The Continental Drift:
Anglo-American and French Theories of Tradition and Feminism

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Abstract

The notion of a "Great Tradition" in literature is a problematic paradigm for feminist critics, in part because "tradition" receives support in particular sociocultural practices which exclude women. Inheritance, as elucidated by Virginia Woolf, is an instantiation of a patrilineal tradition in which property as well as education are denied to women. Furthermore, dichotomies which structure Western metaphysics and which determine patterns of thinking (civilized/savage; man/woman) constitute woman as absence or "other." These dualities inform the liberal humanist discourse of critics T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis.

From this perspective, the legitimacy of theories of tradition in women's writing is questioned with reference to the works of Anglo-American feminists whose critical discourse is inherited from liberal humanism. In contrast, French feminist theoreticians Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray actively deconstruct logocentrism and operate from beyond the boundaries of dualism. Their influence on Anglo-Americans represents the "continental drift" of feminist criticism.

Resumé

L'idée d'une "Grande tradition" dans la littérature est un paradigme problématique pour les critiques féministes; et ce en partie parce que "l'idée de tradition" est supportée entre autre par dés practiques socio-culturelles opprimant les femmes. Le phénomène de l'héritage tel qu'élucidé par Virginia Woolf, est l'un des exemples illustrant la tradition patrilinéaire. D'après cette tradition non seulement les biens matériels sont-ils interdits à la femme mais également l'accès à la Connaissance et au pouvoir sont aussi hors de sa portée. De plus les dichotomies structurant la métaphysique occidentale déterminent les modes de penser (civilisé/sauvage; homme/femme) où les termes sont définis à partir de la perspective patriarchale. De cette façon "la femme" est constituée en tant qu' "absence" ou "autre." Ces dualitiés sont inhérentes aux discours critiques de T.S. Eliot et F.R. Leavis.

Ainsi nous pouvons questionner la légitimité des théories sur la tradition d'écriture féminine mise en avant par les critiques féministes brittaniques et américaines dont le discours critique s'inspire de l'humanisme libérale. Cependent les théoriciennes féministes françaises comme Hélène Cixous et Luce Irigaray déconstruisent le "logos" occidental et vont au-delà des limites de la pensée dualiste. Leur influence sur les Américaines représente le mouvement continentale ("continental drift") de la critique féministe.

Preface

"Feminism" is on the one hand a catch-word for women's awareness of social and political inequality, and on the other an often obtuse and impenetrable body of theories bearing no apparent relation to the "common reader." Similarly, this thesis is a combination of a long-standing personal interest in the status of women in a society regulated and defined by male institutions, and recent feminist scholarship which explores these sentiments from a theoretical, philosophical and often "logocentric" perspective. The seeming incommensurability of the two approaches is reflected in the unwieldy title of the thesis. The discovery of an antiquated little book in my father's study brought home, if you will, well-nigh inbred ideas about tradition and the inherent phallacy of reading and researching in "the father's library." The dialectics of feminism leads me to propose an alternative title: "The Patriarch's Library: A Feminist Critique of Tradition."

The successful completion of this thesis is due in large measure to the dedication of my thesis advisor, Michael D. Bristol. His passion for knowledge is surpassed only by his ability and willingness to engage his students in current theoretical discourse. He helped link the metaphoric elements in my anecdotes with the "anxiety of

influence," and prevented the baby from going down with the bathwater.

I would also like to thank my co-conspirator, Robert Barsky, without whom this thesis would have remained on scattered pieces of paper. Bob's generosity with his time and computer increased the seriousness of this endeavor.

Finally, this work is dedicated to my father, John Dunn, a sometimes poet and patriarch, from whom I inherited a love of words, books and writing.

Contents

Introduction:

The Patriarch's Library

My father's library contains much of the "great" literature, the so-called "classics." He has the works of Shakespeare bound in elaborate end papers and the Harvard classics, a set of books inherited from his father. However, not until recently did I discover a small hardcover, tucked in the shelves between an old Latin grammar and a copy of Pepys' diary. Perusing The Study of Words I came upon the following in the first chapter: "There are few who would not readily acknowledge that mainly in worthy books are preserved and hoarded the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which the world has accumulated; and that chiefly by aid of books they are handed down from one generation to another" (1). This idea that knowledge, like books, is handed down through the generations gave me ideas for researching the notion of "tradition" in literature while the discovery of the book in my father's library concretized or actualized the idea.

Written by a 19th century English archbishop, Richard Chenevix Trench, The Study of Words was originally a series of lectures delivered by its author to students at a sectarian college. What struck me about the book was the

uncanny relationship between the rhetoric of Trench and of my father and the idea of teaching (one of my father's vocations) as a dissemination of spiritual values through the instruction of language. Trench argues that words contain spiritual truths and that mainly through the understanding and correct usage of words, generations of people maintain a link with the past and with their community. With some modification this notion has found its way into twentieth century literary criticism. In "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture" F. R. Leavis writes "the most important part of this 'language' is actually a matter of the use of words. Without the living subtlety of the finest idiom (which is dependent on use) the heritage dies" (168). Although Leavis places less emphasis on the transmission of spiritual truths through the use of language, both he and Trench have qualified their observations with slightly elitist judgements. Trench refers to "worthy" books while Leavis mentions the "finest" idiom. As for the idea of "tradition" in literature it can be regarded as the embodiment of these ideas, whose "heritage" is dependent on a particular use of language, or critical discourse.

Continuing with my stories about researching in the "father's library" a second incident stands out in my memory. This occurred when a new book was brought <u>into</u> the house in contrast to the discovery of one already there. This was at a time when I was beginning to read Simone de

Beauvoir (The Second Sex and the wholly appropriate Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter) and other books of the "women's lib" period. When I brought home The Female Eunuch and accidentally left it in the foyer of the house (knowing either the title or the famous torso cover would offend my father's grave sense of propriety), my worst fears were confirmed: he opened the front door and threw it outside. Neither of these stories is fictional. In fact my purpose in using them here is to draw attention to the symbolic properties of two very real, personal accounts of reading and researching in the "father's library." With Trench in one hand and Greer in the other, I straddled the epistemological divide, partly in my father's library and partly in the world of feminist politics. These two anecdotes represent a concrete enactment of the problematics of feminist research, since feminist critics can only legitimate tradition illegitimately or on the other hand, risk being marginalized. Thus the dialectics of inside/outside, also formulated in discourse as self/other, come into play as depicted by the image of straddling the epistemological divide. Feminist critics are not only outside the academic community, but are also marginalized because their area of interest - woman - has been relegated to the metaphysical position of "other" in Western humanist discourse. "Woman" has come to represent everything that is not present in discourse, everything that is outside standard academic concerns, in short, everything in a

dualistic hierarchy of valuation which is inherently negative.

My father greatly influenced my interest in books, although our relationship is fraught with creative and intellectual tension. He received a classical education in the humanities studying Philosophy, English and History at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto just before the outbreak of the second world war. However, for him scholarly pursuit was and still is regarded as a thing befitting a "gentleman;" education is the "pursuit of truth" (and I quote him). However, the received notion of a gentleman and a scholar is dialectally bound to my personal beliefs as a feminist and a scholar. The two anecdotes as much as the two authors in question, Germaine Greer and Richard Trench, illustrate the dialectic in practice. On the one hand, The Study of Words was discovered by accident. According to traditions of influence, which are modelled on the notion of inheritance, the book should have gone from father to son. Trench's text, in the hands of my father, incarnates the transmission of a religio-cultural heritage, which presumably was to continue with the son. However, now the text is in the wrong hands and is being used subversively. At the other extreme, the banishment of Germaine Greer from the father's library brings to mind the exclusion of women from libraries and universities. One is reminded of Virginia Woolf's account in A Room of One's Own of being caught on the grounds at "Oxbridge." Having

entered exclusively male territory, she observes, "this was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me" (8). Both Woolf and Greer were banished to the margins, the "gravel". The relationship between the library and the university is in their function as synecdoches for the whole Western philosophic tradition, one which has in its social practices, systematically rejected or under-represented womens' achievements. The discovery of Trench's text and the prohibition of Greer's from my father's library symbolizes an aspect of tradition peculiar to women; the patriarch's library as a bastion of standard, classical texts which rejects the female corpus; the language and law of the father as a tradition in which gentlemen scholars derive much of their authority from the rejection of feminist scholars. In this way the transmission of culture can be regarded as violently misogynistic or simply as a "natural" unfolding -- traditions as they should be. That I found Trench's text in my father's library (an example perhaps of daughterly intervention in the mishandling of the canon) for me perfectly objectifies an "anxiety of influence" specific to women in artistic or intellectual pursuits, notably those of their fathers.

Archbishop Trench must have appealed to my father in part because he writes about language from the perspective of a well-educated Christian theologian. When speaking of language, Trench's views clearly rely on humanistic

assumptions, not only about the world but about language itself. To a 19th century scholar, language was entirely unproblematical; a deep and thorough understanding of the English language led one to express clear and univocal meaning. In this way, a solid training could lead one to Truth. What critics now call logocentrism was to Trench an unselfconscious "natural" orientation; his philosophy is classically logocentric, but his was the "Age of Innocence" of logocentrism: "God gave man language, just as He gave him reason...for what is man's word but his reason, coming forth that it may behold itself?" (14). Taking his cue from the bible ("In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God"), Trench's quotation reiterates the notion that the logos operates as a metaphysical presence. Since the logos is here a self-reflecting signifier, it may "behold itself:" it is true unto itself. The quest for origins and truth in A Study of Words therefore, is guaranteed by the self-confirming discourse of Trench's theo-logocentrism, which implies that meaning is fixed, absolute, unchanging. Yet the assumptions inherent in a discourse in which meaning is unitary and non-contradictory are precisely based on Christian humanist dichotomies, particularly in a figuration in which God the father gives man language. In this way Trench's text is symptomatic of what I have come to call the "religion of tradition" insofar as his discourse on words is informed by 19th century Christian humanism.

It is a commonplace of postmodern criticism to assert

that Western thought is structured on a pattern of polar opposites. Thus, culture and nature, man and woman, mind and body, presence and absence -- these dichotomies determine our cultural ideology. However, the terms in a set of polar opposites do not coexist as independent or as opposite in meaning. The first term takes its meaning from a negation of the other, which results in a hierarchy of values. Thus man subsumes woman, and man is the signifier of all of humanity. To a great extent, what this hierarchical structure provides is a valorization of presence, unity and identity. Therefore, while cultural values determine discourse, they are always already inscribed in language. As Catherine Belsey writes in Critical Practice "ideology is inscribed in signifying practices -- in discourses" (42). This idea takes us back to my assertion that discourses such as Trench's are based on humanistic assumptions, the two central ones being unity and identity. The history of tradition is a good example of a unified, singular ideology.

According to the OED, tradition is commonly understood to be the transmission from generation to generation of beliefs, rules, customs; it is a long established and generally accepted practice or method of procedure. If this description is read closely, it is evident that there is no external law acting upon tradition -- it is simply "commonly understood" and "generally accepted." It is my contention that this universal acceptance can only occur through a

discourse which is self-legitimating. Furthermore, we note that tradition is analogous to a genetic code, that it passes from one generation to the next. In the discourse on tradition, it is no coincidence that metaphors of inheritance crop up repeatedly, or indeed that the ideology of tradition is derived from inheritance as an aspect of the sociocultural order. To this extent, tradition is not just analogous to the transmission of a genetic code, but is also gender coded, or as the geneticists say, sex-linked.

Inheritance is perhaps the umbrella under which we can group educational privileges, property ownership and religious beliefs, a series of cultural values through which traditions maintain themselves in the sociocultural order. The preservation of language is like the continuation of name and property in the family. As a sign of culture and civility, language is a legacy or heritage passed from one generation to the next. Trench supplies a vivid and concrete example of this when he says there is "something" in the language of the "savage"

> which proclaims his language to be the remains of dissipated inheritance, the rags and remnants of a robe which was a royal one once. The fragments of a broken sceptre are in his hands, a sceptre wherewith once he held dominion (he, that is, in his progenitors) over large kingdoms of thought, which now have escaped wholly from his sway (22).

The sceptre is an accepted symbol in church and state of the

divine right, passed from one guardian of the rule to the next. According to Trench however, the sceptre also represents intellectual dominion. Both operate within the sociocultural realm, where a tradition of traditions gives them clout. It is significant that Trench describes the savage as having in his hands a "broken" sceptre, not the unified, whole-unto-itself phallic sceptre of the patriarchal rule.

