This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

Rethinking History And Borders Within Conversation: Narrative And Historiographic Metafiction In Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and Maxine Hong Kingston's Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book

presented by

Sherry Lynnette Wynn

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

M.A. degree in American Studies

Major professor

Date 17 May 91

RETHINKING HISTORY AND BORDERS WITHIN CONVERSATION: NARRATIVE AND HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION IN TONI MORRISON'S *SONG OF SOLOMON* AND MAXINE HONG KINGSTON'S *TRIPMASTER MONKEY: HIS FAKE BOOK*

By

Sherry Lynnette Wynn

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ART

Program in American Studies

1991

ABSTRACT

RETHINKING HISTORY AND BORDERS WITHIN CONVERSATION:
NARRATIVE AND HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION IN
TONI MORRISON'S *SONG OF SOLOMON* AND
MAXINE HONG KINGSTON'S *TRIPMASTER MONKEY: HIS FAKE BOOK*

By

Sherry Lynnette Wynn

In this study I attempt to locate the way Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston employ narrative, irony, parody, writing beyond the ending and dialogue to evidence the postmodern paradox and map out a space to practice their politics in a contested sphere. This is a multifaceted critique, but I rely most heavily on the theoretical concepts of: conversation, as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, especially his notions of tradition and I-lessnes; heteroglossia and hybrid construction as proposed by Makhail Bakhtin, and historiographic metafiction as defined by Linda Hutcheon.

I propose that feminists look at language, not as a tool, but as the essential. I stipulate, however, that at certain historical moments, and in certain contexts, we should re-figure the rules of the Gadamer's conversation model when I-lessness seems to accomplish, not better understanding, but erasure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Katherine R. Fishburn, for her arduous labor over several drafts. Unlike many professors, Dr. Fishburn is a teacher as well as a scholar. When she critiqued my drafts, writing comments on every page, she made the "good grammar" rules come alive as my eleventh grade English teacher had not. But more importantly, her theoretical insights helped me to "push the theory" further. She often provided the intellectual context that I could not. Instead of looking outside of the department for an example in my field, I was fortunate to have have a bricoleur for an advisor and friend.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Lisa Fine. My love of history was intensified in her classes. She too had an active pen. However, it was in her Graduate seminar on Twentieth Century American Women's History that I compiled the literature review which grew into this study. I also would like to thank Dr. William Johnsen for letting me teach *Song of Solomon* to an undergraduate Humanities class. Through their guidance, criticism, and trust, I gained the confidence to write this manuscript.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTESTED SUBJECT

As with the objectivism/relativism debate, many contemporary theories founded on false polemics have been generated in the last ten years of scholarship.[1] Feminism, which has emerged within the wake of this debate, has a substantial stake in subverting the power of objectivity claims without embracing relativist dismissal. As Diana Fuss reminds us, feminists must also contest their involvement in the essentialist/constructionist debate which is an extension of binary thinking. Identity is a political concept and one which necessitates continued debate. Works which claim both the essentialist nature of the construct of woman and the constructed nature of her gender, i.e. the equality-versus-difference debate, are less willing to reduce a feminist politics to an either/or which will never satisfy our varying constituency. As Linda Hutcheon has suggested in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, we must operate within the realm of paradox. At the places in the text, or in our politics, where resolution seems least likely, we should question our attempts to reduce the tension and push the theory further. This study attempts to locate the way Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston, two storytellers, employ narrative, irony, parody, writing beyond the ending, and dialogue to evidence this paradox and map out a space to practice their

---

[1]See Richard Bernstein's *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia, 1983), as well as Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988).

politics in a contested sphere. Using Bakhtin's concept of hybrid construction and Hutcheon's discussion of postmodern multiplicity, we can see how this debate can be transformed within feminism to further dialogue instead of closing off important discussion.

This is a feminist project--not strictly a woman's studies one. My use of the word feminist is not to be confused with womanist.[2] I believe that the definition of feminism and/or feminist theory within the academy has too often been interchangeable with women's studies. This serves to keep it a limited, closed discourse that can easily be ignored. The endeavors of feminists, however, should strive to have implications for all peoples. If our venture is rooted in a theoretical frame which challenges the notion of patriarchy, we can implicate all power relations, definitions, and discourses. I foresee an effort, as suggested by Judith Butler, to "question whether feminist politics [theory] could do without a 'subject' in the category of women" (Butler, 142).

I intend to start with Butler's concluding chapter of *Gender Trouble*, "From Parody to Politics," where she proposes that "the feminist 'we' is always and only a phantasmatic construction, one that has its purposes, but

---

[2] I do not refer to Alice Walker's concept of womanism because she is talking about a special, woman centered lineage of writers. However, although many feminists do not use the word womanist, their theoretical investigations only center on how institutions, namely patriarchal ones, have affected women. I wish to explore a feminism which has broader ramifications than sexism exerted over generic 'woman', a mythical construct, by her generic oppressor, the white, capitalistic man.

which denies the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent" (142). This is of vital importance when we discuss literature by women of color, for as Elizabeth Spelman notes, "Feminism" has too often enabled "our [white, middle class women's] views to assert or express domination without explicitly or consciously intending to justify it. Feminist theory does that wherever it implicitly holds that some women are really more complete examples of 'woman' than are others" (Spelman, 11).

Although I find the binary self/other inherently problematic, I will manipulate this dualism in my discussion where I situate myself in the project of self-conscious ethnography, exploring the texts of my "Other" as a woman. In turn, however, I will fault this distinction through an exploration of Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In this novel Morrison makes problematic the notion of a totalizing definition of black womanhood. Current notions of identity formation and the philosophy of self need to be (re)vis(it)ed in all contexts.[3] I must admit that my text is both self contradictory and polemic even as I attempt to undermine the ethnocentric values that have been impressed upon me.

Even my attempts to locate a female situated subject lead me in troubling directions. To look at women through

---

[3]I use Elizabeth Meese's pun on this word, which can be read as [re]visit[ed] or revis[it]ed.

the supplemental lenses of color, sexuality, and class is to both prioritize identity [in this case womanhood] and to reinforce the notion that the supplement is "the excess that necessarily accompanies any effort to posit identity once and for all" (Butler, 143). In other words, if we continually find it necessary in our feminist endeavors to qualify our use of woman and man, we are encouraged to rethink the importance of sex as the ultimate signifier of difference. The notion that feminism is womanist denies the supplement its significance. A search for a feminist epistemology relies on an Enlightenment definition of the subject. Unfortunately, claiming a new epistemology reinforces that one way of knowing is crucial and therefore viable for all people. In "Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology--Beyond Epistemology," Paul Rabinow states, "the chief culprit in this melodrama is Western philosophy's concern with epistemology, the equation of knowledge with internal representations and the correct evaluation of those representations" (234). He links this discussion to discourses of the other in which he reminds us that rejecting epistemology does not amount to rejecting truth, reason, or standards of judgement. What is taken to be truth is dependent on a prior historical event--"the emergence of a style of thinking about truth and falsity that established the conditions for entertaining a proposition as being capable of being taken as true or false in the first place" (237). Rabinow proposes that epistemology must be

seen, not as the goal of theory, or as the key to a proper methodology, but as "a historical event--a distinctive social practice, one among many others, articulated in new ways in seventeenth-century Europe" (241). He further suggests that we do not need to project a new epistemology of the other, but instead have to recognize that our ways of seeing participants in other cultures are influenced by an implicit system of knowing. Therefore, we are often led to see agents as victims or passive, or even as pre-modern, in light of a continuum of modernity. The most striking suggestion in his argument is that "we need to anthropologize the West: show how exotic its constitution of reality has been; emphasize those domains most taken for granted as universal (this includes epistemology and economics); make them seem as historically peculiar as possible; show how their claims to truth are linked to social practices and have hence become effective forces in the social world" and avoid the error of relocating the center, a form of "reverse essentialism" (241). I think if we think about his suggestions in terms of feminisms there is also great room for improvement within our theorizing. I will attempt to discuss Butler's suggestion that the shift from an *epistemological* account of identity to one which locates the problematic within practices of *signification* permits an analysis that takes the epistemological mode as one possible and contingent signifying practice" (Butler, 144, emphasis in original). Butler argues that language, not a correctly qualified

definition, is the key to our understanding "because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely" (145, emphasis in original). Although an examination of epistemology as a historically situated ideological agent is, I feel, necessary, an extension of its presence into new discussions is not.

Feminisms are suffering from identity crisis because many women originally conceptualized feminism as a separate, woman centered space. At this point, we have evidence that the tendency to construct a homogeneous feminist platform has been as repressive as the Western humanism we sought to challenge. I am arguing that a polarized metaphysics has operated within feminism. On the one hand, radical feminists understand women to be incapable of enforcing catastrophic material and hierarchical oppressions. Both Western humanists and separatist feminists operate within a metaphysics, both propose delimiting definitions of identity. On the other hand, liberal feminists, as Allison Jaggar has pointed out, do not contest the metaphysics of self, but instead protest that they have been eliminated from access to the same benefits that the core self deserves. In their compliance with individualism, liberal feminists do not present a forceful challenge. Whatever the concept of human nature, many women contest the generic category of "woman" and claim that Feminism with a capital F, a faulty construct, has not situated their/our needs or presence. I feel it is in

our best interests to move away from centralized arguments, although I feel the same concern that local groups will repeat the claim to a new center. Postmodern theorizes of the self and cultural constructions have challenged us to undermine, displace, or marginalize the center through discussions of culture, discourses, difference and *differance* and yet, as will become evident in my discussions of local communities, there is a danger that the local is little more than a repetition on a small scale of those practices often being contested by feminists.

Postmodernists advance questions like, *what is woman--is she biologically or culturally determined, can she prioritize her sex over questions of race, class, sexual preference, religions, etc. Does the definition of woman change in the context of a heterosexual family or a lesbian community?* Just when some women believed they had won the right to define the concept of "woman," their definition is being challenged. Today, for example, lesbians and women of color are challenging liberal feminism with the same vigor that the NOW feminists of the 1960s challenged the homogenized definitions of "woman" so neatly proposed by western humanists.

As we can see, this quest for self definition has led to inconsistencies. The women's movement was soon found to consist of many movements. It has taken so-called mainstream movements a very long time to recognize, and is still not generally recognized as important, that the philosophy of

unified definition or unified naming, is a problematic quest which will always foster lack of dialogue, or what has been interesting labeled, negatively, as disunity.[4]

In the past two years I have pored through hundreds of essays, texts, and lectures, in which the authors suggest a new epistemology for feminism is called for. But this call for change reminds me of Audre Lorde's warning that the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house and, in a sense, I think she is right. But we cannot reinvent the wheel. Therefore, we do owe a debt to those pre-feminist philosophers who have been instrumental in undermining the notion of objectivity, "truth," and knowledge. However, that is not to say that we cannot again rethink their efforts, challenge them, and manipulate them. As Sandra Harding states in "The Instability Of The Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," "we have been able to use aspects or components of each of these discourses [deconstruction, hermeneutics] to illuminate our subject matters. We have stretched the intended domains of these theories, reinterpreted their central claims, or borrowed their concepts and categories to make visible women's lives and feminist views of gender relations. After our labors, these theories often do not much resemble what their non-feminist

---

[4]For too long the word disunity has been used to silence people who have genuine concerns. To acknowledge that I look at feminism through a different lens than a black academic women, or a Latino working class woman, is to acknowledge that class and race will give rise to disunity, but also to claim that unity on the basis of sex--while neglecting equal concerns of class and color--will do service to no one in the long run.

creators and users had in mind, to put the point mildy" (Harding, 1986, 646).

I. Where to Begin

Paradoxically, I would like to argue that before we can have any feminist consciousness, we must, contrary to what is generally accepted, undermine both the philosophy of the subject and community. It is for this reason that I employ postmodernism, or a version of it, as I call for a critique which is pluralistic in both the voices it acknowledges and the multi-theories it weaves into its text. I am not in the business of proposing a grand narrative theory. For as Jean-Francois Lyotard has already proposed, "the grand narrative has already lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (Lyotard, 37). Instead I encourage those scholars who employ feminism, or something like it, to consider working across theoretical planes and across the disciplines when suggesting new courses of endeavor. For an example of how this has been done, one need only look at the humanities. For if we look at the humanities curriculum, we can see that educators have consistently believed that we must reach students on all levels, drawing, for example, on the resources from history, literature, and psychology. Our approach should be that of the bricoleur that Claude Levi-Strauss proposes in *The Savage Mind*. Any theories which are applied to texts should acknowledge interdisciplinary efforts.

As part of this review of the problem of essence and construction, I would like to propose an approach that encourages an extended dialogue among the disciplines of history, philosophy and literature. Multi-faceted critiques allow feminists to displace the biological definition of woman. For some women of color, these tensions have resulted in the expressed need to separate themselves from the rest of us and chart their own womanist course. But, as Claudia Tate has observed, this separation phase is often plagued by the same tenets of Western humanism. This can unfortunately result in the charge that black feminist criticism must, for example, attempt to uplift the race. In "Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism," Joyce A. Joyce charges that the "poststructuralist sensibility" should not be applied to black literature. She writes, "since the Black creative writer has always used language as a means of communication to bind people together, the job of the Black literary critic should be to find a point of merger between the communal, utilitarian, phenomenal nature of Black literature. . ." (Joyce,343). Joyce concludes the essay by claiming that the job of the black literary critic consists in forcing ideas "to the surface, to give them force in order to affect, to guide, to animate, and to arouse the minds and emotions of Black people" (Joyce,343). In this claim, she presumes to define her audience, confident that she knows exactly who they are and what constitutes their grief and their pleasure. Clearly she has chosen to ignore the

problematics of identity as posed by Hazel Carby and Henry Louis Gates,Jr..

