Woman (and a metaphorical one at that); it should come as no surprise to us that she is white, Western, and middle-class.
3.

The notion of a generic "woman" functions in feminist thought, according to Elizabeth Spelman, "much the way the notion of a generic 'woman' functioned in Western philosophy" (ix). Most white feminist theory, including, as Spelman clearly demonstrates, Nancy Chodorow's Reproduction of Mothering, proceeds from the assumption that gender is a variable in human identity which exists independently from other variables of race, class, sexual orientation, etc. Chodorow's color and class blindness is, of course, particularly significant given the incredible influence she has had on feminist scholarship across the disciplines. Many feminists have quieted their anxieties about reliance upon male models by substituting Chodorow's psychoanalytic framework for Lacan's: if Lacan is the "father" of contemporary white feminist theory, Chodorow is indisputably the "mother." In either case, the frame is the patriarchal nuclear family and the feminist theorist occupies the subordinate position of daughter.

Despite the virtual explosion of publishing by women of color over the past decade, an astounding number of feminist theoretical and critical works produced by white women during that same period have failed to even recognize race and class as categories of identity and experience. Those who have included considerations of race and (much more rarely) class have typically ghettoized them in a chapter or two, and these have almost always been written by and about black women. Most white feminists have yet to discover that women of color are not always black and not always poor and that white women are not always Anglo-Saxon and not always middle-class.

In her survey of "three centuries of key women thinkers," Dale Spender does not identify one feminist theorist of color or feminist theory of race.
Rosemary Tong's "Comprehensive Introduction" to feminist thought includes thirty-four pages on Lacan and Derrida, but not one reference to writing by women of color.\(^4\) Toril Moi acknowledges that "some feminists might wonder why [she] has said nothing about black or lesbian (or black-lesbian) feminist criticism in America in" her survey *Sexual/Textual Politics*, but "the answer is simple," according to Moi, "in so far as textual theory is concerned there is no discernable difference between these three fields" (86).\(^4\)

When Michelene Wandor edited *On Gender and Writing*, she "was fabulously ambitious" and "wanted writers from every genre imaginable; from all age groups and (possibly) from both sexes" (2). The collection does include four men, but no people of color. None of the contributors consider issues of race or class. "Men in Feminist Criticism" warrant an entire chapter in Janet Todd's recent *Feminist Literary History," but women of color are relegated to a single footnote (the purpose of which, ironically, is to defend Patricia Spacks against Alice Walker's charge of racism) (*Feminist Literary History* 144n5).\(^4\)

In *Contemporary Feminist Thought*, Hester Eisenstein criticizes feminist theorists for "false universalism" and "insufficient regard for differences of race, class, and culture," but Eisenstein's own analysis of race and class is limited to a few sentences (132).\(^4\) Similarly, in his "broad survey" of feminist literary critical theories and practices, K.K. Ruthven notes black feminists' "indictment of recent feminism for concentrating almost exclusively on the problems of middle class women" but then goes on to do precisely that in his own analysis.\(^5\) Mary Eagleton's *Feminist Literary Theory* does include excerpts from several black women writers, but there is no discussion of race in any of the other pieces by white women.
The Poetics of Gender, a book whose cover proclaims it to be "the best of the best," "the strongest collection of feminist interpretive and critical essays [Robert Scholes has] ever seen" and which consists of seventeen articles by very prominent white feminist critics, completely ignores both race and class. An anthology which was published just last year and calls itself The Feminist Critique of Language includes eighteen articles by more than eighteen different authors but only one reference to race: an analogy between racism and sexism which is drawn in order to illustrate the seriousness of sexist language usage. The "body" Jane Gallop is "thinking through" turns out to be not only female but white; the only consideration of "color" in her most recent book is her discourse on the significance of the mauve (or possibly pink) cover of Writing and Sexual Difference (Thinking Through the Body).

Carolyn Heilbrun, who argues in Writing a Woman's Life that feminist criticism needs to focus its attention on narrative rather than language, acknowledges that black women novelists have produced "profoundly and dazzlingly new" narratives, but she nonetheless defines the scope of her study in such a way as to exclude them. From her discussion of the (otherwise all white) World War II generation of women poets, Heilbrun omits Audre Lorde, who fits chronologically but "does not belong" because "she, her life, and her work have focused on other patterns and influences" (74). Heilbrun might better have titled her work: "Writing a White Woman's Life."

Rather than revise their theories, white feminists again and again have found it more expedient to manipulate their data, trimming off and discarding the raggedy edges of whatever does not fit neatly within the pre-established borders of "feminist" inquiry. In Sex Changes, for example, Volume II of No Man's Land,
the epic exploration of "the place of the woman writer in the twentieth century," which presumes to cover the 1880s-1930s, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar self-consciously omit any discussion of black women writers (xvii). Rather than challenge the received definition of literary "modernism," Gilbert and Gubar chose to exclude from their study writers who, like those of the Harlem Renaissance, did not seem to fit it. One can only conclude from this treatise that the woman writer of color has no place in the twentieth century.

Alicia Ostriker includes a number of women of color in her survey of twentieth century American women poets, but she does not acknowledge that race and class might be factors as significant as gender in determining one's relationship to the dominant discourse. Although she rejects the belief that "true poetry is genderless," Ostriker apparently believes that women's poetry is raceless and classless. Ostriker urges her readers "to learn to see women poets generically." "Women's poetry' exists in much the same sense that 'American poetry' exists," she claims. "It has a history. It has a terrain... it has something like a language" (Stealing 9).

4.

To the extent that white feminists critics have acknowledged ethnicity as a factor in the relationship between women and language, almost all have assumed that women of color living in Western societies are "doubly marginalized," twice muted. All women, according to poststructuralist logic, are marginalized; some
are more marginalized. But the relationship between one's sexual and racial identities cannot be expressed by a simple arithmetic equation; one does not experience sexual oppression as discrete from racial oppression. When feminist critics begin to look more systematically at how race and class interface with gender, many of our most cherished beliefs will be called into question, and a much more complicated picture of women's relationship to language will begin to emerge.57

Perhaps Lacanian theory has been embraced by so many white feminist critics because it predicts and describes perfectly the linguistic and cultural alienation expressed by the writers which they have "canonized"—i.e., Dickinson, Woolf, H.D., Stein, Plath, Rich, Lessing, Atwood—all of whom derive from the white, Western, Judeo-Christian, middle or upper-class nuclear family unit that is presumed by Lacan to be universal. But what about the writers who come out of other familial and cultural contexts? What about women who learn their language, not in their fathers' libraries, but in their mothers' kitchens or their mother's gardens?58 For the first time in history, we have a group of published women writers who did not launch their careers from positions of white, middle-class privilege and who do not necessarily perceive themselves as having "stolen" their language away from their literate fathers, but perhaps having legitimately inherited it from their (often illiterate) mothers.

We cannot assume, as do Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, following Lacan's lead, that "most men define themselves as inheritors of both the authority and the inexorability of the traditional alphabet" ("Ceremonies" 41). In Western societies, only white men, and only certain white men at that, are bestowed author-ity as a birthright.59 Identification with the father, according to Lacan,
affords the child a name and a place in the family, the language, and the culture. But this is not necessarily the case when the father, too, has been denied an identity and a legitimate place in society. Can it be claimed that the black phallus (for example), subject as it is to both literal and figurative castration by a racist culture, still functions as a "transcendental signifier"? Is the Law-of-the-Black-Father transmitted in the language system of the black family, or is it negated by the Law-of-the-White-Father?

Neither can we tacitly assume that the female voice is unilaterally muted by all cultures. "The female voice may be universally described as divided, but," as Barbara Johnson has argued, "it must be recognized as divided in a multitude of ways" ("Metaphor" 218). Language has certainly not been less problematic for women of color who, along with their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons, have been systematically denied access to the power of the written word. Until very recently, women of color have been effectively excluded from the public sphere discourse of the dominant American culture, but, as some black women are suggesting, within their own families and communities, they perhaps have been heard more loudly and clearly than the white "lady" has been heard in hers.

In striking contrast to white, middle-class women writers' preoccupation with paternal texts, many women of color are re-membering powerful maternal voices. Poet Carolyn Rodgers identifies her mother as "the sturdy Black bridge that I / crossed over on." Like Alice Walker, numerous other writers—including Audre Lorde, Paule Marshall, Toni Cade Bambara, Cherrie Moraga, Maxine Hong Kingston, Amy Tan, and Leslie Silko—have traced their literary roots to their mothers' storytelling. "Only recently did I fully realize this," Walker says: "that through years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed
not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke."
(Gardens 240). "This emphasis on woman's silence may be an accurate remembering of what has taken place in the households of women from WASP backgrounds in the United States, but," according to Bell Hooks, "in black communities (and diverse ethnic communities), women have not been silent. Their voices can be heard" (Talking Back 6).

Unlike literate cultures, oral cultures are not logocentric; they do not, as Walter Ong has argued, privilege a central (sacred) text or a particular speaker (137). In Judeo-Christian Scripture, creation is accomplished by virtue of the word, and speech is defined as a godlike power which is properly exercised by Adam (and not Eve), but non-Western creation myths often emphasize the power of the female to create, not just with her body, but also with words. In matrilineal Pueblo cultures, for example, Spider Woman, she who thinks creation into existence and names it, is the eldest god, and the grandmother is the supreme storyteller (Sacred Hoop 35). In the quest for the mother (tongue), it would seem that women (and men) closest to such oral traditions are at a distinct advantage.

5.

Derrida's critique of Western "phallogocentrism" and privileging of marginalized discourses has catalyzed feminists of all colors to seek out and (re)claim their (or someone else's) oral "roots." But romanticizing oral traditions as alternatives to the literate traditions which have excluded us is not
unproblematic. As Walker's *The Color Purple* and Kingston's *Woman Warrior* suggest, non-Western cultures, while they may not be "logocentric," may still be "phallocentric." Our mother's stories do not always liberate us; often they (re)inscribe patriarchal law.

Furthermore, it is not clear to what extent these oral cultures have survived the ravages of dislocation, slavery, colonization, and genocide and are, therefore, accessible to contemporary writers of color. To what extent have they been inherited, and to what extent have they been invented? For twentieth century college educated American women, are the oral traditions of their ancestors really, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest in *No Man's Land*, fantasies, myths which empower and enable writers like Hurston or Walker to cope with their "anxiety of authorship" and therefore parallel strategies to those employed by writers like Woolf or Rich? Or do they constitute a qualitatively different linguistic base for women writers of color and therefore necessitate a new or separate critical theory?

But once again essentialism threatens to rear its ugly head. "Women of color" are not—contrary to current usage—a monolithic group. Incorporated under this rubric are, as Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa note in their introduction to *This Bridge Called My Back*, "women of every shade of color and grade of class." "We are women from all kinds of childhood streets: the farms of Puerto Rico, the downtown streets of Chinatown, the barrio, city-Bronx streets, quiet suburban sidewalks, the plains, and the reservation" (5).

Even generalizing about "black women" or "Latinas" or "Native Americans" is fraught with danger. There are vast differences between Alice Walker's Southern rural African-American culture and Audre Lorde's Northern urban West
Indian-American black culture, between Paula Gunn Allen's Southwestern Laguna culture and Louise Erdrich's Midwestern Chippewa culture, between Gloria Anzaldúa's Tejana Chicana culture and Aurora Levins Morales' Puerto Rican Spanish Harlem culture, between Maxine Hong Kingston's San Francisco Chinatown culture and Cathy Song's Chinese-Hawaiian culture.63

"Modern feminist theory is faced with a dilemma," according to Elizabeth Spelman. "Will throwing out the bathwater of white middle-class privilege involve throwing out the baby of feminism?" (171). If we insist that gender must always be considered in conjunction with such factors as race, class, nationality, historicity, and sexual orientation, will we preclude the possibility of ever again making any coherent statements about "gender"? If feminist critics truly confront the real differences among women writers, will any of our generalizations survive? Will we, in fact, put ourselves out of business?

The sweeping and dramatic generalizations which have characterized much of the feminist criticism of the 1970s and 80s are probably a thing of the past. Now, even though they are perhaps less likely to wow tenure committees and publishers, we must begin to make subtle distinctions and qualified conclusions. We must begin to evolve a more richly textured tapestry of feminist critical theory, one which is woven of as many kinds of thread as there are women, because, as Barbara Smith has repeatedly tried to tell us, "feminism" which fails to account for all aspects of female experience "is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (49).64 As the enormity of the feminist project becomes ever clearer, Adrienne Rich's words of over a decade ago seem even more pertinent today: "There is the challenge and the promise of a whole new psychic geography. But there is also a difficult and dangerous walking on
the ice, as we try to find language and images for a consciousness we are just
coming into, and with little in the past to support us . . . . As women, we have
our work cut out for us" ("Dead Awaken" 49).
CHAPTER II NOTES

1"The Burning of Paper Instead of Children," *The Fact of a Doorframe,* 116. Hereafter abbreviated as FD.


3"Strictures on Structures," 148.

4She goes on to specify that this contract is "of Christian, Western civilization and its lay ramifications" (24).

5In *Madwoman in the Attic,* Gilbert and Gubar describe women's writing in terms of disease: "infection breeds" in women's sentences (57). Both women and their writings suffer from agoraphobia, claustrophobia, aphasia, amnesia, and schizophrenia (69).

I am using the terms "women writers" and "feminists" here in the reductive way they have most often been used: to designate those who have dominated feminist discourse, i.e., white, middle-class, Western women. I want to emphasize here the word "seem" since I will argue that this linguistic alienation may only appear to be a general phenomenon among women writers because white feminist critics have largely ignored women of color and others who have not fit their theories.

6Woolf's statement reveals the contradiction which ensnares those who pursue this line of reasoning: only if literature is someone's private ground, if literature is defined as a male province, can women writers can be described as "trespassers."

7As Mary Daly points out in *Pure Lust,* a "transgression" is "the act of
crossing, passing over, going beyond limits set or prescribed by law or command” (244).

8 Ostriker's title reflects her "intextuality" with Roland Barthes, who says: "When no known language is available to you, you must determine to steal a language--as men used to steal a loaf of bread" (147).

See also Nicole Ward Jouvre, White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue, who says she writes fiction in her "mother tongue" of French and criticism in the "patriarchal discourse" of English and describes writing as an illicit activity undertaken as a child in secrecy and darkness: "Writing, I could cease to be 'good' . . . It has to do with theft . . . Silence. Secrecy. Daring: the cracking of safes is full of risks" (23, 35).

9 Atwood habitually associates language and violence: i.e., in "It is Dangerous to Read the Newspapers," "another village explodes" . . . "each time I hit a key / on my electric typewriter" (Selected Poems 60); in "Lives of the Poets," "the heroine will step across the stage, words coiled, she will open her mouth and the room will explode in blood" (Dancing Girls 217); the communication between the two lovers in "The Grave of the Famous Poet" is like "those silent black-and-white comedians hitting each other until they fall down" (DG 93); in Surfacing, "language divides us into fragments" (172); it creates the illusion that head and body are separate, but "the language is wrong, it shouldn't have different words for them" (91).

10 In Your Native Land, Your Life, Rich describes "words pulled down from the walls / like dogwhips," the "verbal brutalities" (15) she suffered in "the room with the books / where the father walks up and down / telling the child to work, work" (16), "borne thereafter like any burn or scar" (15).
11. *Collected Poems*, hereafter abbreviated as CP. In "Daddy," Plath chooses perhaps the most shockingly violent image of all time—Nazism—as a metaphor for her father's language and value system.

12. In *Gyn/ecology*, Daly says: "Crones find that we have inherited a contaminated language. Words/labels often stop thinking/imagining/conquering. We must break their mindbinding power . . . For this purpose, Crones need to sharpen our minds/wits so that they become the Sacred Double Axes of Amazons" (368). In *Beyond God the Father*, she says: "The method of liberation . . . involves a *castrating* of language and images that reflect and perpetuate the structures of a sexist world. It castrates precisely in the sense of cutting away the phallocentric value system imposed by patriarchy" (9).

13. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf advocates verbal death by fire: "What could be more fitting than to destroy an old word, a vicious and corrupt word that has done much harm in its day and is now obsolete? . . . Let us therefore celebrate this occasion by cremating the corpse. Let us write that word in large black letters on a sheet of foolscap; then solemnly apply a match to the paper. Look, how it burns! (101).

14. Jane Gallop borrows the title of her most recent book, *Thinking Through the Body* from Adrienne Rich, who in *Of Woman Born*, asks "whether women cannot begin, at last, to think through the body, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized" (1). Many contemporary writers have followed Emily Dickinson in her quest for the "word made flesh," but poststructuralists seem to be moving in the opposite direction, as reflected in the juxtaposition of Helena Michie's title, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies*. 
15 Disturbing to many is what seems to be contemporary feminist criticism's embrace of inarticulateness, a valorization of hysteria and silence. Woman's writing is, according to Kristeva, "the discourse of the hysteric." "If women have a role to play . . . it is only in assuming a negative function," creating "ruptures, blank spaces, and holes" in the phallogocentric discourse by expressing bodily drives that refuse to be repressed (New French Feminisms 166). For Cixous, the hysterical Dora, "the indomitable, the poetic body," is "the true 'mistress' of the signifier" (‘Medusa’ 886). In claiming that woman "writes in white ink," "that good mother's milk"—presumably invisible on white paper—Cixous again seems to privilege silence (881).