As instances of a particular social practice which valorize the masculine, we need only look at certain "laws" which are part of our Western cultural inheritance. The most obvious example is property inheritance, a long established custom in which both title and property go through successive generations from father to son. The old boys' network also holds sway in business relationships, in which the older, established partner hands over the business to the younger partner, while the business is often a family one. At another level of the cultural order, in education, the mentor-protege relationship is an intellectual's version of the father and son. Even the practice of naming which critic Toril Moi calls "an enactment of Nietzsche's 'will to knowledge'" gives the father's name to the entire family (160). The family has functioned as a model in cultural practices while it has been encoded in cultural discourse. In Notes Toward the Definition of Culture, Eliot includes the family as a protectorate of culture; genetic purity is analogous to his sense of tradition -- "there must be groups

of families persisting, from generation to generation, each in the same way of life" (48). This would help ensure and regulate the continuity of "culture" as a body of male-dominated practices.

From the notion that a father-son paradigm is institutionalized at almost every level of the sociocultural order, it is not a great leap to the canon in English literature, which according to critic Harold Bloom in The Anxiety of Influence, is a tradition of influence and denial, a tradition of Oedipal relations between one (male) poet and the next. To propose a critique of the discourse on tradition or "traditional" criticism, it is necessary to see that the underlying supports, the ideological foundation the discourse draws on is itself implicated. Therefore we are faced with a methodological paradox; in the well known essay, "Structure, Sign and Play," Jacques Derrida writes:

> it is a question of explicitly and systematically posing the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself (282).

To apply Derrida's idea to feminist discourse, we see that the paradox for the feminist critic is contained in borrowing critical paradigms from the patriarchal heritage, while simultaneously posing a full scale assault on the same literary and critical heritage. It is for this reason that feminist literary scholarship remains bound to the dominant analytical discourse, while trying at the same time to

undermine the precepts and assumptions of Western, masculinist literary criticism.

Feminist literary criticism problematizes, and yet is bound, to the notion of a "Great Tradition" of writers in English. As such, it is plagued by its daughterly position, struggling to define its separate approach from within the dominant tradition. This fundamental split between self-definition and inherited definition marks women's literature and now describes the feminist critical program. For example, in addressing the question of a "Great Tradition," feminist literary criticism throws into question literary criteria while often formulating a separate approach. Similarly, two by now established approaches to feminist criticism are recuperative (finding a lost or submerged tradition) and utopian -- envisioning a revision to the canon. The task then of the feminist critic is doubled. At once, she must deconstruct the bedrock of dominant culture values on which the "Great Tradition" canon rests, while defending and advancing an alternative methodology. To do so, she must <u>write out of</u> and <u>write herself out of</u> an ideological paradox, for at the heart of the matter is the critic's topic and tool -- what Dale Spender has termed "man-made language."

In order to be accepted as "serious" by the critical establishment, feminist critics are forced to undermine their own project; they are obliged to supply the literary world with fresh (i.e. radical) ideas encoded in dominant

culture discourse. The contradiction inherent in this approach is a maddening version of the hermeneutic circle, *for* as women and as speaking subjects we are already inscribed in discourse. To be anything other than silent means reinscribing ourselves according to the values of the patriarchy. Even as I write, I am complicating my subject, meaning both my self and my language, for the "language of imperialism" has conditioned us to believe we can be masters of both. Hence the problem is how to come to terms with old order interpretations and orthodox discourse without capitulating to its logic.

In the process of "recuperation" and in the process of creating a tradition of women in literature, Anglo-Americans have radically criticized the male bias of the literary industry, the business of reputation, the "canonization" of texts. However, in re-writing the tradition in literature, feminist critiques have ironically restored woman to a position of otherness, by capitulating to the dominant (male) discourse, and therefore by working within a system in which humanistic assumptions are embedded. I would like to examine some of the standard feminist positions in the matter of tradition, in order to argue that the discourse is essentially problematical to feminist hermeneutics. Beyond a study then of Anglo-American literary theory, I would also like to show how French feminists have theoretically unbound woman from symbolic systems of representation and have produced texts which, through re-readings of

psychoanalytical discourse and linguistics, offer a more politically radical interpretation of language and its relation to "woman." This only barely outlines my project, which must first begin with a clear understanding of the domihion of traditions in literature. Therefore I begin by discussing some early 20th century critics on tradition.

Chapter One:

Early 20th century Theories of Tradition

In the early twentieth century there was a strong impulse to theorize tradition, a fact which suggests that tradition was no longer experienced as simply unfolding in a quasi-natural way. The idea of tradition holds sway in the sociocultural order (family, church, state), but when its influence wanes, the resulting sense of loss or disconnection gives rise to a desire to reiterate its importance -- in theory. In this way the motivation to theorize notions of "tradition" is symptomatic of a lack of connectedness with living. As family and church communities begin to lose authority, the will to theory (which indicates a dependence on language) takes over the task of transmitting culture. The reasons for this I will venture to say are associated with both the Christian humanist ethos and pathos of certain literary critics whose opinions shaped the cultural and educative climate of the time. Of the critics whose work I plan to discuss - Leavis and Eliot and to a lesser extent, Trench - all were some combination of poet, critic, religious thinker and educator. In what way then did creative, analytical, theological and academic discourses overlap, for surely there were all informing ideas of tradition. I would locate their similarity in the use of a dichotomy between primitive and cultured, however modified or veiled (and often it is neither). A number of

other discursive dualities are modelled on this distinction and their analysis should provide for us an understanding of some of the foundations on which the rock of tradition has been built.

Clearly Archbishop Trench relied on a colonial imperialist distinction between savage and civilized, implying as he did that manners and morals inhere in the English language. Arnold and Leavis, the father and son of late Victorian and twentieth century humanist criticism privileged the cultured and everything associated with it to such an extent that one suspects them of trying to prop up old values through jingoistic polemics. Did they dismiss American culture as vulgar so as not to draw attention to the "decline of the British empire?" Certainly one of the main reasons for the plethora of theories of tradition was the rise of technology. In the writings of both Leavis and Arnold, technology was grouped together with odious American pseudo-traditions, like the newly emerging mass-media, no doubt because they represented new forms of social discourse. In short, culture was being democratized by technological advances whereas it had always and implicitly been produced by and maintained by an educated elite in Britain. Until the upsurge of technological production, tradition had been a relatively uncontested source of authority; now it had to prove itself as a "living" force in an increasingly mechanical age.

Of the three critics I will concentrate on in this

first chapter, Leavis, Eliot and Virginia Woolf, all agree that tradition necessitates what Eliot called "the historical sense" ("Tradition" 49). All three agree that the poet must absorb the past and express it to be relevant in the present. Eliot asserted that the "best" and "most individual parts" of a poet's work are those in which "the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" ("Tradition" 49). Leavis argued that Jane Austen "not only makes tradition for those coming afer, but her achievement has for us a retroactive effect....Her work, like the work of all creative writers, gives a meaning to the past" (Great Tradition 5). Woolf's view of the "historical sense" does not rest so heavily on the idea of the past as a certifiable measure of excellence as does Leavis' or Eliot's. She comments that "if you consider any great figure of the past, like Sappho, like the Lady Murasaki, like Emily Bronte, you will find that she is an inheritor as well as an originator" (Room 104). Woolf's idea that writers are originators as well as inheritors is echoed by Edward Said's theory of "beginnings" in literature. Said posits the notion of "adjacency" over one of "dynasty" as a figuration of one text's relation to another (Beginnings). This represents a radical departure from Bloom's theory of influence, which is "dynastic" insofar as it operates within a psychohistorical model centered on a predetermined canon of male poets.

To invoke the "historical sense" is to reinforce the

hegemony of all aspects of the patriarchal dispensation, which at the level of discourse means logocentrism and binary thought patterns, in short a system of signification in which everything that is "other" is also "woman." To belong to a tradition in literature is to be automatically respected. Literature which does not belong to a tradition, that is to a literary family, is "illegitimate;" it has no father(s). Therefore I would say that Eliot's "historical sense" is an abstract way of invoking a patrilineal ideology. The production of literary meaning, in this model necessitates from one generation to the next, a coherent, unified philosophy of "sameness."

Finally, a note on Eliot, Leavis and Woolf. Critics have tended to overemphasize the social background of each of these writers as providing an explanation of their world consciousness: Eliot as an expatriated American, Leavis as the son of a working class man, and Woolf as a psychologically plagued upper-middle class aesthete. This overdetermination of view based on sociological differences is an approach which I find limited and reductive. Rarely does it offer a new evaluation and therefore as a methodology is dubiously qualified. For the purposes of this paper, I would prefer to highlight gender rather than social class as a way of pointing out distinctions in critical discourse.

Obviously the gender question is an issue in feminist inquiry. However, to date, the bulk of Anglo-American

feminist literary scholarship linked to ideas of tradition has imitated male-biased theories of tradition. Elaine Showalter's A Literature of Their Own, for example, substitutes women writers and their social background for "canonized" male writers. However, as Sandra Harding has argued in "Why Has the Sex/Gender System Become Visible Only Now?" the sex/gender system is an "organic social variable" (312). As such it is not merely a symptom of social or political change but is a "reality" underlying more superficial "appearances" in various epistemologies (311). According to Harding's formulation of the sex/gender system, Showalter's alternative canon is merely an "appearance" of anti-patriarchal criticism, which does not address the underlying "reality." Rather than switching the valorization of gender as Showalter has done (by replicating an interpretation of gender in the Western humanist mode), Harding suggests the use of gender as a tool for cultural and social analysis. Harding also believes that the discovery of the sex/gender system is attendant on an epistemological revolution, although within the limitations of her paper she does not specify how or why. However, if gender is, as Harding says, an "organic social variable" this implies that it crosses national and historical borders and ultimately that it inheres in various epistemologies. Therefore it is appropriate to use gender as a critical tool by which to pry open the discourse on tradition.

T. S. ELIOT

In his seminal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot's central concern is the mutual dependence of the past and the present in the art of poetry. He writes that "the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (49). The function of the coexistence of past and present is revealed primarily at the level of tradition and the individual. Thus

> the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order (49).

Within the body of his essay, Eliot's belief in the necessary simultaneity of past and present acts as an argument <u>against</u> highly personalized or self-indulgent poetry. He argues that what makes a poet traditional and at the same time unique is not his difference from his predecessors but his similarity to them. Yet Eliot is not advocating blind imitiation of the great writers. He employs a metaphor of literary ancestry to make his point, writing that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of (the poet's) work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most

vigorously" (48). Throughout "Tradition and the Individual Talent" the notion that the past should ideally cohere with the present in the production of poetry is articulated in order to suggest that meaning cannot be found in isolation. Poetry, to Eliot, can have no universal value, no semantic significance if it is merely an expression of personality, or conversely, if it is unaware of tradition. This idea is reinforced by his assertion that poetic values shift as literary history unfolds itself -- the "existing order" readjusts to permit the entrance of the "new" (50). By extension, this implies that literary meaning is in a state of perpetual redefinition. However, this is misleading because the redefinition is of an existing and established definition of poetry, therefore of meaning. The "order" does not change, but is rather developed or continued.

The opening paragraph of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in which Eliot lays out his ideas of what tradition is and is not, contains some rather contentious statements. It seems odd at the present time that in 1919, Eliot could start off what would become a highly influential and widely read essay by stating that "in English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence" (47). At the time of writing this statement may not have been disputable, yet sixty years later, it sounds unrealistic. It leads me to believe that the idea of tradition has received most attention in the twentieth century, that traditions have been forged and

maintained by modern literary criticism. Eliot's essay marks an acknowledged moment in critical discourse, yet it is precisely the lack of critical inquiry into the concept of tradition that makes the essay memorable. This is a point to remember because critical discourse of the type that Eliot and Leavis supply, is what Catherine Belsey would call "common sense criticism," in which much of the underlying ideology is taken to be "obvious" or given (Critical Practice 1-36). At the same time there is scarcely a mention of ideology, although as Belsey says, common sense ideology is inscribed in discourse.

In the context of Eliot's essay, the absence of a certifiable tradition has another function. It allows him to discuss tradition on the basis of an extremely abstract definition. The above quotation continues:

> We cannot refer to "the tradition" or to "a tradition", at most we employ the adjective in saying that the poetry of So-and-so is "traditional" or even "too traditional." Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure (47).