Identity politics are best represented by the commonly used analogy of the onion. Although the many layers of the onion seem immediately recognizable--the same--the onion is problematized by two things: there is no core, and the cells which are woven together have many distinct organelles and membranes which are not visibly distinct. The implications are apparent in the race to prioritize race and sex. In this analogy one recognizes that the layers, although one seems to peel them away, are not categorically distinct. What is most immediately visible is not the sum total of the whole, and further yet, there are many factors. Race, culture, ethnicity, sex, and sexuality cannot be represented by any particular layer of the onion, nor can the skin be used as a metonymical representation of the whole. It is not my purpose to discredit Joyce's motivation, but I do want to suggest that if black women haven't been able to find common cause with women of the so-called "dominant culture," why should they believe that unity can be forged on race. Joyce is suggesting a unified black community based on the institution of slavery and racism but I would argue this is not enough--since such an assumption denies how class differences and gender oppression both unite separate black women and unite different women.

In a more complicated example, Leslie Silko, a writer and spokesperson for the "Native American" identity

implicitly implies that Louise Erdrich's postmodern prose is "light-years away" from the communal and shared experiences she attributes to Native Americans (179). In fact, she further criticizes Erdrich for creating characters who cannot be immediately recognized as of Indian ancestry (Silko, 181). Although Silko herself blurs racial boundaries, in Ceremony she discusses a "half-breed," she has no trouble taking Erdrich to task for not correctly positing a whole identity.

My project is a response, most immediately, to the assumptions extended from metaphysical assumptions of identity that feminists have embraced, to our disservice, and which are further complicated by their extension into local settings. The existence of the institution of sexism is not the defining characteristic, sum-total of all women's experience. Grand narratives of oppression, whether focused on sex, race or class, cannot emancipate, as Lyotard stated, because in the process of the large scale critique, many differences are erased to make the theory work. Unless feminist critiques acknowledge all categories of human life, they will be criticized for omissions. It is unfortunate that the charted course to find a racial cause again relegates many women (within their race,) to the category of other if their vision or prose or politics does not meet with the implied agenda.

However, the tendency to posit some women as better representations of womanhood, as Spelman suggests, plagues all feminist groups. those filled by both "white" women and

women of color.[5] The 1990 disruption of the National Women's Studies Association has brought the problem of representation to the surface. Some women of color within the association have drawn up a list of grievances stating how their needs have been overlooked in the effort to find a woman-centered common cause. This grievance outlines both class and race oppression within this national organization. Diverse forms of essentialism and elitism plague feminist groups. Some groups lump all blame for oppression onto the aggressive shoulders of the patriarchy--men, especially white men of means. In their quest for a holistic definition of womanhood, these groups are also prone to ignore the fact that women of the so-called "dominant culture" can also participate in racism and classism and homophobia. Women of color, in this example, African-American women who wish to have the concerns and history of black women articulated and studied, often establish oppressive narrow boundaries and assumptions of their own. Deborah McDowell cautions us that in our quest to define identity there is the danger of making demands and subjective limitations on sisters who may have different socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and education. The current controversy involves some women, black women, who reject recent endeavors in poststructuralism as antithetical to the black woman's quest for self identity.

---

[5]I want to clarify that I do not perceive of white women as race*less*, but instead to acknowledge that my use of women of color is done to avoid the preoperative label minority. For more discussion of this see Diana Fuss's *Essentially Speaking*.

Some, such as Joyce, suggest that the unified black female subject is involved in the quest to uplift her race and her sex, in a very particularized fashion, special to black sisterhood. Demands that the texts explored by black women critics must be seen first as propaganda and second as art, can be just as harmful. Therefore, essential definitions of womanhood, and essential categories of blackness must be recognized and explored by all women.

Fuss suggests that the critics of poststructuralist African-American theory are often too concerned with preserving the " 'authentic nature' of the Afro-American text. All are wary that a preoccupation with language will de-nature black literature and culture, detach the text from its cultural roots (86). Fuss instead suggests that we should "show how racial essentialism is exactly that which historically underwrites cultural racism and which tenaciously upholds its academic institutionalization . . ." (86). Many critics still argue that a separate endeavor which focuses on the efforts, struggles, and needs, of black women is essential for black women to engage in. Many scholars have proposed theories of how to encourage plurality, but the linguistic burden alienates many scholars and invents new tensions. As Fuss writes, "What is called for is an approach which intervenes in the essentialist/constructionist polemic that has hitherto imprisoned 'race' in a rigidified and falsifying logic" (92). One should not ignore, however, the social, political and material circumstances that have

emerged from this polemic nor forget that some very powerful counter-hegemonic forces have emerged out of this polemic.

In "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories," Nancy Hartsock claims that "we need to develop our understanding of difference by creating a situation in which hitherto marginalized groups can name themselves, speak for themselves and participate in defining the terms of interaction, a situation in which we can construct an understanding of the world that is sensitive to others" (189). She suggests that perhaps theories produced by minorities[6] should rest on different epistemologies than those of the "majority" (Hartsock, 189). As I will explore in my conclusion, through an examination of different models of community and local narratives, I do not believe that it is epistemology that we are striving for but, instead, a more fully articulated understanding of the role language plays in our knowing the world. In this case language and culture would be connected.

II. Epistemological Re-visions?

In "Feminism and Epistemology: Recent Work on the connection between gender and knowledge," Virginia Held asks if the "world would seem entirely different if it were

---

[6]I choose not to use the term minority because I am trying to avoid the binary minority/majority because I see it as an acceptance of the distinction lesser. I will refer to women in the plural -- to mean many groups of women, and I will use the supplements, race, culture, ethnicity, and class when referring to specific women. I will try not to use catchall categories for those who have been linguistically relegated to the margins of academic and philosophical study.

pictured, felt, described, studied, and thought about from the point of view of women?" (Held, 296) Her question suggests the importance of the lens by which art, history, importance, truth--everything in our society--is viewed. Feminist scholars such as Hazel Carby, Allison Jaggar, and Sandra Harding have shown how subjectivity is disguised to appear like objectivity. Their examinations of the hermeneutical questions which motivate scientific inquiry have undermined the notion of scientific objectivity. Such scholarship has already opened and will continue to open up the implications of feminist scholarship for all peoples. Sandra Harding has, for example, suggested that it is:

> 'women's experiences' *in the plural* which provide the new resources for research. This formulation stresses several ways in which the best feminist analyses differ from traditional ones. For one thing, once we realized that there is no universal *man* , but only culturally different men and women, then 'man's' eternal companion--'woman'--also disappeared. That is, women come only in different classes, races, and cultures: there is no 'woman' and no 'woman's experience.' Masculine and feminine are always categories within every class, race, and culture in the sense that women's and men's experiences, desires, and interests differ
>
> within every class, race, and culture (Harding,

1987, 7, emphases in original).

If we acknowledge that we can have different epistemologies or explore different culturally constructed "ways of knowing," then we have grounds for critiquing the intellectual constructs of knowledge/truth/importance--a critique that involves more than simply replacing a new subject in the center.

Instead of looking for a new epistemology, perhaps we should instead examine interpretive strategies and interpretive communities. We should examine Stanley Fish's suggestion that certain interpretive strategies or reading of texts have not yet been claimed or affirmed by an interpretive community, and cannot be ruled out of the future (Fish, 345-346). As the civil rights and women's rights movements, as well as lesbian and gay rights movements, have suggested, there are interpretive strategies existing in our world today which were not "possible" in the past. Decision making is historically situated and it is dependent on many factors. Instead of looking for a way of knowing or a methodology we should interpret the evidence, engage in a dialogue, and then stipulate a temporal, local explanation.

III: A Caution: Equations and Hierarchies

As I have argued above, scholars too often incorrectly assume that when we use the works of diverse writers (in this context implying race, gender, class, religion and sexual preference,) we are accomplishing a total revision.

Again I turn to Diana Fuss, Hazel Carby, Deborah McDowell, and Valerie Smith, who suggest the limitations of such hasty closure. Fuss writes, "Hazel Carby's work is especially important for its attentiveness to the complex political formations and social conditions in which black women's literature has historically been produced. Carby's semiotic/materialist approach, grounded in British Cultural Studies, challenges us to rethink the category of 'black feminist criticism' outside the essentialist and ahistorical frame in which it is so often cast, and at the same time, compels us to interrogate the essentialism of traditional feminist historiography which posits a universalizing and hegemonizing notion of global sisterhood" (Fuss, 94).

Carby's work is both refreshing and promising. In *Reconstructing Womanhood* she argues, for example, that

> Black feminist criticism has too frequently been reduced to an experiential relationship that exists between black women as critics and black women as writers who represent black women's reality. Theoretically this reliance on a common, or shared, experience is essentialist and ahistorical" (Carby, 16).

She concludes this section of "Woman's Era" by telling her readers that she is critical of such an approach, one which has "been constructed as paradigmatic of Afro-American history." She also rejects Houston Baker, Jr.'s suggestion of a particular language of expression, in his case the

blues, when she argues that "the theoretical perspective of the book is that no language or experience is divorced from the shared context in which different groups that share a language express their differing group interests . . . .This struggle within and over language reveals the nature of the structure of social relations and the hierarchy of power, not the nature of one particular group" (17). Carby rejects the belief that certain language systems operate outside of this sharing: the sign . . . is an arena of struggle and construct between socially organized persons in the process of their interaction" (17). Further Carby argues that her own text is an effort to show how different social interests are experienced by the "same sign community." I will return to this suggestion as I explore Gadamer's analogy of the game and the I-lessness of the participant, as well as Bakhtin's discussion of heteroglossia in his suggestion that a word is always half someone else's. This allows her to move away from absolute "black" or "feminist" forms of identity.

Carby's work also does more than pay lip service to class. As Fuss suggested, Carby is very much aware of material differences and how they paralyze suggestions of sisterhood in the feminist community. In this respect she is showing the very complex contextual web, of race class and gender without prioritizing any social factor. Finally, she cautions white women of means to recognize the deep divisiveness of material and racial conditions when she writes, "Ideologies of white womanhood were the sites of

racial and class struggle which enabled white women to negotiate their subordinate role in relation to patriarchy and at the same time to ally their class interests with men and against establishing an alliance with black women. We need more feminist work that interrogates sexual ideologies for their racial specificity and acknowledges whiteness, not just blackness, as a racial categorization" (17). And she reminds her reader, as the news media often forgets, that work which "uses race as a central category does not necessarily need to be about black women" (17). Therefore, the phrase "women of color" is not interchangeable with the word "black." Too many feminist theorists have accepted the obligation to represent the conditions, ideas, and scholarship of black women only to ignore those works by Latino, Asian and Native American women. If the endeavor is truly to be pluralistic, then we should follow Hazel Carby in undermining notions of simple sisterhood. In this project, I make such an effort by arguing that we cannot rank women's oppressions, explain them all as a consequence of patriarchy, or divide them into a mathematical equation of fifty percent race, twenty-five percent sex, and twenty-five percent class. My intention is to challenge the notion of the unified black woman with her historical mandate to uplift the race for her sisters and brothers. Likewise, I will employ the scholarship of Elaine Kim in a similar discussion of Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*.

I plan to explore questions of race, class and gender

as they appear in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *Sula* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and *Tripmaster Monkey*, texts about the contested self. To do so will first require that I expose current tensions by engaging in a rather lengthy literature review of recent scholarship. I would like to propose a complex theoretical approach in which I highlight ways of reading texts. In other words, I want to look at the way Morrison and Kingston make problematic the nature of truth, history, knowledge, and identity in ways which undermine the philosophy of "humankind" or "essential race" categories. In their narratives, Morrison and Kingston remind the reader that they are constructing and fictionalizing even as they re-figure the historical record. In doing so, they contest our notion of history as fact.

I attempt to use a deconstructive notion of woman, race, and class which rejects the subjective limitations imposed by such categories--but one which does not negate the very real experiences, and concerns of women within that subjectivity. The political imperative of my feminism "never forgets that we must seek not only to describe this relation in which women's subjectivity is grounded but also to change it" (Alcoff, 422).

In the following literature review, I attempt to explain why women of color feel it is important to claim a separate, raced space. But I also want to caution against a definitive, exclusive space for the literary and critical endeavor of black or Asian-Americans.

Before I begin, I must, with regret, admit that I have had to revise the focus of these postmodern critiques I employ here. Although these theorists work with the same questions I work with, they too often revert to polemic tactics and male/female dualisms which do not acknowledge questions of difference within the ranks of women, but instead relegate those discussions to a paragraph. With few exceptions, they use male/female antagonisms to express the constructed gendered subjectivity. I have therefore utilized their postmodern critiques but have foregrounded other questions in my effort to avoid the temptation of trying to rank oppressions.

IV. The Deconstructive Project

Leslie Rabine suggests that to reject the subjective limitations imposed on women by the patriarchy, feminists must confront "the double and circular necessity of developing a deep long-term critique of structures that produce patriarchal injustice, while at the same time battling in an immediate way against the products of injustice" (Rabine, 14). In critiquing structural oppression, Rabine considers gendered categories of both men and women, and deconstructs the assumed inherent difference which allows men/white culture a unified identity while negating the identity of women/people of color. We must fight against stereotypes and role prescriptions as repressive myths which are used to keep certain people, namely middle class white

men, in a privileged position in current activities and in the historical record. It is also important to reject the historical assumption that women are included in the generic definition of man, an assumption that is contradicted by the practice of subjugating woman as "different, as an inferior or lesser man" (Rabine,18). Women must suggest their own definitions, based on their own experiences within their gendered subjectivity.

In "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference," Joan Scott suggests that fixed categories, such as gender roles or race and ethnic stereotypes, "conceal the extent to which things presented as oppositional are, in fact, interdependent--that is, they derive their meaning from a particularly established contrast rather than from some inherent or pure antithesis" (Scott, 37). Based on her reading of Derrida, Scott explores how the Western philosophical tradition of binary oppositions is structured in terms of "unity/diversity, identity/difference, presence/absence, and universality/specificity. The leading terms are accorded primacy; their partners are represented as weaker or derivative" (37). Through the use of deconstruction, we can see the way meanings are made to work. Scott suggests that deconstruction consists of "two related steps: the reversal and displacement of seemingly dichotomous terms and their meaning relative to a particular history" (37-38). Although I would argue Derrida's aim is to get beyond reversal, Scott's discussion shows how these

contradictions are constructed for the purpose of a "patriarchy," as opposed to being natural male/female oppositions.