As many recent titles suggest—Silences, On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, "Cartographies of Silence," "The Art of Silence and the Forms of Women's Poetry," Breaking Silences, "The Blank Page and Issues of Female Creativity," etc.—silence seems to have become one of the most talked about subjects among feminists. Feminists must guard against the danger of becoming like John Irving's Ellen Jamesians, women who cut out their own tongues in sympathy with a rape victim whose tongue was cut out so that she would be unable to identify her accusers.

16 In Gyn/ecology, Daly says that we must imitate "dumb' animals, whose nonverbal communication seems so superior to androcratic speech" (414). "Animals are our essential guides to" Websters' First Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language, 17.

17 The Wickedary is a declaration that words and women have served the fathers' sentences long enough. Websters ride the rhythms of Tidal Time, freeing words. Like birds uncaged, these Soundings rush and soar, seeking sister-vibrations" (3).
Throughout Three Guineas, Woolf makes reference to the "daughters of educated men," a term which is descriptive of herself as well as virtually all of the other women who, up until very recently, have gained entrance to the literary canon.

Woolf, Plath, Lessing, Rich, and Atwood all describe mothers of considerable talents who nonetheless have been overshadowed and overwhelmed by powerful father figures. As Elaine Showalter notes in A Literature of Their Own: "A factor that occurs with remarkable frequency in the backgrounds of these writers is identification with, and dependence upon, the father; and either the loss of, or alienation from, the mother" (61).

Even as they struggle against it, all seem to accept as given a masculine culture-feminine nature dichotomy. As Rich says in Of Woman Born: "My father's narrow body did not seize my imagination, though authority and control ran through it like electric filaments . . . . It was his voice, presence, style, that seemed to pervade the household. I don't remember when it was that my mother's feminine sensuousness, the reality of her body, began to give way to the charisma of my father's assertive mind and temperament; perhaps when my sister was just born, and he began teaching me to read" (219). Like the protagonist of Surfacing, she goes on to say: "My mind and body might be divided as between father and mother, but I had both" (220).

See also Mary Jacobus, Reading Woman, who argues that "women's literary genealogies threaten them with the story that they have tried to forget--the hysteric's story, the story of hopeless desire" (252). According to Margaret Homans in Women Writers and Poetic Identity, women poets must be
"matrophobic": "the first project of any poet who is also a daughter must to be keep herself from becoming her mother" (17).

21 One method of "thinking back through the mother" may be suicide. Virginia Woolf's choice of "death by water, not by fire" was, according to Jane Marcus, "a moral and political choice made in sanity." Walking into the Ouse River with rocks in her pockets was a "dignified descent into the arms of mother water" (VW: Feminist Slant 4). In A Literature of Their Own, Showalter argues that the ultimate room of one's own is the grave. In The Bell Jar, Plath describes Esther Greenwood's suicide attempt as a desire to return to the womb.

On a more hopeful note, Annette Kolodny offers as an example of a woman writer who was able to successfully "think back through her mother," Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, who "early took on her [novelist] mother's name and continued to publish under it for the rest of her life" and, thereby, was able "to resurrect her mother's unused talents" and keep her own "anxiety of authorship" at bay ("Influence of Anxiety" 135).

22 Showalter is mistaken when she identifies the audience of Three Guineas as the "daughters of educated men" (Literature of Own 294). Woolf writes about the daughters but to their fathers. She provides us with a sketch of the generic father to whom she directly addresses herself: "You, then, who ask the question, are a little grey on the temples; the hair is no longer thick on the top of your head. You have reached the middle years of life not without effort, at the Bar; but on the whole your journey has been prosperous . . . your prosperity--wife, children, house--has been deserved." (4). Although she and he come from the same class and speak with the same accent, the difference in their sex, and consequently their educations, results in a "gulf so deeply cut between
us that for three years and more I have been sitting on my side of it wondering whether it is any use to try to speak across it" (4).

23In a letter to Ethel Smyth, Woolf wrote of A Room of One's Own: "But my 'book' isn't a book--it only talks to girls" (Letters IV, 102). Yet, in that "book," she nervously asks: "Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Charles Biron is not concealed? We are all women, you assure me" (85). See also Adrienne Rich's comments on this phenomenon in Lies, Secrets, and Silence, 37.

24On the anniversary of her father's death in 1928, she wrote in her diary: "His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; inconceivable." (Writer's Diary 135). Yet it is also true that it was her father who taught her to read and write; it was his example and his library that generated her ambition and her models for a literary career.

25Three Guineas, 65. In her review of Woolf scholarship, Lynda Koolish takes issue with Carolyn Heilbrun's conclusion that, in her fifties, Woolf no longer feared the expression of her anger or its effects on the men who overheard her. Woolf's 1936 diary entry, Koolish argues, proves otherwise: "I must carry the proofs [of The Years], like a dead cat, to L[eonard] & tell him to burn them unread. This I did . . . (559).

26Plath's father, Otto, was an eminent scientist as well as (German) language teacher. In a February 1951 letter to her mother, Plath wrote: "I am the strange sort of person who believes in the impersonal laws of science as a God of sorts and yet does not know what any of those laws are" (64). Of Ted Hughes she wrote: "I have met the strongest man in the world . . . brilliant poet . . . a large, hulking, healthy Adam . . . with a voice like the thunder of God" (263). Of
W.H. Auden: "He is my conception of the perfect poet . . . I adore him with a big Hero Worship. I would someday like to touch the Hem of his Garment and say in a very small adoring voice: Mr. Auden, I have apomeforyou: I have found my God in Auden" (117). Although Plath desired these godlike qualities for herself, her female body seemed to her to preclude this possibility: "I am destined to be classified and qualified. But, oh, I cry out against it. I am I—I am powerful—but to what extent? I am I" (37).

27 A. Alvarez has, in fact, called "Daddy" a "love poem," 66.

28 Your Native Land, Your Life, 9.

29"To designate Lacan at his most stimulating and forceful is to call him something more than just phallocentric." "He is also," according to Gallop, "phalloreccentric. Or, in more pointed language, he is a prick" (Daughter's Seduction 41).

30 Cause and effect are difficult to distinguish here: is Lacanian theory's popularity among feminists the result of its ability to describe and predict so accurately the linguistic alienation expressed by so many of the writers in feminist canon or are writers admitted to the canon because of their conformity to the au currant theory or have these writers themselves been "seduced" by Lacan?

31 It should be noted that, although Gallop characterizes the relationship between Lacan and feminist theorists as incestuous seduction, she does not ultimately disapprove of it. As she explains in Daughter's Seduction: Lacan "gets all the girls because he unveils his desire, manages to show his prick" and expose and demystify phallocentrism (38). Deconstructing Lacan's text, Gallop finds openings for women readers: "At the very moment . . . when phallic privilege is asserted, the cunt clamours for recognition, makes a big stink . . . Those cunts gaping . . . were just so many holes in the text, and Lacan ends not by plugging
up those holes, but by maintaining them as questions. This may be a truly feminist gesture" (32).

32 Early anthologies of feminist criticism record the painful and protracted debates about such things as whether or not feminist critical practice was informed by a theory or theories, and whether, in fact, theoretical coherence was even desirable, and what sorts of theories we might borrow/invent. See, for example: Brown and Olson, eds, Feminist Criticism (1978); Cornillon, ed, Images of Women in Fiction (1972); Diamond and Edwards, eds. The Authority of Experience (1977); College English 32 (May 1971); Donovan, ed, Feminist Literary Criticism (1975).

33 According to Ruthven, "a much better case can be made out for feminism than many feminists have succeeded in making," and he obviously thinks that he, finally, succeeds in making it (9). Despite the fact that Ruthven himself cites all the titles listed in note 32 above and more, the cover of his book rather incredibly proclaims it to be "the first broad survey of both the dominant theories of feminist literary criticism and the critical practices which result from those theories." The cover also tells us that Ruthven, presumably in contrast to all the women who have fumbled along in their attempts at feminist criticism, "writes from a balanced, non-partisan standpoint."

34 It is not really Lacan the Father, however, but Derrida, the New Testament version of the French critical Jehovah, who has converted so many feminists—including Gallop herself—to the religion of poststructuralism. Without questioning its fundamental assumptions about language and gender, Derrida has turned Lacan's formulation on its head. In lieu of Lacan's erect phallus, Derrida places at the center of his theory, the folded hymen, symbolic for him of opening,
Otherness, absence, the blank space upon which the pen writes its dissemination. Privileging the repressed (m)other tongue over the father's name, Derrida attributes to this forbidden desire a revolutionary potential: to the extent that the Other can be dis-covered/re-membered, the phallogocentric discourse can be ruptured, allowing for the free play of *jouissance* (as Barthes has defined it). Ironically, then, it is "Derri-dada" who has provided the map by which many women writers are pursuing their quest for the mother.

35"The question now facing women's studies," according to Adrienne Rich, "is the extent to which she has, in the past decade, matured into the dutiful daughter of the white patriarchal university--a daughter who threw tantrums and played the tomboy when she was younger but who has learned to wear a dress and speak and act almost as nicely as Daddy wants her to" ("Disobedience and Women's Studies" 78-79).

36When some of the most prestigious male critics began to try their own hands at "feminist" criticism, Elaine Showalter reacted with characteristic suspicion and wit: "Is male feminism a form of critical cross-dressing, a fashion risk of the 1980s that is both radical chic and power play?" ("Critical Cross-Dressing" 134).

37A term which Elaine Showalter invents in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 248.

38Elizabeth Spelman has noted this "dismay and discomfort with manyness" and labelled it "plethoraphobia" (160).

39As Alice Jardine has observed in *Gynesis*: "Woman"--who is "divided, multiple, everywhere, and nowhere on Lacan's graph" (164)--"has been reduced to a metaphor" (191). What the twentieth century reader is left with is "the
disjointed maternal body of an infantile or psychotic's fantasy" (252).
Paradoxically, however, by translating and writing about French critical theory,
Jardine has played a very significant part in affecting its popularity among
American feminists.

40 Carrying a very heavy political load, the phrase "as a woman" has
become, according to Elizabeth Spelman, the "Trojan horse" of feminist
ethnocentrism (185).

41 Chapter Four of Inessential Woman, 80-113. Gloria Joseph and Jill
Lewis, the authors of Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White
Feminism, who are black and white respectively, note the differences in their
reactions to Chodorow: Jill was immediately interested and tried to convince
Gloria of its "political importance," but Gloria failed to see reflected there her
experience within a black family structure (9). See also Adrienne Rich's critique
of Chodorow's heterosexist bias in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian
Existence."

42 Feminist theory which has been inspired/influenced by Chodorow suffers
from the same lack of attention to race and class: Trebilcot's Mothering ignores
race and class altogether. In The (M)other Tongue, ed Garner et al, one essay
deals with class; none deal with race. Belenky et al included women of different
colors and classes in their sample, but they did not analyze these issues in their
study, Women's Ways of Knowing; in Maternal Thinking, Ruddick announces that
her theory is based on the "urban middle-class cultures I know best" (20);
significantly, she neglects to mention that this culture is also white. Ruddick cites,
without acknowledging any contradiction or irony, a number of black women
writers to support her theory.
These include: Allen/Young, eds, *The Thinking Muse*; Gisela Ecker's *Feminist Aesthetics*; Frank/Anshen's *Language and the Sexes*; Homans' *Bearing the Word* and *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*; Jacobus' *Reading Woman*; Jardine's *Gynesis*; Johnson's *A World of Difference*; Kauffman's *Discourses of Desire*; McConnell-Ginet et al's *Women and Language in Literature and Society*; Michie's *The Flesh Made Word*; Ostriker's *Writing Like a Woman*; Schor's *Reading in Detail*; Todd's *Gender and Literary Voice*; Waugh's *Feminine Fictions*.


*The Female Authorgraph*, ed Stanton, is remarkable for its cross-culturalism: Japanese, Spanish, Italian, French, Russian, Anglo-American, African-American, German, British, Argentinean, and Palestinian perspectives are included, but only in "The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady" is race addressed.

A notable exception to this "white solipsism," as she has coined it in "Disloyal to Civilization," is Adrienne Rich, who has consistently reminded white feminists of the necessity of attending to race and racism. But even Rich sees race in black and white terms; she does not acknowledge in this article the existence of women of other colors.
"Derrida," "desire," "differance," "Lacan," "phallocentrism," "phallogocentric thought," "psychoanalysis and feminism," and "psychoanalytic feminism" are all indexed in Feminist Thought; "race" and "racism" are not. Class is mentioned on only a few pages.

Moi's inability to recognize more than three (ontologically distinct) categories of feminist theory and her willingness to allow one to stand for the other two is a function of her own French critical bias and her refusal to acknowledge the relevance of female experience to feminist criticism.

In "One Child of One's Own," Alice Walker took Spacks to task for dealing solely with white, middle class women in The Female Imagination. Phyllis Chesler, like Spacks, felt "reluctant and unable to construct theories about experiences I haven't had" (42). But, as Walker points out, not having lived in nineteenth-century Yorkshire did not prevent Spacks from theorizing about the Brontës.

Eisenstein mentions Angela Davis' criticism of Susan Brownmiller's treatment of race (133) and Audre Lorde's critique of Mary Daly's Gyn/Ecology (134). In her conclusion, she devotes a paragraph to women of color who are "beginning to articulate their own experience"; the only example she provides is the work of Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis (142). Bell Hooks, one of the few who has attempted to analyze the intersections of race, class, and gender, is buried in a footnote (149n15).

Ruthven cites Lacan twelve times and psychoanalysis seventeen times, but mentions Angela Davis and Gloria Hull only once on the same page (19). Otherwise, race and class are ignored.
In her article, "Piecing and Writing," Elaine Showalter, the only one of the contributors to *The Poetics of Gender* to mention race, identifies the patchwork quilt as "one of the most central images in this new feminist lexicon" and quilting as "an art that crossed racial, regional, and class boundaries," yet she does not support or complicate her thesis with any examples of literature by women of color, not even the obvious choice of Alice Walker (224-5). The irony of her inclusion in this Francophone volume, is subtly acknowledged by Showalter, long and often a harbinger of the dangers of Lacanian criticism, when she describes herself as a Pepperidge Farm croissant in the *Maison Française*. She promises, but does not deliver, "a downhome, downright Yankee historical approach" (222).

In "Difference on Trial," Domna Stanton notes, but does not correct, the lack of socio-historical context in the French feminist debates (176).

This is also the single reference to race in *Mother Tongue, Father Time* by Alette Olin Hill. *Language, Gender, and Society*, Barrie Thorne et al, contains one essay which addresses race: "Linguistic Options and choices for Black Women in the Rural South." Barbara Eakins and R. Gene Eakins' *Sex Differences in Human Communication* does not acknowledge race or class.

Heilbrun also excludes from the World War II poets, although she does not say so, Gwendolyn Brooks.

The single reference to a woman of color is to Hurston's "glamorous garb" (327).

Neither do the women of color appear in *Madwoman in the Attic*. Gilbert and Gubar mention women writers of color on sixteen separate pages of their 320 pp. *No Man's Land, Vol. I*, but they do not come to terms with the
issues of class, race, nationality, and historicity and their inter-relationships with gender. Although Gilbert and Gubar do include black women writers in the "canon"—The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women—they do not include any Hispanic writers. Tey Diana Rebolledo told me that when she communicated her concern about this omission to the editors, they explained that there were no Hispana writers who merited inclusion.

In "Ceremonies of the Alphabet," Gilbert and Gubar assert that ethnic and lesbian writers suffer from "a double dispossession," but then they go on to generalize about the "alphabetic anxiety" and "linguistic fantasies of female artists" without distinguishing between their examples of Atwood, Cather, Cota-Cardena, Hurston, Levertov, and Woolf (31). Interestingly, the conclusion about "double dispossession" is omitted from Chapter Five of No Man's Land, Vol. I, which is the revised version of this article. In "Sexual Linguistics: Women's Sentence, Men's Sentencing" (Chapter Five), the authors make no allowance for racial distinctions among women writers.

In Essentially Speaking, Diana Fuss argues that, like "the female subject, the black subject begins with double consciousness" (95). Clearly Fuss does not conceive of a subject who is both black and female.

See also Suzanne Juhasz who claims that "the black woman suffers from not a double but a triple bind" (Naked and Fiery Forms 145). In Writing Beyond the Ending, Rachel Blau DuPlessis casts a wider net: black, colonial, Canadian, working class, and lesbian writers face "double marginalization" (33). This conveniently seems to cover almost all the women writers currently under discussion in feminist criticism. It does not, of course, take into account the
woman writer who is all of the above; she is presumably marginalized to the fifth power and must reside somewhere in outer space.

57 Marianne Hirsch is one of the few white critics to have touched on the differences between white and black women's attitude toward and use of language: "Unlike so many contemporary white feminist writers who define their artistic identity as separate from or in opposition to their mothers, black writers have recently been insisting on what Mary Helen Washington identifies as "the connection between the black woman writer's sense of herself as part of a link in generations of women, and her decision to write" (Mother/Daughter Plot 177).

In her "Afterword" to Daughters and Fathers, Carolyn Heilbrun draws a conclusion that is "not likely to be granted by many": that the black father's "failure to perform his nuclear or Freudian role has aided the daughters" (421).

58 As Alice Walker has written: "It is to my mother--and all our mothers who were not famous--that I went in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the black woman has inherited, and that pops out in wild and unlikely places to this day" (Our Mother's Gardens 238-9).

59 As Barbara Christian points out in her critique of Foucault's "Fantasia of the Library" and Thiebaux's feminist revision of it: "Most of my black sisters and brothers would not even have gotten in the library, or if some of them did, like the parlour maid in Jane Eyre, they'd be dusting the books... 100 years ago, I would not even have been conceived of as a reader, might in fact have been killed for trying" (Black Feminist Criticism ix).