This point - that tradition to Eliot is an abstract ideal - is worth emphasizing because to determine exactly what is meant by "tradition" it is necessary to give a close reading to Eliot's essay. Furthermore (and this may appear to be a digression but it is in fact crucial to the development of my argument), since the concept of tradition is regarded as a universally understood ideal in early 20th century

criticism, it has rarely been questioned. Later I will discuss F. R. Leavis; he and Eliot have in common that they both consider tradition to be a result of "right living" (After Strange 30). In this respect, neither of them is strictly a literary critic but a cultural critic as well. Certainly the idea of tradition is reverenced in sociocultural institutions - the university system of mentoring, inheritance, naming etc. - but these are cultural forms or particular instances of tradition is practice. Nowhere in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is there any evidence of the construction of a tradition. In After Strange Gods Eliot writes that tradition is "a way of feeling and acting which characterizes a group throughout generations" (29). When tradition is conceptualized as an aspect of a sociocultural order in which "right living," "feeling and acting" are critical standards, it must issue from humanist discourse.

The title "Tradition and the Individual Talent" seems to designate a dialectical relation between the accumulated literary "monuments" of a country, a region etc. and the individual. However, Eliot employs a trope in this essay (in various forms at least five times) which narrows or focuses the "dialectic" and which reminds us that the relationship between the past and the present is not only a material one, i.e. the history of poems, but is also a history of minds. Eliot speaks of the "mind" of a nation or race; out of this is born the mind of the particular poet.

According to Eliot, these two minds are not compatible yet it is erroneous to formulate their relationship as dialectical since, in the end, Eliot says "the mind of Europe" is "much more important" than the "private mind" of the artist (51). Yet again it is misleading to think of private and national minds as conflicting or as dialectical because they belong to the same "mind."

When Eliot speaks of the "mind of Europe" or the "mind" of a particular country, he says it "is a mind which changes...which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draghtsmen" (51). This, I suppose is tradition, a "mind," the "consciousness of the past," a "development" or "refinement." As Eliot would have it, the poet's duty is not to impress his individuality into the mold of the historical mind, but to contribute to it. He suggests therefore, that individual talent is not subjective and not a product of personality. In fact, the poet "surrenders" himself "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (53). What the poet is surrendering is his "private" mind in favour of the mind of his country or race, to which he can make a valuable contribution. The poet's task, Eliot writes, is to "develop or procure the consciousness of the past" and to "develop this consciousness throughout his career" (52). This ensures that the literature of a country or a race, is a body, a

"living whole" (53) and not a set of discrete, unconnected parts. In a later essay ("The Function of Criticism") Eliot reiterates this position saying he thinks of "the literature of the world" or of Europe, or of a country,

> not as a collection of the writings of individuals, but as "organic wholes," as systems in relation to which, and only in relation to which, individual works of literary art, and the works of individual artists, have their significance (24).

While the emphasis in Eliot's discourse overtly claims to be the relationship between the past and present, there are certain assumptions which lead out of an ideological predilection and which have a less obvious bearing on his text. Therefore I would like to comment on the idea of "mind" as a formulation for the past and by extension, tradition.

To suggest that Europe or a single country can be characterized as a mind - disembodied and reified - implies that the literary history of the country or continent is seamless, monologic and unitary. Eliot's idea of the interrelationship between tradition and individual talent rests heavily on the poet's work as historically oriented, not in terms of content, but in terms of the fraternal unity of a nation's literature. No one can write in a vacuum, or for his own purposes or to meet his own ends. Although this seems to deemphasize the individual, it does in fact assert the sovereignty of the subject, because the poet has no

identity without the past. In this way the poet can maintain his individual integrity provided that he functions according to the rules, or the unwritten code, which is tradition.

The poetic discourse of the past is established, is establishment, while Eliot argues that the modern poetic discourse must be congruent with the establishment. This is a conservative view of art, one which takes as its primary given, an unproblematic history. It is a view which privileges continuity, unity, and similarity rather than discontinuity, disunity or difference. From a feminist perspective, any model of history (in this case, tradition) based on the concept of unity is a phallocentric model. Since the idea of tradition is based on unity and continuity of thought, it supports a non-contradictory theory of language. Furthermore, "tradition" in Eliot's sense seems to sanction its own assumptions and monopolize discourse partly because of its Christian humanist support in the sociocultural realm. It does not recognize difference and could therefore be called gender biased. It is a model which does not negotiate with its opposites, but instead subsumes them. As such, it is not dialectical. What we see in Eliot is a pattern of opposites (past/present, tradition/individual) which subtends a patrilineal and logocentic paradigm. Insofar as Eliot's idea of the past promotes likeness of vision (best exemplified by his usage of "mind") it adheres to a conception of literary history as

one, unified, uninterrupted heritage. At the same time, the "individual" of Eliot's title fits its theoretical hand in the glove of a uniformly constructed tradition: the "mind of Europe" or the "mind of a single country" operates discursively as an external analogy for the unified and fully integrated self, usually referred to as "man." A model of this type does not recognize difference, as stated previously -- it is driven by an impulse towards organic wholes, syntheses. In this respect it is situated within a humanist discourse by which the law of (God) the father provides what Julia Kristeva would term the "single true and legislating principle" -- the Logos (About Chinese 21). Precisely because Eliot's binary pairs are not dialectic, the discourse is not dialogic; it belongs to and supports a monologic and monotheistic approach to the idea of tradition.

Perhaps Eliot is an easy mark on the subject of monotheism, since he conspicuously upholds a belief in "unity of religious background" as an essential aspect of tradition (After Strange 20). In "The Function of Criticism" he alludes to this and other aspects of the humanist/patriarchal order when he speaks of something external to the artist

> to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to earn and to obtain his unique position. A common inheritance and a common cause unite all artists

> consciously or unconsciously: it must be admitted that the union is mostly unconscious (24).

Allegiance, devotion, sacrifice: these words connote the monarchy, Christianity and patriotism, aspects of the sociocultural order in whose practices tradition is accorded its authority. With these ideas in mind, I will return to Eliot's discourse as one predicated on humanist assumptions.

A discursive trait common to both Eliot and Leavis is the use of the individual, mind and even "life" as critical standards, as sources of meaning. These categories are determined by humanistic assumptions -- appropriately, about humans, life, the world. However, like most assumptions, they are unexamined principles and yet this is one of the strong points of humanist discourse -- it is a belief system in which the tenets are "obvious." Its points of reference are vague and generalized. The idea of "life" cannot be subjected to much interpretive scrutiny although Leavis and Eliot manage to tag critical imperatives on words like life. In "Second Thoughts About Humanism" Eliot makes this clear by saying,

> Humanism, because it is general culture, is not concerned with philosophic foundations; it is concerned less with "reason" than with common sense. When it proceeds to exact definitions, it becomes something other than itself (488).

Eliot's version of humanism is a living social creature -- it proceeds from the Christian morality of its

perpetrators. Yet when it exceeds this normative role and is defined exactly, humanism becomes ideology or is seen as a philosophy.

It is significant that Eliot separates "general culture" from any kind of philosophic attitude or discipline and similarly, that he isolates "common sense" from reason. By doing so, Eliot allies humanism with all that is obvious or natural and suggests that it represents the universal ideal, the eternal truths of humankind: humanism seeks to understand "human nature." It does not concern itself with narrow or specialized views. Undoubtedly, this accounts for the enduring, universalist position by which humanist critiques have withstood the vicissitudes of modern criticism. As a non-philosophical, non-ideological methodology, humanism has been refied through discourse. It uses empirical approach to which everyone has access -- the life of the author, the sex of the author, his religious orientation, his views about life etc.

Clearly Eliot regards humanism as a fact of existence, not as a theoretical set of beliefs. Like Leavis, we see in Eliot an effort to make a discussion of judgements and opinions. Moreover, their judgements derive from notions about culture which are presumed to be obvious and universally understood and which therefore require no "statement of principles." According to Eliot "it is not the business of humanism to refute anything. Its business is to <u>persuade</u>," according to its unformulable axioms of

culture and good sense....it operates by taste, by sensibility trained by culture" ("Second Thoughts" 488). If humanism does not issue from a theoretical or political program, but instead is informed by human assets like good sense, taste and sensibility, it must necessarily be informed at some level by cultural standards, as Eliot suggests. Culture, in this instance, represents class and education -- proponets of humanism find their good taste and good sense "trained" by culture. It is a learned, rather than inherent trait. A Marxist comment seems inevitable, for humanism is produced by cultural discourse -- there can be no discourse without ideology. As Raymond Williams notes in Culture and Society, "culture was made into an entity, a positive body of achievements and habits, precisely to express a mode of living superior to that being brought about by the 'progress of civilisation'" (248). This is particularly relevant to a discussion of Leavis whose discourse divides itself down these lines, of high culture and mass civilization.

F. R. LEAVIS

In The Great Tradition F. R. Leavis does not discuss the canon of writing in English literature, but rather discusses the "significant few" (3) who comprise the "great tradition." They are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence: "the great

tradition of the English novel is <u>there</u>" (27). This is a highly select minority of Brits and expatriates who set the standard. Like Eliot, Leavis implicitly believed that "tradition" was an achievement for the minority, not for the possession of the masses. Moreover, Leavis' adherence to a minority as the seat of culture extends from those who make up the "great tradition" to those who uphold the tradition -- through standards in language and through involvement in cultural institutions, notably the University. As Leavis develops the relationship between culture and language, the means by which a tradition is forged, his departure from Eliot's slightly disembodied, metaphysical description of tradition becomes apparent.

Leavis is not only proposing a syllabus for the study of English literature; he is implicitly advocating a critical discourse of authority and discrimination. Catherine Belsey writes that "what <u>The Great Tradition</u> produced was not simply a canon and a syllabus but a critical discourse, and the assumptions inscribed in this discourse are easily overlooked in the discussion of its specific assertions" ("Re-Reading" 121). In this section on Leavis, I will focus on the critical assumptions contained in Leavis' judgements and discuss how these assumptions relate not only to criticism but also to the canon in literature, to education and to culture in general.

In the introductory chapter of the book, Leavis defines the terms of his "Great Tradition" by eliminating

authors whom he considers to be "minor." Others including Mrs. Gaskell, Trollope and Charlotte Yonge are allowed their historical importance, but this concept is distinguished from importance in a tradition. According to Leavis' narrow conception of greatness, Mrs. Gaskell and Trollope do not belong in the same category as Austen and Eliot. What elevates a novelist to the heights of great is "a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity" (9). In general, Leavis arrives at an understanding of the novelist by examining his or her life and social background (class and religion), the details of which contribute either to a moral vision or a set of ideas which inform the actions and psychology of characters. These two levels of interpretation - the biographical and the textual - provide access to novelistic meaning by sharing the same humanistic values. Whether discussing the life of the author or the life of a character, Leavis is looking for the same coherence: the credibility of character, development of morality (that the characters grow and learn) -- broadly speaking, self-knowledge. In other words, the <u>life experience</u> of the <u>individual</u> is the main concern in Leavisian criticism, and these notions are implicitly <u>positive</u> in the hierarchy of valuation expressed in the discourse. Indeed, Catherine Belsey points that in <u>The Great Tradition</u> the authority of the critic takes over from the authority of the novelist. She says not only that the subjectivity of the critic

inheres in Leavis' reading of the novelists but also that "what is judged...it not writing but subjectivity itself; novels as access to the identities of the novelists" ("Re-Reading" 128). Particularly when taken in the context of Leavis' comments on modernist writers do the concepts of growth, learning and identity parallel the attainment of truth as a Western metaphysical ideal.

Leavis implicitly associates the attainment of truth, or self-knowledge, with development of ideas, resulting in a firm resolution of "form and content." By applauding the successful convergence of self-awareness and formal unity in the novel, he rejects the discontinuous prose of modernism. Ulysses is a "dead end," a piece of flag-waving anti-humanism, an example of the "disintegration" of the moral fibre of life (Great Tradition 26). While Eliot promoted the work of new modern writers such as Djuna Barnes and Lawrence Durrell, Leavis wrote,

> the spirit of what we are offered affects me as being essentially a desire, in Laurentian phrase, to "do dirt" on life...."One must speak for life and growth, amid all this mass of destruction and disintegration." This is Lawrence, and it is the spirit of all his work (26).

This quotation perhaps better than any other reveals Leavis' liberal idealism and humanistic inclinations.

Novelistic form parallels life and growth while Leavis suggests that these are aspects of the "Great Tradition."