Scott's discussion of equality-versus-difference further exposes how homogenization attempts to suppress differences. I would suggest that "universal" history follows the same pattern. For her part, Scott is suggesting that "the sameness constructed on each side of the binary opposition hides the multiple play of differences and maintains their irrelevance and invisibility" (46). Our consciousness has been played out in terms of either/or's. In other words, our history has attempted to trivialize difference in terms of concrete categories which we are now undermining through deconstruction and through the "singing out" occurring in diverse populations of women who have previously been silenced as "others." Scott urges us not to argue that we need equality as women as if it were in opposition to speaking about the differences within the ranks of men and women. Instead she suggests that differences are "the condition of individual and collective identities, differences as the constant challenge to the fixing of those identities, history as the repeated illustration of the play of differences, differences as the very meaning of equality itself" (46). We must therefore scrutinize gender categories as normative, and view them as cultural prescriptions.

Feminist theories offer both a challenge and an unprecedented opportunity to manipulate theories of

deconstruction and use them to critique internal societal structures. In using these theories, however, we[7] need to protect ourselves from the possibility that poststructuralism can seem to erase individual agency and "suggest that woman is a fiction that must be dismantled" (Alcoff, 417). In other words, we want to show the unnatural hierarchy of power relations, created by a gendered subjectivity without accepting the deconstructive notion that "woman herself is merely a passive recipient of an identity created by social factors" (434). I would suggest that feminist use of deconstruction only rejects subjective limitations imposed by the gendered subjectivity--it does not negate the very real experience of women within that subjectivity. And therefore, the "political imperative of feminist theory . . . never forgets that we must seek not only to describe this relation in which women's subjectivity is grounded but also change it."(422). In order to engage in this deconstructive/ reconstructive project, I think we should consider Kristeva's three generations.

V. Kristeva's Three Generations: Women's Time

In 1981 Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time" was translated and released in the United States. In this essay Kristeva distinguishes between "two generations of feminists: the

---

[7]The we suggested here is an all inclusive one. As the reader will notice, white feminists, in speaking of their racism, often use the we in a way which unproblematically situates their implied reader as a white woman. It is interesting to explore Ong's "The reader's Audience is Always a Fiction" and language studies in this context.

first wave of egalitarian feminists demanding equal rights with men or, in other words, their right to a place in linear time, and the second generation, emerging after 1968, which emphasizes women's radical difference from men and demanded women's right to remain outside the linear time of history and politics" (Kristeva, 187).[8] To place these two generations in the context of my historical discussion, I would define the first generation as "Immasculatory history" or, "His-Story Revisited," with the new task of finding significant women to fill in the gaps where there had been none before. Many feminist theorists--starting with Gerda Lerner, and echoed by Sandra Harding and Joan Scott--have termed the first generation "compensatory history" or "contributory history." The historians engaging in these methodological pursuits in no way challenged the guidelines or rules of proper history, they just set out to find extraordinary women who could be included in "traditional" historical account.[9]

While compensatory efforts were important and led to more substantial projects, they were largely unsuccessful and unfulfilling. Sandra Harding states, "one needs to recognize the limitations of the most obvious ways one could try to rectify the androcentrism of traditional analyses. Feminist

---

[8]I have relied heavily on interpretations of the same passages that Thomas Foster cited in "History, Critical Theory, and Women's Social Practices: *'Women's Time* and *Housekeeping*, *Signs* 14(1), (1988): 73-99.

[9]Obviously I realize my use of "traditional" here is a language problematic, however, I believe the academic community has had a socially, communally suggested version of the traditional account--that is what I am envoking here.

researchers first tried to 'add women' to these analyses. There were three kinds of women who appeared as obvious candidates for this process: women social scientists, women who contributed to the public life social scientists already were studying, and women who had been victims of the most egregious forms of male dominance" (Harding, 1987, 3-4). Unfortunately, as many historians have pointed out, there aren't that many extraordinary women, women who could be shoved into male norms, whose contributions can be explained on the basis of male standards. While "lost women" lead us to other women, they do not show us much about the majority of women, who have not been recognized or examined. Nor, as Harding has noted , do these analyses "encourage us to ask what have been the *meanings* of women's contributions to public life *for women*" (5, emphasis in original). Although victimization accounts expose the violence and repression of the patriarchal culture in which we live, they more powerfully suggest that "women have only been victims" (5). If there are no investigations into the agency of women, then there is little reason to argue that anyone should study them.

Therefore, many historians and theorists in other discourses have participated in Kristeva's second generation. "Herstory" feminists have rejected the current methodologies, a rejection which has lead them to challenge periodization. Joan Gadol Kelly suggests, for example, that the Renaissance was not a Renaissance for women, and thus argues that we need

to re-evaluate the linear notion of time advanced by traditional history. Sandra Harding's book, *Feminism and Methodology,* is a wonderful example of the second stage and a promising gateway into the third phase, the feminist phase. Harding proposes definitions of method and methodology which challenge the notion that women must fit the traditional mold in order to be found in the historical text. She defines a research method as a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence, but what is important about her discussion/definition is that she acknowledges that the ways researchers engage in methods vary drastically. Feminist scholars, she proposes, observe behaviors of women and men that traditional social scientists have not thought significant. On the other hand, Harding suggests that a "*methodology* is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed; it includes accounts of how 'the general structure of theory finds its application in particular scientific disciplines'"(3, emphasis in original). She argues that traditional researchers apply theory in ways that make it difficult to understand women's participation in social life, or to understand men's activities as gendered too. Harding finally suggests that we need a feminist epistemology which recognizes women as knowers. I think the challenge is greater. I believe that we need to challenge the whole notion of knowledge. Do we want to replace epistemology, or instead spend this time exploring why people feel the need to have stable definitions and methodologies?

It is interesting to note that Hans Kellner, an intellectual historian, suggests that the real aim of history is to get the "story crooked."[10] In Kellner's discussion of history as narrative, he ridicules the fiction that there is a story waiting in the sources ready to be told.

Linda Alcoff's "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminism" is a good supplement to this discussion. She contends that "the dilemma facing feminist theorists today is that our very self-definition is grounded in a concept that we must deconstruct and de-essentialize in all of its aspects. Man has said that woman can be defined, delineated captured--understood, explained, and diagnosed--to a level of determination never accorded to man himself . . . " (Alcoff, 406). This is why we need new definitions of history, of method of the "subject." In the second generation women have considered a new definition of woman/women which is articulated from the vantage point of <u>all</u> women. This separatist phase was and continues to be necessary, even as I suggest transition into the feminist generation. As Allison Jaggar writes, "because the ruling class has an interest in concealing the way in which it dominates and exploits the rest of the population, the interpretation of reality that it presents will be distorted in characteristic ways. In

---

[10]See Kellner's book, *Language And Historical Representation,* as well as Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse* and Dominic LaCapra's *History and Criticism* which discuss the narrative aspects of history, and the myth of objectivity.

particular, the suffering of subordinate classes will be ignored, redescribed as enjoyment or justified as freely chosen, deserved or inevitable. Because their class position insulates them from the suffering of the oppressed, many members of the ruling class are likely to be convinced of their own ideology. . . " (Jaggar, 370). In contrast, she suggests that the voices and epistemology of oppressed groups will be less likely to perpetuate repression because "their pain provides them with the motivation for finding out what is wrong, for criticizing accepted interpretations of reality and for developing new and less distorted ways of understanding the world" (371).

On this last point, I must take issue with Jaggar. The tensions within many feminist and womanist organizations show evidence to the contrary.

VI: How Many Others Constitute the "Other"

This is a good place to explore the second and very important component of Kristeva's second generation or "Herstory." We must acknowledge that there are many "others" within *the second sex.* Kristeva's second generation was characterized by the rejection of linear time and interpretations of the dominant historiography, yet more importantly Kristeva stresses that women must also reject a "unitary image of self-identity, unmarked by internal contradictions such as differences between women" (Kristeva, 194). This is a very important component of the historical

debate and one which I wish to develop. Since the emergence of women's history in the 1970s, many texts have been written about the experiences of women. I suggest that we cannot accept a definition of women's history or literary theory which says the "woman's" voice has now been heard. All women need to acknowledge the differences among our experiences, goals, desires, and needs. Unless we acknowledge the plurality of women's experiences, we run the substantial risk of alienating many women and perpetuating a white, middle class form of the androcentric viewpoint. Once again this challenges the bedrock of historical assumptions.

In keeping with Kristeva's proposal, even in the separation stage, we must acknowledge and demand our right to be pluralistic. I cannot stress this point enough. It is not enough to include the undifferentiated gendered category of women in our historical discussions because women are affected by class, race, community, gender, marital and occupational expectations, biases, and standards. At the same time, feminist historians and scholars in this new methodology must be careful not to perpetuate new mythical norms. As Patricia Hill Collins observes, "the fences created by middle-class, white women's experiences, as new, more benign mythical norms, promise to confine women of color and other groups deemed as other, and in doing so, suppress feminist scholarship and activism overall" (Hill Collins, 19). Hill Collins criticizes feminist scholars who resist the elite white male representations of history and yet have

been negligent in reforming our own pedagogy. In our attempts to have the voices of women heard, "we often duplicate the very behavior we claim to abhor in others" (19). Often only what is isolated as "male" is deemed worthy of criticism. As I move my discussion into the third stage, the one I find most promising and revolutionary for the historical practice, I feel this component of the second generation or "Herstory" must be actively maintained.

As this discussion implies, I am very concerned that women have become stuck in the second generation. I feel that separation suggests that the job is over. In other words, "Herstory" suggests that only women can engage in women's history, and therefore it reinforces women's depiction as the other, only understood by those of her own kind. Therefore, in the African-American or Asian-American "herstory" there will be the implication that there is a communal consensus that can be represented and that only those within this constructed consensus can "explicate" the text. This is a false assumption, likewise, that lumps all women, regardless of race, and socioeconomic status into the category of the "other." It is not only the responsibility of women to educate themselves about gaps in history but also that of all scholars.

Kristeva describes the third generation, what I call the "feminist" generation, as "the mixture of the two attitudes--insertion into history and the radical *refusal* of the subjective limitations imposed by this history's time on an

experiment carried out in the name of irreducible difference . . . " (Kristeva, 195, emphasis in original). Rabine concurs when she claims that "women ally with men in national liberation, union, or peace movements, but within those movements they engage in feminist struggles where their male allies are at the same time their enemies" (Rabine, 25). In this generation, or phase, the separatist movement of women naming and articulating their own needs, definitions, and desires, is not abandoned, but the project of revolutionizing history is undertaken simultaneously by entering the field, and opening it up. In keeping with Jaggar's thesis, Rabine suggests that feminists can engage in a better representation because we "lack a complete solution, a totally accurate representation of the political situation, not because we haven't formulated the right position but because the nature of sociopolitical order as an interwoven tissue of conjoining and conflicting contradictions, as a tissue of supplementarity and *differance*, can not be represented by stable positions" (27). Through the work of feminist theorists, historians, and philosophers, we can introduce the possibility of radical change; we can acknowledge the "fact" of the heterogeneous population which makes up the populous for the historical text.

This plurality is best explored in a discussion of language. We know the world through narrative. Carby reminds us that there is no foundational sign or sign context. I will therefore examine the narrative strategies of

two storytellers who write out of communities which have been quick to acknowledge the significance of an oral tradition. After exploring their texts, I would like to return to these questions: What is the role of community in dialogue? Where does the local exist? If subjectivity is a narrative construct, can we ever get underneath, around or behind it? What role does power play in initiating a dialogue? Can we/should we appropriate the heteroglossia in the text? Can we have a conversation which assumes good intention -- can all players lose themselves in the game? Can we have a feminist politics of equality-versus-difference in relation to men and within our ranks?

CHAPTER TWO: RE-FIGURING THE SUBJECT

Song of Solomon (1977), *Sula* (1973), *The Bluest Eye* (1970)
Tar Baby (1981)

I. History and Fiction: Narratives

In "Minority History as Metafiction: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*," Donald Goellnicht explores Claudia Tate's concern that criticism by and about people of color has become mimetic and humanistic. Goellnicht concurs that such an approach accepts language as a referential tool for portraying history. Goellnicht looks at the historical novel in terms of the act of textualization. (I categorize Toni Morrison's texts as included in this endeavor.) He is fascinated, as I am, by the parallels authors draw between the act of constructing history and fiction.

I employ the concept of historiographic metafiction in this study. In *Narcissistic Narrative*, Linda Hutcheon defines metafiction as writing which is "self-referring or autorepresentational; it provides, within itself, a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own process of production and reception" (xii). Historiographic metafiction "emerges when the hard-won textual autonomy of fiction is challenged, paradoxically, by self-referentiality. If language, as these texts suggest, constitutes reality rather than merely reflecting it, readers become the actualizing link between history and fiction" (xii). Through this theoretical lens, Hutcheon is suggesting

that not unlike fiction, history is a construct. This is very much related to the idea in Dominick La Capra's *History and Criticism* where he criticizes his contemporaries for refusing to admit that the objectivist/documentary mode of history is a myth because just like the literary critic, the historian is a reader and interpreter of what have been disguised as hard facts, but are little more than the labeled, correct, epistemological sources of the time. Likewise, Hayden White in *Metahistory* and again in *The Content of The Form* approaches history through narrative theory in order to avoid what La Capra cautions is the reduction of "all texts in homogeneous fashion to mere symptoms of some encompassing phenomenon or process" (La Capra, 36).[11] White contends that "no history presents absolute truth, for all history is textualized, and while it may form our concept of past 'reality,' inherent in language lies the possibility--the necessity even--of manipulation through selection, judgement, choice of rhetorical tropes, and so on, so that reality becomes distorted,'truth' biased" (quoted in Goellnicht, 290). I feel that Hans Kellner's discussion of "crooked reading" is appropriate here; "to examine the historical text," he argues, "we must see it

---

[11]For more discussion of history as narrative see Dominick LaCapra, History and Criticism (Ithaca and London, 1985), Hans D. Kellner, Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked (Madison, 1989), Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe (Baltimore, 1973), and The Content of The Form (Baltimore, 1978),as well as F.R. Ankersmit, Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language, (1983).