60 As Hortense J. Spillers has argued in "The Permanent Obliquity of an In[pha]llibly Straight," that, by the laws of the North American Slave Code, "the
African father is figuratively banished" (159). Ellison's Invisible Man is, Spillers says, about "the failure of phallic signification, not its fulfillment" (168).

For the starting point of his argument on the historical powerlessness of the black man to name himself and his offspring and its literary reflection, Kimberly Bentston quotes Malcolm X interrogating a black male academic: "Brother Professor, do you know what they call a black man with a Ph.D.?” "Nigger,” Malcolm explains (151).

Although black women have been the most powerless group in our entire society, they have,” Gerda Lerner has argued, "higher status within their own group than do white women in white society” (xxiii-xxiv).

"In the social gatherings of black people, black women have always been predominant," according to Maya Angelou. "White men say to white women . . . I don't really need you to run my institutions," but "black women have never been told this (Tate 27).

Angela Davis has made a similar claim for the equality of black women and men, which she attributes to the levelling influence of slavery. Because "the alleged benefits of the ideology of femininity did not accrue to her," the slave woman "was not sheltered or protected . . . . She was also there in the fields, alongside the man, toiling under the lash from sun-up to sundown" (7).

Roseann P. Bell et al have taken their title, Sturdy Black Bridges, from Carolyn Rodgers poem, "It is Deep" (184). This idea is also reflected in the title of This Bridge Called My Back.

These differences are further complicated by the fact that many of these writers, like most other Americans, are actually multicultural: i.e., the "black" writer Alice Walker has roots in Cherokee and Anglo-Irish as well as in African
cultures; "Native American" Louise Erdrich is three-quarters German and Norwegian-American and one-quarter Chippewa; and Paula Gunn Allen is Lebanese-American as well as Laguna and Sioux; Cherrie Moraga has a Chicana mother and an Anglo-American father; Aurora Levins Morales is Puerto Rican and Jewish.

64See also Barbara Johnson's "Metaphor and Metonymy in Their Eyes": "The process of de-universalization," as Barbara Johnson has noted, "can never, universally, be completed" (218).
CHAPTER III
THE (T)RACE OF DIFFERENCE; THE RACE FOR THEORY

This is about Weseucechak. He was out thieving things. He was thieving words this time. He'd been doing this for a long time, since long ago. People have to work hard to get the words back.

Howard Norman

The naming of the northeast coast of North America . . was rhetorical warfare . . . Since the earliest colonial period, the history of North America has been one of cross-cultural conflict that included a battle of rhetorics, of words, of images—a true war of and for poetic dominance.

Juan Bruce-Novoa

The universality of the belief that correct English is the only language of American truth has made language an instrument of cultural imperialism. The minority experience does not yield itself to accurate or complete experience in the white man's language.

Frank Chin, Jeffrey Chan, Lawson Inada, and Shawn Wong

Logocentrism marched arm in arm to delimit black people in perhaps the most pernicious way of all: to claim that they were subhuman, that they were 'a different species of men,' as Hume put it so plainly, because they could not ‘write' literature.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

There's no racism without language.

Jacques Derrida

50
Feminists are not the only ones, it seems, to have been colonized by the great white fathers and converted to the religion of poststructuralism. Derrida's critique of logocentrism—in particular his characterization of it as a Western phenomenon—has cast a new light on non-Western literatures and their American descendants. Along with women's literature and feminist criticism, deconstruction promises to transport these other marginalized literatures—and their critics—closer to the center of literary studies.

Since T. S. Eliot, the Western canon has been defined as a closed set of texts that speak to the "human" condition and to each other in formal patterns of repetition and revision. New Criticism "bracketed" questions of race, "along with all sorts of other 'unseemly' or 'untoward' notions about the composition of the literary work of art."6 "The question of the place of texts written by the Other," was "suspended or silenced by a discourse in which the canonical and noncanonical stand as the ultimate opposition" ("Writing" 2).

But now it appears that race, which "has been an invisible quantity, a persistent yet implicit presence," is achieving some visibility in literary criticism. Contemporary critical theories, some believe, have cleared a narrative space within which it is now possible for critics of "noncanonical" literatures to ask: "What importance does 'race' have as a meaningful category in the study of literature and the shaping of literary theory?" ("Writing" 2-4).

"We must," Henry Louis Gates argues, "determine how critical methods can effectively disclose the traces of ethnic differences in literature." In his own
African-American tradition, this means to Gates isolating "the signifying black difference through which to theorize about the so-called discourse of the Other" ("Writing" 15). Echoing Julia Kristeva, Gates asks: How does a speaker "posit a 'black self' in the very Western languages in which blackness itself is a figure of absence, a negation?" The trope of blackness in Western discourse has," he claims, "signified absence at least since Plato." Gates is urging, therefore, that critical attention be turned "to that which has been most repressed: the language of the black text" ("Jungle" 6).

In this manifestation of poststructuralism, race, not gender, is privileged as "extreme otherness," "the ultimate difference." The flipside of the feminist analysis, this theory does not integrate issues of race, class, and gender any more successfully. Just as poststructural feminist critics, in their quest for the essential "Woman," have denied and obscured the significant differences among women, so, too, poststructuralist critics of ethnic traditions have pursued the essence of "the race" at the expense of specifying differences among the individual members. And just as this brand of feminist critic ultimately deconstructs the very subject she sets out to illuminate, these ethnic critics paradoxically erase the racial self, dismissing it as a metaphor in the language of the colonizer. Both schools of critics are locked into binary oppositions which condemn them to the status of "other" and banish them to the margins of academic inquiry.
Although critics of Arabian, Asian, Indian, Palestinian, Spanish, Puerto-Rican, Native American, Asian-American, Chicano, Appalachian, gay literature—and no doubt others—have adopted poststructuralist approaches, the most highly developed argument for the relevance of (post)structuralist theory to the literary analysis of race has come from African and African-American critics.\textsuperscript{9} Sunday O. Anozie, "a veritable sub-Saharan Roland Barthes," pioneered (post)structuralist theories of black literature.\textsuperscript{10} "Integrating a structuralist framework with a conceptual framework of negritude will serve," Anozie has argued, "not only to revitalize but also to provide negritude with the one thing it so far lacks—a scientific method of inquiry" (105-6).\textsuperscript{11} "No adequate sociological theory of African literature," Anozie goes so far as to say, "can be formulated outside a framework of structuralism."\textsuperscript{12}

Nigerian playwright, poet, novelist, and critic, Wole Soyinka was exposed to "the gospel of the New Fiction from across the Channel" while a student at Leeds, and "it did not take long for me to realize that I had stumbled on a perfect paradigm for the social reality of the radical shift in critical language in my own African community" (27-8). Soyinka declares Barthes, whom he identifies as "a demolition agent of bourgeois mythologies," "our elected pointer" (54).

In the United States, it is most notably Henry Louis Gates, Jr. who, following the lead of his African colleagues, has championed poststructuralist approaches to marginalized literatures and has almost single-handedly forged an association between "race,' writing, and difference."\textsuperscript{13} "For non-Western, so
called noncanonical critics, getting the 'man off your eyeball' means using the most sophisticated critical theories and methods available to reappropriate and to define our own 'colonial' discourses" ("Writing" 14). The most sophisticated theories, according to Gates, indeed the only theories appropriate to the study of black literature, it would seem, are (post)structuralist. "

Because interpretative practices are, according to Gates, culture-specific, temporal-specific, and text-specific (Monkey xxii), African-Americans must ground their criticism in a "black cultural matrix" ("Blackness" 285). Black critics must "step out of the discourse of the white masters and speak in the critical language of the black vernacular" ("Talk" 8). "I once thought it our most important gesture to master the canon of criticism, to imitate, and apply it," Gates admits, but now he believes that "we must turn to the black tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to our literatures" ("Writing" 13). The jury is still out, however, on whether Gates' current critical strategy is an innovation or just a consummate imitation.

Just as poststructuralism has aroused some suspicion in feminist circles because it is perceived to be a male system of thought, it has been challenged by some ethnic critics as a European system which is, therefore, inappropriate as a foundation for the study of non-Western literatures. "Everything in [Anthony Appiah's] training, my thought, and my [African-American] culture resists the desire, which pervades much of contemporary American culture, to be Derridean" (127). The difficulties with this methodology arise, Appiah argues, because of the "attempt to mediate between Europe and Africa." The "sinister line" interwoven
in the poststructuralist critical text is "the post-colonial legacy which requires us to show that African literature is worthy of study precisely (but only) because it is fundamentally the same as European literature" (145). Appiah questions Anozie's adoption of Saussure as "Father" and wonders whether this European "parentage is not more burden than privilege" (130-1).

Despite the fact that theorists like Gates have called for a vernacular model of African-American criticism, their own writing is rife with specialized critical jargon. Houston Baker, one of the leading poststructuralist African-American critics himself, has characterized "Race, Writing, and Difference" as lacking "real side' referentiality and present-day political sensitivity" ("Caliban" 381). Gates makes clear that he does not intend to practice his own theory when he replies: "No, Houston, there are no vernacular critics collected here . . . . Todorov can't even hear us, Houston, when we talk his academic talk, how he gonna hear us if we 'talk that talk,' the talk of the black idiom" ("Talk" 409).15

Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon also object to the gap between poststructuralist theory and socio-historical reality. The inability of deconstructionists to analyze race is demonstrated, they say, in Derrida's "Racism's Last Word."16 Derrida, they argue, reduces "apartheid" to a word which he severs from its historical context. "Paradoxically, what is most absent from Derrida's essay is an attentiveness to racial and class difference" (352). An alternative theoretical approach is required, they conclude, and "such favored monoliths of poststructuralism as 'logocentrism' must be abandoned" (353).
But what is missing from all these analyses is attentiveness to gender. Remarkably, Gates seems to have escaped criticism for his failure to integrate an analysis of gender with his analysis of race. Even feminist critics who have expressed wariness of poststructuralism have praised and/or befriended Gates.\textsuperscript{17} In contrast to many other black male writers and critics, Gates has courted black women writers. Recently, Gates has edited the Schomburg Library thirty-volume collection of nineteenth-century black women writers as well as an anthology of black feminist criticism. In his introduction to Reading Black, Reading Feminist, Gates heaps praise on black feminist critics and even acknowledges "the important work of such activist-intellectuals as Barbara Smith and Angela Davis" (8). Diplomatically, Gates describes Michele Wallace's inflammatory Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman as "a signal intervention in the generation of the contemporary black woman's literary movement" (10). "Having learned from some of the early missteps of both the black nationalist and women's movements," Gates' latest publication reflects, he says, "an embracive politics of inclusion" (8).

Mindful of the highly publicized antagonisms between men and women in the black community, Gates has adopted the role of mediator, emphasizing unity and commonality. "Much has been made--too much," according to Gates, "of the supposed social animosities between black men and women and the relations between the commercial success of the black women's literary movement and the depiction of black male sexism. Perhaps some media commentators have been titillated by the notion of a primal black fratricide-sororicide" (Reading Black 2).\textsuperscript{18} Determined not to allow his community to fall prey to a strategy of divide
and conquer, Gates has adopted the role of peacekeeper and developed a theory which appears to integrate—among others—Ishmael Reed and Alice Walker, who have come to represent the two poles of the gender debate within the African-American literary community.

Gates maintains that there is no conflict between African-American and feminist criticism; he, in fact, encourages feminist critics of all colors to model their own practice on his poststructuralist theory of African-American literature. Although Gates insists that "signifyin(g)," which he defines as a specific linguistic practice within the black community that forms the basis for the African-American literary tradition, is not a gender-specific rhetorical game" ("Blackness" 290), he himself provides ample evidence to the contrary.

The African discourses upon which he founds his theory are, Gates claims, "truly genderless, offering feminist literary critics a unique opportunity to examine a field of texts, a discursive universe, that escaped the trap of sexism inherent in Western discourse" (Monkey 30). But Gates' assumption that sexism is unique to Western cultures is highly questionable, particularly in light of his own description of the discourses in question: Fon and Yoruba.

From the Fon and Yoruba cultures of Benin and Nigeria, Gates derives the central symbol of his theory: Esu-Elegbara or, as he is known in the New World, "the Signifying Monkey." Esu, whose most direct Western kinsman is Hermes, is Gates' trope of literary revision, the figure for the black literary critic. The Signifying Monkey is "he who dwells at the margins of discourse," "he who wrecks havoc upon the signified" (52). Sophisticated enough to be aware that his
use of the pronoun "he" might raise some feminist eyebrows, Gates reassures us that "each time I have used the masculine pronoun for the referent Esu . . . I could just have properly used the feminine" (29). "Despite the fact that I have referred to him in the masculine" and "despite his remarkable penis feats," Esu, Gates maintains, is "genderless" (29). 19

But it unclear how Esu's signification, which is manifested in a "phallic dance of generation, of creation, of translation," might possibly be construed as "genderless" (20). Esu's role, Gates explains, is 'as the perpetually copulating copula" (26). "As promiscuous as divinely possible, Esu . . . signifies 'promiscuous exchange (or writing)'" (42). 20 The related figure of Legba, "the divine linguist," is also described as "a living copula" and "hugely oversexed and therefore not to be trusted with women" (27). Clearly, within this mythological system, male sexuality is not incidental to language development; it is the source and the essence of it.

Gates sets the tone for Black Literature & Literary Theory with an epigraph from Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo, the text which, he explains, stands at the center of his theory of African-American signifying:

Son, these niggers writing. Profaning our sacred words. Taking them from us and beating them on the anvil of Boogie-Woogie, putting their black hands on them so that they shine like burnished amulets. Taking our words, son, these filthy niggers and using them like they were god-given pussy (1).
For Gates, the significance of this quotation lies in its "intertextuality" with C.L.R. James' "splendid work of criticism," Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways, which Gates, in turn, connects to Wole Soyinka's Madmen and Specialists, both of which were composed in prison: simultaneous acts of writing and acts of courage and self-defense, and, therefore, Gates argues, paradigms for the African-American text.

But to the woman reader, the epigraph is an immediate signal that this "jungle"--the site of Gates' criticism--is for her hostile territory. Not only is "nigger" understood here to be synonymous with "black man," but the black's acquisition of language is equated with rape, clearly not a metaphor with which women writers will readily identify. Speaker and speech are defined as male, and the word--the cultural currency or exchange unit between men, which the black man must steal away from the white man who has falsely appropriated it as his god-given property--is defined as female, or even more reductively, "pussy." Such a system of signification, which reduces the woman to an object or a sign for which men compete, obviously precludes female subjectivity and speech. "Mumbo Jumbo" refers, as Gates explains without comment in another epigraph, to a Mandingo language "entirely unknown to the women, being only spoken by the men" in order to "keep the women in awe." If the men were to discover that the women had deciphered this language, "they would certainly murder them" (Monkey 217).

As an "especially accurate" example of the practice of black signifying, Gates offers H. Rap Brown's verbal display of phallic power and privilege: "They
call me Rap the dicker the ass kicker / The cherry picker the city slicker the titty licker . . . I'm seeing a whole lot of ass but I ain't taking no shit" (Monkey 72-3). The Monkey tales, Gates admits, "generally have been recorded from male poets in predominantly male settings such as barrooms, pool halls, and street corners," and "recorded versions have a phallocentric focus" (54).

Evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, Gates still maintains that "signifying can be undertaken with equal facility and effect by women as well as men" (Monkey 54). Believing that she lends support to his thesis, Gates cites Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, the first scholar (apart from Hurston), according to Gates, to record and explicate female signifying rituals (72). Having studied the language behaviors of black male and female adolescents and adults, Mitchell-Kernan concludes that the verbal dueling and insults typically associated with black males playing "the dozens" is only one aspect of a much more complex practice of signifying (54).

Whereas her colleagues studied lower-class male language use, then generalized from this limited sample, Mitchell-Kernan's data, Gates notes, are derived from a sample "more representative of the black speech community" (80). But Mitchell-Kernan's broader sample results in her observation that "both the sex and the age of the linguist's informants 'may slant interpretation,'" a conclusion which actually undermines Gates' contention that gender is irrelevant to the study of black language and literature (80). Focussing on the equality of male and female verbal power, Gates ignores the issue of quality and begs the question of whether black men and women use language or "signify" differently.
The few examples of female signifying which Gates does offer also undermine rather than support his argument for a "genderless" theory of African-American literature. Chapter Five of *Signifying Monkey*, "Zora Neale Hurston and the Speakerly Text," begins with epigraphs from Frederick Douglass and Zora Neale Hurston. The first is from Douglass' apostrophe to the ships in Chesapeake Bay:

Our house stood within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of the freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition . . . . "You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave!" (170).

The second, from Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Gates argues, is meant to "signify" upon the first:

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns
his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked
by death by Time. That is the life of men.

Now, women forget all those things they
don't want to remember, and remember
everything they don't want to forget. The dream
is the truth. Then they act and do things
accordingly (170).

The most striking thing about these passages, of course, is the distinction which
Hurston makes (and Douglass fails to make) between the male and female subject.
Gates is primarily concerned with Hurston's revision of two tropes which, he
argues, are central to the African-American literary tradition: the "Talking Book"
and the chiasmas. Although he notes that, in her revision of Douglass, Hurston
makes a distinction between male desire, which she represents metonymically, and
female desire, which she represents metaphorically (172), Gates still does not
acknowledge the possibility that signifying might be practiced differently by
women and men.