Dickens' novels are classics -- this Leavis grants. However, his genius was that of a "great entertainer" (19), a talent which detracts from profundity or seriousness of moral purpose in the novel. Of Dickens, Leavis writes,

> I can think of only one of his books in which his distinctive creative genius is controlled throughout to a unifying and organizing significance, and that is Hard Times, which seems, because of its unusualness and comparatively small scale, to have escaped recognition for the great thing it is (19).

At the same time, by writing that "there is no organic principle determining, informing, and controlling into a vital whole" (25) the disparate voices and allusions in Ulysses, Leavis expells all modernist writers from the "great tradition" on the grounds that they "do dirt" on life and therefore on the standards of tradition.

We have seen in Eliot the notion of tradition as an idealized, wholly unified past. Similarly, Leavis conceives of the novel, as the emblem of tradition, as an organic whole which is mirrored by the lives of the characters and novelists. As a convention of the novel, unity, comments Said,

> is maintained by a series of geneological connection: author-text, beginning-middle-end, text-meaning, reader-interpretation and so on. Underneath all these is the imagery of succession, of paternity, of hierarchy (162).

The criterion therefore, of the idea of tradition and of "living" traditions are the same -- unity, identity and similarity. Indeed because these various traditions infiltrate every strata of the sociocultural order, they come to represent "culture" -- the "positive body of achievements and habits" as Williams termed it.

In Leavis' criticism, the cultural and the literary tend to converge. As he says, "a study of tradition in literature involves a great deal more than the literary" ("Idea" 19). In his discussions of the state of education and the state of standards in criticism, what emerges is a sense of cultural values in crisis. Yet he speaks also of a "positive cultural tradition" which can be drawn upon or indeed revived with liberal education ("Idea" 18). Particularly in the essays of Education and the University, Leavis draws a link between an education in the humanities and the dissemination of positive values in the cultural life of the community. However, the tenets of this "positive cultural tradition," are latent in cultural institutions and critical discourses to the extent that Leavis, like Eliot on the subject of humanism, does not feel compelled to define it. Leavis is concerned instead with "picking up a continuity; carrying on and fostering the essential life of a time-honoured and powerful institution, in this concrete historical England" ("Idea" 19). Education, in this sense, can best be understood as the socializing function of "tradition" by which groups of

people occupying a particular social status in a certain time and place decide by tacit concensus the critical standards that distinguish "art" from "low brow culture." A study of tradition therefore is the highest endeavor of a literary humanist; it "carries on" a tradition of study which is, according to Leavis, best exemplified by the liberal education programme he hoped to encourage in British universities.

In his editorials for Scrutiny and in Education and the University Leavis presents a continuing argument on standards in culture. Essentially, his argument can be divided between "high" humanism and "low" technocratic philistinism. Although he attempts to avoid intellectual snobbery, his discourse is often prickly and defensive as if he were aware of the shortcomings of his arguments. On the one hand he rejects the notion of "high brow" culture and dissociates himself from its implicit condescension. On the other hand, he feared the rising influx of vulgar, popular culture which he associated with mass production and technology. Positioned between the two, Leavis makes a pitch for the moral and social purpose of art. His audience could be culled from all classes; an Arnoldian "remnant," they transcended the habits and limitations of class and represented the "common reader." Although Leavis himself does not make the distinction between "high" humanism and "low" technocratic philistinism, the duality is implicit in his discussions of the university (as the institution which

emblematizes tradition), and what he calls "technologico-Benthamite civilization" (English Literature 24). The latter he regards as a pernicious influence, not necessarily American though best represented by popular texts which America produced --movies, broadcasting, pulp novels and advertising. These new social discourses encouraged the "standardization" or "levelling down" of culture with their "Book Society values" ("What's Wrong" 143). In turn the mass marketing of these new values dissolved the effectiveness of an educated nucleus of "scrutineers" through whom humanist criticism had maintained the standards of "tradition."

In rejecting these new discourses, Leavis implies that "Great Tradition" literature represents the best mankind can aspire to, since according to his assumptions, great literature promotes human concerns. Eliot, Pound, Joyce and Woolf he felt were "beyond the reach of the vast majority of those who consider themselves educated" ("Mass Civilization" 164); they were an avant-garde minority who subverted the select few of the "great tradition." The overriding factor about modernist writing is its dialogic quality; Joyce and Woolf especially threw into question the single voiced narrator of the novel. Using many voices (or the discourse of the splintered self), their writing challenged not only the status quo but also the classical humanist assumptions of the text -- the moral epiphany, the sovereignty of the subject, the seamless unity of classical narrative, the sex

of the author. According to Leavis' underlying ideology, these works represent an anti-humanist faction. Furthermore, and in opposition to Bloom's "anxiety of influence," Edward Said cites Joyce and Yeats among other modern writers whose work makes reference "by adjacency, not sequentially or dynastically" (10). This is to say that modern works are associated synchronically, rather than diachronically, which radically undermines the whole concept of "tradition." However, the remark about the moderns being "beyond the reach" of the educated implies that a classical education trains one to think dynastically, that is, along the lines of unity, coherence of subject, life, living, in short humanism.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

It has been established that F. R. Leavis is paradigmatic of authoritarian criticism, in which subjective judgements are represented as common knowledge. The author is the single definitive source of truth in the novel and the critic's judgement as to the experience of the author determines his or her status as major or minor in the canon. In A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf essentially argues that the construction of a tradition in literature is contingent on its relationship to cultural institutions -- the university, property laws, inheritance etc. According to one's membership or access to these institutions, one is

accorded rights and privileges such as education, money and leisure. The creation of literature and of traditions in literature is ultimately a product of money and a room of one's own. "Intellectual freedom" Woolf writes " is dependent on material things" (103).

A Room has been labelled "a kind of feminine Declaration of Independence" (Muller 34) as well as a "Marxist-feminist theory of literary criticism" (Marcus "Liberty," 60). Both comments correctly imply that Woolf's text is a gender-based political argument which brings economic and cultural facts into a harsh light -- i.e. the light of women and their production of literature. The argument is radical or was, at the time of its publication, while the discursive approach is even more radical, particularly when viewed from a postmodern hermeneutic.

The two above quotations illustrate by constrast the critical attempt to "feminize" theory. The first, by Herbert Muller comes from a 1937 text and in its entirety, the quotation reveals how sociobiological determinism has found its way into the literary world. It uses gender (masculine, feminine) to comment on identity (male, female). Muller not only relies on the conventional connotations of the feminine to demote Woolf, he also, in Leavisian style, associates Mrs. Woolf with Mrs. Dalloway and other of her characters. The "penalty of her culture and refinement" he says, is ultimately that she cannot write of any "big emotion, any violent conflict, any profound or

tumultuous experience" (34). Muller calls A Room a "well-mannered plea" for the rights and freedom of women (34).

> Mrs. Woolf now has a room of her own. But what does she do in it? She sits and embroiders. She does water colors in pastel shades. She plays minor chords with the soft pedal down. In short, her room might as well be the drawing-room of a parsonage, and she serving tea to the ladies of the parish. Essentially, she writes like that busy housewife, mother and soft-eyed model of Victorian womanhood, Mrs. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (34).

Muller's idea of the feminine is derived from its difference from masculine -- pastel colors and embroidery as opposed to the more robust "red beef and port wine" which men prefer (34). In this respect, feminine is defined as difference from masculine and therefore cooperates in a dualistic hierarchy of value. Muller suggests that because women write of feminine experience (which is "wistful, fragile, filmy, dainty") they "seldom produce more than minor classics" (36). Major classics, on the other hand, grapple with "large issues or ultimate meanings" (36).

The other quotation, from Jane Marcus clearly states that Woolf's text is a feminist one -- in which meaning stems from a conception of difference in and of itself, or difference from that which is already different. The cultural connotations attached to "feminine" and "feminist"

are exceedingly important in an examination of Woolf's text. In her mode of discourse, which she was deliberately attempting to foreground by using irony and parody, Woolf undermines the single and unitary voice of the author. In playing with the notion of "voice," in calling attention overtly to the unreliability of the speaking source and by not identifying herself with any of the personas, Woolf challenges the authoritative voice of the author and calls into question the notion of the single and sovereign subject. This is part of her strategy and part of our interpretive strategy in discussing A Room. However, as previously mentioned, Woolf also polemically manifests the view from "outside" -- outside privilege, outside the university, yet within the patriarchy.

Although an intention to steer clear of sociological and biographical arguments has already been made, the notion of the family romance is one in which gender as an "organic social variable" becomes apparent. In the case of Virginia Woolf, the lives and careers of her male relatives cannot be overlooked in a discussion of the classic British university education, since, for example, Woolf's brothers were educated at Cambridge while she and her sister had tutors at home. There is no intention here of lamenting the inherent sexism of this unfortunate circumstance, nor of exploiting the notion of inequitable education to Woolf's advantage. Rather, as Jane Marcus states in her analysis of A Room, "Woolf always looks at the writer in historical context, at

the conditions of women's lives" ("Liberty" 60) and we, too should look at the concrete surroundings of Woolf's life in order to assess the ideological underpinnings of A Room.

In "Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny" Marcus supplies an extremely thorough account of the Stephen men and their circle who were, she says "shaped by institutions, Cambridge University and the secret society, the Apostles, which affirmed their being as the 'intellectual aristocracy' of England" (60). Although Woolf's text is not an open condemnation of the elitist, misogynistic and imperialist basis of these institutions, clearly her narrative of "women and fiction" is informed by some first hand experience with the profession and the institutional machinery behind it. She does attempt to formally and literarily overthrow a "tradition" in which her family participated. Her father, compiler of the Dictionary of National Biography, was responsible for recording the lives of great Englishmen. Leslie Stephen along with most of Woolf's other male relatives, -- judges, politicians, poets and professors had a monopoly on the means by which culture was produced -- they were the law, the father, the university, the language. Her male relatives represented the patriarchy at its fullest and most far reaching. As critic Beverly Ann Schlack writes, "the family, is the state, society and culture in miniature" (52-53). In A Room, Woolf declares that no one could fail to see that

> England is under the rule of the patriarchy. Nobody in their senses could fail to detect the dominance of the professor. His was the power and the money and the influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor. He was the Foreign Secretary and the Judge (34).

Under the rule of the patriarchy, Englishwomen like Woolf could hardly escape being defined by the standard erected by the masculine superstructure. What she attempted then was to outline women's entrance into culture. She had a personal stake - some would say an axe to grind - in the analysis of culture, especially as it hinged on education. Aware of the familial, institutional, ideological and historical interconnections informing the notion of tradition, Woolf argued not for their abolition but for women's time, women's money, women's room to move in the culture.

The first chapter of A Room is essentially a treatise on the economic factors involved in the founding and funding of a university. Woolf reveals a deep and clear understanding of the way in which a patriarchal institution, represented by the twin powers of Oxford and Cambridge embodied in Woolf's fictional "Oxbridge," maintains its monetary influence over the centuries. It does so by educating men of the upper middle class, and who, through education, gain access to the higher levels of the social strata and then in their wealth endow the university which

led them to higher societal ranks. Woolf writes,

> An unending stream of gold and silver...must have flowed into this court perpetually to keep the stones coming and the masons working....But it was then the age of faith, and money was poured liberally to set these stones on a deep foundation....And when the age of faith was over and the age of reason had come, still the same flow of gold and silver went on; fellowships were founded; lectureships endowed; only the gold and silver flowed now, not from the coffers of the king, but from the chests of merchants and manufacturers, from the purses of men who had made, say, a fortune from industry, and returned, in their wills, a bounteous share of it to endow more chairs, more lectureships, more fellowships in the university where they had learnt their craft (11).

By listing the documents which legitimate the ownership of property (land grants, tithes and wills), Woolf cogently details an aspect of the patriarchal dispensation which we can term the law of succession. Woolf describes the founding and funding of the university as one which unfolds in a "nature-like" manner, that is through endowment by generations of men. Her prose reflects the sense that the process is smooth, even and uninterrupted. Moreover, in one short passage, she manages to mention most aspects of the law of succession -- the right of king or queen to the throne, the professor-student relationship, property

ownership laws. The law of succession therefore is not only written into the law books but is also encoded in sociocultural patterns. The exclusive old boy's network operates by allowing the discriminating few to teach and train younger men so that the standards and values disseminated gradually become accepted as the norm. In this way the normative order sustains itself through processes of acculturation and education. Since the sociocultural order is dominated by male-empowered institutions, it can function as a self-perpetuating entity -- hence, the illusion of it unfolding "nature-like."