'crooked,' even if doing so makes it harder to attain the precise purpose of the text. To see the text as straight is to see through it -- that is, not to see it at all except as a device to facilitate knowledge of reality" (Kellner, 1989, 4). The purpose of such an endeavor is to "foreground the constructed, rhetorical, nature of our knowledge . . . Beginnings and endings are never 'given' in a universe of life in time, yet without conventionalized temporal frames -- historical periods -- the landmarks that prevent events in time from swirling meaninglessly would be gone" (8). Although I am not dealing with an academic historical text, Morrison's works of fiction, which challenge the form, objective stance, rationality and epistemology of the historical text, serve to implicate historians through the stories they tell.

Goellnicht speaks of the empowering function of re-figuring history. He cautions, however, that although the official version of history is exposed as a lie, any *alternative* or *re-visionary* histories, produced through the literary endeavors of women of color, is done so with the understanding that such searches produce yet new fictions (291). Goellnicht is not unaware of Nancy Hartsock's criticism that "at best postmodernist theories criticize Enlightenment assumptions without putting anything in their place. And at worst they recapitulate the effects of Enlightenment theories that deny the dominated the right to participate in defining the terms of interaction" (Hartsock, 1989-90, 20). Hartsock suggests that postmodern readings

will disempower people of color just as they claim their voice. One form telling history is not invalidated because it is housed in fiction or because it is not a complete revision of the story. Or, as Bernstein has suggested in his discussion of Gadamer's hermeneutics, there is not a "transcendental or ahistorical perspective from which to evaluate competing claims to truth" (154). Goellnicht is, following the work of narrative theorists, pointing to the understanding that a story is a construction which is most readily revealed when we look at the beginning, middle, and end, or antagonism, climax, and falling action. Stories or history only point to a particular version of truth as told by a particular informant. If we want to critique the historical exclusion of the voices of people of color we cannot practice simple replacement or recovery because doing so means we never get around to critiquing the ideological premise of identity. This identity is based on the Enlightenment claim that, according to Hartsock, assumes "human universality and homogeneity, based on the common capacity to reason"--a claim in which differences were erased as "fundamentally epiphenomenal" (17). If we do not challenge the Enlightenment definition of rationality then we cannot argue different processes of knowing and thereby we weaken our criticism that knowledge is subjective and contingent on those who are in power. Acknowledging the link between power and knowledge exposes the "crooked" nature of Aristotelian logic.

II. Attempts to Get the Story Crooked

Cornel West in "The New Cultural Politics of Difference" makes some important observations about the "modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness" that are crucial to my project. He suggests that those who initially responded to racism fought for representation and recognition founded on "moral judgements regarding Black 'positive' images over and against White supremacist stereotypes. These images 're-presented' monolithic and homogeneous Black communities in a way that could displace past misrepresentations of these communities" (West, 103). He highlights two limiting factors in this resistance--the "*assimilist manner* that set out to show that Black people were really like white people" and the "*homogenizing impulse* that assumes that all Black people were alike" (103, emphasis in the original).

Toni Morrison, as West has suggested, does not get caught in this double-bind. Her texts are not based on the binary opposition white/black; she does not critique white racism in terms of showing simple conflicts between whites and her textual agents. Instead she critiques racist structures of power, knowledge, and rationality which have denied black people their voices. She does not fail to recognize the interconnectedness of identity that Hazel Carby and Deborah McDowell discuss. Whereas Joyce had suggested that she could name the pleasure of a black woman, McDowell writes that "black women's loves are not uniform" (54). She

cannot attribute a metaphysics to the black woman's experience because black women "have not developed in a vacuum, but, rather in a complex social framework that includes interaction with black men, white men, and white women, among diverse social groups and subgroups and our relationships and loyalties to each group are complex and shifting" (54). She suggests that black women need not worry about fending off "foreign" methodologies" or creating distance between themselves and "different interpretive communities" (54). She, like Hutcheon, calls attention to the multiplicity of experience.

In her exploration of intra-racial relationships, Morrison shows how the black community is not established on similarity but with the structures of inequality, hierarchy, scapegoating and fragmentation. What Morrison does in *Song of Solomon* is to critique the West, a la Rabinow, by using its own internal logic to deconstruct it. As much as she is critiquing what West labels the modern Black diaspora problematic, she is also critiquing the white western rationality.

Toni Morrison constantly reminds the reader of the fictionalizing process, of the constructs which both bind and liberate. Morrison, Kingston, Carby and McDowell question racial identity as a homogeneous cloak. Morrison's Milkman is positioned in a quest to find the history of his name, and the reader explores white racism and Morrison's skepticism of rationality and the unified community. Her text illustrates

that "language shapes, rather than merely reflects, reality for both the victimizers and the victims" (Goellnicht, 291). A striking example of this would be the different "truths" that Macon and Ruth convey to Milkman about the Doctor. Macon depicts an incestuous deception whereas Ruth talks about her love for her father and Macon's insane jealousy.

Morrison's narrator also speaks of Ruth's relationship with her father, but it is entirely unclear who is the reliable teller, and what version of truth we should come away from the text with. The "all-knowing" narrator, a fiction, is not utilized in this passage except to be one more voice in this ugly chorus. One should not confuse the repetition of concerns that Ruth's relationship with her father was "unnatural" with the suggestion the Morrison is cluing the reader towards the truth.

In version number one, the omniscient narrator revives the dead Doctor, Ruth's father, and speaks of his concerns:

> Fond as he was of his only child, useful as she was in his house since his wife had died, lately he had begun to chafe under her devotion. Her steady beam of love was unsettling, and she had never dropped those expressions of affection that had been so lovable in her childhood. The good-night kiss was itself a masterpiece of slow-wittedness . . . More probably it was the ecstasy that always seemed to be shining in Ruth's face when he bent to kiss her--an ecstasy her felt inappropriate to the

occasion (23).

This narration is crucial to my reading: "None of that, of course, did he describe to the young man (Macon) who came to call. Which is why Macon Dead still believed the magic had lain in the two keys" (23). In another scene Macon recalls those keys, the power of those keys. This passage parodies Macon's belief that his keys to city properties make him a man worthy of the doctor's daughter. In this comment, the narrator departs from a focus on a father thinking of his daughter, and returns to the mistruths ever present in the text. It also complicates our sense of what to believe, by showing how we interpret events, how we narrate our lives with stories, and how these stories become assumptions of fact. Macon knows the power of those keys, just like the Doctor knew his daughter was too found of him. The Doctor's truth led him to reinforce Macon's assumption that money was power.

In talking to Milkman about Ruth's "unnatural" relationship with her father, Macon speaks of the birth of Corinthians. Ruth "had her legs wide open and he was there. I know he was a doctor and doctors not supposed to be bothered by things like that, but he was a man before he was a doctor" (71). To reinforce the perverse truth of his observation, Macon discusses the events immediate to the doctor's death:

> In the bed. That's where she was when I opened the door. Laying next to him. Naked as a yard dog,

> kissing him. Him dead and white and puffy and skinny, and she had his fingers in her mouth (73).

Milkman's response to Macon's version is quite important to what transpires later in the text. Milkman was "entirely sympathetic to the stranger's problems--understood perfectly his view of what had happened to him--but part of his sympathy came from the fact that he himself was not involved or in any way threatened by the stranger's story"(74-75). In fact, he questions himself, "How was he supposed to feel about the two of them now? Was it true, first of all?"(76)

Later Milkman recalls,

> My mother nursed me when I was old enough to talk, stand up, and wear knickers, and somebody saw it and laughed. . . His mother had been portrayed not as a mother who simply adored her only son, but as an obscene child playing games with whatever male was near -- be it her father or her son (79).

Prior and current knowledge contrast. Milkman (and may I add Morrison) does not labor to know truth instead, he wonders why his father had told him the story. He exhibits more concern for understanding why his parents feel compelled to give a truth to their tale. I feel this is an important clue to our reading of the text, analogous to Morrison's initial suggestion in *The Bluest Eye* that if we are looking for why we will never be satisfied. Looking for why means we are asking the wrong questions.

The contrasting versions of truth are further

complicated when Ruth gives her story:

> I am not a strange woman. I am a small one. I don't know what all your father has told you about me down in that shop . . . But I know, as well as I know my own name, that he told you only what was flattering to him. I know he never told you that he killed my father and that he tried to kill you. Because both of you took my attention away from him. I know he never told you that. And I know he never told you that he threw my father's medicine away, but it's true (124, emphasis added).

Is this a tale of incestuous bond between a father and daughter, or is it just the construct of a jealous and perverse husband? We never learn. Nor are we given a sense of morality. Likewise, in *The Bluest Eye* we are never told that Cholly's rape of Pecola constituted hate because that hate was conveyed in the language and through the lens of "love" which contrasts with the actions of physical violence:

> The tenderness welled up in him, and he sank to his knees, his eyes on the foot of his daughter. Crawling on all fours toward her, he raised his hand and caught the foot in an upward stroke. Pecola lost her balance . . . He wanted to fuck her--tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold. The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear . . . .

> . . .The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her (129).

Just preceding the rape, Cholly contemplates his role as a father. The narrator suggests that "the aspect of married life that dumbfounded him and rendered him totally dysfunctional was the appearance of children. Having no idea of how to raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be" (126). As Cholly watches Pecola wash the dishes he struggles to understand the nature of her "young, helpless, hopeless presence" (127). He asks: "Why did she have to look so whipped? She was a child -- unburdened--why wasn't she happy?" (127). He reads this unhappiness as an accusation: "guilt and impotence rose in a bilious duet. What could he do for her--ever?" "What of his knowledge of the world and of life could be useful to her?" (127). And once more we are reminded, before we make the mistake of suggesting why, that "*since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how* (9). Are we missing the significance of these events if we fail to look at the way Cholly knows how to show love? Do we seek premature closure?

In all of her novels, Morrison weaves a complex web of *truths*. Throughout *Song of Solomon* she shows how the layers of these truths, often exposed as mistruths, build the foundation of knowledge. A good example of this would be Macon. He *knows* that property means access to anything--including a wife. This knowledge is challenged by my earlier

reading of the keys. He knows property means respect. Wayward Freddie, however, laughs about him behind his back and Mrs. Bains, a tenant he is about to cast into the street with her young children, says: "A nigger in business is a terrible thing to see" (22). Macon is not privy to others' perceptions, but he constructs assumptions that bolster his ego. Despite the conflicting knowledge of others, Macon claims to *know*. However, what Macon knows does not constitute common knowledge or "common sense." His process of coming to know has been based on conjecture, experience and his "reading" of the social context in which he lives. Likewise, could not our own ways of knowing parallel Macon's? Even the most cautious, careful literary critic? I think so.

Despite all of our careful and calculated methodological and textual tools, different critical interpretations transpire. Can we concur that some readers "do it right" while others go astray? The American deconstructor might suggest that we look to the text. Isn't that just what we do? The reader of *Song of Solomon* is slowly introduced to an awareness of the social construction of knowledge in this text. For example, Macon appeals to Milkman's reasonableness as a man. The text suggests that logic is not a linear progression of facts, but instead different paths which are chosen as a result of different experiences and tendencies for seeing the world. Milkman is exposed to many different processes of rationalizing, and through these experiences, he is led to question reason and

truth.

Likewise, the critic rethinks authority, for example, when reading the scene where Macon walks away from Mrs Bains, all the time thinking, "it was because of those keys that he could dare to walk over to that part of Not Doctor Street (it was still Doctor Street then) and approach the most important Negro in the city . . ." (23). Macon also knows, ironically, given our prior glimpse at Freddie, that Freddie was a "reliable liar. He [Freddie] was always right about the facts and always wrong about the motives that produced the facts" (25). However, we (the readers) are lead to believe that Freddie knows more about Ruth's motives for nursing her son--whose feet dangle to the floor--than he is willing to tell. Freddie does not share this speculation so that he, like the rest of the town, can laugh at Macon behind his back. Where, one asks, is the authority of this text?

Naming also becomes important in this text. Milkman's naming is kept from Macon, while Macon's rightful name is Dead*ened* by a drunken clerk. Likewise, it is important to note that Ruth is doubly dead--she is on several occasions referred to as the 'dead doctor's daughter' and she bears the consequence of Macon's misnaming [Dead] in her last name. Another interesting signifier is "Doctor Street" and its subsequent naming "Not Doctor Street." The narrator says:

> . . .Not Doctor Street, a name the post office did not recognize. Town maps registered the street as Mains Avenue, but the only colored doctor in the

> city had lived and died on that street and when he moved there in 1896 his patients took to calling the street . . . Doctor Street. Some of the city legislators, whose concern for appropriate names and the maintenance of the city's landmarks was the principal part of their life, saw to it that 'Doctor Street'. . .would always be known as Mains Avenue and not Doctor Street . . . .
>
> It was a genuinely clarifying public notice because it gave Southside residents a way to keep their memories alive and please the city legislators as well. They called it Not Doctor Street, and were inclined to call the charity hospital, at its northern end, No Mercy Hospital. . .(4).

The symbolic signifying that takes place in this passage is incredible. The choice of Doctor Street, to recognize someone of meaning in the black community, and their subsequent choice of adding a negative qualifier relative to their situation--namely an attempt by the city to deny black people their terms for naming--is a very important textual element. The reader is left to question what is the importance of naming, the name itself or the ability to name. They are naming against the hegemonic, governing body that invalidates their ways of knowing and defining landmarks.

What, when, why, where, and *how* are likewise, problematized in this text. When Pilate attempts to tell

Guitar and Milkman about the murder of her father, Guitar asks, "Who?" Pilate responds, "I don't know who and I don't know why. I just know what I'm telling you: what, when , and where"(43). However, her attempts to describe those conditions fail to meet Guitar's expectations. He insists, "You didn't say where," and this series of exchanges takes place:

> "I did too. Off a fence."
>
> "Where was the fence?"
>
> "On our farm."
>
> "Guitar laughed, but his eyes were too shiny to convey much humor. 'Where was the farm?'"
>
> "Montor County."
>
> "He gave up on 'where.' 'Well, when then?'"