Hurston is the only woman writer Gates considers in "The Blackness of
Blackness," but he devotes a chapter of The Signifying Monkey to Alice
Walker.24 The Color Purple, Gates argues, is an example of African-American
intertextuality, which, in this case, he traces between Walker, Hurston, and
Jackson (Monkey 257). Parenthetically, Gates observes that a passage in which
Shug tells Celie that "You have got to git the man off your eyeball before you can
see anything a'tall" constitutes "an important feminist critique of the complex
fiction of male domination," but he quickly returns to further developing his own
critique of black signifying. "Getting the man off your eyeball" is, of course, the
same expression Gates uses in "Writing 'Race'" to describe the role of the
noncanonical critic, but Gates' concern is not male domination (Race 14). To
Gates, "the man" represents the white power structure, of which women are also
a part. To Walker, however, "the man" represents the male power structure,
which includes black men as well as white.

Significantly, to the extent that Gates does acknowledge "male
domination," he reduces it to a "fiction." But for women, most especially for Celie,
male domination has been experienced as a painful reality and most certainly not
a fiction. Walker's goal in The Color Purple is to concretize the horrors of male
domination; the "fiction" she deconstructs is male superiority. On some level
Gates understands and superficially acknowledges that both Hurston and Walker
are engaged in "critiquing what we might think of as 'male writing,"' but Gates
himself never critiques or even grants the existence of male discourse (Monkey
206).25

Despite the fact that he takes pains to subsume women writers and
feminist critics under the umbrella of his literary theory, Gates, like his
predecessors and colleagues, frequently conflates the black tradition with the
black male tradition. Gates culminates Black Literature & Literary Theory with
a quote from W.E.B. DuBois, which he does not qualify or revise, equating "the
history of the American Negro"--described as a "seventh son"--with "this strife, this
longing to attain self-conscious manhood" ("Blackness" 317).
In establishing the history of the African-American tradition, Gates quotes Thomas Hamilton's 1859 *Anglo-African Magazine* article: "[black people], in order to assert and maintain their rank as men among men, must speak for themselves" and counter the racist "endeavor to write down the negro as something less than a man" (Monkey 173). By inserting, in brackets, "black people," Gates seems to be suggesting that "men" can be read as inclusive of "men and women"; instead he forges an equivalence between the generic "people" and Hamilton's obviously gender-specific "man."

Gates identifies the originators of the African-American literary tradition as five male authors of slave narratives ("Writing" 12). He tries to explicate *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and situate its author Zora Neale Hurston in relation to a black literary tradition which he also defines as entirely male: Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Jean Toomer, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and Ishmael Reed ("Blackness" 295). Melville's *Confidence Man* and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are included as antecedent texts to *Their Eyes*, but Gates does not identify a single female predecessor. Gates' description of "the classic black narrative" as "the questing protagonist's journey into the heart of whiteness" clearly excludes stories by black women which, in contrast to those by black men, have almost always focussed on the dynamics within the black community rather than a confrontation with the white community ("Blackness" 295).

Gates' theory of African-American literature originated from, as he explains, a close reading of two male authors: Ralph Ellison and Ishmael Reed
In its early stages, Gates' theory revolved around the "triangle of influence" formed by Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison. In *Signifying Monkey*, however, he redefines "the cardinal points of a triangle of influence" as Hurston, Wright, and Ellison (184). Gates inserts Hurston in his previously all-male triangle of influence, even though "no two authors in the tradition are more dissimilar than Hurston and Wright" (*Monkey* 183).

The experience of editing *Reading Black, Reading Feminist* may have raised Gates' consciousness to some extent. In his introduction to this anthology, Gates acknowledges that the triangle of Wright, Baldwin, and Ellison belongs to (what he seemed previously to deny the separate existence of) "the black male tradition" (2). But Gates still defines black women's writing as a subset of the black (male) tradition: a "tradition within a tradition" (2). One is forced to wonder, however, how much Gates learned from the experience of editing the Schomberg Library collection when he characterizes (in 1990) the black female literary voice as "resoundingly new" (*Reading Black* 2). Gates would have done well to have read more carefully Mary Helen Washington's contribution to *Reading Black*: "The Darkened Eye Restored: Notes Toward a Literary History of Black Women."

In this essay, Washington objects to critics who have treated Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha*, when they have deigned to acknowledge it at all, as if it "stood alone" (31). Reading reviews of this novel, Washington "was struck not only by their resistance to the deeper meaning in *Maud Martha* but by their absolute refusal to see Brooks' novel as part of any tradition in Afro-American or
mainstream American literature" (32). "Without exception," Washington notes, "Afro-American women writers have been dismissed by Afro-American literary critics until they were rediscovered and reevaluated by feminist critics" (34).  

Although Gates does not, as do most poststructuralist theorists of race, ignore gender altogether, he does, like them, hierarchicalize differences. Just as white feminist critics normally privilege gender as the original and most significant difference, so, too, Gates privileges race as "the ultimate trope of difference" ("Writing" 5). The black African is, according to Gates, the "extreme" Other ("Writing" 5). "That which has been most repressed" is "the language of the black text" ("Jungle" 6).  

Race is the ultimate difference because, Gates contends, "it is so very arbitrary in its applications. The biological criteria used to determine 'difference' in sex simply do not hold when applied to 'race'" ("Writing" 5). Race, Gates argues, is a "fiction," a metaphor, a linguistic construct of European cultures. Race is, therefore, put under "erasure"; Gates put quotation marks around it in his title. But I wonder, along with Harold Fromm, why "race" is the only word put in quotation marks. "Why not every single word in the entire issue of Critical Inquiry," Fromm asks. "For to refer, it seems, is to colonize, to take things over for one's own brutal use, to turn everything else into a mere Other" (396).  

Race, according to Gates, is a cultural and, hence, "arbitrary" designation, while sex (which is not put in quotation marks) is a natural, and presumably necessary, category. But Gates is standing on shaky biological ground here: in what sense are the physical differences between men and women any more "real"
or "essential" than the physical differences between Caucasians, Africans, Asians, etc.? What Gates, along with Appiah, discounts as "mere 'gross' features of hair, bones, and skin" are not discountable. Subtle academic distinctions are, Houston Baker argues, "ultimately unhelpful in a world where New York cab drivers scarcely ever think of mitochondria before refusing to pick me up" ("Caliban's Triple Play" 384-5).

Gates is caught in a false dichotomy; he erroneously assumes that racial differences are either a function of nature or they are a function of culture, but obviously both race and sex have biological as well as sociological aspects. Neither sex nor race can be reduced to ideological fictions; both have bases in material reality. Theorists of race need to develop a distinction parallel to the one, central to feminist theory, between sex—the biological classification of male or female—and gender—the sexual identities (i.e., "masculine" or "feminine") which are shaped by society/chosen (or not) by individuals.

But if, as Gates insists, racial differences do not exist, then how can they be inscribed in literary texts? And, conversely, if sex differences are not culturally constructed, then (how) can they be deconstructed by literary critics? By adopting a poststructuralist methodology, Gates, finally, is trapped within the binary system of logocentric thought which he sought to dismantle.
3.

The "pioneering" work of Houston Baker and Henry Louis Gates "suggested new directions in Afro-American criticism" to Elliott Butler-Evans. "But both scholars," he notes, "stressed racial discourse and generally downplayed the ideological issues generated by the representation of Black women in the narratives of Black males and the strategies of self-representation that characterized the writings of Black women" (16). "What was generally missing," according to Butler-Evans, "were attempts to examine the application of theory to the texts of Black women writers." His study, Race, Gender, And Desire, was intended to fill that "void" (17).32

Butler-Evans questions the application of poststructuralist theory, but, unfortunately, not the theory itself. Although he foregrounds women writers, Butler-Evans, like Gates, separates and hierarchicalizes gender and race. Race and gender are, in Butler-Evans's analysis, "warring factions" (68), "contending desires" (187), but curiously this conflict is only experienced by black women. Black men have no gender in Butler-Evans's analysis; they are simply black. "Race-specific narratives that highlight a gendered subject"—i.e., stories by and about black women—"require the fusion of two discourses" (19). The black woman writer, in contrast to her male peers, must "pursue a strategy that attempts to resolve tensions between the two discourses" (19).33

Following Lacan and Derrida, Butler-Evans defines "self" as male and "other" as female, "text" as dominant male discourse and "sub-text" as repressed female desire. The role of black women writers is to fill in "the blind spots of a
largely male discourse" (35). Through the "insertion of a Black female subject" (40), the "Black" aesthetic is "modified" (35). Black women enter the "racial discourse" through "gaps" and "disrupt" its "primary focuses" of "literariness" and black community "by insertion of feminine desire" (89).

Butler-Evans' assumption of a conflict between the black (female, but not male) self and the black community apparently derives from the Black Power movement of the 1960s, which he privileges as the "master text" (21), certainly not from a reading of black women writers themselves. The first chapter of Butler-Evans' book, "Producing the Signs of Race: Self-Fashioning in Black Aesthetic Discourse," presumably intended to provide a socio-historical context for his study of black women writers, contains not a single reference to a woman. One is forced to ponder whether: a) black women are not part of the race; b) black women do not possess selves; and/or c) black women have not engaged in aesthetics. The black aesthetic movement focussed on "Black Power," Butler-Evans explains, and was "therefore largely male-centered" (32). Power, like aesthetics, is apparently male.34

When Butler-Evans uses terms like "Black aesthetics," "Black power," "Black experience," "Black 'reality,"" "Black nation," as he does throughout his book to refer to the activities and perceptions of black men, he does not use qualifiers. His references to black women, however, are always specifically coded as "women writers," "feminine desire," "feminine counterdiscourse," etc. Within Butler-Evans' system of signification, women are obviously the marked, and men the unmarked, case.
In his discussion of Zora Neale Hurston, Butler-Evans contrasts Hurston with her male contemporaries who were emphasizing the politics of the "racial struggle" (42). By focusing on the "private and personal," Hurston "undermines," according to Butler-Evans, "Black writing of the time" (44). In pursuing this line of argument, Butler-Evans constructs a syllogism with a disturbing conclusion: 1) Black writers focus on the political; 2) Hurston focuses on the personal; therefore, 3) Hurston is not a black writer.

There is no doubt that black women are central to Alice Walker's thinking and writing: "For me," Butler-Evans quotes Walker, "black women are the most fascinating creatures on earth" (122). And yet, even in his reading of Walker's novels, Butler-Evans considers "his-story" central and "her-story" marginal. Walker's "focus on a general racial history" places her, according to Butler-Evans, "within the tradition of Black male fiction," but she is "also concerned with the specific experiences of Black women" (125). Obviously black women have no place in black history; they are relegated to the realm of "myth."35

The Sojourner tree story, a parable about female silence and speech, which clearly stands at the center of Walker's Meridian, is interpreted by Butler-Evans as a "digression from the larger struggle of the civil rights movement," a "myth as an alternative to history" (143). Walker's telling of Mem's story in The Third Life of Grange Copeland is, Butler-Evans claims, "a move away from the original ideological purpose" of documenting "dehumanization" (131, 139).37 In this analysis, Walker, as author, loses control; her story gets away from her. A
more credible explanation would seem to be that telling Mem's story was Walker's purpose.38

The flaws in this line of reasoning result from Butler-Evans' subscription to two fundamental either-or fallacies: 1) that African-Americans are either black or female; and 2) that human activity is either political or personal. Black male writers were, according to Butler-Evans, representing the "heroic" exploits of black men, while Hurston "focused almost exclusively on the Black woman's quest for personal freedom" (45).39 Butler-Evans fails to recognize that the quests of both black women and men, whether or not they have taken place in the public arena, have been heroic and have had political causes and effects. Obviously, he has not been sufficiently aware of the feminist movement to have learned the lesson that many of us learned in the 1970's: the personal is not the antithesis of the political; the personal is political.

Throughout Race, Gender, and Desire, feminine "desire" is described as a "problem."40 For whom, one is moved to ask, does feminine desire constitute a problem? Surely not for black women, who obviously do not experience their gender as separate, let alone in conflict with, their race. Black women's "desire" or selfhood appears to be a problem for Butler-Evans, presumably because he, like the architects of the Black Power movement, believes it to be an obstacle in his quest for black manhood.41

In Butler-Evans poststructural analysis, "women become semiotic strategies, signs of suffering and oppression, rather than complex individuals with personal histories" (139). Because black female experience and history are
"unrepresentable," because the black woman is "a fictive construction generated by the ideological desires of a mythical community," she must be deconstructed (162). Cast in the "revolutionary" role of disrupting the logocentric discourse, the black woman is denied a discourse of her own. The black woman is thus reduced to a hole in the history of the "race."

4.

The "major theorists of race" are, according to Diana Fuss, Henry Louis Gates, Houston Baker, and Anthony Appiah.42 On the last page of her book on "Feminism, Nature & Difference," Fuss mentions and then dismisses feminist analyses of race because, she argues, "except for Hazel Carby and Hortense Spillers, black feminist critics have resisted poststructuralism" (95). Fuss does not consider that black feminists might have analyzed race from perspectives other than poststructuralism or that feminists of other colors might have analyzed race. Neither does she delve into the reasons why black women might be resistant to poststructuralism. Is there something about the theory itself which is inherently alienating to women of color? Or is it just the practice of poststructuralist criticism, as engaged in, for example, by white women and black men, which is problematic? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to examine the attempts on the part of women to apply poststructuralist theory to the study of race in literature.
Bell Hooks' Foucaultian reading of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* illustrates one of the most dangerous pitfalls of poststructuralist interpretations. Walker's novel, Hooks claims, reproduces the Victorian ideology "where female identity is constructed solely in relationship to sexuality, where sexual experience becomes the way in which a woman learns self-knowledge" (456). "Walker makes the powerful suggestion that sexual desire can disrupt and subvert oppressive social structure because it does not necessarily conform to social prescription, yet this realization is undermined by the refusal to acknowledge it as threatening--dangerous." Strangely, Hooks is disturbed by the absence of homophobia in the novel, and she invokes Mariana Valverde to argue that "lesbianism is thus robbed of its radical potential because it is portrayed as compatible with heterosexuality" (457). Loving partnerships between women are denied, in this analysis, material or historical reality. If lesbians do not play the role of logocentric spoilers, they are not allowed to play at all. The attempt to represent a black woman, in particular a black lesbian, as self--not other--is, in Hooks' analysis, bourgeois and reactionary.

Similarly, in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Gayatri Spivak argues that Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in contrast to that "cult text of feminism" *Jane Eyre*, represents a form of feminism "which does not reproduce the axioms of imperialism" (262). Christophine, Antoinette's black nurse, is "the first interpreter and named speaking subject" despite the fact that she remains "tangential to this narrative" (272). "No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self," Spivak claims, "because the project of imperialism has
always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self" (272). Both Spivak and Hooks are caught in the poststructuralist net of binary opposition: the "other" cannot achieve selfhood and is forever condemned to the margins of discourse.

Even Hortense Spillers, one of the few other black feminist critics to have embraced poststructuralism, seems lately to have experienced a change of heart. Spillers' earlier scholarly writing embodies all those traits of poststructural criticism that have come under fire: abstract thought, convoluted language, and elaborate diagrams which serve to obscure, for this reader at any rate, rather than illuminate the text under analysis.45 More recently, however, Spillers has herself expressed some doubts about the applicability of poststructuralism to the study of black women's writing.

In "An Order of Constancy," Spillers assumes a critical stance which is "neither fish nor fowl," "illegitimate" by current critical standards, she admits, because it is founded upon the assumption that "the literary text does point outside itself" (244). Spillers expresses uneasiness with the equation of the "feminine and the female body" and with the concept of "écriture féminine," a la Kristeva, which turns out, she realizes, to have "little to do with women in history" (247). Spillers recommends the "greatest caution" in supporting a "feminine writing" (261).

"Reading counter to the current" (268) and "risking an anachronism," Spillers asserts the historical "flesh-and-blood" female body (248). Textual analysis
alone is inadequate, she argues; knowledge of the "extra-text" of black women's history is necessary for the interpretation of African-American women's writing. "What seems to me a fairly complete breach between matters of feminist social theory and feminist metatheory appears beyond repair" (247).

Deborah McDowell objects to "the current wave of literary/theoretical sophistication" which calls into question the "naive" commonsense categories of "character," "protagonist," or "hero" (93-4). But the integrity of the black female self is not something which black women writers have been able to take for granted and not something, therefore, that they can or should now "deconstruct." Rather, the "consistent preoccupation of black female novelists throughout their literary history" has been, according to McDowell, "imagining the black woman as a 'whole' character." The critical concerns of black women's novels must, McDowell argues, "emerge organically from those texts, rather than to allow current critical fashion to dictate what those concerns should be."

The job of black feminist critics is, according to Barbara Christian, to remember and reconstruct their past and to listen to the vision and the language "created for us by our foremothers, by our sisters in the streets, the houses, the factories, the schools" ("Highs and Lows" 48). Some black feminist critics, however, have listened, instead, to "the new critic priests" who are "presiding at the altar" and have decreed that "the text was God, unstained by history, politics, experience, the world" (48). "The awareness that we too seek to homogenize the world of our Sisters, to fix ourselves in boxes and categories through jargon, theory, abstraction, is," Christian says, "upon us" (49).
Black feminists could not be heard by the critical establishment, according to Christian, unless they "talked their talk, which was specialized, abstract--on high ground. So we learned their language only to find that its character had a profound effect on the questions we thought, the images we evoked, and that such thinking recalled a tradition beyond which we had to move if we were to be included in any authentic dialogue" (48). "But as we look high, we might also look low," Christian suggests, "lest we devalue women in the world even as we define Woman. In ignoring their voices," Christian warns, "we may not only truncate our movement but we may also limit our own process until our voices no longer sound like women's voices to anyone" (51).