Woolf makes her reader aware that tradition is an ideological construct and that it is given shape and credence in material ways, through the accumulation of property, titles and wealth. Moreover, this law of succession is a cultural form to which only one half of the population, by rights, has access. She argues that women not only had no means by which to accumulate capital and thus no separate store of resources on which to draw, but also that until The Married Women's Property Acts, a woman's property belonged to her husband. Woolf writes that it is pointless

> to ask what might have happened if Mrs. Seton and her mother and her mother before her had amassed great wealth and laid it under the foundations of college and library, because, in the first place to earn money was impossible for them, and in the second, had it

> been possible, the law denied them the right to possess what money they earned....Every penny I earn, they might have said, will be taken from me and disposed of according to my husband's wisdom -- perhaps to found a scholarship or to endow a fellowship in Balliol or Kings, so that to earn money, even if I could earn money, is not a matter that interests me very greatly (23).

As critics Michèle Barrett and Jane Marcus have argued, Woolf's ideas on women and fiction took into account the material conditions of a particular historical period (cf. Introduction; "Sorority"). Barrett writes that Woolf "argued that the writer was the product of her or his historical circumstances, and that material conditions were of crucial importance" (12). In the previous passage from A Room, Woolf narrates the story of women's economic oppression, connecting it repressive marital laws. She compells the reader to recognize that economic oppression excludes women from the privilege of knowledge -- that having control of the money and the schools also means having control of the language. Although fictionalized, Woolf's account of being barred from the library at "Oxbridge" (which has actual historical and social precedents) emblemetizes the exclusion of women from the sources of knowledge -- "ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction" (9). Another

intended meaning of this quotation has been suggested by critic Susan Hardy Aiken:

> Like the library, the canon might well be read as a kind of metatext, a synecdoche of the Western academic tradition. That tradition, in its turn, frequently operates as a synecdoche for what is called "civilization."...like Western patriarchal culture, the library and the literary canon have historically functioned as paternal edifices...(289).

Woolf demonstrates that the University, which Leavis proudly called the "recognized symbols of cultural tradition," is a symbol of sexist society ("Idea" 16). "Ladies" cannot be admitted without a "fellow." Thus the University functions by way of fraternal exclusiveness or same-sex bonding, which is informed by misogyny. In the second chapter of A Room, Woolf links male power and aggression as played out in war with the putative inferiority of women. In doing so, she denounces the English imperialist campaign as thoroughly as she did the university system. The similiarity between war and fraternity is found in her assertion that power is based on anger directed towards women; from this anger comes a feeling of superiority. Graphically depicting the violence of this anger, Woolf describes the author of The Mental, Moral and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex

> labouring under some emotion that made him jab his pen on the paper as if he were killing some noxious insect

> as he wrote, But even when he had killed it that did not satisfy him; he must go on killing it; and even so, some cause for anger and irritation remained (31).

Jane Marcus writes that such "Victorian violence against women" was institutionalized in "fraternal organizations like the Cambridge Apostles" ("Liberty" 69). While the Apostles represent the philosophical and academic wing of patriarchal violence against women, some of their members were active in the political life of England. Woolf's grandfather, James Stephen was Permanent Under Secretary for the Colonies and responsible for imperialism under seven changes of government; Woolf's uncle Fitzjames Stephen codified English and Indian law and was a judge while her father, Leslie Stephen, supervised the compilation of the DNB, a political who's who of Englishmen (see Marcus "Liberty," 69-70). Ironically, Richard Trench, author of The Study of Words is listed in the DNB and was himself one of the Cambridge Apostles. Trench was indirectly involved in the project of colonization, insofar as he uses reports from missionaries in Africa in the 19th century to provide examples for his belief in cultural relativism. The "savages" were spiritually impoverished since they had no word for "God" but had many words for abortion and patricide, among other atrocities (Trench 20-21). Here again we see the inseparability of language from patriarchal institutions like church and state. It is not insignificant for example, that the twelve Apostles at Cambridge who met

to debate philosophical issues, called themselves after the followers of Christ.

As Woolf broadens the scope of the inferior-superior dichotomy, she suggests that it has been central to the success of military campaigns. Woman is a "mirror" and mirrors, she writes, are "essential to all violent and heroic action" (36).

> Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power...the glories of all our wars would be unknown (35).

Essentially, Woolf argues that the relation of colonialism and imperialism to sexual oppression is direct: sexual oppression is absorbed into the discourse of man/woman, self/other, or as with Trench, civilized/savage.

> Hence, the enormous importance to a patriarch who has to conquer, who has to rule, of feeling that great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, are <u>by nature</u>, inferior to himself. It must indeed be one of the chief sources of his power (<u>Room</u> 35, emphasis added).

It is interesting to note that Woolf does not promote the healing of the division between man and woman, but instead offers the idea of androgyny as a solution. Although it seems obvious from her argument that male dominance of women creates misogyny, this is not to say that granting equality

would create a better state of affairs. What this would create is another version of humanism, in which women, "by nature" are still inferior to men. Thus, misogyny is an extreme aspect of patriarchal tyranny whereas humanism is simply a veiled or more covert attack on women.

Although Woolf's argument in the first half of A Room covers the misogynistic and hegemonic impulse behind the academy, the professions and the military, her critique ultimately dissects binary patterns of thought, which have been naturalized through the use of language. Moreover, in arguing that the "great mind is androgynous" Woolf undermined one of the central concepts of Western humanism -- the notion of the unitary self, single in gender, wholly autonomous and commonly called "man." This is a concept Woolf actively challenged in Orlando in which the shifting sex of the main character suggests that conventional ideas of sexuality (normalcy, heterosexuality and monogamy) are socially constructed -- that is, more learned than natural. By the same token, the term "mankind" loses legitimacy in Woolf's writing since "man" assumes that we can locate an innate human nature, outside of and separate from sociocultural constraints. Woolf problematizes the unity of the Self not only figuratively in Orlando but also explicitly in A Room. In the Woolfian "mind" androgyny results directly from a disunified Self. In A Room, the narrator's identity is metaphysically problematized: "'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real

being" (6).

The novel Orlando could be called a theory of tradition. In the feminist counterpart to the canon of writing in English literature (The Norton Anthology of Women), the authors write in the introduction to Woolf that Orlando is a

> parodic biography of a four-hundred-year-old character who changes from male to female in the late seventeenth century and whose fantastic, centuries-long development represents...the evolution of English literature from the Renaissance to the twentieth century (Gilbert and Gubar 1343).

Just as Orlando, the character, has an/other side (man or woman), so Orlando calls into question the discourse of the unified self (the hero), the organic unity of the novel and with it, the greatest teleology, Truth. At the beginning of A Room, Woolf ironically plays with the "first duty of the lecturer -- to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth" (5). Finally, she suggests, there is no truth, particularly not on the topic of women and fiction. Furthermore, truth is an illusory product of the logocentric system of thought and this is exactly what Woolf is actively undoing. The first line of Orlando ("he...for there could be no doubt about his sex...") parodies the absolute certainty with which language describes sex (9).

Ultimately, Woolf suggests that we "think back through our mothers," which implies an awareness of continuity with

the past and entails an historically dynamic, long term form of solidarity (Room 72). However the vast part of A Room demonstrates exactly why and how this female solidarity has been prevented. In contrast, solidarity has been available to men, in secret societies and in sociocultural practices such as inheritance and education. This implies that "tradition" in literature has been constructed on the model of the phallus -- the original sovereign entity, non-contradictory and unambiguous, like the Self of man which it represents. The phallic structure of the tradition has erected itself, and its discourse, on its sexual other. Woolf images the letter "I" as a phallus, "honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching" (95). In the shadow of the letter "I" is a woman; the Self is male defined while the "other" therefore is constituted as woman.

When the Leavisian "mind" enacts a silent duel (dual) with the body (its logical coorelative), it actively suppresses woman and assigns to her the role of other. It erects itself on solid male ground ("polished for centuries by good teaching"), and in doing so, underscores its foundation in Cartesian thought. In rejecting the dichotomy between masculine and feminine, Woolf challenges the notion of identity; by decentering the Self, she implicitly rejects the realist demand for "unity, simplicity and communicability" (Lyotard 75), as well as the novelistic requirement for a single hero, searching for the truth of

himself. One critic writes (wrongly, I suggest) that Woolf, in A Room,

> presents the argument of the essay through two modes of discourse:...the "story"...rambling, digressive, associative....the second mode of discourse is that of the formal rhetorical argument itself: clear and ordered...(Jones 229).

Offering the dual mode of discourse as the critical response to Woolf's idea of androgyny, the author of this quotation resorts to a binary pattern which generally relegates women to the side of negativity, be it in a model of androgyny or not. On the other hand, critic Toril Moi asserts that Woolf practices a "deconstructive" form of writing --. "one that engages and thereby exposes the duplicitious nature of discourse" (9). Avant-garde in its day, Woolf's project can now be called "post-modern" in that it subjects established codes of discourse to what Jean-François Lyotard calls the "severe reexamination which post-modernity imposes on the thought of the Enlightenment, on the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject" (73). Woolf's novel Orlando, while not exactly a "severe reexamination" of these ideas, is an embodiment of them. Orlando lives for over two centuries during which time his/her strangeness of union with Self and other presents a challenge to the normative subject. In this way Woolf mocks the Cartesian subject and transgresses all normative rules of subjectivity and life history.

Chapter Two:

Anglo-American Feminist Literary Criticism

In North America, feminist literary criticism came of age as part of the Women's Liberation movement which itself was initiated, along with other "minority" rights groups, in the 1960's. Yet even before Kent State and the students riots in Paris in May 1968, pioneering works such as Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique (1963) demonstrated with almost scientific exactitude the disaffection of American women with their role in society, particularly in the institution of marriage. It could be argued that women's lib was overshadowed by the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war; women's demands, in retrospect, seem vague or perhaps confused with the so-called sexual revolution. Change in general, or at least the improvement of the role of women in society was required. Because feminist literary criticism was the academic part of this widespread change, it adopted a similar set of principles, studying the social and political history of women and its effect on literature. "Feminist criticism" was "a new literary analysis based on the tenets of the American women's movement" (Donovan 1). With the publication of Kate Millett's ground-breaking Sexual Politics in 1971, the effort to denounce stereotypes of women in literature by men was under way. The pattern of inquiry in these examples is

based on actual or perceived oppression of women in society and on the depiction of women in literature. The domination of men over women is considered to extend from fictional representation to the canon of works and to the syllabus in university courses, which can be read as analogous systems of oppression, in which women are excluded or silenced. Marcia Landy in her essay "The Silent Woman: Towards a Feminist Critique" emphasizes the concatenation of history, socialization and exclusion from education, which, as constitutive of the normative order have determinated woman's place in literature. She concludes the following passage by suggesting that this state of affairs is reflected in critical language:

> Even within the novel tradition, one must examine why for the most part, although women have been novelists, the majority of significant novels have been written by male writers. In part, this situation can be attributed to the male guardians of "the great tradition," perpetuated in critical studies and in university curricula...and we automatically accept standards of literary excellence on the basis of pre-existing social bias, in terms of legitimating the traditional social order and its values (21).

The predominance of male writers on university course syllabi and the predominance of male scholars in tenured positions or senior academic positions in the universities, have assisted, it is claimed, in producing a gender biased

standard of criticism.

From this brief overview the point emerges that Anglo-American feminist literary scholarship concerns itself with the overlap between the social and literary valuation of women. Indeed, because feminist criticism in America grew up with anti-Vietnam and civil rights marches, it has had and continues to have a strong political impetus. Feminism itself eventually became a political ideology of its own, with branches -- Marxist-feminist, lesbian-feminist etc. However, unlike other ideologies whose tenets are based on theoretical writings (Marxism), feminism is an ideology with roots in actual, personal experience, a notion which was popularized by the adage "the personal is political." Throughout the highly empirical 1970's and into the more sophisticated 1980's, feminist critics have often cited examples culled from their classroom teaching, their personal experiences, their students' responses to literature, their experience in curriculum meetings with male colleagues etc.[1]

The empirical tendancy of Anglo-American feminism is carried through in topics of research. The area of feminist criticism known as "images of women" was the earliest form of criticism, and according to Cheri Register, also "well defined and frequently practiced" ("American Feminist" 2).