To which he receives this response:

> "When he sat there -- on the fence."
>
> "Guitar felt like a frustrated detective. 'What year?'"
>
> "The year they shot them Irish people down in the streets"
>
> "Was a good year for guns and gravediggers"(42).

In contrast to that of Western readers, Pilate's concept of time does not include standard periodization, or the need to give a linear date. Position, for her, is not as much geographic as it is spatial. Pilate's terms of disseminating information are foreign to Guitar.

Just as her fictional, bellybuttonless Pilate refuses

linear time, Morrison critiques it as a Western construct. Pilate's defiance of the community standard makes her an unlikely candidate to be the bearer of knowledge and yet it is her story that guides Milkman's quest. It is also her story that guides me to use Morrison's fiction to critique our notion of reality and truth. For what was truth to Pilate seems to be unacceptable source material for the scholar who believes that specified historical events and dates must precede any acquisition of knowledge. In opposition to Enlightenment standards of rationality, Morrison guides her character through the text with a song about Solomon, the flying African, that many critics would dismiss as fantasy.

Another example of how Morrison complicates a quest for epistemology is evident in the text when Pilate learns that it is abnormal for a person not to possess a bellybutton. Pilate "knew from the horror on the older woman's face" that the discovery that she did not have a bellybutton was a terrible wrong. Although I have just suggested that Morrison rejects Enlightenment rationality, I do not wish to exoticize her texts. Her characters, even the mystical Pilate, often use empiricism and either/or distinctions to "know" their world too. For example, the young Pilate interprets the difference between Macon and herself using a binary system of comparison:

> He peed standing up. She squatting down. He has a penis like a horse did. She had a vagina like a

> mare . . . He had a corkscrew in his stomach. She did not. She thought it was one more way in which males and females were different. The boy she went to bed with had one too. But until now she had never seen another woman's stomach" (144)

The significance of this passage can be addressed in several ways. First I would like to extend its criticism to binary systems of thought. If one relies on the biological distinction between the sexes, a lot can be overlooked. Pilate uses what is at her disposal--comparison/contrast--which leads her to believe that bellybottons are only possessed by males. In this assumption, she is, of course, incorrect. However, the community uses the understanding that most men and women possess bellybuttons as a general statement that Pilate must also possess a bellybutton. Inductive and deductive logic, obviously tested to extremes, are indicted in this text. This example also shows that there was no interpretive community in which one could conceive of Pilate. Not unlike the people of the Bottom in *Sula*, the community of migrant workers are guilty on a large scale of reduplicating Pilate's mistake. They rule out an alternative reading of Pilate's birthing because of their inability to account for such a vast difference. Both the community and Pilate are, at times, trapped by their dependency on binary oppositions. Morrison is doing some creative "writing beyond the ending" or making available an alternative narrative by plotting Pilate in the text. Once

again I recall that Morrison warns us that "why" isn't the most facilitative question. I am not suggesting that anything goes, but instead, that it has become very easy for us to rule out Pilate on the basis of scientific/biological inquiry.

Likewise, critics of Morrison have been unable to envision a space in which she is proposing a reconciliation between the sexes because they only read her examples of sexism in a particular fashion. I believe they overlook the subtly in which she introduces Sweet to the text:

> She put salve on his face. He washed her hair. She sprinkled talcum on his feet. He straddled her behind and massaged her back . . . . She said please come back. He said I'll see you tonight (289).

This is an important, but often overlooked, event in the text. Milkman, who only acknowledges women in terms of their attempt either to kill him or nourish him, is involved in a reciprocal exchange for the first time in the text. Could Morrison, who admittedly has written a novel in which the sexes appear to have very different spheres and desires, be attempting some kind of reconciliation? Morrison's reconciliation does not decharge the sexism within the black community. When Morrison attempts to weave the male and female spheres she has created, she does not borrow from existing narratives of male/female relationships which often consist of compromises that have silenced black women.

I feel, however, that too many of the critics are ready to place this text in one of two categories: the sympathetic narrative of black male emasculation or the continuation of divisive propaganda. In the first scenario, the reader, who of course has political motivation, decides that Morrison is repressing the feminist/womanist voice in order to show how black men's inability to fully embrace the man's sphere has oppressed both black men and black women. This implied reader assumes that Morrison has displaced the rage of the white community onto the figure of black women, in a way to suggest that until men are free, women will never be held in esteem or that black women writers are agents of white oppressors when they criticizing "their" men. This is best exemplified through the figure of Guitar who is convinced that everybody wants the life of a black man. The second scenario requires an alliance with Pilate to the exclusion of her love and connection for her capitalistic brother, Macon. What many readers fail to do is read these narratives in both opposition and convergence. What does the tension between these two narratives produce? Why is one so readily embraced over the other?

III. Problematic in The Text

I audited an undergraduate seminar entitled "Sister of the Spirit: Morrison and Walker." As I listened to student responses to *Song of Solomon*, I was struck by their tendency to assume that Morrison chose Guitar to represent the

fruitless, Black Panther type renegade. My reading of Guitar's function in the text differs sharply. I will use Guitar's explanation of the Seven Days to discuss a problematic for many of *Song of Solomon's* white readership. In this we need to recall Rabinow's suggestion that to critique epistemology we should "anthropologize the west: show how exotic its constitution of reality has been" (241).

Guitar's description of the haphazard selection of a white victim is unnerving to say the least. Yet his response to Milkman's inquiry as to why the Seven Days did not just "hunt down the ones who did the killing? Why kill innocent people?" is even more problematic. Guitar's answer implicates all whites when he resolutely states, "There are no innocent white people, because every one of them is a potential nigger-killer, if not the actual one. You think Hitler surprised them? You think just because they went to war they thought he was a freak? Hitler's the most natural white man in the world" (156). Milkman, horrified, pursues, "But people who lynch and slice off people's balls--they're crazy, Guitar, crazy." But Guitar responds,

> Every time somebody does a thing like that to one of us, they say the people who did it were crazy or ignorant . . . Why isn't cutting a man's eyes out, cutting his nuts off, the kind of thing you never get too drunk or ignorant to do? . . . And more to the point, how come Negroes, the craziest, most ignorant people in America, don't get that crazy

> and that ignorant? No. White people are unnatural. As a race they are unnatural. And it takes a strong effort of the will to overcome an unnatural enemy (157).

The preceding passages from *Song of Solomon* present a challenge to the Western notion of rationality and logic. As Guitar resolutely comments, the legacy of white supremacy is unnatural. It is unnatural because on one level whites are deemed to be morally superior, more rational and humane, and yet on another level the only "rational" explanation we can give for lynching and genocide is mental incompetence. Likewise, black people have been portrayed as functioning with the lowest level of rationality and the highest level of incompetence and sin, and yet there is no standard by which to judge those who molest and destroy except to say they are untrustworthy and deficient. In other words, all black people are described by white culture as innately savage and inferior, not to be trusted, <u>but always responsible for their actions against those who would rule over them</u>. In striking contrast, those white citizens who would perpetrate acts of aggression of the most horrible kind are not held accountable. There is an inherent contradiction that Morrison points to rather brilliantly--accountability is stacked in favor of what I will loosely label "white culture" or the hegemonic discourse. In this fashion, there is no necessity to critique the attitudes and actions of the racist mentality of whites. If we are to look at the KKK and those who lynch

black people as taking a racist mentality to its logical end (i.e. treating the other as disposable) we begin to understand how the crookedness of racism is made to appear straight.

Guitar, who sings of injustice throughout the novel, unfolds the "exotic" nature of Western humanism. Milkman, not unlike the "more-conscious" white reader has difficulty with Guitar's logic. Milkman, as do many liberal white audiences, fruitlessly inquires about the nice white people: "What about the nice ones? Some whites made sacrifices for Negroes. Real sacrifices" (157). Guitar answers, "that just means there are one or two natural ones. But they haven't been able to stop the killing either" (157). Lynching has been a pursuit of fun and drunkenness, Guitar continues, the value of the Negro life has been measured by its ability to provide entertainment for whites. Guitar strikes all the wrong chords; he has implicated white culture using its own logic. Is Guitar an example of radicalization for black people, or does he serve to indict western white readers? I feel he serves both purposes. But I want to explore what I as a reader feel compelled to do with this passage besides bury my face in shame, resign myself to the fact that I have no right to give a critical interpretation of the text, or worse yet, to reject the text as horrid, divisive propaganda. I feel this passage has direct links to the feminist movement. This passage brings the white reader to the same impasse that is troubling feminist theories and politics.

How can I accept the fact that I cannot, as a feminist, wish this Guitar mentality were "irrational," and yet try to smother my always present doubts that I am, in fact, guilty of oppressing those who I have claimed are my sisters. I, implicated and cautious, feel that the empowerment of feminisms awaits a time when we can deal with these questions. Feminisms cannot proceed as if only certain women can articulate, address, and respond to certain texts, namely those by women of their own color, class, etc. And yet I feel convicted/convinced by the suggestions that I should claim ethnography as my pursuit. Therefore, I will explore how Morrison has made exotic, or rather primitive, the rationality of the white Westerner.

To look at the Western, racist mentality of the "Other" in the terms found in Morrison's novel is to acknowledge how exotic our concept of humanity actually is. If white western critics model our pursuits on the example of anthropological ethnographers, we can re-see the exploits of western manifest destiny of thought. To look at the "Other," through a constructed lens of the "Other," is to complicate just who is the "Other." The "Other" always appears in terms of one's point of reference. And yet I have heard many, apologetic, white liberal feminists refer to their colleagues of color as "The Other"--always already designated. They fail to acknowledge the perceptions and recognition of diverse women of color looking at white women, with the same "Otheredness." The "Other" cannot always only be woman or black or any other

"supplement" but, instead, it is a constructed margin by which the critic, or a communal hierarchy, places those not within its intended borders in the margin and therefore if is often used inappropriately or in a way which negates the agency of people of color.

I would also suggest that this would apply to those categories usually located under the heading of Judith Butler's "supplement." If we look at our "Other" within the gendered subjectivity of women or the gendered, race*full*, class*full*, contexts then we are again acknowledging the displaced functions of the center and the margin in terms of the "Other"--something or someone is always "Other" on some term. It is our responsibility as critics to sharpen our critical lens to the multiple contexts we are working within. In less complicated terms, I am re-stating what I proposed in Chapter One; to essentialize any category, or those things that have been labeled supplements, is to always displace and oppress those whom we call our sisters. This does not just happen within the boundary of white feminism which fails to acknowledge a plurality of differences, but it also happens every time African-American women critics suggest that the center of black women's writing is to uplift the generic black race. For as I hope one would concede, although these efforts are important and admirable, no one author or community of authors can uplift all people within the black race. Nor can any woman writer use her experience to mandate those changes that need to be made for a larger community of

women. Nor can we mandate our community in terms of oppression, as I earlier stated, because we all experience life through the layers of many lenses -- class, ethnicity, sexuality, race, gender, etc. These categories are not divisible, and the lenses are inseparable. Each time a scholar chooses to write about the gendered subjectivity, or a racial "community," she/he must acknowledge that to focus on particular elements of the self/selves is an unnatural thing in isolation -- but also a necessary endeavor in order to discuss those problems which we, through our own lenses, have come to see as important topics of life for discussion.

IV. Community and Self Identity

In this section I critique the construct of community. I choose to use Morrison's *Sula* because it shows the socially constructed, but very real circumstance of blackness, womanhood, and class, and because it highlights the scapegoating function which serves to make the fragmented population appear to be whole. In this sense the notion of individual and community are undermined binary oppositions. I believe the community is better understood in terms of difference, and not just difference defined against the hegemonic discourse labeled "white culture." I also believe that we should teach history in terms of the faultlines in communities. Students would be better served to learn about discontinuities and disagreement than idyllic fallacies. Morrison's artistic palate does not consist of one shade of

black. She writes: "You think dark is just one color, but it ain't" (40). I turn to *Sula* to conclude this chapter because in this text Morrison demonstrates how racist structures are reduplicated in the black community through the isolation of a scapegoat.

In *Sula*, Morrison shows how a community can be bound only in terms of keeping out a common enemy. Therefore, when the mother gushes with concern for Teapot, the young boy whom she had previously neglected, we are seeing community in action. Community in Morrison is tied to scapegoating and notions of which outsiders must remain in the margins. Sula could not be absorbed because although the evidence against her was "contrived their conclusions about her were not. Sula was distinctly different" (118). "Once the source of their personal misfortune was verified, they had leave to protect and love one another" (119). It is interesting that an outsider who does not serve to make the community question "rationality" and self definitions--namely Shadrack--is not so vehemently opposed. Yet Sula's self absorbed ways, her ways of being different, have to be singled out for blame. Within the community of *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye*, education, money, lightness of skin and snobbery divide the black folk, but the common object of scorn always identified (Sula and Pecola), made it easier for the people of the bottom to feel secure in their differences.[12]

---

[12]See Renee Girard, The Scapegoat for further discussion of the scapegoat's significance to community.

The communal element in community is a negative thread. Citizens of the bottom are not bound together because of sameness, but instead to keep out that which was so different (or if we reject binaries--the logical example of their difference put in an unacceptable light) that it showed the falseness of the bond. In order to appear whole, the community had to find a scapegoat who could absorb all the tensions that their differences and unrest created. It is this notion of the anti-community which I discuss. How much communion is in the community? I would suggest not very much. However, the notion of the community has made it very convenient for Westerners, black and white, to assume that certain aspects of our identity can be prioritized for a homogenized community. In fact, the notion of the majority versus the minority reinforces the notion that "minorities" must have consensus in order to gain empowerment.