Barbara Johnson, who describes herself as a "white deconstructor," admits that poststructuralists, including herself, have failed to come to terms with the intersections of gender, race, and class. When she applies Mary Jacobus' question, "Is there a woman in this text?," to her own text, The Critical Difference, Johnson is forced to answer: "No."

For no book produced by the Yale School seems to have excluded women as effectively as The Critical Difference. No women authors are studied. Almost no women critics are cited. And, what is even more surprising, there are almost no female characters in any of the stories analyzed . . . . In a book that announced itself as
a study of difference, the place of the women is constantly being erased (39).

Between the publication of The Critical Difference (1980) and A World of Difference (1987), Johnson began to recognize that "my discussion of such differences was taking place entirely within the sameness of the white male Euro-American literary, philosophical, psychoanalytical, and critical canon," and "I began to ask myself what differences I was really talking about." Since then, Johnson has turned her attention to African-American literature: her current project, she announces, is to "re-referentialize the notion of difference so as to move the conceptual operations of deconstruction out of the realm of abstract linguistic universality" ("Thresholds" 317); her new scope is the "real world" (World 2). She points to a "semblance of a progression" within A World of Difference "from white male long-standingly canonical authors to white or black female authors who are rapidly being canonized even as I write" (4).

But Johnson's theory, which is fathered by Paul de Man and "mothered" by Stéphane Mallarmé, is still unable to come to terms with the true complexity of difference. "Deconstruction acquires gender," according to Johnson, in Chapter Four of World of Difference: "Gender Theory and the Yale School" (4). But all we learn in this chapter is--something which some of us had already suspected--that deconstruction has, in fact, failed to come to terms with gender. When Johnson does address herself to "the question of gender" she reduces it to "a question of language" (37). Another chapter written under the influence of this new consciousness of difference is devoted to defining Mallarmé as "primal parent,
pre-oedipal mother" (143). The author poses the rhetorical question that no doubt occurred to a few of her readers: "How can it be said that a male poet comes to play a maternal role in literary history? Why is the mother's part not taken by a woman?" (141). Because we are taught that men are powerful and women are not, Johnson concludes that "a man whose work consists of questioning . . . phallogocentrism . . . would somehow appear to fill the maternal role better, more effectively, than a woman" (141-2). A "mother" is a textual phenomenon: Johnson argues for consideration of mothers as "the subject of discourse rather than as the source of life or the object of desire and anger" (143).

When Johnson does finally attempt to apply poststructuralist theory to the interpretation of a black woman's text, the theory collapses under the strain. Johnson notes that both W.E.B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson, who argue that blacks experience double-consciousness, "assume without question that the black subject is male": "The black woman is totally invisible in these descriptions of the black dilemma" (World 166). If the black man's soul is divided in two, Johnson wonders, what can be said of the black woman's? Johnson performs the simple mathematical computation logically dictated by the theory and arrives at a "tetrapolar graph" of the black female psyche. The black woman, she claims, is divided into four quadrants, which "are constantly being collapsed into two" (167).

But what happens when one begins to take into account nationality, region, class, interracial subdivisions, etc.? How many poles can the diagram accommodate, and at what point does it cease to clarify and serve only to confound? "Ultimately," Johnson herself realizes, "this mapping of tetrapolar
differences is itself a fantasy of universality" (168). "Unification and simplification are fantasies of domination," she admits, "not understanding" (170). Although Johnson fails to arrive at an alternative method of schematizing difference, she succeeds in recognizing that there is a "world" of "difference" and that the attempt to categorize people and/or their literary productions according to race or sex may be futile and dangerous. "A woman's work is never done," Johnson concludes. "Penelope's weaving is nightly re-unraveled" (171).

5.

Is it possible--or even desirable--to arrive at an essential definition of "black" or "Native American" or "Chicano" literature? Have theorists of race succeeded in defining unique traditions? The "double consciousness" which Gates attributes to African-American literature has also been claimed by Elaine Showalter, among others, as a distinguishing characteristic of feminist criticism. When Barbara Bowen argues that the struggle for voice ("finding the authority to speak") is what signifies the difference between the Anglo- and the Afro-American traditions, she fails to consider Anglo-American women writers, who are characteristically engaged in this very same quest (187).50

Gates focuses on "signifying" as the unifying feature of African-American literature, but is not reacting to and revising one's literary predecessors what constitutes a literary tradition in any culture? Gates' trickster figure is found not
only in African-American folklore, but also in Native American and Hispanic cultures. The "black" music around which Houston Baker's theory of African-American literature revolves is also central to Martin Espada's analysis of Puerto Rican poetry (259). James Snead claims that the "cut," as derived from improvisational jazz, is the distinctive feature of African-American literature, but, in addition to Jean Toomer and Ishmael Reed, he illustrates his theory with the examples of Joyce, Faulkner, Woolf, Yeats, and Eliot (74). But isn't Snead describing a (post)modern phenomenon rather than defining a specific cultural practice? To date, no one seems to have carved out an identity which is unique to any particular ethnic tradition.

Have these critics who speak about the vernacular, but not in it, been reduced to a dream, an invention of an oral tradition because, as Fuss suggests, "for the professionalized literary critic, the vernacular has already been irrevocably lost?" (90). Is the romanticizing of his "oral roots," the poststructuralist strategy of the "Invisible Man" for achieving visibility within the academy? As Richard Oyama has commented about his own tradition of Japanese-American literature, "many Sansei and Yonsei find themselves in the predicament of being thoroughly Americanized yet desiring to reclaim their cultural past, however distant and elusive it might be" (255).

In a note, Gates admits that when he asked a colleague if, as a child, he had ever heard of the Signifying Monkey, he replied: "I never heard of the Signifying Monkey until I came to Yale and read about him in a book" ("Blackness" 318n13). Although he interprets this remark as facetious, Gates himself
learned about the Signifying Monkey from a book: "My supervisor at Cambridge, John Holloway, had forced me to read Frobenius's *The Voice of Africa*, and it was there that I first met Esu-Elegbara" ([Monkey](#) ix-x).

**Aztlán**—"the Chicano version of the homeland myth" in which "Chicanos were transformed into the heirs of the glorious Aztec tradition and became the seekers of a lost homeland"—was "invented," Juan Bruce-Novoa relates, by poet Alurista (237). Impelled by *Chicanismo,* the search for the lost unity of Aztlan is, according to John Crawford, "a gender influenced myth of heroic discovery" which is challenged by the emergence of La *Chicana* as poet, who brings with her "other images of our ancestral past—the figures of the grandmother and the mother as nurturing and sustaining forces, the home as the center of the world, and the artist as the synthesizer" (169).

Is the goal of these new poststructuralist theorists of race, as Gates proclaims in his introduction to *Black Literature & Literary Theory,* "opening up the canon?" ("Jungle" 24). Or is this really a power struggle with the white man over who draws the canonical boundaries and where? Chicano critics are, according to Bruce-Novoa, engaged in "rhetorical warfare," "a battle of rhetorics, of words, of images—a true war of and for poetic dominance" (227). Native Americanists are, Arnold Krupat reports, currently engaged in their own process of canonization; poststructuralist theory allows Native Americanists to "vie for authority and dominance in the eyes of an established and institutionally defined clerisy—the academic establishment" (113, 121). "Speaking the very same language and employing the shrewd methods of the overseers," many of these theoreticians
of race seem to be practicing a "hermeneutics of overthrow." But like the Russian revolution, this critical revolution seems doomed to fail, reproducing as it does, the politics of domination.
CHAPTER III NOTES

1"Wesucechak Becomes a Deer and Steals Language" 403.

2"Chicano Poetry" 227.

3"Introduction" to Aiieeeeel.

4"Talkin' That Talk," (408). Subsequent references to this work will be abbreviated as "Talk."

5"Racism's Last Word" (331).

6Gates, "Writing Race' and the Difference It Makes" (2-4). Subsequent references to this work will be abbreviated as "Writing."

7"Criticism in the Jungle," 7. Subsequent references to this work will be abbreviated as "Jungle."

8"The Blackness of Blackness," 315. This article is the first version of Gates' theory of the signifying monkey in African-American literature; the expanded version appeared as The Signifying Monkey. Subsequent references to these works will be abbreviated as "Blackness" and Monkey respectively.

9In addition to the essays in Race. Writing, and Difference on African, African-American, Native American, Palestinian, Arabian, Spanish, and Indian literatures, see also: Edward Said's Orientalism and Harris and Aguero, eds, A Gift of Tongues, especially Juan Bruce-Novoa's, "Chicano Poetry," Steve Abbott and Rudy Kikel's, "In Search of a Muse: The Politics of Gay Poetry," and P.J. Laska's, "Poetry at the Periphery."
Significantly, none of these critics integrates an analysis of gender with an analysis of race. In his introduction to "Race," Writing, and Difference, Gates notes that Gayatri Spivak, Hazel Carby, and Barbara Johnson "share a concern about the curious interrelationships between figures for sexual and racial Otherness" (17); what he does not acknowledge is that this concern is not shared by the other twenty-three contributors.

10 Gates describes Anozie this way in "Criticism in the Jungle," 16.

11 The négritude movement, which proclaimed the beauty of blackness and the richness of the African heritage, was founded in the 1930s by Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal, Aimé Césair of Martinique, and Leon Damas of Guyana, educated in France and still living there when they began attempting to revitalize their poetry with African materials. In "Survival Comes This Way: Contemporary Native American Poetry," Joseph Bruchac draws a connection between this Pan-African movement and the Pan-Indian movement now underway in the U.S. (203).

Similarly, in "Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture," James Snead has argued that only since and because of the advent of structural anthropology and linguistics can black culture be valued in positive terms (64).

12 Anozie uses the term "structuralism" broadly to include also what has come to be known as poststructuralism. He has high praise for Derrida and deconstructionists, "particularly at Yale" (117).

13 The controversial--as I shall discuss later--title which Gates, as editor, gave to the publication which resulted from the two special issues of Critical Inquiry 12:1 (Autumn 1985) and 13:1 (Autumn 1986) on race.
Another important influence on Gates was Jay Edwards, who combined Claude Lévi-Strauss' paradigmatic approach, Vladimir Propp's and Alan Dundes' syntagmatic approach, and Noam Chomsky's generative-transformational approach to study African-American folktales. In "Structural Analysis of the Afro-American Trickster Tale," Edwards describes "structural analysis as the key which unlocks the central meanings of all shared, complex forms of human culture" (81). See also Edwards' *The Afro-American Trickster Tale: A Structural Analysis*.

14 Part I. of *Black Literature* is entitled: "Theory: On Structuralism and Post-Structuralism." All seven of the articles classified as "theory" are authored by men; although a couple of them do refer incidentally to texts by women, none of them acknowledges gender as a factor in the writing or reading of black literature. On the other hand, more than half of the articles in the section on "Practice" are authored by women. This seems to be a perfect illustration of Elaine Showalter's two-tiered system of "hismeneutics" and "hermeneutics."

See also Arnold Krupat's "Post-Structuralism and Oral Literature," in which he urges "an openness based on the rather modern poststructuralist theory of the trace, with some supplementation from ancient wisdom" as a method of vying "for authority and dominance in the eyes of an established and institutionally defined clerisy," rescuing Native American literature from marginalism and restoring to it its previously "important status in the economy of cultural maintenance" (121-2).

Krupat admits that "to speak of post-structuralist theory in conjunction with Native American literatures may seem as odd as serving dog stew with sauce béarnaise," but, he argues, as students of oral cultures and traditions, Native
Americanists have (whether they know it or not) a natural affinity with poststructuralism which equates orality and textuality (113-114).

In "Chicano Literature," Carmen Tafolla maintains that although Chicanos "speak a common mythological language," the critical establishment is deaf to it. "With a critical base of study," she argues, "Chicano literature can no longer be ignored by those unfamiliar with its symbols and settings" (211).

Gates is referring to Tzvetan Todorov's essay "Race,' Writing, and Culture," in which Todorov accuses Gates of "reinstating what he himself referred to as the 'dangerous trope' of 'race'" (371).

McClintock and Nixon object to Kamuf's translation of Derrida's title: "The Last Word in Racism' might have been a preferable rendition" (339). Derrida dismisses McClintock and Nixon's critique: "Reading you, I very quickly realized that you had no serious objections to make to me. So I began to have the following suspicion: what if you had only pretended to find something to reproach me with in order to prolong the experience over several issues of this distinguished journal?" ('But Beyond' 335).

For example, Valerie Smith, Mary Helen Washington, Deborah McDowell, and Diana Fuss. In Essentially Speaking, Fuss defends Gates against charges of essentialism and conservatism (86). In "The Changing Same," McDowell characterizes Gates' "adaptations of the theory of intertextuality" to African-American texts as excellent; she does, however, rather timidly suggest that Gates "may not go far enough toward defining the Afro-American narrative tradition" since he does not examine, "in any thoroughgoing way, the place of Afro-
American female writers in the tradition as they define it" (115n40). In a note to "My Statue, My Self," Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has observed that "Gates's concept of the 'signifying monkey' opens the discussion but does not pay special attention to the blending of cultures in Afro-American women's imaginations" (201).

18 Following a lecture on "Race and Canon: An American Idea" which Gates delivered at Siena College on November 1, 1989, I questioned Gates about his lack of attention to gender; he explained that his motivations for ignoring distinctions between black men and women were political. He was unmoved by my observation that this is the same rationale that many white feminists use for ignoring race in their analyses and my suggestion that while his strategy of ignoring gender might seem politically expedient, it is not likely to result in a very accurate description of the spectrum of African-American literature.

19 If Gates could have used either "he" or "she" to refer to Esu, then he is obligated to explain why he chose "he," rather than merely state that he did. (He also uses "he" to refer to each member of his African-American hermeneutical triangle: the Monkey, Lion, and Elephant). If Gates had, in fact, meant to communicate genderlessness, he would have chosen the English pronoun which denotes that: "it."

20 Houston Baker's discussion of the trickster figure in "To Move Without Moving" also emphasizes his virility. Baker traces Ellison's symbolic use of the black phallus back to the African trickster tales as characterized by anthropologist Victor Turner: "Tricksters appear with exaggerated phallic characteristics: Hermes is symbolized by the herm or pillar, the club, and the ithyphallic statue;
Wakdjunkaga has a very long penis which has to be wrapped around him and put over his shoulder in a box; Eshu is represented in sculpture as having a long curved hairdress carved as a phallus." Like the phallic trickster, Baker argues, Ellison's Trueblood is a "cosmic creator, [un]bound by ordinary codes of social restraint. He is a being who ventures chaos in an outrageously sexual manner—and survives" (231).

These words, spoken by a character created by Reed, are twice removed from Gates, but choosing them to introduce his essay and his anthology clearly identifies them with the spirit of Gates' critical enterprise. Although Reed and Gates obviously do not share the (white male) speaker's contemptuous attitude toward the black man, they apparently accept and applaud the portrayal of him as a thief of language. Gates in no way tries to distance himself from the quotation or to place it within an ironic context.

Such a description calls to mind, of course, Eldridge Cleaver's equation of the rape of white women with black revolutionary praxis in Soul on Ice (14). Expressed in language, this philosophy seems to constitute "hermeneutical rape."

Also illuminating is Gates' analysis of Mumbo Jumbo's cover, designed by Reed, which consists of "repeated and reversed images of a crouching, sensuous Josephine Baker superimposed upon a rose" and counterposed with "a medallion depicting a horse with two riders." The doubled image of Baker and rose is "meant both to placate Legba [the critic] and to summon his attention and integrity in a double act of criticism and interpretation" ('Blackness of Blackness" 299-300). Although Gates fails to analyze the gender implications of this image,
it is clear that, once again, within the system of representation he describes, the reader (and writer) is defined as male, while the text is female.

In my Nov. 1989 conversation with Gates, he admitted to me that he was aware of, but chose not to acknowledge, the numerous black women who have noted in print what they perceive to be significant differences between black men's and women's language. He "had to do some digging" to find a black woman who could be used to argue for the generalizability of his theory to black women writers. That Mitchell-Keman fails to serve this function is less obvious in "The Blackness of Blackness," where Gates provides a very sketchy reference to Mitchell-Keman's study, than in The Signifying Monkey, where the description is more detailed.

Gates does mention Walker's name in "The Blackness of Blackness" when he explains that part of Ishmael Reed's significance lies in the critique of the Afro-American tradition embodied in his six novels, the effect of which has been to "clear" the "narrative space" which Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, among others, occupy (297).

Gates use of quotation marks around "male writing" implies that this distinction between male and female writing is fictional rather than actual.

Gates also conflates the racial and the male subject when he defines the "Other" in European cultures as "African, Arabic, Chinese, Latin American, Yiddish, or female" [my emphasis] ("Writing" 2). Similarly, Anozie equates black and male when he says: "only a black man . . . can understand what it really is to be a black" (119). Benston analyzes the "trope of 'nigger'" in terms of all male
characters by all male authors, in comparison to white male authors and their characters (157ff).

27 Although Gates is prepared to claim major novels by white male authors as antecedents of African-American texts by both men and women, nowhere does he acknowledge any "intertextuality" with white women authors, despite the fact that Walker, for example, has herself frequently cited numerous white (and other) women writers as influences on her work. Gates does identify Alice Walker as a successor to Hurston, and, in a note, Gates suggests a comparison between Hurston and Woolf, which he says he will explore in the sequel to *Signifying Monkey* (277n35).