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[1]See Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination; Susan Hardy Aiken, "Women and the Question of Canonicity;" Sandra M. Gilbert, "What Do Feminist Critics Want?" 29-45 and Carolyn G. Heilbrun, "Bringing the Spirit Back to English Studies" 21-28. The latter two are found in The New Feminist Criticism.

Inspired by Mary Ellman's Thinking About Women and Sexual Politics, images of women criticism initiated the feminist response to the male dominated literary world. Therefore, it is characterized by analysis of images and stereotypes of women in literature by men and to a lesser extent by the categories of criticism employed by male reviewers of texts by women. (A good example of the latter is the review of Woolf by Herbert Muller on page 39 in Chapter 1). Henry Miller, D. H. Lawrence and others have been reevaluated (see Millett) as particularly misogynistic in their supposedly liberal attitudes towards sexuality, (read women).

However, the emphasis in images of women criticism has been on the "authority of experience" as Diamond and Edwards' volume is titled. As opposed to being silenced or subsumed by the universal experience of "mankind," images of women criticism sought to give voice to the specific experience of women. The implication in this type of criticism is that the female characters in literature by men were not realistic, falling into broad classifications of virgin and whore and so on (see Donovan 3-8). According to images of women critics, these stereotypes did not accurately portray the lives of real women and therefore falsified the experience of women. Stating that "female readers need literary models to emulate" Cheri Register underlined what Toril Moi calls the "deep realist bias of Anglo-American feminist criticism" ("American Feminist" 20; 47). Examples abound. In an essay entitled "Eve among the

Indians," Dawn Lander describes salient childhood memories in great detail before commenting,

> Ten years after I left Arizona, I began graduate studies in American literature and, not surprisingly, my interest focused upon literature of the wilderness. Repeatedly, however, I could find no place for myself and for my pleasure in the wilderness in the traditionally recorded images of women on the frontier (195).

In The Female Imagination, Patricia Meyer Spacks liberally makes use of the comments and experiences of her students both to provide concrete examples for theories and to query aloud. "But women learning the power of art inevitably wonder about love. Is the cost of achievement the loss of relationship?" (318). Spacks assumes that most female literary figures are unsatisfactory because they do not provide the young women who registered for university courses on women's fiction with viable alternatives to the conventional depiction of women. Spacks would no doubt agree with Cheri Register who remarked that "a literary work should provide role-models" and should "instill a positive sense of female identity" ("American Feminist" 20). Discussing the character of Gwendolen Harleth in Daniel Deronda, Spacks assumes a direct correspondence between reader and character; she expects the novel to teach the student something about her own life.

> To study the situation of women as recorded in literature is to open one's eyes to painful truths; and to what advantage after all, my students keep asking, this seeing?...Women rarely feel it possible to control their destinies; they are often correct. Gwendolen ends by accepting a straitened life; girls fearing they must do the same wonder about the advantage of knowing life's narrowness (56).

I have chosen to focus briefly on images of women criticism in order to introduce feminist discourse as practiced in later critical works. Feminist literary criticism is primarily political in motivation; this was established by its roots in political events of the 1960's. For this reason the one claim that unites feminist criticism in all its pluralism is the insistence on the importance of historical, sociological and cultural reasons for women's oppression. Furthermore, since feminism is a branch of criticism like any other (Marxist, Freudian, liberal-humanist), it maintains a separate view, a distinct vocabulary, and a separate set of ideals. A "reaction against the strict formalism in vogue in midcentury" as Cheri Register says, feminist criticism has stressed that no critical stance is objective or value-free ("Review Essay" 271). In the essay "Female Criticism," Annette Barnes claims there are no "independent standards" and no "impartial criteria" to which we can refer, "which would allow us to evaluate the claims of correctness or truth made

by a Freudian critic, a Marxist critic, a feminist critic" (3). Therefore, any claim to objectivity, universality or truth in critical discourse is misleading and authoritarian. This is simply to say that the critic's view is informed by political, social and historical factors and hence that by stating one's bias and limitations, the feminist critic admits the monopoly on truth or universality is impossible. Toril Moi writes that this "remains one of the fundamental assumptions of any feminist critic to date" (44).

That said, it is necessary now to further comment on images of women criticism, which, it must be granted was a necessary and vital part of the feminist critical project. However, there are problems inherent in an approach to literature based on empirical data. Firstly, to connect literature to life experience and attempt to look for a direct correspondence automatically assumes a notion of reality which is singular and verifiable. It also suggests that literature should provide an authentic reproduction of this reality, which is a highly prescriptive order. In one sense, images of women criticism is Leavisian, since it relies on the author's experience of life as told in fictional accounts. Secondly, this type of criticism, partly because it seeks to reevaluate and legitimate the feminine, operates on a conventional, binary level. Spacks' The Female Imagination is paradigmatic of this tendency. Although she reviews the stereotypic position of women both

in society and in fiction, and implies it is damaging for a young woman's sense of self, she does not set about to offer alternatives, but rather states that "the orthodox female vocation of caring for others, the orthodox female posture of dependency, contain...hidden possibilities for exercising control" (317). Spacks accepts the classic associations of masculine and feminine, placing the feminine in a separate but equal power structure. Yet this is simply the inverse gender bias of the male guardians of the academy, assigning to women an essentialist intellect. This succeeds only in reducing women to participants in a patriarchal hierarchy, in which "feminine charm can combat masculine forcefulness," as Spacks writes of Mary Ellman's powers of rhetoric (26).

Finally, the exaggerated emphasis on reading personal correspondences into images of women in literature is decidedly anti-critical. In comparison to most of the later feminist literary criticism, texts such as The Female Imagination and The Authority of Experience exhibit a lack of theoretical insight. However, images of women criticism, although now superceded by its sisters practices, was important as the first form of feminist criticism.

Part II

Ideas of Tradition in Anglo-American Feminist Literary Criticism

In the late 1970's feminist literary critics departed

from "images of women" criticism and collectively embarked on a more "woman-centered" project or "gynocritique" as Elaine Showalter has termed it. Since images of women criticism is "male centered," focusing on male authored texts, it emphasized woman as reader, whereas gynocritique emphasized woman as writer ("Towards" 128). During this period, three texts in particular expounded "woman-centered" theories and at least two of them have been enshrined in the feminist critical canon. These two, Showalter's A Literature of Their Own (1977), and the encyclopaedic The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar both propose theories of tradition in writing by women. Their critical differences will be discussed separately in this chapter, while at this point is it important to establish the similarity of view between A Literature of Their Own, Madwoman and the third text, Ellen Moers' Literary Women (1976).

The critical stance common to all three texts is the notion that a tradition of women's writing is subcultural, which is to say that most women's writing up to and often including the 20th century was produced under conditions of constraint. Ellen Moers remarks that "to be a woman writer long meant, may still mean, belonging to a literary movement apart from but hardly subordinate to the mainstream: an undercurrent, rapid and powerful" (42). Showalter concurs, quoting this passage from Moers, adding that the development of a female literary tradition is "similar to

the development of any literary subculture" (A Literature 10-11). While Gilbert and Gubar do not explicitly address the idea of a women's tradition as subcultural, their entire work corresponds thematically: the "most successful women writers" they assert, "have created submerged meanings, meanings hidden within or behind the more accessible, 'public' content of their works" (Madwoman 72). By this, Gilbert and Gubar imply that women writers were aware of their non-dominant position in literary traditions, and that this awareness is evidenced in covert or subversive levels of meaning, even within conventional forms such as the novel. All critics mentioned here implicitly relativize a tradition of women writers; Showalter observes that it is important to see the female literary tradition in "broad terms...relative to a dominant society" (11).

The title of Showalter's text (A Literature of Their Own) is one of the signals towards a woman-centered perspective. All three texts implicitly affirm the tradition of women as separate, separate from the "great tradition" and its aesthetic criteria. It is this consciousness of sex difference and categorical denial of value-free scholarship which gives a tradition of women's writing its authority. How this notion is theorized in A Literature Of Their Own and in The Madwoman in the Attic is the next issue to be discussed.

Since the canon in literature is defined by a collection of "great" or major novelists, the binary

imperative under which "tradition" operates suggests there is also a heritage of lesser known or minor novelists -- the subcultural tradition. The works of minor novelists have been suppressed because of repeated instantiations of a patriarchal aesthetic. Showalter's concern is with the minor novelists, whom, she alleges comprise a gender-specific literary tradition -- "the lost continent of the female tradition" (10). Her argument is based on a perception of women's literary history as discontinuous: it is full of gaps and holes because of the bias towards the "great" women writers -- Austen, Eliot, the Brontes and Woolf. To counter this imbalance, Showalter concentrates on the "minor" writers, suggesting that an understanding of them and their conditions provides a more accurate picture of the development and continuity of women's writing. Since the minor writers, she maintains, were "the links in the chain that bound one generation to the next" (7) only a study of them from a sociological perspective will afford a comprehensive women's literary history.

Showalter practices recuperative criticism; her effort to reclaim a tradition of lost or forgotten women writers is political in the best feminist sense. Like feminists in other areas of research (anthropology, medicine, history), Showalter's approach is interdisciplinary, focusing on the connection between women and their culture or society. In this sense it is informed by the actual oppression of women throughout history, and hence by the effort of the Women's

Liberation movement to seek social change. Thus, Showalter establishes a lineage of women's writing by thoroughly documenting "the relationships between writers' lives and the changes in legal, economic, and social status of women" (7). To this end, Showalter produces evidence of the material conditions of life particularly in 19th century England. Discussing Victorian sexual mores, family life, marriage and income, Showalter holds that these limited women in the profession of writing.

At the risk of disguising Showalter in socialist-feminist garb, it must be stated that her research was impelled by questions of a sociosexual nature.

> I have needed to ask why women began to write for money and how they negotiated the activity of writing within their families. What was their professional self-image? How was their work received, and what effects did criticism have upon them? What were their experiences as women, and how were these reflected in their books? (13).

If the idea of women writers as a subculture is analogous to women as a class, then Showalter touches on the socialist tenet of class. However, the subjective element stressed in the above quotation is telling: Showalter is concerned, from an empiricist position with a woman's biography and how women writers' lives changed through the course of history. This accounts for Showalter's consistent attention to women's "traditional" preoccupations and roles and how these

how assisted in shaping women's literary history, that is, with considerable pain and effort. Although she calls the "domestication of the profession" for example, a "trap," (86) nonetheless most parts of her text engage stereotypical female concerns. This is an essential part of her thesis, since it is precisely these concerns that are found in women's writing of the period she describes and it is precisely the fictionalization of these concerns that marginalized the works.

On the grounds of equity, recuperative feminist criticism encourages the visibility of a female tradition. Yet at the same time and by the same terms, it risks relegating women writers to the gender ghetto. Furthermore, there is a sense in which Showalter's deliberate forging of a specifically female tradition is just that -- a forgery. She has manufactured an imitation from a woman's perspective, and although the supporting features of her tradition specific to women (childbirth, motherhood, enfranchisement, "pin money" etc.), the critical categories she employs are identical to those of patriarchal critics. She argues that women have been "unified by values, conventions, experiences and behaviors impinging on each individual" (11), which is scarcely distinct -- as a critical strategy -- from the Christian-humanist imperialist-expanionist values which unified proponents of cultural tradition like Eliot and Trench.

My main objection to Showalter's approach is that like

images of women criticism, it rests solidly on the notion of life experience and to this extent it participates in liberal humanist principles. Critic Nelly Furman elaborates on this idea in her essay "The Politics of Language."

> (a)n unfortunate consequence of the critics' efforts towards a separate, but equally valid, literary tradition is that they leave unquestioned some of the prejudices which create the authority of tradition in the first place. Among those notions which remain unchallenged are the assumed "universality" of human experience and the "reflection" of experience in literary representation....many feminist critics embrace the learning imparted by traditional humanism and consequently take for granted that, as human beings, we all share basic universal values, and that although women's and men's experience of the world may be different, we have a common view of experience, a collective understanding of language and literature -- in short, that we share an unquestioned "common sense" (63).

Showalter's gynocentric recuperative method is linear; in substituting a tradition of women for the "great tradition" she lends credence to its humanist principles. The critical equation between experience and fictional representation is realist, while the entire notion of a women's tradition as subcultural situates it within the very cultural paradigms which suppressed women's writing in the first place.