I could continue with such examples from the texts of Morrison and a host of others, but I think my point has been made. We must rethink the construct of both the self, a rational reasoning individual and the community, a homogeneous entity defined against, in this case white society, in order to accomplish a feminist re-visioning. McDowell's discussion of the character in process is relevant here. She writes, the character is a process "whereas the former (concept of subject) is based on the assumption that the self is knowable, centered, and unified. The latter is based on the assumption that the self is multiple, fluid,

relational, and in a perpetual state of becoming" (McDowell, 58). We all participate in many social structures labeled as communities, some because of skin color, others because of sex, and still others because of sexuality, and class. However, to attribute the whole of our lives to a particular center is to deny the importance of many signs within our system of signifiers. I wish to look at those feminist theories which focus on the layers of identity. We must rethink rationality and the necessity of epistemology which requires a definable subject because we will always leave out the supplement, and relegate important issues to the realms of excess and exception in favor of suggesting that all people are basically the same because of their ability to reason. I wish to pluralize our endeavors so that we may constantly critique our politics, and rely on contradictions within the many unknowns to keep us rethinking our practice.

However, we are still left with a question. If the community is forged against the scapegoat or in terms of resistance to, in this case, racism, how can we/they partake in a feminist (inter/intra)racial/class discourse. I must acknowledge that the concept of community is still vital to many current feminist scholars. How can their valid concerns be re-figured into a more developed discourse on community, one which does not e(race) or undercut the issues? If we acknowledge that there are indeed different ways of knowing available to agents/subjects, why are we still discussing re-vision? Can I say that the black community uses a

particular epistemology? Probably not. As I discussed in chapter one, the essentialism of white, black, Asian Native American feminist discourses have only led to lack of communication. Much of the current scholarship on Black Women and Asian Women, namely Hazel Carby's Reconstructing Womanhood and the anthology compiled by Asian women United of California Making Waves, makes great strides to discuss internal community differences. Their critiques go beyond prioritizing oppressions against the measure of white, middle class feminism. In their sense of urgency, much effort is now being directed to rethink foundational categories of identity instead of proposing replacement grand narratives, for as Lyotard has suggested, "regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" the grand narrative has lost its credibility (37).

Does my employment of postmodernist theories deconstruct feminist agency? What are the options for empowerment? Am I saying that there can be no fusion of horizons? How can situated knowledge aid our quest if the community is in question? These are the questions which will occupy the center of my conclusion.

CHAPTER THREE: BORDERS RECONSIDERED

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts (1976)

Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book (1989)

In this chapter I would like to explore Bakhtin's notion of hybrid construction in conjunction with Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His fake book*. In this reading, I will suggest that the text "shifts from common language to parodying of generic and other languages and shifts to the direct authorial word" (Bakhtin, 302). As I have shown in my discussion of *Song of Solomon,* there is a heteroglossia present in a text by the very nature of the shifting narration. Bakhtin's proposal that "The word in language is half someone else's," helps us to read *Tripmaster Monkey* (293). For example, a hegemonic consciousness or construct of "common sense" can be evoked by the narrator in Kingston to parody it.

Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His fake book* presents Wittman Ah Sing, the ultimate storyteller performing his "One Man Show" combatting racism, exoticism, and the Vietnam War. I will examine the narrative strategy Kingston employs. She engages her reader with provocative questions, ones that initiate a multi-cultural, well-intentioned conversation. She asks questions such as: What is beauty? What is race? What is community? Are pluralism and diversity the aim of Asian-Americans? She challenges our notion of a proper ending through her use of many scripts,

but she ends with a "harangue" delivered by our articulate Wittman Ah Sing, story teller extraordinare! Kingston often uses an ironic, often doubled narrative tone, in order to strike a balance between the need to find an American space and her recognition of the raced/ethnic community. In *Splitting Images*, Linda Hutcheon suggests that "Irony has become one way of working within prevailing discourses, while still finding a way to articulate doubt, insecurities, questionings, and perhaps even alternatives" (15). Kingston's text, for example, explores how hard it is for a Chinese-American man to be fulfilled in the romantic plot. The difficulty is labeled, by Wittman himself, as a problem with women's expectations. Through the use of parody and the establishment of a reciprocal, albeit not a same race relationship, however, Kingston subverts Wittman's sexism.

Kingston's novel accomplishes an amazing feat, something that feminist critics would do well to examine. It employs postmodern narrative strategies, definitions of subjectivity and critiques of the hegemonic while resisting the temptation to reinscribe a mandate for Chinese-Americans. When we remember that people of racial and ethnic communities, as well as all women within all communities, have lived in a perpetual state of multiplicity, we are reminded of the likely connections between postmodern critiques of foundations and unity of condition and the lives of all women/all peoples of color. Hutcheon proposes that the "current poststructuralist/postmodernist challenges to the

coherent, autonomous self or subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for these must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity" (71). I offer this antithesis of my utilization of postmodern theory because I think it is important to acknowledge the concerns of such theorists as Linda Alcoff, Nancy Hartsock and Donna Haraway, and because I think the motivation to use postmodern criticism in conjunction with texts by people of color must be tempered with political consciousness of the danger involved. I do feel, however, that race ethnicity, and gender are tropes; they are essentialisms which only signify how people have perceived others to be. Perceptions can be effectively problematized through the use of irony. Irony, which works in subtle and not so subtle ways in the texts of Kingston and Morrison, "allows 'the other' to address the dominant culture from within that culture's own set of values and modes of understanding, without being co-opted by it and without sacrificing the right to dissent, contradict, and resist" (Hutcheon, 1991, 49). I am reminded by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s comments at a recent lecture that there is no pure racial culture in the United States and the attempts to revive something that never existed are futile. What one needs to do is to is make the language of the hegemonic, which is also half the language of Chinese-Americans, signify dissent; this is done through the use of parody and irony.

In a discussion of *Tripmaster Monkey* it is useful to

invoke Hutcheon's further suggestion that self-definition within a new culture may well necessitate "separation from this ethnic [racial, geography, sexual] past, at least temporarily" (Hutcheon, 1991, 51). Amy Tan's "Double Face," an excerpt from *The Joy Luck Club*, both utilizes this irony and introduces the problematic of the media and appropriation of ethnicity. The narrator speaks of her daughter:

> My daughter did not look pleased when I told her this ['When you go to China, you don't even need to open your mouth. They already know you are an outsider], that she didn't look Chinese. She had a sour American look on her face. Oh, maybe ten years ago she would have clapped her hands--hurray!--as if this were good news. But now she wants to be Chinese, it's so fashionable (Tan,127).

And irony is a "useful device for articulating both the pull of this tradition and the need to contest it. It is also a way to challenge ethnic stereotyping" (51). Hutcheon extends this proposition using the work of Eli Mandel. "The artist/author is left to create literatures out of a doubled experience at the 'interface of two cultures: a form concerned to define itself, its voice, in a dialectic of self and other and the duplicities of self-creation, transformation, and identities' " (Mandel,274, quoted in Hutcheon, 49).

This discussion will lead up to my conclusion because Kingston herself is a self reflexive author or metafictionist

who is re-figuring the history of the nineteen-sixties as well as the role of many Asian-Americans within it. Kingston exposes the hegemonic discourse which shapes conceptions of beauty, worth and community. The reader never suspects Kingston is giving a new definition for the Asian community which has been defined by simplistic, monolithic, passifistic and subservient characteristics. As Elaine H. Kim has suggested in "Defining Asian American Realities Through Literature," "the Asian American writer exists on the margins of his or her own marginal community, wedged between the hegemonic culture and the non-English speaking communities largely unconcerned with self-definition" (147).

I. Self Definition and Stories: "How do I know my reality" in *The Woman Warrior*

> Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies? (Kingston 1977, 6)

As I have implied in Chapter Two, human beings are story telling creatures. Alasdair MacIntyre writes: "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to

truth" (216). But as Gadamer has also suggested, we do not just create stories, we are constructed by stories, and we participate in regenerating those which have formed us. We are owned by a tradition, and even if we classify ourselves at the margin, or in a counter-hegemonic position, we are a part of that tradition. In *The Woman Warrior*, a second generation Chinese-American woman laments that her reality, her growing up years, were marked only by stories: "Whenever she has to warn us about life, my mother told stories than ran like this one, a story to grow up on . . . Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhood fits in solid America" (5-6). In order to both resist the stories of her Chinese ancestry and claim her native stories, the narrator re-writes the romantic plot of her father's sister, the aunt who drowned in a well after disgracing her family by having a illegitimate child while her husband was away. Like the three versions of truth about Ruth available to Milkman, the narrator creates three contrasting stories for her aunt. In the first she suggests that :

> My aunt could not have been the lone romantic who gave up everything for sex. Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil. I wonder whether he masked himself when he joined the raid on her family (7).

Then again, she thinks:

> he may have been a man who sold her cloth for a dress she sewed and wore. His demand must have surprised, then terrified her. She obeyed him; she always did as she was told(7).

And perhaps her family had decided it was time for her to marry, marry someone else, and she had married, lain in the marriage bed, and then kissed the new stranger good bye as he left for America, his face barely present in her mind. The narrator decides that "the other man was not, after all, much different from her husband. They both gave orders: she followed"(8). She later tries to envision a "wild woman," who "kept rollicking company." Imagining her aunt free with sex, however, doesn't fit her need to appropriate this story in her life; "unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help"(10).

Likewise, Hutcheon uses the example of Michael Ondaatje's *Running In The Family*. In manner similar to that of Milkman and the narrator of *The Woman Warrior,* the main character of *Running* gives vision to different versions of his father. According to Hutcheon, he "questions his own motives in invading the privacy of the past in this way, he admits that he still wants to know that 'lost history,' because it so is a part of the reality of his past" (Hutcheon, 1988, 88). Likewise, Kingston's narrator knows that the talk-story opens up a narrative space in which she can be a swordswoman, and she hears the echo of the chant of Fa Mu Lan, "the girl who took her father's place in battle"

(24). She vows to grow up to be a Woman Warrior. I believe she finds reconciliation with her long lost aunt, the "No Name Woman," by living within her story.

In "No Name Woman," Kingston re-inscribes a previous erasure by giving the aunt a story from which her main character can name herself. As Hutcheon suggests, much of the work by peoples of color is to prepare the way for a new story, to erode the old boundaries. *The Woman Warrior* presents the reader, and the narrator, with an alternative to the repression of the stories, it allows her to find a ex-centric position from which to speak as a Chinese-American.

In the narrator's attempt to escape the repression of her mother's stories and the narratives her community attributes to young women, she encounters the story of racism. Instead of deciding between the two, she recognizes that she is undeniably a part of both. She defines her position in this statement: "I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes" (35).

Kingston does not attempt to tell a new or pure story, she simply revises an old story. She attempts to tell a story which will unravel or negate some of the effects and politics of the stories which have conditioned Americans. Her stories recognize the politics of identity and history. Language is by far the most contested realm in Tripmaster Monkey. This re-figuring of identity through discussions of language and narrative "has little to do with nostalgia and a

search for order, and much to do with a distancing from the old and making room for the new" (Hutcheon, 1991, 19-20).

Stories constantly remind us of narrative choices. Morrison and Kingston's stories neither claim "truth" for all of humankind, nor even for a particular community, yet they do explicitly parody the Enlightenment concept of self. As I suggested in my introduction, it is my goal to undermine the notion of the self as a metaphysical core, or as a subject defined against an object. It is my goal to make problematic the supplement, as Judith Butler suggests, as a way of accessing Lyotard's local setting. And yet if I undermine what I suggest are strawman categories, what are we to do with the notion of definition itself? Is there a black community? Asian community? How many layers, layers we already understand to be problematic, must we pull away before we get to the local? I remain skeptical of any discussion of the local which constructs more than temporal truths, because I feel that the empowering function of the local is to open up spaces. It should not be re-position. In the next section I will show how the boundaries of community repress. Both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses involve implicit assumptions about essential connections and both require explicit co-operation from all participants.

II. Exterior and Interior Essentialism: The Problematics of Boundaries

Kingston explores the repressive function of myth or essentialism within Asian-American Communities. The interior and exterior distinctions of community can not go unproblematized in a postmodern critique as they do not go unarticulated in this text. Kingston take on both internal and external definitions. In order to follow my reading, consider these questions: How does one battle "external" definitions when one isn't quite sure what function boundaries play? What happens when racial/ethnic stereotypes are embedded in a community's self-definition? How do writers reject the homogenization of difference within their communities? I think *Tripmaster Monkey* is a model for a well intentioned conversation since Kingston encourages her readers, both Chinese and other, to explore the consequences of the aforementioned questions. Through this text Kingston traverses boundaries on many levels, showing, for example, how hegemonic stereotypes are perpetuated within the community. An example of this would be when Wittman Ah Sing meets a young Chinese American woman, Judi Luis, on the bus. Judi initiates a conversation with Wittman in which she informs him about the psychology class she is taking. A few lines into the conversation, Wittman presumes to knows her "story:"

> Here's a girl trying for heart truth. She may even have important new information. So how come she's

> boring? She's annoying him. She was supposing in the first place, that he was Chinese, and therefore, he has to hear her out. Care how she's getting along. She's reporting to him as to how one of our kind is faring. And she has a subtext: I am intelligent. I am educated. . . . here was this girl, a night-school girl, a Continuing Ed girl, crossing the Bay, bringing a fire duck weekend treat from Big City Chinatown to her aging parents (74).

When I first read this paragraph, I thought Wittman Ah Sing was thinking to himself that he has just met a "simple" girl. I no longer think this reading is valid. Instead I think this is a classic case of what Bakhtin would call hybrid construction. For example, the speaker envokes a notion of "common" understanding--all people know the story--"Continuing Ed girl" from Chinatown. If I want to argue, however, that Kingston is parodying what a macho Chinese male would consider an annoyance, I must make a break in the narrative and consider that her narrator, Kuan Yin (introduced later) is mocking Wittman's own simplicity. For example, let us consider the question "So how come she's boring?" Is this Wittman thinking of himself as the object of Judi's essentialist harangue? Is this Kuan Yin poking fun at Wittman's never satisfied search for the perfect Chinese woman? Or is this Kingston suggesting that although Wittman has a lot to learn about interpreting the stories he plays

with, Judis are a mutual irritation to both Wittmans and Kingstons? I think that all three can be operational at the same time. Perhaps Wittman expresses the most angry representations of Chinese community in which Judi participates, and yet Kingston using Kuan Yin, further shows how those with "consciousness" perpetuate some part of the shared racism/sexism in which their language is bound.