28 Gates identified it as such in his Nov. 1989 Siena College address. From René Girard, Gates derives the concept of a "triangle of influence" which pervades his work. "The use of interlocking triangles as a metaphor for the intertextual relationships of the tradition," Gates explains, "is not meant to suggest any form of concrete, inflexible reality" (*Monkey* 270n49).

29 White men are not the only ones engaging in "critical cross-dressing." Some sort of a trend seems to be developing among black men, too: in addition to Gates editing the Schomberg Library collection and *Reading Black*, Amiri Baraka, whose feminism was never before in evidence, has also edited *Confirmations: Anthology of African-American Women Writers* (1983).

30 Washington seems to have served this function of feminist conscience for Gates, who notes, in his preface to *Signifying Monkey*, his regular correspondence with and help from Mary Helen Washington and Barbara Johnson (x-xi).
It is interesting to compare the prioritization implicit in the titles of Gates' *Reading Feminist, Reading Black* and Bell Hooks' *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*.

The "void" which Butler-Evans perceives is evidently a lack of *poststructuralist* analyses of black women's texts, since examples abound of feminist critical readings of black women's literature. Butler-Evans' own approach is "too 'objective," he says, to be considered feminist (17).

See also Selwyn R. Cudjoe's "Maya Angelou: The Autobiographical Statement Updated," where he argues that: "For Angelou, as for Morrison, the pain and suffering of black women flow like tributaries into the rivers of their general pain, with poignant demand that the black male be cognizant of their general pain" (304).

Butler-Evans apparently cannot conceive of female power; neither can he imagine a female power movement: "The broad-based political movement that provided the context for the Black Aesthetic did not exist," he says, "for Black feminist discourse" (37). Either he is unaware of or does not associate black women with the feminist movement, which has been ongoing in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century.

"Women's issues," Butler-Evans claims, "are often passed over or presented elliptically" by Alice Walker (149). The reader of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, according to Butler-Evans, "experiences [the women's stories] as largely elliptical and fragmented" (149). Toni Cade Bambara's "insertion of themes related to the desires of Black women and girls disrupts and preempts the stories'
primary focus on classic realism and nationalism" (92). And even, incredibly, in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, he identifies the stories of the Peace women as subordinate to the "dominant focus" of the black community (82). Butler-Evans' seems to assume that "the reader" as well as "the writer" perceive, as he does, female experience as peripheral to "human" experience.

Similarly, when Butler-Evans analyzes Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* in terms of Bakhtin's concept of dialogic vs. polyphonic structures, he claims that it is structured around a tension between the "authentic" discourse of Son, who represents the "race," and the "inauthentic" discourse of Jade, who represents "deracination" (154).

The "dehumanization" is understood to refer to Grange and Brownfield. By separating the oppression of black women from the theme of dehumanization, Butler-Evans is obviously excluding them from the human race.

Or at least part of it. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, "the larger historical picture," according to Butler-Evans, "becomes a containment strategy for the [female] subnarratives that constitute it" (138). But whose strategy is it to "contain" these narratives? Certainly it is not Walker's, whose objective, here and always, is obviously to set loose women and their words. Butler-Evans is unable to distinguish between the feminist writer's point of view and the point of view of the patriarchal culture she critiques.

Contained "within" and subordinate to Toni Cade Bambara's "dominant concern" with "the creation of a new political vision" is, according to Butler-Evans,
an "assertion of feminist desire" (185). Clearly Butler-Evans does not associate feminism—or, it would seem, any female belief or behavior—with politics.

40 In his discussion of Toni Cade Bambara's short story, "Raymond's Run," Butler-Evans even labels "female bonding" a "problem" (99).

41 As an example of a character who successfully resolves this conflict between the "specific articulations of women's lives" and the struggles of "the race" (70), Butler-Evans offers Pauline Breedlove of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Butler-Evans seems to idealize Pauline, who "obviously places race above any romanticized concept of sisterhood," for choosing to remain with her abusive black husband rather than following the advice of her white female employer to leave him (75). Pauline's "simple, earthy response bespeaks reality," he says (74). As evidence of Pauline's "essential understanding of herself as a Black woman," Butler-Evans offers her delivery of Pecola—ironic, indeed, in light of the fact that Pauline projects her self-hatred unto her newborn infant and rejects her because, like Pauline, she is black and female and, therefore, "ugly." Clearly, it is not Pauline's female selfhood which appeals to Butler-Evans, but precisely the opposite. Except for Pecola, it is difficult to conceive of a character in literature or in life with a less developed sense of self than Pauline Breedlove.

42 *Essentially Speaking*, 94. The four principle texts, she says, are Gates' *Black Literature & Literary Theory*, "Race," *Writing, and Difference*, Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, and *New Literary History* (Winter 1987), which is an exchange between Gates, Baker, and Joyce A. Joyce on "The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary
Criticism." Fuss draws an analogy between the female subject and the black subject, both of whom she describes in terms of "double-consciousness" (95). Like the "major theorists" whose example she follows, she does not acknowledge a subject who is both black and female. Fuss also divides theorists into separate chapters on: feminists (who are all white); blacks (who are all male); and gay (who are all white).

43"Writing the Subject," 454-470. Hooks herself is ambivalent about poststructuralism; even as she engages the critical practices of deconstruction, she interrogates the "trendy notions of 'difference' that lump all people together without distinguishing perspectives [which] can serve to mask the absence of an African-American presence in the field of cultural studies" (Yearning 9). "Should we not be suspicious," Hooks asks, "of postmodern critiques of the 'subject' when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time?" (28).

44As Hooks herself notes in Talking Back, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, Adrienne Rich and others have accused her of homophobia (168).

Houston Baker apparently suffers from this condition, too. In "Our Lady: Sonia Sanchez and the Writing of a Black Renaissance," Baker claims that Sanchez is "telling it like it 't'is" and putting into forceful language "the wisdom of the tribe" when she addresses "a jealous cat" and tells him that "jealousy's a form of homosexuality"; thus, according to Baker, Sanchez clears "a space for successful black heterosexual relationships (332). "What a white woman got," Sanchez asks, "cept her white pussy / always sucking after blk/ness" and "her faggoty white man
/ who goes to sleep with her / without coming?" (331). Rather than critiquing the obvious (hetero)sexism of the particular poems of Sanchez' which he chooses to highlight, Baker celebrates the "heterosexual bonding and collaborative journeying" he claims they represent (334).

45See, for example, "Chosen Place, Timeless People: Some Figurations in the New World."

46Hazel Carby, the other exception which Fuss notes to the general resistance of women of color to poststructuralism, seems also, to an even greater extent than Spillers, to have distanced herself from deconstructive methodology. In "The Quicksands of Representation," for example, Carby's approach to nineteenth century black women writers is a very traditional socio-historical brand of criticism.

47Johnson identifies herself as a "Yale daughter"; Paul de Man is the intellectual father-figure to whom she devotes herself in A World of Difference: "My dedication and epigraphs are meant to situate this book in complex relation to de Man's death" (6). The essays of Part I "mark various phases of mourning for the death of Paul de Man" (4). Although Johnson notes that it was de Man's "eagerness to preserve differences" that motivated his endorsement of deportation as "a solution to the Jewish problem," she apparently sees no problem or contradiction in constructing her own theory of "difference" upon the foundation of his (xv-xvi). She has also functioned as a dutiful daughter to Derrida, whose Dissemination she translated.
Johnson also analyzes "the mother" in her discussion of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Here she tells us that Shelley's writing, like "the necessary murderousness of any declaration of female subjectivity," was a figurative repetition of "the matricide that her physical birth all too literally entailed" (World 152).

See also Françoise Lionnet, "Autoethnography," who, "in light of the skepticism with which contemporary literary theory has taught us to view any effort of self-representation in language" (383), analyzes Hurston's autobiography as mythic "representation" rather than historical "reality." "The only events of her 'private' life on which Hurston dwells in Dust Tracks are," according to Lionnet, "those that have deep symbolic and cultural value." Hurston "dwells on" the death of her mother, not because it constituted a major trauma in her life, but because "the death of the mother and subsequent dispersion of the siblings echo the collective memory of her people's separation from Africa-as-mother and their ineluctable diaspora" (395).

Although Johnson quotes Gates, DuBois, and Johnson, it is only the latter two whom she accuses of conflating black and male subjectivity. Presumably because, unlike the others, Gates uses "his or her" to refer to the African-American writer, she lets him off the hook. But Gates makes no more allowance for gender differences among black writers than do DuBois or Johnson; without any reconsideration, the double-consciousness which has been attributed to black men is simply projected unto black women. Women are subsumed under
the umbrella category of African-American writer, but the concept is not revised
to accommodate them.

In "My Statue, My Self: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women,"
Elizabeth Fox-Genovese also posits a dichotomy between the black self and the
black woman when she asks whether "the black woman writer [is] first a self" or
"is she first a woman--and if so, in relation to whom?" (199-200). Hurston, she
seems to argue, is not a woman: "her primary identification, her primary sense
of herself transcends gender" (196).

Bowen also compares the call-and-response pattern she identifies in Jean
Toomer's Cane with "the questioning of voice we find in Whitman" (200).

Sansei" and "Yonsei" are the third and fourth generations of Japanese-
Americans.

Gates relates this anecdote as an example of black signifying: "If I had
responded to Dwight Andrew, 'I know what you mean; your Momma read to me
from that same book the last time I was in Detroit, I would have signified upon
him in return" ("Blackness" 318n13).

Gates contradicts this claim himself many times when he talks about
establishing the canon of African-American literature. Frequently Gates draws
parallels between Anglo-American "canonical" texts and African-American
"noncanonical" texts in order to argue that the latter deserve to be included in the
same category as the former. In Signifying Monkey, for example, Gates analyzes
Mumbo Jumbo as a postmodern text and then concludes that Ishmael Reed "has
secured his place in the canon" (238).
In "Caliban's Triple Play," Houston Baker applies this term to Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak (388).
CHAPTER IV

MARX MARRIES AND TAKES A LOVER:
IS THERE A CLASS IN THIS TEXT?

Marxism . . . deconstructed a few years back. Or did we?
Terry Eagleton¹

The Althusseran knock-out left . . . a small generation of literary Marxists dancing on the ever-decreasing pinhead of science while hundreds of deconstructive angels traced elaborate figures all around, apparently unsupported by anything except their research grants and fellowships.
John Bowen²

Deconstruction-US style has been a Reagan kind of radical theory.
Norman Mailer³
Of all the "differences" under discussion here, class, particularly in America, is the most neglected. Marxist critics—essentially the only ones to have attended to class in their analyses of literature—have, to an even greater extent than feminist critics or critics who privilege race, been seduced by poststructuralism. Over the past decade, Marxist criticism, which achieved high visibility in the 1970s, has virtually ceased to exist; it survives only in hyphenated forms. Marxism is popularly understood to have, as Terry Eagleton, one of its foremost proponents, admits, "deconstructed a few years back."

"Any English Marxist who tries now to construct a materialist aesthetics," Eagleton laments, "must be painfully conscious of his inadequacies." "Bereft of a tradition," Marxist critics "labour under these embarrassments" (Criticism and Ideology 7). Marxist critics have lamented the ahistoricity and anti-materialism of poststructuralism, but even Marxists now argue that Marxist theory is inadequate as a basis for a class analysis. According to Tony Bennett, Marxism has failed to develop a truly revolutionary aesthetic (398). No viable theory of class is currently available to us.

Contemporary Marxism, Prospero Saiz and Anne Reilly argue, has been "unable to compete against the politically coded verbal technologies of deconstruction" (412). Marxist critic Frank Lentricchia is "not interested in politics anymore" (John Bowen 7). Even Herbert Marcuse, it is claimed, "has finally shown himself not to be a Marxist" (Hartwick 416). "Marxist thought is
trapped in an *episteme* that is coming to an end," according to Michel Foucault; "it is now anachronistic to nominate oneself Marxist" (Reilly and Saiz 543).

The question arises, Saiz and Reilly note, whether Marxism has "in the wake of political defeat been definitively moved to silence" (413). Beginning after World War II, and most acutely with the recent developments in Germany and the Soviet Union, the failure of Marxism to express itself successfully in practice has raised serious doubts about the viability of the theory. Marxism in the west has, Perry Anderson contends, retreated from the economic and political arena and taken refuge in the academy, learning to "speak its own enciphered language, at an increasingly remote distance from the class whose fortunes it formally sought to serve or articulate" (32).

The locus of revolution has moved farther and farther from the factory, and the "proletariat" is no longer a synonym for the working class. Marx's faith in the revolutionary potential of the working class was gained too easily, according to Mark Poster; the working class is no longer the standardbearer of revolt. Many different groups have now laid claim to "proletarian" status. Marxism is unable, in Poster's analysis, to account for the complexity of such contemporary oppositional struggles as those of the Chinese peasants, Iranian Muslims, French prisoners and prostitutes, American women and blacks, and Spanish and British Basques. If Marxism is to survive, he argues, "it must become more than the special theory of the workers' exploitation" (459).

May 1968 was a turning point in the tide of traditional Marxism. When protesting students pointed to hard line French Leftism as the problem, rather
than the solution, a crack was created through which structuralism began seeping in. It was within this atmosphere that Louis Althusser reconsidered Marx through a Lacanian lens, published *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, and gave birth to "structural Marxism." One reflection of this new political climate was the poststructural transformation of *Tel Quel* from, as Terry Eagleton has characterized it, "a militant Maoism to a strident anti-communism" (*Literary Theory* 148). But, Eagleton rather surprisingly concedes, "poststructuralism was right to upbraid orthodox Left politics of its time with having failed" (LT 148).

Marx—who is now commonly understood to have erred in focusing on history rather than "discourse," economic rather than symbolic systems—is, in the prevailing climate of poststructuralism, embarrassingly (even, or perhaps especially, to Marxists) passé. Although clearly Marx did acknowledge the importance of language, his theory is inadequate by contemporary standards because he naively subscribed to the "classic model" of discourse. "Marx did not analyze language itself," according to Séan Golden; "that is the work of the present age" (428-429n3).

As in the case of feminist and ethnic critics, Marxist critical attention has been deflected from socio-historical contexts to "texts." Both history and consciousness are considered to be mediated through—and ultimately synonymous with—"discourse." Marxist hermeneutics, Fredric Jameson has argued, can no longer do without psychoanalysis. In Jameson's hands, Marx's "consciousness" is thus recast as "the political unconscious"—a juxtaposition which many, most especially Freud, might argue is an oxymoron.⁶ Jameson's definition of "politics"
is, at any rate, very far removed from that which Marx had in mind in *The Communist Manifesto*. While Marxist critics have begun finally to acknowledge the potential significance of sex and race, class has paradoxically gotten lost in the shuffle.

2.

Simultaneous with the (post)structuralists attack on Marx for his failure to come to terms with language has been the feminist critique of Marx's failure to come to terms with sex and gender. When the women's movement of the 1970s began to attract the attention of women in the left, the socialist-feminist—whom Barbara Ehrenreich defines as a socialist who goes to twice as many meetings—was born (Young 64)\(^7\).

Marxists, they argued, were unwilling to compromise class solidarity by recognizing conflicts of interest within families and, therefore, were insufficiently attentive to gender, while feminists, intent upon defining women as a monolithic "class," were insufficiently attentive to the socio-economic differences among them. The solution, it seemed, was to "marry" the two systems of thought. Marx's analysis of production was supplemented with an analysis of reproduction. Housework was studied alongside factory work. Marx, the husband, acquired a wife, in other words, to attend to domestic matters; the effect of this union,
however, has been to support, rather than to challenge, patriarchal power and privilege.

Economist Heidi Hartmann led the way in suggesting that attempts to relate feminism and Marxism had resulted in an "unhappy marriage" (2). If a more progressive union--enriched with an improved understanding of class and sex and devoid of dominance and subordination--was not forthcoming, then, she argued, it was time to file for divorce. Hartmann's marriage metaphor spawned a host of others to describe the relationship between feminism and Marxism: "shotgun wedding," "trial separation," "living together," "illicit tryst," "teenage infatuation," "May-December romance," "puppy love," "friendship," etc. If race is considered as a factor in this dynamic, as it almost never is, the relationship becomes even more strained: the trinity of Marxism, feminism, and racism, Gloria Joseph has suggested, constitutes an "incompatible menage à trois."8

Lillian Robinson, one of the first and only Marxist-feminist critical voices in America, defines feminist criticism as "criticism with a cause, engaged criticism," but she complained in 1971, feminist criticism had been so far merely "engaged to be married" (3). Although the literary profession has chosen to ignore the class nature of the categories and the standards it employs, women in particular, she argued, could not afford to do this. "Feminist criticism cannot become simply bourgeois criticism in drag. It must," Robinson asserted, "be ideological and moral criticism; it must be revolutionary."

Originally published in 1980, Michèle Barrett's Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter was, she explains, an "attempt to bring
together two world-views that have continued to go their separate ways in spite of our efforts at marriage guidance" (v). **Women's Oppression Today** made the case for analyzing capitalist relations of production as historically gendered, but, as Barrett acknowledges in her introduction to the 1988 edition, that argument suffered from ethnocentrism: it did not take into account ethnicity, race, or racism. "No satisfactory class-based theory of gender ideology," she concludes, "has been so far proffered" (xviii).