Furthermore Showalter constructs what Louise Marcil-Lacoste would term a "downstream" version of critical analysis, insofar as it draws upon the notion of tradition ("an already given form of rationality"), not analyzing the concept itself but advancing her critique by virtue of the cultural power of tradition (124-6). Although Showalter's inquiry of women and social life has been one of the most important areas of research for feminist criticism, it remains bound to the dominant critical paradigm -- of male culture as the norm. As philosophers Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka point out -

> (w)ithin the theories, concepts, methods and goals of inquiry we inherited from the dominant discourses we have generated an impressive collection of "facts" about women and their lives....but these do not, and cannot, add up to more than a partial and distorted understanding of the patterns of women's lives (ix).

Harding and Hintikka's assertion that feminist inheritance from the dominant discourse results in distortion is emphasized by Marcil-Lacoste. In her essay "The Trivialization of the Notion of Equality," Marcil-Lacoste isolates three epistemological categories (historicity, materiality, values) by which feminist inquiry gives the illusion of "announcing new forms of rationality" (26). Of the three, only materiality is self-explanatory. The other two are more complex, but essentially Marcil-Lacoste argues that the use of historicity and values implies that our

established ways of thinking are valid. Applying these epistemological categories to Showalter we see that her text is, to a great extent, a repetition of dominant paradigms. Thus, a society of women, a "sisterhood" of influence, a notion which Showalter repeatedly emphasizes, is only relative to the inherited tradition, and as such remains the gender relative of the "brotherhood." Here we refer to "priestesses" rather than Apostles (A Literature 183). Oddly enough, Showalter herself supplies criticism of her own approach: "So long as we look to androcentric models for our most basic principles -- even if we revise them by adding the feminist frame of reference -- we are learning nothing new" ("Feminist Criticism" 183).

Showalter shares with the authors of The Madwoman in the Attic an implied confidence in the notion of separate female voices expressing in literature common social concerns. Showalter speaks with almost mystical reverence of the "indistinct but persistent impression of a unifying voice in women's literature" (A Literature 5). Similarly, Gilbert and Gubar remark on the "coherence of theme and imagery...in works of writers who were often geographically, historically and psychologically distant from each other" (Madwoman xi). Although Gilbert and Gubar's work involves transhistorical and cross-cultural studies, they have located unity among the authors in voices of concealment.

As distinct from Showalter's text, The Madwoman in the Attic supplies close readings of images of confinement,

metaphors of illness and themes of escape in 19th century women's writing. Through detailed argumentation, Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate that women of this period define themselves as "prisoners of their own gender" and thus that "dramatizations of imprisonment and escape...represent a uniquely female tradition" (85). Yet through rereadings of Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot and Emily Dickinson, the two critics attempt to positively revaluate the recurrent pattern of imprisonment. Their text provides a tradition of formal complaint, as it were, in which women authors rebelled against the confinement of literary labels and tastes. "The most successful women writers" they claim, "often seem to have channeled their female concerns into secret or at least obscure corners" (72). Consequently, Gilbert and Gubar focus their attention on subtexts, arguing that submerged, "hidden" or "secret" meanings often of anger or malcontent are visible below the surface meaning of the text.

Although the female authors in question overtly seem to capitulate to literary standards (notice most if not all of them are syllabus material), Gilbert and Gubar, in an extremely persuasive passage refer to their works as "palimpsestic," works whose "surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (73). In this way, Gilbert and Gubar argue, women writers rejected stereotypes "inherited from male literature...the paradigmatic

polarities of angel and monster " (76). However, these stereotypes were not simply replaced with more positive (and realistic) models but were deconstructed and reconstructed. In accordance with the goal of revisionary feminist poetics, Gilbert and Gubar dramatically conclude that this strategy assigns to women writers a separate literary autonomy. In one of the most powerful extracts of Madwoman, the authors state: "Thus these authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards" (73). This insight has afforded the critics a route to often brilliant and sustained literary analysis. It implies that 19th century women writers were aware of their position as second class literary citizens and that behind the novelistic exterior they were actually feminists.

Part One of Madwoman ("Toward a Feminist Poetics") contains three excellent and often incisive theoretical essays, one on the "metaphor of literary paternity" and another on "the anxiety of authorship." Gilbert and Gubar approach the topic of literary paternity by asking - in the first sentence of the text - "is a pen a metaphorical penis?" (3). They answer affirmatively (after a fashion) and continue by demonstrating that authorship is loaded with masculine metaphysical and reproductive connotations - "the writer 'fathers' his text just as God fathered the world" (4). In turn, they make the analogy that male authored texts embody the controlling cultural paradigms of the

patriarchal order in which they were produced. "In patriarchal Western culture...the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis" (6). How then do women (en)gender texts? To what extent does the patriarchy affect this process? Since, as Gilbert and Gubar note, "both the patriarchy and its texts subordinate and imprison women" (13) by idealizing them as angels or by projecting onto them a male dread of femininity (monsters), women authors had to escape the confinement of textual stereotypes. They propose therefore, that while women writers see their reflection in the dual constructs of angel and monster (Snow White vs. Bertha Mason), the palimpsestic aspect of the works belies a hidden purpose. The woman writer has "an invincible sense of her own autonomy, her own interiority" which reverses and hence valuates for the better the image of women (16). Through this process women writers could speak (write) as self-conceived individuals, from voices of autonomy and authority.

It is from the switch to self-definition (as opposed to inherited patriarchal definitions) that Gilbert and Gubar derive a subsequent idea - that of the "anxiety of authorship." This situates 19th century women writers in a quasi-Bloomian model of literary inheritance. Gilbert and Gubar qualify the use of a model they admit is "intensely" and "exclusively" male (47) by advising that Bloom's theory is "not a recommendation for but an analysis of patriarchal

poetics" (48). Gilbert and Gubar's point of departure from Bloom's theory is in regarding a woman author's precursors as male, but unlike the male poet, she is not involved in a process of affirmation or denial of the achievements of her predecessors. Rather, women authors are engaged in psychohistorical warfare with fathers who determine her place - in society, in literary history and in poetics. What she inherited from male precursors was a patriarchally defined identity. Her battle "is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her" (49). Thus "the anxiety of authorship" is produced as a result of the conflict between the woman writer's inherited sense of identity and her own "invincible" sense of autonomy. Essentially then what Gilbert and Gubar argue is that because a women writers lack a history of same sex models, their anxiety is not transhistorical and Oedipal; their anxiety results precisely because they have no influences.

The images of concealment mentioned earlier indicate one way this "anxiety of authorship" manifests. Gilbert and Gubar trace the origins of this phenomenon to the socialization of women. Socially conditioned to femininity, women were plagued by feelings of "self-doubt, inadequacy and inferiority" (60), and often resorted to what Gilbert and Gubar call "male transvestism" - writing under a pseudonym. But the formal method of disguise -- the specific imagery of concealment -- results from the

nineteenth century woman's confinement to the house, to bed and to household activities. Coupled with their stereotypic depiction in literature, women writers found themselves with no viable voice of protest.

> Literally confined to the house, figuratively confined to a singled "place," enclosed in parlors and encased in texts, imprisoned in kitchens and enshrined in stanzas, women artists naturally found themselves describing dark interiors...(84).

Occasionally the dark interiors described in fiction by women is a metaphor for the inner self, often sick or mentally ill. "Infection in the sentence breeds" -- the subtitle to Gilbert and Gubar's chapter connotes the actual social confinement and physical restriction which presented women writers with a situation in which to fictionalize their resentment.

The madwoman, according to Gilbert and Gubar represents the "<u>author's</u> double" -- she personfies the author's "anxiety and rage" (78). No longer an aspect of the gothic novel, the madwoman in this theoretical formulation expresses the socially unacceptable anger of the confined woman. Again, it is important to remember that <u>duplicity</u> on the part of the author is central to Gilbert and Gubar's idea of "anxiety of authorship." Therefore, the recuperative methodology stresses the dual formal properties -- the conventional and the subversive. While the Brontes, for example, are considered "greats" within the convention

of the novel, their works are also charged with anger and female conspiracy. As Gilbert and Gubar put it, "even when they do not overtly criticize patriarchal institutions or conventions...these writers almost obsessively create characters who enact their own, covert authorial anger" (77). This implies that nineteenth century women authors experienced themselves as powerless within the context of a patriarchal society and so aggressively (obsessively) inverted their imposed social silence, coming up with semi-biographical "madwomen." If we follow Gilbert and Gubar to their logical conclusion, we find that this deviation from the "norm" generates an authority peculiar to women.

The proposal that a separate authority for women exists by means of covert action is, to my mind, contradictory, and here we arrive at a criticism of the theoretical foundation of Gilbert and Gubar's text. Broadly speaking, the notion of authorial transcendence and its formal equivalent - an organic text whose narrative destiny and unitary vision parallel the Self - are, as repeatedly stated, functions of a Western humanist ideal. Gilbert and Gubar, by offering author-centered criticism, implicitly condone the ideas of the Western humanist "tradition" although as feminists they attempt to stress woman's difference from this tradition. "Separate" and "authority" spell a contradiction in terms; the former belongs to the feminist project while the latter should not, according to

the Anglo-American feminist rejection of patriarchal authoritarianism. What Gilbert and Gubar have failed to account for is that "woman" occupies a subordinate place, not just in traditions of literature, but also in a prevailing epistemological paradigm. "Woman" is always/already constituted in Western philosophical paradigms as everything that is "other." Therefore a separate category of criticism and a separate tradition for women in literature merely reinscribes the status of women in literature as man's other and reinstates the primordial authority of the "great tradition."

The following examples point up Gilbert and Gubar's problematic relation to the patriarchal-humanist criticism they claim to revise. First off, the notion that women authors form a subculture places women in a comparative position to the dominant tradition, implying that male authors represent a norm, by the standards of which even the tradition of women authors is judged. Gilbert and Gubar, along with Showalter and Moers, all work within the epistemological paradigm which situates women oppositionally to male culture. Regrettably it has been the trend in Anglo-American criticism to insist on and even glorify women's position as separate and other.

In the second place, original insights in Madwoman are superceded or made ineffectual by orthodox critical stances. The figure of the "double" - potentially rich with interpretive meaning - is overshadowed by the conflation of

author and character in the text. Similarly, recuperating the madwoman from novels which masquerade as patriarchally condoned texts is a duplicitous strategy. It suggests that the madwoman represents the woman author's power to speak within the normative order. In an article on women and madness, Shoshana Felman observes that madness and reason are dichotomous parallels of woman and man. She asks then, "how can woman be thought about outside of the Masculine/Feminine framework, other than as opposed to man, without being subordinated to a primordial masculine model. How can madness, in a similar way, be conceived outside of its dichotomous opposition to sanity, without being subjugated to reason?" (4). Felman's first question here is crucial since feminists must now make it their concern to rethink the feminine from a position other than the binary one. It is this which restricts the power of feminist discourse and which restricts the required epistemological revolution. One of the major deficiencies of Gilbert and Gubar's work is that it aspires to critical excellence - and is accepted as such - because it operates within the dominant criticial discourse.

In relation to this last point, we come to my final criticism of Madwoman, which concerns Gilbert and Gubar's adaptation of the "anxiety of influence." Primarily I disagree with Gilbert and Gubar's assertion that Bloom's model is "not a recommendation for but an analysis of patriarchal poetics." In claiming this, the feminist

critics imply that Bloom's critical language is neutral and thereby absolve themselves of the responsibility to interrogate the extent to which his discourse can be constitutive of patriarchal ideology. On the contrary, I would argue that Bloom's model is a recommendation for patriarchal poetics since both his subject matter (the poets) and his own critical anxiety (the Freudian) are established guarantors of patriarchal "canon-fire." Other critics have voiced similar reservations. Cheri Register asks: "Can there be an authentic, autonomous female aesthetics as long as the primary influences are male?" ("Review Essay" 274). Similarly, Showalter in her comprehensive essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" notes that while the aims of feminist criticism are ambitious, "in practice, the revisionary feminist critique is redressing a grievance and is built upon existing models" (183). A case in point here is not just Gilbert and Gubar's revision of Bloom's anxiety, but also Ellen Moers' chapter "Women's Literary Traditions and the Individual Talent." Using the Eliotic formula, Moers argues that women writers were influenced by reading other women writers. Thus, George Eliot's Adam Bede "seems to hover below the surface of Emma" (49) while "Dickinson's use of Mrs. Browning is a case of tradition in the best T. S. Eliot sense" (60). However revisionary feminist criticism, by participating in paternal models does not contribute to the feminist theoretical project. By redressing and forging traditions

of writing by women, the critics discussed in this chapter merely transposed male conceived literary values onto texts by women. This is not meant to completely devalue the entire corpus of revisionary criticism since it was a crucial phase in the development of Anglo-American literary criticism. While it provided for feminist critics an awareness of the achievements of women writers, it also provided an awareness of the limitations of this approach.