Two assumptions are challenged in this example. The first is the belief that the supplement Chinese or Japanese does not entitle one to the distinction American. The second assumes that women cannot/do not have an awareness of racism and essentialism. This is a complex argument when one considers that Kingston authors a male character to which she gives a blindness of insight, one which the reader must question as intentional. Implicitly, she also challenges the notion that only through a female character can issues of gender oppression be articulated. Instead of racing the streets with a female monkey, Kingston has chosen to employ Wittman in an example of the power of parody.

Like me, Elaine Kim also discusses the inherent problems of authors who attempt to claim America and yet retain difference. She notes: "So much writing by Asian Americans is focused on the theme of claiming an American, as opposed to Asian, identity that we may begin to wonder if this constitutes accommodation, a collective colonized spirit -- the fervent wish to 'hide our ancestry,' which is impossible for us anyway, to relinquish our marginality, and to lose

ourselves in an intense identification with the hegemonic culture"(Kim, 147). If she were to think in terms of hybrid construction, Kim might discover would the to-and-fro movement which is necessary to claim and then retreat from a communal truth.

Here I want to turn again to Hutcheon, this time a chapter from *The Canadian Postmodern.* Though the texts discussed are Canadian, I find her ideas in this chapter are especially suited to my own discussion of Kingston. Hutcheon employs the work of Robert Kroetsch who writes of contradiction, 'they uncreate themselves into existence' (Hutcheon, 1988, 171). Kroetsch investigates borders as the places where things can happen: "on the margin, off-centre, ex-centric" which strongly contradicts the "sense of self-satisfaction that might come from creating a fiction of wholeness of self, that might resolve the inevitable splits and tensions" (Hutcheon, 174). To explore the suggestion that "'possibilities not only co-exist but contradict'" (182) fits well into our utilization of hybrid construction. This is a place where Bakhtin, however, is least useful. In "Discourse in the Novel" he takes the work of Dickens and appropriates the narrative voices; he gives name to each. Although Bakhtin looks at shifting narrative language, he does so in order to inscribe the voice belonging to the shift. A syntactic analysis would, no doubt, be employed by Bakhtin to clarify our reading, to get back to the authorial, narrative, or hegemonic voice which is speaking at a

particular time. Although Bakhtin offers hybrid construction as a necessity of the heteroglossia of language, his discomfort with the possibility of contradiction as the resolution is apparent. It is in this attempt that he seems to forget his own suggestion that "expropriating it [language], forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (295). *Tripmaster Monkey* protests what could be considered exterior definitions even as it assumes that those exteriors are woven with interior understanding. Kingston creates a contradiction at the site of contest which cannot be attributed to a single speaker.

Exterior definitions are usually contested by positing new definitions. Although community can serve as a blockade to racist inscriptions, it can also operate to reinforce them by incorporating exterior definitions, such as Judi's distinctions us/them. There is another level of protest here, that which states once a "local" truth is decided upon by a particular, historical community (in this case Chinese-American, 1960s, Pacific Coast resident) it must constantly be involved in debate. Local truths are only temporary means of accomplishing political aims as Wittman states: "community is not built once-and-for-all; people have to imagine, practice, and re-create it" (328).

Wittman attempts to subvert Judi's community essentialism as the conversation deteriorates. Instead of re-imaging community, however, Wittman practices social

avoidance (the reader is left to assume that Wittman does not see Judi to be the appropriate conversationalist). He claims he is Japanese to escape Judi's assumption that they have "like-minds" because of their status as "Chinese." Judi appears oblivious to his indignant response, as is made evident in her response, "At least you Japanese boys take your girls out. You have a social life" (76). Wittman, obviously angry, reacts to her refusal to recognize or signify Wittman and herself as Americans:

> Don't say 'social life.' Don't say 'boys.'. . .
> Don't say 'Chinese.' Don't say 'Japanese.'(76).

Judi goes on to tell him about a dance she attended at church in which all those who attended were 'Chinese.' She asks:

> How is that I mean, it's not even an all-Chinese church. The same thing happens at college dances. Posters on campuses say 'Spring Formal,' but everyone knows it's a Chinese-only dance. How do they know? Okay, Chinese know. They know. But how does everybody else know not to come? Is it like that with you Japanese?(77).

Two things are problematized in this passage. First, we see how communities can operate in a false binary, us versus everybody else as them. Second, Judi credits Chinese, again unqualified, with a race specific sense--"they know?" Wittman refuses to speculate about the *Japanese* and responds "I don't go to dances. Don't say 'they.'" Feminist theorists

would do well to listen to how this criticism speaks to "our" a priori sex binaries which are often a priori by class, race, sexual orientation, and religion as well which reduces the significance of priority.

III. A Problematic: Positioning Women

Throughout the novel Wittman searches for a Chinese-American "girl" to love, but he always dismisses the possibility that he will find one because he links Chinese-American women to two contradictory interests. On the one hand, Wittman suggests that Chinese women want a "Chinaman" to complete the picture of domestic bliss. On the other hand, Wittman depicts Chinese American women as having the ability to envision only a separate ethnic/racial space for their lives. Wittman rejects both goals and in so doing rejects reconciliation, through most of the novel, with Chinese-American women. Wittman, not unlike the Beat poet that so disturbed him (the one who while shaking his hand, asked, "'What's a good Chinese American restaurant around here?' The one who has got right politics, anti-war, anti-segregation, . . . but on me he turned trite" (318)), turns trite on Chinese American women, and is suspicious, if not resentful of white women. In this quotation, he tries to categorize white women:

> 'Blonde chick. White girl,' he said, calling her names.'Are you a loose white girl? Where do you live, loose white girl'(151).

He offers Tana a "starring role" in his play that plays like

life. He, however, does not trust Tana, the wife he has unofficially married, for he says of her: "Whenever you find a white person you can trust, get some inside answers to questions. Spy out specific racisms" (156). In conjunction with this tension, I would like to explore Elaine Kim's proposal that "claiming America also means reconciliation between men and women. . . there is no doubt that the rift between our men and women caused by racism is reflected in our literature" (167). In their respective attempts to deal with rifts between men and women, Kingston and Morrison risk being confused with Wittman and Guitar's narratives of emasculation. However, we must remember that the central protagonist or the frequent first person narrator, a man singing the blues, is only one level of narration in these texts; there are often several voices within the same sentence.

And Kingston reminds us in *The New York Times Magazine* that:

> the careful reader will see that the omniscient narrator is a woman, Definitely a female voice. She's always kicking Wittman around and telling him to do this and that and making fun of him. She always understands the woman characters. She's Kuan Yin, goddess of mercy (55).

For example, after Wittman has been patronizing Tana, a omniscient narrator steps in and says, "Wittman thought that with this story he was praising his lady, and teaching her to

call him Beloved. Unbeknownst to him, Tana was getting feminist ideas to apply to his backass self" (175). There is also a contrast after the lovemaking episode. Wittman thinks in terms of the grand narrative of male female relationships:

> Every girl he ever made it with (two) wore t-shirts to bed. They only wear negligees in movies. They want you to make love to their real self and not their peignoir (157).

There is an implicit assumption, attributed to Wittman by the narrator, that he is always behind the situation, that he can place the story of the women he is with, whereas in this instance, as in many others, this assumption is made ironic by the thoughts attributed to Tana:

> Tana thought about complimenting Wittman on how nice and soft his penis was. But he was such a worrier over masculinity, he'd take it wrong. . . Wittman was not one you could praise for his softness (157).

Wittman, to borrow a pun, peters out in always trying to link women to the interior, domestic, emotive yet self-interested, quest to attain domestic bliss.

Reconciliation defies the racial romance and the battle between the sexes that Kim suggests must be subverted. I offer the examples of Milkman and Sweet and the developing respect between Tana and Wittman. Reciprocal relationships are proposed by Morrison and Kingston as repairing the damage of racism, sexism and solid borders. Through the character

of Tana, Kingston subverts the sexist, narrowing intentions of Wittman who would appropriate her to the internal realm of the romance. For instance, after Wittman extends the offer to give Tana a role in his play she offers a narrative turn:

> You don't define my life. I just want you to know how I am before you make it with me. Making love is my idea as well as yours . . .
>
> Do you know Chekhov's concept of dear friends? That's what we can be to each other, dear friend (154).

I feel that Rachel Blau DuPlessis's discussion in *Writing Beyond the Ending* is applicable here. DuPlessiss suggests that "writing beyond the ending means the transgressive invention of narrative strategies, strategies that express critical dissent from dominant narrative" (5). Her further suggestion of a female prototype, a breaking with unchanging reality and imposed patterns is also applicable here. She writes, "A prototype is not a binding, timeless pattern, but one critically open to the possibility, even the necessity, of its transformation" (134). Kingston rejects the narrative absence or death of the female character, and or the typical marriage plot. Tana is both philosophically astute and capable of engaging in a relationship in which she is not appropriated in the script. The reader becomes aware of Wittman's many attempts to cast Tana and Nancy in his script. Kingston's hybrid constructions open up the heterosexual relationship text. We are reminded that:

> She beat him to it. Outplayed again. He was the tough-eyed one who had been planning to let the next girl know point by point what she would be in for entangling with him (154).

Likewise in *Song of Solomon* Morrison places selfish Milkman, the man who could not imagine women disconnected from his life, in a reciprocal relationship with Sweet. A reciprocal relationship may indeed be Morrison and Kingston's construction of a prototype.

Both of these novels, written by women, with seemingly central roles mapped out for male characters, address the sexism perpetuated within civil rights. Although both novels employ characters well versed in the politics of racism and war, Wittman and Guitar are given the narrative of black male emasculation. Their narratives are strained by their willingness to displace their rage against white racism and capitalism on the women within their "communities." Both novelists employ and reject these narratives, stories that are available to them through their own experiences. Kim suggests that reconciliation must take place between the sexes. Morrison and Kingston are adamant that this will only take place when certain narratives are disempowered within the repressive borders of communities. Both authors reject displacement in their stories--they find signifing spaces. They also re-figure the history of civil rights in order to explore the ironies of sexism.

IV. On Stage: Narrative Performance

Kingston has been criticized for her narrative turn in "One Man Show." Pamela Longfellow, for example, who defines herself as a fellow monkey, a Native American who also walked the San Francisco streets during the sixties, chides Kingston for a bitter, explicit harangue which replaces the subtle irony of the previous chapters. As a fellow person of color, she argues that she does not need to be hit over the head. However, I feel the power of the book resides in this seemingly ugly critique. The subjectivity debate or necessity of epistemology is central to Wittman's criticism :

> They depict us with an inability to say 'I.' They're taking the 'I' away from us. 'Me' -- that's the fucked over, the fuckee -- 'I' that's the mean-ass motherfucker first person pronoun of the active voice, and they don't want us to have it (318).

Gadamer characterizes the language game as dependent on I-lessness, the ability to lose onesself in the game. (Gadamer, 1976, 65). Are Asian-Americans part of the tradition? Initially I thought no. I agreed with Hartsock who suggests that people of color must first have an identity to cast off. *Tripmaster Monkey*, however, does not liberate me to exempt Asian-Americans from the tradition. Identity, because it is expressed through language, is already half someone else's, whether it be a racist external inscription or a communal boundary, and therefore, it is a contested

area. I would be guilty of ignoring my feminist politics and Kingston's heterogeneity if I tried to essentialize race.

When Kingston explores what an enlightened understanding of identity might be, she lets Wittman speak it, for as we know, men have, for all races, generally been given the deciding voice about boundaries. When she parodies his voice through language play, however, she participates in a conversation where a prior truth is distanced or put on hold. Understanding the narrative like this means we must not try to locate the authority in the text, because it exists at different sites, always contested. The effect of this is to direct our attention to language--to the conversation itself. When this text is looked at as a hybrid construction, it is much more provocative, and less the harangue that Longfellow complains about. None of the voices that speak in this text seem univocal, not even "One Man Show," nor does Kingston attempt to claim a definition, instead she maps out a interpretive community which looks at composite identity and at the problem of a single standard, as in the case of beauty (described at length later in this essay). However, when you have a group of people who are arguing that they have historically not been able to exercise claims to America, their concerns must be considered legitimate. Although the subject position is constructed, it has had very tangible effects on people. Wittman challenges I-lessness when he says:

> that's a tradition they've made up for us. We have

> this suicide urge and suicide code. They don't have to bloody their hands. Don't ever kill yourself. You kill yourself, you play into their hands (319).

If a people has been historically situated in the object position, in a polemic of subject/object, how can they benefit from deconstruction and the denial of the subject?

I would like to explore the possibilities discussed by Kingston, in conflict with Elaine Kim's discussion of what claiming America must entail. As Wittman suggests, "They (whites) use movies to brainwash us into suicide" (319). I would suggest that Kingston cautions us to be wary of hearing only one voice, be careful of self-evident truths. The ever shifting voice in "One Man Show" does not define Asian-Americans.

Again, Kingston's brilliant set of scripts for every social situation is probably the most powerful recognition that hybrid construction is crucial to invention. We don't really discover the world, we just revitalize old plots. One recalls Foucault's proposal that the "frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node in a network" (Foucault, 1976, 23). Even being a member of a ethnic/racial community is proposed as a constructed position as much as an essential one. Wittman mimics the stereotype:

> 'You just be the oriental you are.' They think you behave oriental without having to act. 'Just say something Chinese,' says the director, throwing you into the movie. 'Do something Chinese' (325).

We recall Nanci's earlier discussion of her audition:

> They say, 'You don't look oriental.' I walk in, they can tell me about me. They read me, then they say, 'You don't sound right. You don't sound the way you look. . . And I have to say, I have to say, you know, something stupid. I have to speak in a way I've worked hard not to speak like. . . .and the director says, 'Can't you act more oriental? Act oriental' (24).