The tone of Barrett's 1988 introduction differs sharply from that of the 1980 edition; in the more recent case, she seems to throw up her hands and admit defeat at the hands of the poststructuralists. Socialist-feminists have, she reports, "become increasingly dubious about the hyphen in their politics"; "socialist-feminism's influence within feminism as a whole has been steadily declining" (xxiii). The new French feminist emphasis on difference has, she observes, displaced issues of class. The voices now most effectively addressing questions of class, inequality, poverty, and exploitation are," Barrett claims, "those of black women, not white-socialist feminists" (xxiv).

In the light of recent developments in poststructuralist theory, **Women's Oppression Today** now seems, even to its own author, "decidedly out of date" (xxxii). "It is not possible," she claims, "to write in such a confidently materialist vein today" (xxxiii). Although, according to Barrett, poststructuralism is "premised on an explicit and argued denial of the kind of grand political projects that both 'socialism' and 'feminism' by definition are," she admits that were she writing her book on Marxism and feminism today, she would be forced to consider Foucault's
"suspension of epistemology and substitution of 'discourse' and 'regimes of truth' for a theory of ideology" (xxxiii).

In search of an alternative to Marxist historiography, many disillusioned feminists have now turned to Foucault. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby introduce their volume on Feminism & Foucault by asking:

Is this yet another attempt to authorize feminism by marrying it into respectability? Or are we trying to arrange a final divorce from Marxism--or Freudianism or Lacanian analysis--for a happier union with Foucauldian genealogy? (ix).

They answer this question in the negative and suggest that the basis for a "friendship" between feminism and Foucault consists in a shared understanding of the body as the site of power and locus of domination.

The "nicest thing" about Foucault, Meaghan Morris argues, is that he is most definitely not a "ladies' man." "Any feminists drawn in to sending love letters to Foucault would be in no danger of reciprocation" (26). Although Foucault ignores women and women's issues almost entirely, by valorizing love between men, he provides, according to Morris, a model of "reciprocal erotics." Antihomophobia is, in Frances Bartkowski's analysis, what unites the project of feminism with that of Foucault (51).

Feminist thinkers, Diamond and Quinby warn, must not be "seduced" by Foucault, who, they however admit, "glosses over gender configurations of power" (xiv) and "fails to take into account relations between masculinist authority and
language" (xvi). But, it is difficult not to arrive at the conclusion that Foucault--
ladies' man or man's man--has seduced Marxist-feminists.

Although Foucault's "gaze and ear are 'on the side' of the marginal, his
words," Bartkowski notes, "emanate from that very power so eloquently placed
into question" (45). "The seductive sound and the fury" of poststructuralism,
Morris admits, has had the effect of "drowning out" women's speech; nonetheless,
she, Bartkowski, and other materialist-feminists have embraced it. The "payoff"
of poststructuralist theory, Morris claims, is that it might "allow Marxism to catch
up finally on some of its opponents in the ideological domain" (28). Perhaps
because it is a gesture of bourgeois capitalism, many socialist-feminists have failed
to weigh the potential profits of this partnership against the terrible costs.

3.

Responding to the dual challenges posed by poststructuralism and
feminism has become the goal--so far elusive--of (what was once known as)
Marxist criticism. While advocating the deconstructive method that, he argues,
allows us to explode "the seemingly unified text into a host of clashing and
contradictory elements," Fredric Jameson stops short of a "wholesale endorsement"
of poststructuralism (Political Unconscious 56). Jameson notes the "anti-Marxist"
character of poststructuralism and stresses the necessity of undergirding this
cultural revolution with a material foundation. Repudiating totalization,
poststructuralists themselves are, Jameson recognizes, often guilty of it. "Desire," Jameson argues, does not exist outside of time and does exist outside of narrative.

These reservations notwithstanding, Jameson champions poststructuralism, at least partly, he claims, on the basis of what he perceives to be its ability to help Marxists come to terms with gender. One of the chief advantages of this theoretical framework is, in Jameson's estimation, that it allows us "to short-circuit the false problem of the priority of the economic over the sexual, or of sexual oppression over that of social class" (99). Within this framework, we are able to grasp that "sexism and the patriarchal" are "the sedimentation and the virulent survival of forms of alienation specific to the oldest mode of production of human history, with its division of labor between men and women" (99-100).

The affirmation of radical feminism--which seeks to annul the patriarchal--is, according to Jameson, "the most radical political act" (100). Feminism and Marxism--both of which seek to transform the dominant modes of production--are, therefore, perfectly consistent. Jameson's brand of feminism is, in fact, so consistent with his Marxism as to be indistinguishable from it, invisible, indeed, within it.

Except for the comment quoted above, neither Marxism and Form, Prison-House of Language, nor The Political Unconscious contain a single reference to feminism, sex, gender, or even women. By claiming a kindred spirit with feminism, Jameson defuses its threat and attempts to excuse himself from
the obligation of re-evaluating his own thinking in the light of the issues it raises. Not surprisingly, race is also entirely absent from Jameson's theory.

Terry Eagleton goes much further than Jameson in trying to reconcile Marxism with both poststructuralism and feminism. In the context of asserting the value of deconstructive theory, Eagleton admits that, in practice, deconstruction "fails to comprehend class dialectics and turns instead to differences, that familiar ideological motif of the petty bourgeoisie" ("Marxism and Deconstruction" 480). In its most common form, deconstruction is, he grants, an "extraordinarily modest proposal: a sort of patient, probing reformism of the text" (480). Although deconstruction "never had much belief in the class struggle, it nevertheless strikingly reproduces just those gestures: gestures which spring from a massive loss of political nerve" (488).

Eagleton finds himself on the horns of a dilemma: Marxism, is, it seems, theoretically naive and therefore unfashionable, but poststructuralism, while sophisticated and chic, is bourgeois. It is in feminist criticism that Eagleton sees the possibility of rescuing political criticism from extinction. During the 1960s and 70s, while the left "stood mesmerized and indecisive" before the political challenges of the day--attempting either to "belittle" or to "absorb" them "as subordinate parts of its own programme"--it was, Eagleton argues, the emerging women's movement which rose up to meet them. "Not an isolatable issue, a particular 'campaign' alongside other political projects, but a dimension which informed and interrogated every facet of personal, social, and political life" (LT 150), feminism, Eagleton concludes, "can be used to deconstruct a paranoid, patriarchal Marxism" (CL 484).
Eagleton’s paradigm for an ideal revolutionary criticism is, as he announced in *Walter Benjamin*, feminist criticism (131).

Eagleton had not yet undergone his feminist conversion when he wrote *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976) and *Criticism and Ideology* (1976)—neither of which make even passing reference to gender or race—but in *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (1982), Eagleton tries to atone for his past sins of omission and to integrate the critical perspectives of "poststructuralism, historical materialism, and feminism and psychoanalysis" (which tellingly he collapses into one). Eagleton’s title, however, promises much more than his book delivers.

According to Eagleton, class and sex work at cross purposes in Richardson’s writing, and it is this tension which arrests his attention. Samuel Richardson, as "patriarch" of his own print works, was in a position to play an important role in the English class struggle of his day, helping to secure political power and cultural hegemony for the bourgeoisie. Richardson experienced a conflict between public discourse and private reflection, and while he "buttressed the class structure," he also "stressed the individuality of women" (38). In contrast to *Pamela*, which Eagleton characterizes as "a sickly celebration of ruling-class power" (37), he praises the "genuinely subversive effects" of *Clarissa*, which "far exceed the author's intentions" (ix).

Eagleton locates Clarissa on the side of bourgeois order. "In Lacanian terms, Clarissa figures for Lovelace as the Law or the Name-of-the-Father, the censorious, castrating agency which places a taboo on the very desire it provokes..."
into being" (60). Her middle-class morality, her "purity" is the "usual device for denying [her] castration" (59). The premise of Eagleton's argument is obviously the psychoanalytic definition of woman in relation to "lack."

Eagleton characterizes Clarissa's writing as "masculine" and Lovelace's writing as "feminine." Ironically, Lovelace is, in fact, cast as the ultimate écrivain féminine, disrupter of the logocentric discourse and the bourgeois social order. Lovelace is "not allowed to deconstruct that bourgeois ideology," but he does "powerfully challenge it" (84). Lovelace's writing "sparkles with sheer self-indulgent jouissance" (47). Because "promiscuous," this writing is, according to Eagleton, "radical," "dangerous" to the class structure.

The method by which Lovelace undoes the symbolic order is, of course, the rape of Clarissa. "Lovelace can unfix a sign as deftly as he can break a hymen" (84). The "problem of writing," which is the "problem of the woman" is solved by Lovelace; as such, he is a "post-structuralist precursor" (46). It is difficult to distinguish here between Eagleton's position and that of those critics he condemns for having celebrated Lovelace as "Bryonic hero, Satanic vitalist or post-modernist artist" (63). Lovelace, by virtue of his accomplishments as rapist, is certainly cast also as the hero of Eagleton's Clarissa.

By raping Clarissa, Lovelace successfully "unmasks" the "reality" of the female body, which, it turns out, is its "subversive absence" (60-1). After the rape, Clarissa's body is revealed to be "nothing"; her self is "nobody." And this Eagleton inexplicably interprets as "a radical refusal of any place within the 'symbolic order,' a rebutting of all patriarchal claims over her person" (62).
In dying, Clarissa performs her greatest service to the poststructuralist cause. In Eagleton's analysis, Clarissa's death is "the final expression of free individual choice" (87). Recognizing "well enough that this is no society for a woman to live in," she manages finally to "slip through the net of male desire" (76). Her death is a "deliberate disengagement from patriarchal and class society" and, therefore, "in a profound sense a political gesture" (73-4). Critics who find Clarissa's masochism and morbidity a little unhealthy are, Eagleton maintains, simply "blind to the radicalism of that political insight" (76).

Eagleton does not go so far as to suggest that Clarissa is herself a political agent; she is rather an object in the hands of a political agent, a political sign, and, therein, apparently, lies her appeal. Clarissa "is not, needless to say, some feminist or historical materialist"; "nobody could be more submissive to patriarchal order" (76). For Eagleton, the feminist par excellence is a woman who has the good sense to recognize when she does not fit in and the good taste to show herself to the door.

Clarissa's "radicalism," then, does not consist of some action or quality of Clarissa, but rather in the use to which others—i.e., Lovelace and Richardson—put her. Clarissa's "political gesture" consists in passively accepting or being powerless to prevent the violation of her body and the ultimate destruction of her life. Eagleton disparages the bourgeois liberal brand of deconstruction which "provides you with all the risks of a radical politics while cancelling the subject who might be summoned to become an agent of them," but clearly Eagleton himself is guilty of employing such a "desperate last-ditch strategy" (CL 484-5). Eagleton has
invented a purified form of feminism which eliminates its messiest and most disturbing element: woman.

Woman, in Eagleton's analysis, is pure sign, and sex is "mainly a matter of discourse" (44). Because Lovelace's rape of Clarissa is "unrepresentable," "the act is purely empty" (83). While deeply concerned about the rape of texts, Eagleton is oblivious to the rape of women. Real women, whose material bodies have been sexually violated, know, as Eagleton apparently does not, that rape is much more than a metaphor. Despite his Marxist apprenticeship in historical materialism, Eagleton is unable to arrive at an understanding of the material reality of sex and sexism. Eagleton "deconstructs" rape, erasing patriarchal violence against women, and reconstructs it as a heroic semiotic gesture.

Class is privileged over gender in this analysis; indeed, Eagleton collapses the two and subsumes gender under class. Sex, he argues, is the medium through which the class conflict is conducted. Since the destruction of the class system is Eagleton's true concern and Clarissa is just a means to that end, her fate is irrelevant to our considerations. As Eagleton sketches her, Clarissa is devoid of subjectivity; she is pure object.

In *The Rape of Clarissa*, Eagleton has scotch-taped together Marxist and Lacanian theory, preserving, indeed amplifying, the weaknesses of both. He looks at, rather than through, female consciousness, and, to add insult to injury, he locates that consciousness in a male character created by a male author. Richardson, Eagleton argues, is "indispensable" to the emancipatory movement of
"women's writing" (101). The "so-called woman question," Eagleton concludes, "is nothing of the kind"; the "root of [it] is men" (96).^{15}

Elaine Showalter finds hope in *Literary Theory*, where, she claims, Eagleton "is no longer scolding feminist criticism for its separatist tendencies and lack of theoretical rigor (as he does in his book on Benjamin), or speaking for it (as in *Rape of Clarissa*) for his own interpretive ends." In *Feminist Theory*, Showalter argues, feminist as well as Marxist ideas have "penetrated Eagleton's system everywhere and inform his entire account of the development of contemporary critical discourse" ("Cross-Dressing" 147).

I am, unfortunately, unable to match Showalter's enthusiasm for Eagleton's latest critical enterprise. As Eagleton himself admits, any reader of *Literary Theory* expecting a socialist or feminist theory will be disappointed. This introduction to literary theory is organized into chapters on 'Phenomenology,' 'Structuralism and Semiotics,' 'Post-Structuralism,' and 'Psychoanalysis'; conspicuously absent are chapters on Marxist and feminist criticism. The only "feminist" critic even mentioned in the entire text is Julia Kristeva. (Kate Millett, to be fair, does merit an endnote).

The reason for this omission, Eagleton rather weakly explains, is that he wishes to avoid creating the false impression that "political criticism' was another sort of critical approach from those I have discussed" (207). Eagleton wants to convey the message, he claims, that all theory and knowledge is "interested"; all criticism is political. It is difficult to imagine, however, how this might possibly be accomplished by discussing Marxist and feminist criticism only in the conclusion,
which is subtitled "Political Criticism." In the same way that he "integrated" sex in his analysis of Clarissa, by subsuming and rendering it invisible, Eagleton integrates Marxism and feminism so successfully in Literary Theory that we are virtually unconscious of their presence.

Increasingly abstract and self-referential, mainstream literary critical theory is apparently culminating in an intellectual dead-end: male critics are suffering a crisis of identity, an anxiety attack about the meaning and value of their work. Death imagery is employed in self-description: Literary Theory, Eagleton says, "is less an introduction than an obituary"; "we have ended by burying the object we sought to unearth" (204). Literary Theory culminates with a reference to hermetically sealed texts and two references to "the death of literature" (216-7).16

Interaction with feminist criticism is for Eagleton a kind of sexual consummation, a reintegration with the fertile female which, it is hoped, will bring about the revitalization of the sterile male critical tradition.17 Similarly, Lawrence Lipking finds his entry into feminist criticism through the "vast black hole" of female silence--a "hole" which he feels somehow strongly compelled and uniquely qualified to fill (61). Clarissa Harlowe's name, Eagleton notes, contains the anagrams "whore" and "whole" (86); although he does not mention it, Harlowe also, of course, contains a "hole." By attempting to construct a "feminist" criticism by filling a perceived female void, Eagleton, like Lipking, engages in hermeneutical rape.
Perhaps Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak—a woman of color born in a third world country deeply divided along class lines and subjected historically to colonial rule, a critic who describes her approach as "feminist Marxist deconstructivist"—represents our best hope of a poststructuralist approach which integrates the issues of gender, race, and class. Spivak struggles with "the vexed question of how to operate race-, class-, and gender-analyses together" (Other Worlds 128) and attempts to counter both the "politics of exclusion," in which woman is the ideologically excluded other, and the "politics of inclusion," which is how she characterizes recent male excursions, like Eagleton's Walter Benjamin, into feminist criticism (132).

While Spivak finds fault with Eagleton for failing to integrate issues of gender and race in his analyses, she admits that she herself has also been guilty of such sins. In a postscript to "Feminism and Critical Theory," a talk given "several years ago," Spivak notes that, in these remarks, she had dealt directly with gender, only indirectly with class, and not at all with race. "Today I would see my work as the developing of a reading method that is sensitive to gender, race, and class" (81). It is, she claims, "the deconstructive view that keeps me resisting an essentialist freezing of the concepts of gender, race, class" (84).

Spivak's contempt for "phallic feminist criticism" is ironic, however, in the light of her own problematic (de)constructions of gender. Spivak's definition of woman—which "rests on the word 'man' as used in the texts that provide the foundation for the corner of literary criticism establishment that I inhabit"—is, in
her own estimation, "reactionary" (77). Attempting to claim for women some of the power which men have appropriated for themselves, Spivak characterizes the clitoris as "orgasmically phallic" and the uterus as "the reproductive extension of the phallus" (82). Spivak criticizes Marx and Freud for avoiding the idea of the womb as a place of production, but in substituting women's reproduction for production and focusing her class analysis on families, Spivak leaves herself open to charges of heterosexism and (what she herself has labelled) "hystero-centrism" (83).

Spivak's treatment of race is also troubling. In contrast to American feminist criticism, which she criticizes for restricting its attention of race to the constitution of racism in America, Spivak focuses on the history of third world women and the production of "the colonial object" (81). The context for Spivak's analyses of colonialism has been the work of the historical collective called Subaltern Studies. In order to explain the continuing exploitation of the third world, Spivak turns away from Marx, whose labor theory of value she struggles to revise, and invokes Foucault, whom she says allows her to represent the "subaltern as gendered subject rather than as allegorical seme for Mother India" (246).

It is through her translations of and introductions to such third world texts as Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" and "Stanadayini" [Breast-Giver] that Spivak feels she does her greatest service to subaltern studies. Spivak's goal is "resisting 'elite' methodology for 'subaltern' material" (253), but Spivak's ability to come to terms with race is seriously compromised by her own upper class bias.
In her preface to "Draupadi," Spivak explains the problems that she experienced in translating "the peculiar Bengali spoken by the tribals" into English. Spivak chooses to render the tribal dialect into "straight English" because:

In general we educated Bengalis have the same racist attitude toward it as the late Peter Sellers had toward our English. It would have been embarrassing to have used some version of the language of D.H. Lawrence's "common people" or Faulkner's blacks (186).