The limitations of revisionary criticism are inherent in the theory, for how can critics oppose binary thought without succumbing to its logic? In the past, challenging the sovereignty of dualism has meant, in part, simply assigning new connotations to, or reproducing "the couple." As a result, the fundamental duality which continues to determine our way of thinking reenters discursive circulation untouched: the dialectic of sex. In this way, the same limiting oppositions of Western metaphysics (nature/culture, body/mind, masculine/feminine) which produced the need for feminist thinking in the first place, are the same ideological dialectics which confine Anglo-American feminist criticism to either/or logic. In submitting to this opposition, it remains reactionary.

Heavily influenced by French feminist and deconstructionists whose work took academics by storm around 1980, current feminist theory has turned towards the question of the inscription of woman in language and how to theorize outside the double imperative of

masculine/feminine. In the next chapter, I will explore the "continental drift" of feminist theory, or French theories which have had a tremendous impact on the American feminist critical project.

Chapter 3:

The Continental Drift

For the past two chapters I have been working towards an analysis of feminist discourse itself, because women have not only been subjugated historically and socially, but have been inscribed as a sign of the negative in language. The question therefore, how can feminists theorize an intensely patriarchal scheme like "tradition" without lending credence to the values which empower tradition in the sociocultural order? This can be answered (though not conclusively) by examining more specifically how "woman" functions as an element in theoretical discourse.

The trend in 1980's American feminism emphasizes theory, in large part due to the influence of feminism from France, where, as Alice Jardine tells us, "feminist (literary) criticism, as such, does not really exist as a genre" ("Gynesis" 55). The introduction of French feminism (in translation) to American audiences began, roughly, with the publication of Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Signs in 1976. Signs and Diacritics are both largely responsible for disseminating French theories to American academics. These two publications, along with New French Feminisms - an entire anthology and respectable cross-section of writings - represent the importation of new ideas to American feminist criticism. The most prominent

figures to emerge from this "continental drift" are Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Using linguistic, psychoanalytic and deconstructive models, each theoretician has contributed to new imaginings or theories of the feminine. Cixous' focus has been "écriture féminine" or "writing the body," the theory of which posits the female unconscious as a stylized body politic. Irigaray's formulation of woman as the site of repression in discourse is linked but dissimilar. In "This Sex Which Is Not One," Irigaray uses the lips of the labia as a model for multiplicitous and plural discourse, as the ambiguous meaning of her title denotes - this sex which is neither one nor two; this sex which is not a sex. Kristeva's belief in language as inherently problematical impinges on the theoretical inscription of women as subjects. Two related points therefore should be held in reserve until taken up later. The first is the notion of subjectivity, which in Kristevan semiotics, departs radically from the transcendental signified or Cartesian speaking subject. The same holds true in the works of Cixous and Irigaray, in which the subject (Self) has been decentered, demystified and deconstructed. Secondly, because Kristeva takes language a priori to be problematical, it follows that language cannot be monological and consequently that the overdetermination of meaning (as univocal or absolute) is reductive. The notion of differance or Derridian deferral has suggested that language is an endless free play of

signifiers and thus that meaning cannot be accurately construed as fixed, absolute or closed. Meaning, like woman, is elsewhere.

Bluntly put, each of the theories put forth by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva are distinctive and cannot be grouped under a single rubric. However, if one can trace a similarity in them it is an explicit attack on Western metaphysics, on the overprivileged role of identity and presence in the Cartesian ego. A parallel attack is made on logocentrism which Elaine Marks regards as a "a sign of nostalgia...a longing for a coherent center," and phallologocentrism -- which situates man as the locus of single, unified, non-contradictory meaning ("Women and Literature" 841). The charge which has motivated this attack sees woman as that which is not represented -- which is elsewhere, other, "mad" or silenced. "Woman" has been repressed by the dominance of male libidinal economy; more specifically woman's desire has been repressed. It is for this reason that differance - difference and deferral - occupies a central place in French feminist thought.

At this point I should make it clear that this discussion will not consider the entire oeuvre of any single feminist, nor even a representative sampling of the lot. My intention is not to provide a comprehensive overview of French theories of the feminine. (That can also be found elsewhere).[1] My concern is narrowed to a few ideas

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[1]See Ann Rosalind Jones, "Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine" in Making A Difference 80-112; Toril Moi's last three chapters in Sexual/Textual Politics; and New French Feminisms for a sampling of various French feminist writing.

specific to this argument as a whole -- to concepts of identity, unity and resemblance on which the discourse of tradition is built.

Partly because of the French proclivity to theorize, American feminists have become critical and self-conscious of their empirical methodology. One American feminist observes

> some French women regard the pragmatic empiricism of American feminist criticism as fundamentally doomed. They claim that our critical enterprise aims for equality within the Logos, for an equal share of existing symbolic systems and thus that it essentially reconfirms the dominant phallologocentric order (Stanton 78).

This point was argued, though perhaps not so concisely, in Chapter Two. However to continue, French feminists attempt to actively explode the power the logos exerts, some even to embody that subversion (e.g. Cixous' discontinuous <u>écriture féminine</u>). However, Anglo-Americans have also been critical of the sometimes impenetrable Lacanian, Freudian and Derridian theories which inform the French project, arguing that feminist investment in male-centered theories is an indication of an anti-feminist will to theory. Despite this fact, French feminist theories have managed to infiltrate Anglo-American feminism. Alice Jardine in particular has devoted her research to contemporary figurations of the feminine as influenced by the French. Moreover <u>The Future</u>

of Difference is an anthology whose borrowing from the French is explicit and extremely well-informed.

The most fundamental agreement amongst French feminists resides in their belief that "woman" has been repressed not only by patriarchal institutions, but also and more importantly, in Western theoretical discourse. This I see as the main distinction between Anglo-American and French feminism. Whereas feminist literary criticism in America has revised the canon, rewritten literary history, and recuperated women's writing, Moers, Showalter and Gilbert and Gubar have done so simply by inserting woman into a dominant critical paradigm. In contrast theories issuing from France suggest that women's oppression exists at the level of a binary structure which determines our patterns of thinking. In "Sorties" Cixous argues that philosophical discourse is organized according to a dualistic metaphor which ascribes to women the role of passivity. The typeset of various dichotomies side by side at the beginning of her essay graphically illustrates this pattern. Cixous suggests that if "woman" is written into history and discourse, the phallologocentric regime would lose the power base on which it has erected its authority. "What would happen to logocentrism, to the great philosophical systems, to the order of the world in general if the rock upon which they founded this church should crumble?" ("Sorties" 65).

Domna C. Stanton, in referring to Cixous, Irigaray and

Kristeva notes that

> women's oppression, or more precisely, our repression, does not merely exist in the concrete organization of economic, political or social structures. It is embedded in the very subtle foundations of the Logos, in the subtle linguistic and logical processes through which meaning itself is produced (73).

In the preface to New French Feminisms, Marks and de Courtivron observe that "only one sex has been represented" in Western theoretical discourse; "the projection of male libidinal economy in all patriarchal systems - language, capitalism, socialism, monotheism - has been total; women have been absent" (xii). In response to this widely levelled charge, feminists such as Cixous and Irigary have attempted to write "woman" into discourse.

The writings of both Cixous and Irigary are not limited to an attack on phallologocentrism; both have written in a discourse of the feminine located not between the binary, but outside of it. Rejecting phallologocentric unity, identity and resemblance, both women have produced theories which take the form of their own philosophy. Irigaray, while not as linguistically gymnastical as Cixous, uses a strategy involving puns, mimicry and back to back comparison of the master narratives to rob them of their legitimacy. Cixous' écriture féminine is an attempt to inscribe the feminine unconscious -- phantastically, creatively, explosively, erotically. Her manifesto "The

Laugh of the Medusa" begins:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies -- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement (875).

As Cixous inscribes the feminine, it is polymorphous and undifferentiated. Similarly, Irigaray posits feminine language and meaning as outside the binary imperative. The two lips which speak together represent a model of multiplicity and fluidity. The lips of the vulva Irigaray presents as an ironical alternative to the authority of signification represented by the phallus.

Behind these theories is the belief that woman's jouissance or sexual pleasure, cannot be understood or even situated within a masculine sexual economy. Cixous writes that "you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes" ("The Laugh" 876), and hence that the symbolic and imaginary realms are open to many meanings. For her part, Irigary claims that woman's diffuse, autoerotic pleasure cannot be reduced to an economy of the same precisely because it is not dependent on "the couple."

> (W)oman has sex organs just about everywhere. She experiences pleasure almost everywhere. Even without

> speaking of the hysterization of her entire body, one can say that the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, that is imagined - in an imaginary centered a bit too much on one and the same ("This Sex" 103).

If symbolic systems of representation consistently reduce women to a philosophy of one and the same, the radical theories of Cixous and Irigaray - their re-imagining of the female body - propose a way of thinking outside the parameters of masculine/feminine. As it relates to subjectivity, this formulation of female sexuality throws into question the unified Self. Woman constitutes difference in itself: "'She' is indefinitely other in herself" as Irigaray puts it ("This Sex" 103), or elsewhere "she is neither one nor two" (101). In this way, woman's subjectivity cannot be colonized, civilized or homogenized by the masculine hegemonic impulse to conquer and divide.

Since these theories categorically reject the binary enclosures of Western metaphysics, they are not entangled in the either/or logic of Anglo-American criticism, which can only be considered from a humanistic point of view. Rather, Cixous and Irigaray can be seen as operating within a still-evolving plurality of elliptical meaning. Their political committment inheres in their discourse since it undercuts conventional Western notions of dualistic hierarchies which model the idealized coherent Self on the

phallus. One Anglo-American feminist critic writes convincingly that

> (t)o put discourse into question is to reject the existing order. It is to renounce, in effect, the identity principle, the principles of unity and resemblance which allow for the constitution of phallocentric society....It means laying claim to an absolute difference, posited not within the norms but against and <u>outside</u> the norms (Féral 91).

Cixous' project in particular is socially critical; it requires nothing short of complete social change.

One would think that given this revolutionary epistemology Americans would embrace the French theories. However, both Josette Féral and Ann Rosalind Jones have qualified their discussions of French feminism with minor criticisms. Jones objects to the biological essentialism of Cixous' theory of écriture féminine, claiming that "it reverses the values assigned to each side of the polarity, but...still leaves man as the determining referent" (369). In keeping with the Anglo-American predilection for concrete, materialist theories, Jones says that what Americans can acquire from French feminist theory is "the critique of phallocentrism in all the material and ideological forms it has taken" (374). Féral does not seem convinced that the French feminist project is as revolutionary as its claims would have us believe. She writes that -

> France, under the influence of contemporary philosphical and psychoanalytic trends, puts an excessive emphasis on theorizing...privileged objects. Less intent on theorizing, American artists and cultural activists have, however, achieved as much, if not more (93).

Even Toril Moi, whose essays on Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray are among the best published, never whole heartedly endorses their theories without voicing some concern for their applicability. Like Jones, she objects to Cixous' returning of the female body to its essential biology and to Cixous' "lack of reference to recognizable social structures" (126).

In spite of these objections, recent publications point to the fact that in Anglo-American feminist criticism there is today less emphasis on theories of tradition than there has been in the past. This does not imply that French feminists have had a direct influence on Anglo-American criticism, nor that their radical theories have embarrassed the Americans into a re-definition of their project. So long as feminist criticism remains bound to dominant social and epistemological paradigms, by definition it will be in a state of crisis. However, a theoretical feminism as opposed to an empirical feminism has greater cogency as praxis, but this can only come about in relation to a new political constituency. Theoretical feminism is more promising in light of a coherent political and social agency, which would

assist in bringing new communities of thought to the foreground. The University represents one such community; the entrance of radical feminist critiques into universities represents a disruption of the normative order and the possible evolution of a new ethos. From this point of view, it is not enough for feminist critics to revise the syllabus or the canon, which, as synecdoches of "tradition" reinforce the idea of the academy as patriarchal territory. Yet feminist critiques which propose a new epistemology as part of a new political and social order could alter the status of "traditions" and the University.

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