One of the assumptions of "subalternist" work, which Spivak criticizes but apparently shares, is that "the subaltern's own idiom did not allow him to know his struggle so that he could articulate himself as its subject" (253). The very deconstructive framework which Spivak has hit upon as her solution constitutes her problem. Spivak is caught in the dichotomy implicit in her critical paradigm: either she must grant to the "subaltern" subjectivity (the existence of which poststructuralist theory denies) or she must accept her unrepresentability and be complicitous in the erasure of racial (and all other forms of) difference. Spivak's critique of cultural imperialism is itself, finally, a form of cultural imperialism.

Although Spivak has begun asking the right kinds of questions about the intersections of gender, race, and class, her method has not yet produced acceptable answers. None of Spivak's work to date lives up to her own critical standards. I would agree with Spivak that "a feminist-materialist analysis,
menaced as it is constituted by deconstructive erasures, seems called for" (20).
I am still waiting. Spivak feels "helpless before the fact that all my essays these
days seem to end with projects for future work. I seem to be surrendered to the
Great Tradition in closing my piece with a promise" (26). Perhaps there is hope
in Spivak's announcement of a forthcoming book on deconstruction, feminism, and
Marxism.
CHAPTER IV NOTES

1 "Marxism and Deconstruction," 478.


3 As quoted by Colin MacCabe in his "Foreword" to In Other Worlds, xi.

4 Since Americans cherish their myths of individual freedom and a classless society, most of the work on class has been done elsewhere, most notably in Britain. In the U.S., discussions of class have largely taken place in the context of social science.

5 Marcuse responds to the question of his abandonment of Marxism by quoting "old man Marx himself": "Moi je ne suis pas Marxiste" (Hartwick 416).

6 This recent embrace of psychoanalysis is highly ironic in light of the fact that Marxist critics began by summarily dismissing Freudianism as the ultimate expression of bourgeois individualism. This, of course, parallels the development within American feminist criticism, which began with Betty Friedan and Kate Millett denouncing the sexist bias of Freudian psychology and has lately embraced Lacanian psychoanalysis.

7 For evidence of the problems they point to/encounter, see Eva Corredor's "Sociocritical and Marxist Literary Theory." This, in some ways, very informative review of Marxist criticism does not even acknowledge the existence of Marxist feminism.

8 The fact that none of these analyses call into question the patriarchal
(hetero)sexist terms implicit in these metaphors reveals much about their failure to reconceptualize Marxism as a feminist tool.

9 See also Nancy Hartsock's "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," which suggests psychoanalytic theory as a basis for a historical materialist analysis of "phallocratic domination" (158). Hartsock amends Marx to read: "Though class society appears to be the source, the cause of the oppression of women, it is rather the consequence" (176).

10 This is a strategy he shares with Henry Louis Gates.

11 This amounts to saying: "she asked for it." And while it is offensive enough for men to suggest that women asked to be raped, it is particularly absurd for them to suggest that literary characters created by male authors asked for, desired, or provoked anything.

12 In the ultimate expression of insensitivity and bad taste, Eagleton asserts that the rape creates a "bond" between Clarissa and Lovelace: "Few people are likely to bulk larger in a woman's life than the man who has raped her," Eagleton explains. "Even the ruthlessly impersonal act of rape cannot help generating between Clarissa and Lovelace something that might genuinely be called a bond" (82).

13 Eagleton seems to contradict his characterization of rape as a function of signs when he considers Richardson's last novel Sir Charles Grandison in relation to Clarissa and concludes that the "contrast between the two lies in the fact that Grandison cannot be raped." Whether or not one can be raped is what
distinguishes women from men; this, he says, is the "insurmountable sexual difference" (100). Here Eagleton apparently, and incredibly, asserts that rape is a consequence of biological differences between men and women. Perhaps Eagleton would do well to read Genet if he has any doubts about the vulnerability of the male body to rape.

14 Race, of course, does not even enter into Eagleton's discussion; this, one can argue, is a function of the text he has chosen, which obviously does not foreground racial issues. Whether or not the author's failure to address race excuses the critic from consideration of this issue is a question worth debating.

15 In Feminist Literary Studies, K.K. Ruthven dismisses the critical projects of women as "anti-intellectual" and "incoherent" (11) and labels Samuel Richardson "a radical feminist" and Terry Eagleton an "important feminist critic" (17).

16 See also Wayne Booth, "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism," where he describes the effect of feminist criticism on literary studies as "the bursting open of sealed caskets" (48). In "Aristotle's Sister: A Poetics of Abandonment," Lawrence Lipking argues that: "No dead hand of tradition grips feminist literary theory. Its time is the present." Like Lady Lazarus, Lipking imagines that Arimneste rises from her ashes. Surely some new poetics is at hand" (62).

17 Ruthven interprets this in just the opposite way: feminist criticism, he claims, got underway after turning to Marxism to learn how to mobilize an oppositional discourse (36).
I am not convinced that an analysis of race in third world and colonized countries is more valuable than an analysis of race in America; both are necessary and must be undertaken simultaneously. Certainly race in America has not yet been sufficiently analyzed either.

I find the term "subalterrn"-containing, as it does, the very concepts of domination and subordination which the scholars who use it are claiming to dismantle--highly objectionable.

Spivak's Marxism, Colin MacCabe admits in his foreword to In Other Worlds, "will be alien to at least a few Marxist critics" (xiv). "We have reached," Spivak tells us, "the end of the line of the evolution of Marxist criticism--previously named with his own patronymic" (288n20). Spivak uses Althusser and Lacan, she explains with no apparent sense of irony, to produce a more specifically "feminist" version of Marx (141).
CHAPTER V

DIS/CLOSURE:
TOWARD A THEORY OF POST-POSTSTRUCTURALISM

To theorize demands vast ingenuity, and to avoid theorizing demands vast honesty.

T.S. Eliot

Hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own.

Terry Eagleton

This is an important historical moment . . . . It is our responsibility collectively and individually to distinguish between mere speaking that is about self-aggrandizement, exploitation of the exotic 'other' and that coming to voice which is a gesture of resistance, an affirmation of struggle.

Bell Hooks

124
1.

The final test of a literary theory is, for Terry Eagleton: "How would it work with Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*?" (*Literary Theory* 82). An alternative test for feminists, Maggie Humm suggests, is to ask: "How would it work with Djuna Barnes?" (112). Henry Louis Gates' test was, we might recall, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. Aside from the preposterousness of measuring the value of a theory by its ability to describe a single text, one must certainly question the choices of these particular texts. More than coincidental is the white male critic's selection of a text by a white male writer, the white female critic's selection of a text by a white woman, the black male critic's selection of a text by a black male, and the selection by all critics of postmodern texts which reflect/prove their poststructuralist theories.

None of these critics developed their theories in reference to or tested them against texts like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*, Kim Chernin's *In My Mother's House*, or Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*. None of them has taken into account or helped to elucidate the complex interrelationships of gender, race, and class. None has made discriminations between women of color from poor or working class backgrounds and those from (upper) middle class backgrounds. None has compared black women's texts with the texts of white women who derive from oral storytelling traditions. None has addressed the possible connections between gender, race, class and genre. Despite all the attention which has been paid to questions of "difference" over the past decade, we still know surprisingly little about the relationships between and among them.
Is a Marxist Feminist Deconstructive critic an oxymoron? If you cut and paste together three inadequate theories, do you get a complete functional theory or an incoherent mess? The current state of criticism is like a house which has been added on to and added on to without a central blueprint, without a heating or plumbing system adequate for the rambling, sprawling structure which has resulted. We need a theory which is built from the ground up with attention to socio-historical contexts and the specificities of gender, race, class, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

2.

The core of poststructuralism is a binary opposition of subject-object (self-other, presence-absence, fort-da) which proponents claim is a universal organizing principle of human consciousness and identity. The usefulness of the deconstructive method lies in its ability to locate the absences, the gaps in "logocentric" discourse; it is an excellent tool for analyzing the omissions and distortions in patriarchal representations. Poststructuralism allows us to understand how the sexual and racial "other" has been produced and read as a "sign."

Poststructuralism helps us to understand marginalization, but it does not help us to overcome it. Poststructuralism explains female silence, but it does not explain female speech; it explains the absence of women's voices from the cultural dialogue, but it is unable to explain the powerful presence of literary voices like
Toni Morrison's, Maxine Hong Kingston's, or Leslie Silko's. Poststructuralism does not even explain the eloquent ways in which writers like Woolf, Plath, Rich, and Atwood use language to describe their alienation from language. The "other," which has been the object of poststructuralist discourse, has not emerged as a subject within it.

Poststructuralism, defining as it does women and racial minorities in terms of "lack" and otherness, is inherently sexist and ethnocentric. Binary thinking is, many have suggested, peculiarly Western: "Although one of the major themes in contemporary American Indian literature is alienation, traditional American Indian literatures," according to Paula Gunn Allen, "display an attractive absence of a sense of otherness" (Sacred Hoop 127). Native American perception is "inclusive-field"; individuals are regarded as part of the gestalt. "People of color have always theorized, but in forms," according to Barbara Christian, "quite different from the Western form of abstract logic" ("Race for Theory" 68).

Poststructuralism, which has most often served as a method of obscuring or dodging political questions, is not the appropriate vehicle for politically motivated critics. "Textuality" has functioned as "little more than a figleaf," behind which "all the difficult questions of education and class" have been hidden (McCabe xii). Foucault's tripartite axis of power-knowledge-pleasure is, as Frances Bartkowski has observed, missing a fourth term, "which is everywhere present in the text but rarely directly discussed: resistance" (44). Poststructuralist critics have been "studying difference" when they should have been "making a difference" (Nash 168). In lieu of Lawrence Lipking's "poetics of
abandonment," Jane Marcus suggests that we need "a poetics of committment" ("Still Practice" 84).

The failure of poststructuralism to provide us with an integrated and politically engaged criticism is integral to the language in which it is framed. We are desperately in need of a new critical language, one which connects rather than divides, one which allows us to make distinctions but does not essentialize. "When we talk about race and class in conjunction with gender, we really struggle for a new language," Bell Hooks observes. "Everybody nowadays mentions race and class without then revising substantially their notion of gender. We still struggle with language" (Childers and Hooks 67). "A large part of [the] inability to deal with race and class had to do," according to Mary Childers, "with not having a language to articulate what it means to be pained via gender even as you are privileged via race and class. After all these years since the whole question of race came into feminism, we still do not have the language paradigms for white women to be able to express, 'this is how I am privileged' and yet 'this is how I am exploited'" (62-3). Until we acknowledge and seek to correct the limitations inherent in our critical language and paradigms, we will be unable to say anything meaningful about the "differences" upon which poststructuralism has focused so much attention.
Theory, according to W. J. T. Mitchell, "aspires to explain the many in terms of the one, and the greater the gap between the unitary simplicity of theory and the infinite multiplicity of things in its domain, the more powerful the theory" (7). If we accept Mitchell's definition, then we would be forced to conclude that the quest for a theory that is inclusive of the sorts of differences under consideration here is doomed to fail and ought, therefore, to be abandoned.

This is precisely what Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, with respect to the whole enterprise of critical theory, advocate (12). All theories, they argue, necessitate the separation of things which ought not to be separated and are, therefore, based on logical mistakes. Theory is "the name for all the ways people have tried to stand outside practice in order to govern practice from without." Since no one can reach a position outside practice, "the theoretical enterprise should," they maintain, "come to an end" (30).

Theory, according to Stanley Fish, is "an impossible project which will never succeed" (110). The substitution of the general for the local, he argues, has never been and will never be achieved. Fish makes a distinction between "theory fear"--which he defines as "the fear that those who have been persuaded by such arguments will abandon principled inquiry and go their unconstrained way in response to the dictates of fashion, opinion or whim"--and "theory hope"--the hope that "our claims to knowledge can be justified on the basis of some objective method of assessing such claims rather than on the basis of the individual beliefs that have been derived from the accidents of education and experience" (112).
Fear, in Fish's analysis, is the origin of theory, and "theory will stop only when . . . the urgencies and fears of which it is the expression either fade or come to be expressed by something else" (128). "Theory's day is dying," Fish proclaims. "The hour is late; and the only thing left for a theorist to do is to say so, which is what I have been saying here, and, I think, not a moment too soon" (128).

Sadly, much contemporary critical theory does seem to originate out of fear rather than hope. It is surely not accidental that white male scholars have developed this keen interest in theory at precisely the moment in history when their power base within the academy and within the culture at large is being eroded away. "Theory is . . . to thought what power is to politics" (Fish 112), and power is finally what this battle of the theorists is all about: the power to set the terms of intellectual debate, the power to control representation, the power--ultimately--to name and define reality.

Critical theory is the vehicle through which American men of letters are, according to Gilbert and Gubar, seeking "to certify their manhood in a culture where they feel their potency to be imperiled," "to prove that they are not prisoners of sex but macho soldiers in the armies of the night" ("Man on Dump" 404-5). Theorizing is to the late twentieth-century literary critic what pumping iron is to the ninety-seven pound weakling on the beach: insurance against tough guys jeering you and kicking sand in your face. "Virilization-as-defense," Gilbert and Gubar argue, is the only tactic left to men who now feel themselves engaged in a battle against feminization (406).
At a time in history when patriarchal power structures—e.g., the Berlin Wall, statues of Lenin, U.S. military bases, American Savings and Loans, the Trump empire—are literally falling down around us, and a (truly) "new world order" may actually be at hand, the stakes in such power struggles are very high. White Western males are justifiably fearful about losing their traditional power base, while the historically dispossessed have some cause for hoping for a redistribution of power.

While many of the critics on the margins of literary studies have been jockeying for position in the center of this theoretical power struggle, most women of color have opted to stay out of the fracas and let the boys duke it out with each other. Barbara Christian has refused to compete in the "race for theory," resisting the pressures brought to bear upon her to produce a black feminist literary theory: "I consider it presumptuous of me to invent a theory of how we ought to read. Instead, I think we need to read the works of our writers in our various ways and remain open to the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race, and gender in literature" ("Race for Theory" 69). "We have talked so much about theory we never get to our conclusion nor focus on the texts," Diana Rebolledo complains. "Placing our literature in a theoretical framework to 'legitimize' it . . . undermines our literature" (348).

But although I take issue with the direction of contemporary critical theory, I do not believe that it is desirable or even possible to abandon theory altogether. Knapp, Michaels, and Fish, as well as Christian and Rebolledo, are, of course, caught up in the very net they wish to disentangle. It is impossible to
argue against theory without engaging in theorizing oneself. Some practitioners may be unconscious of the theories that propel them, but no practice is uninformed by theory. All in all, it seems much safer to consciously examine our theoretical assumptions than to be controlled by unexamined beliefs. Unlike Fish, I continue to engage in "theory hope," although it is not based (as is his definition) on dichotomous conceptions of objectivity and subjectivity. I seek theories which arise out of, rather than in opposition to, subjectivity.

Theory cannot be allowed to function as a substitute for reading and writing about literature. Theories which are defined independently of or in opposition to practice are, at best, useless, and, at worst, dangerous. We must transcend the present situation in which we have two distinct and hierarchically related groups of literary critics: one which examines literature under the microscope of "close reading" and throws into relief the most minute details of texts while obscuring the larger contexts which would establish the meaning and significance of such work; and another group which views the universe of literature through the telescopic lens of critical theory but is often unable to perceive the specificity of individual texts or make discriminations among them. Between the two groups, no common frame of reference or common language exists to link their separate enterprises. As a result, the value of both "practical" and theoretical criticism, as they are currently defined, is highly questionable.

We cannot afford to continue to pretend that theory and practice are discrete activities and that a critic has a choice of engaging in one or the other. It is incumbent upon every member of the literary profession to interrogate and
articulate our underlying theoretical assumptions as well as to connect our theoretical conclusions to concrete textual and extra-textual realities. Theory and practice must be self-consciously integrated in every act of literary criticism.

We cannot abandon the quest for theory; rather we must pursue it more carefully and more honestly than we have done in the past. As the body of published literature is produced by an increasingly more heterogenous population of writers, it becomes more and more difficult to make valid generalizations, and we must resist the temptation to overgeneralize: a theory which is designed to describe *Finnegan's Wake* has its value, but it must be qualified as such and not passed off as a description of/prescription for the entire Anglo-American literary tradition. We must come to terms with the newly-emerging diversity of the literary community. It is cause for hope, not fear. For the first time in history, there is the potential for the academic monologue to become a true dialogue.
CHAPTER V NOTES

1 As quoted by Stephen Heath in "Modern Literary Theory," 35.

2 Literary Theory, viii. Eagleton extends to literary critics J.M. Keynes' observation about economists: those who disliked theory, or claimed to get along better without it, Keynes argued, were simply in the grip of an older theory.

3 Talking Back, 26.

4 In light of the fact that Derrida once declared his work to be a footnote to Finnegans Wake, it is glaringly obvious that Eagleton's test is specifically designed to prove his own thesis.

5 Gilbert and Gubar locate Frank Lentricchia—who has launched an attack upon them as "the United Dames of America"—within a tradition of macho American men of letters, which includes Walt Whitman, Eldridge Cleaver, and John Irving. Lentricchia, whose verbal and visual poses are intended, according to Gilbert and Gubar, to "convince readers that he's no ivory tower egghead but one of the boys," has achieved the status of the "Dirty Harry of contemporary critical theory" ("Man on Dump" 404-5).
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