The hegemonic impulses to homogenize have denied that all people are actors familiar with many scripts. Only certain actors are allowed/supposed to be familiar with very particularized or racial scripts. What better support for the argument that race is a construction than the director's asking Nanci to be more oriental. Only white, elite, males seem to be justified in suggesting that they are individuals.

Race, gender,and class are supplements often overlooked with white men in the movies. This is an indication of how self-definition, doing one's own thing, has been confused with masculine, white, middle income heterosexuals. It seems that other actors emulate, bow under or serve the hero. When people of color occupy lead roles, however, the thrust of the play is usually about external forces and external

expectations. These "other" narratives are usually tragedies, and even within their local setting there is usually a perpetuation of the violence and narrow expectations present in the mainstream movie industry. For example, one only needs to watch Richard Wright's *Native Son* to see how a supposed racial tragedy reinforces sexism. All the women characters in the text, either black or white, become vessels for Bigger Thomas' displaced rage. I mention this example because it reinforces my earlier point that revolutionaries are often blind to the multifaceted nature of bigotry. "One Man Show" does not reduplicate the racial tragedy. It is a brilliant critique of foundationalism, definitions, and intolerance and it opens up the stage for new heroes.

Through Wittman, Kingston effectively exposes how race operates as a social construction. Wittman is given all the alarming calls: "They use 'American' interchangeable with white" (327). Wittman laments the polemics of being a person of color in this society, "It's scientifically factual truth now -- I have a stripe down my back. Here, let me take off my shirt. Check out the yellow side, and the American side" (327). Even in our attempts to demystify race, we reinvent or reinforce race through vogue invocations of diversity. Who is calling for this diversity? Dialogue, rather than slogans, could be very useful; a local community decides upon certain small truths to accomplish certain historical immediacies, but always recognizes that this is only

temporary in terms of initiating a political or social necessity. The local truth is a constructed position from which to speak until other myths are overcome, but it is not to be used as a new definition. I am suggesting a political act of agency, not of definition. We all participate in groups, but such affiliation need not define our status. As a classmate suggested, we all bring our "bags of stuff" to the conversation. But if all we are is language, we are in desperate need of conversation.

I am interested, however, in who will extend the invitation? Kingston is critical of the fact that good intention does not abound. Through Wittman, she suggests that "We mustn't call ourselves 'Chinese' among those who are ready to send us back to where they think we came from" (327). Here is a case where the supplement, instead of becoming erased, dominates. We forget that language is not a comfortable, representative medium; we lose the motivation to clarify the ambiguous definition of an American. Kim says such negligence reminds Asian-Americans that they are "eternal aliens," with no reason to complain. Complainants, even third generation Asian-Americans, would be told, "if you don't like it here," you can go back(67).

Asian-Americans who claim America have criticized the object position they have been expected to conform to. This object position is recognized as always other, always exotic. Wittman suggests that the play was "written up like they were tasting Chinese food." He chides his audience:

> You like the reviews? I am sore and disappointed. Come on, you can't like these reviews. Don't be too easily made happy. Look. Look. 'East meets West.' 'Exotic.' 'Sino-American theater.' 'Snaps, crackles and pops like singing rice.' 'Sweet and sour.' Quit clapping. Stop it. What to cheer about? You like being compared to Rice Krispies? (307)

Wittman/narrator/author rebuts these token critiques by stating:

> There is no East here. West is meeting West. This was all West. All you saw was West. This is The Journey In the West. . . .That kind of favorableness we can do without. They think they know us--the wide range of us from sweet to sour--because they eat in Chinese Restaurants (308).

But he emphatically issues a charge: "I've read my Aristotle and Agee, I've been to college; they have ways to criticize the theater besides for sweetness and sourness. . . they didn't have to call it 'chop seuy vaudeville'"(308).

Kingston is probably responding to a reviewer for *Publisher's Weekly*, who praised the *The Woman Warrior*, for its "myths rich and varied as Chinese brocade and its prose manifesting the delicacy and precision of porcelain: East meets West with . . . charming results" (72). Kim likewise cites the case of Frank Chin's *Chickencoop Chinaman*. Critics "complained in the early 1970's that his characters did not

speak, dress, or act 'like orientals'" (149). Kim goes on to say that a closer examination would have revealed "its deliberately anti-exotic, anti-nostalgic character" (151). I have found similar responses to *Tripmaster Monkey*. Although Wittman is adamant that his language, his play, is not "Sino-American" there is much evidence that reviewers have not paid attention. In his review of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey,* D.E Pollard writes, "The two books offer fresh evidence that a novel does not after all have to have a story. On the other hand they also show that it is hard to do without stories, and not unnaturally, as Chinese-American novels the stories they incorporate are out of China: in the case of *Tripmaster Monkey* of a <u>mythical-magical</u> kind; in the case of *The Joy Luck Club* <u>domestic-mysterious</u>" (41, emphasis mine). Pollard cites Kingston's "Sino-American" usages, and then goes on to suggest that Tan adds "ostentatious Chinese decoration, most noticeably in the form of Chinese expressions intended to hint at a wealth of meaning that no English can convey. Unfortunately, where these expressions are recognisable [sic] in romanticism, they are more often than not misused" (44). Pollard suggests that the sense of individuality can be dismissed as all the mothers are merged into one "which gives the impression of a composite daughter, but linked by a quadruple, instead of single, umbilical cord" (44). And, on a final note, Pollard writes, "Amy Tan seems a thoroughly nice, caring person who has tried and succeeded" (44) which can only be taken as a

rebuttal to Kingston whom he chides for her bitter harangue. More than any other of Kingston's works, I feel that *Tripmaster Monkey* directly implicates and chides the reviewer, critic, theorist, academic, and scholar for the way diversity and pluralism are currently being applied to literature by peoples of color. Chinese-American women writers are often labeled exotic and incomprehensible. Kingston asks us to isolate that which makes one American. Wittman asks is it his education or his clothes which merit him the title exotic or "not too exotic for American audiences" (308).

V. Middle Minority Status

Kingston suggests that our nation's identity has been characterized in terms of the binary pairing black/white. Besides arguing that black and white, color distinctions, are problematic assessments of culture, what are we to do with red and yellow? Because of racism, black has been described as the 'other' of white, the lesser, the negative, the "minority." During the Sixties there was very little emphasis on the rights or need for self expression of Native Americans, or the many Americans of Asian descent. Although racism has severely affected the lives of black Americans, they have not so often been singled out as foreigners. Kingston often talks about the need for her characters to claim America; to define themselves as Americans. Kim refers to Asian-Americans as the "middleman minority," placed

between whites and blacks on a racial continuum. She writes, "Asian America is a buffer zone between whites and blacks or Hispanics: supposedly obedient, docile, efficient at carrying out the mandates of the decision makers. . ." (149). For example, Kingston depicts an experience at the unemployment counseling office with Mr. Sanchez, a Hispanic employment counselor who informs Wittman that all Asians in liberal arts got C's because of "poor grammar and broken English" (241). Sanchez perpetuates two incorrect beliefs. He assumes that all Asian-Americans do not know English, and on the basis of this assumption he deduces that Wittman does not know English. He further assumes that Wittman was given a break in his liberal arts classes. Once again the belief that Asian-Americans are foreigners, always on the margin of the language medium of the hegemonic, is reinforced to exclude Wittman and to deny his agency, and it is done by another person represented as vying for one of the few positions allocated to the marginal: "the token has to excel over everybody of every kind for that one job" (241). The "employment Counselor was a Mexican-American guy about Wittman's age; you expect right understanding from him" (241) and yet we are reminded how that ever popular phrase "people of color" does not suggest the common cause that we would assume.

Wittman, living during the time of civil rights activism, is antagonized by the black white binary opposition he sees everywhere. He knows civil rights is not about him,

just as it was not about Native Americans when black men got the vote. He recognizes a society poised on polemics. He contests his choices: mediocre American or exotic foreigner. Wittman states:

> They wouldn't write a headline for *Raisin in the Sun*: 'America Meets Africa.' They want us to go back to China where we belong. They think that Americans are either white or Black. I can't wear that civil-rights button with the Black hand and the white hand shaking each other. I have a nightmare--after duking it out, someday Blacks and whites will shake hands over my head. I'm the little yellow man beneath the bridge of their hands and overlooked (308).

He instead asks Asian-Americans to "say who we are. You say our name enough, make them stop asking, 'Are you Chinese or Japanese?'" (326).

A point that is reiterated in the most recent anthology on Asian-American women, *Making Waves*, as well as in Elaine Kim's essay, is that the most effective barrier to conversation, in Gadamer's or anyone else's term, is the question Wittman, a la Kingston, forbids us to pose:

> Never ask me or anyone who looks like me, 'Are you Chinese of Japanese?'. . . And don't ask: 'Where do you come from?' . . .And don't ask: 'How long have you been in the country?' 'How do you like our country?' (317).

In "One Man Show," Kingston suggests that assuming that Asian-Americans are inherently different does not signify good intention. Conversation depends on good intention. If the initiator of a conversation assumes that one person cannot claim that tradition, no conversation can take place. I feel compelled to reconsider the question of whether the traditionary text has included Chinese-Americans. If so, how do we benevolent white people overcome problems of misconstrued good intention? Wittman is trying to claim America, and its Western traditions for Chinese Americans, and he states:

> We're not inscrutable at all. We are not inherently unknowable. That's a trip they are laying on us. Because they are willfully innocent. Willful innocence is a perversion. . . They willfully do no learn us, and blame that on us, that we have an essential unknowableness (310).

The vogue labels of cultural diversity and pluralism, when issued by those always already subjectified is a problematic issue. We, not unlike ethnocentric anthropologists/ethnographers, often assume that there is something inherently primitive, untouched or pure in so called marginal groups. The same ignorance is evident in more explicit racist assumptions that Asian-Americans are, more often than not, more carnal, more vulgar and tastier, just like their food. We are often trapped in our language games, not able to experience the to-and-fro, because

institutionalized assumptions of power set the current. Wittman suggests that he is the West, he wants to know why he seems so exotic. The text, a weave of "common", authorial, and "other" language, dispels myths about his appearance. It also dispels myths about the notion of biological race, as does Barbara Fields who argues that, "Race is not an element of human biology (like breathing oxygen or reproducing sexually); nor is it even an idea (like the speed of light or the value of pi) that can be plausibly imagined to live an eternal life of its own. Race is not an idea but an ideology. It came into existence at a discernible historical moment for rationally understandable historical reasons and is subject to change for similar reasons" (101). The fact that Kingston, a la Wittman, addresses "One Man Show" to Asian-Americans too, reinforces Field's suggestion that "It will not do to suppose that a powerful group captures the hearts and minds of the less powerful, inducing them to 'internalize' the ruling ideology (to borrow the spurious adjective-verb in which this artless evasion has so often been couched). To suppose this is to imagine ideology handed down like an old garment, passed on like a germ, spread like a rumour, or imposed like a dress code. . ." (112-113). Wittman rejects the invention of ethnicity. At the same time he maps out a space where beauty, for those with slanted eyes or yellow skin, may be recognized, not achieved through plastic surgery to remake oneself to look like the model of beauty. It is important to understand that the text does not

mandate a definition of beauty but instead deconstructs the faulty logic of hegemonic beauty codes. In the eloquent example of Dr. Angle, D.D.S., Wittman exposes the faulty logic of beauty codes. Dr. Angle declares "I use my own teeth as the model. Because they are perfect. . ."(314). Wittman, likewise, declares his own looks, teeth and profile as perfect: "So it's not Mount Rushmore, but it's an American face" (314).

In situating her characters as different, but not about to be defined as other, and as American, Kingston is proposing a reconciliation. Identity would not be a constitutive whole but instead a cyclical process, just like the text in which it is portrayed. Since narratives are the sites for the creation of identities, they should also be the sites for the contestation of the impulse to homogenize something that has never been whole. Kingston's work with narrative provides a model that feminists would do well to examine. A novel whose primary form is discourse and hybrid narration, tells us a great deal about our essential connection to language, and that it must be the key to subverting polemics. The richness of our language, much unlike the Newspeak Orwell projects in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* requires the ability to have contradiction, mediation, and paradox. The over-abundance of qualifiers and modifiers tells us a great deal about our language and our ways of organizing the world and making truth claims. Exceptions and ex-centric positions are always already present in our

vocabulary.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION OR CONVERSATION?

Through my readings of *Song of Solomon* and *Tripmaster Monkey* I have implicated truth claims, epistemology, intention and the often empty rhetoric of cultural diversity. I have suggested that feminist readers and activist must recognize language as our essential. We need to pursue conversation but we must reconsider our intention for initiating certain dialogues. Can this language game be a place where horizons are merged without co-optation? And how do I justify my use of Gadamer and Bakhtin who were not particularly interested in or aware of feminist concerns? I must admit that certain theorists benefit from the deconstruction of the subject in a way which women of all races and people of color in general do not. Those most immediately recognized "traditionary texts" have enjoyed the benefits of the now deconstucted status. It is argued that at this historical moment, subjectivity is contested at the same time that counter-hegemonic groups have attempted to claim that status. My readings of both Morrison and Kingston, however, contest the notion of a unified subject and yet they still combat racism and sexism.

How can peoples of color utilize the notion of local knowledge and avoid the same kinds of essentialisms and boundary drawing that they protest in the dominant culture? Interior boundaries seem just as repressive as exterior definitions. Can there ever be a dialogue in which good

intentions reign? Borrowing from Richard Bernstein, how can we "elicit the common concerns that they [people] share, without denying the important differences among them?" (233) In the theorists that Bernstein involves in a dialogic, there is an insistence that "in all of them we have felt a current that keeps drawing us to the central themes of dialogue, conversation, undistorted communication, communal judgement, and the type of rational wooing that can take place when individuals confront each other as equals and participants" (233). Kingston and Morrison have not been participants in this traditionary conversation as equals. Therefore, borrowing again from Bernstein, I want to ask how we can "cultivate the types of dialogical communities in which pronesis, judgment and practical discourse become concretely embodied in our everyday practices?" (223)

In the preceding pages, I have attempted to deconstruct essential feminist or black communities, but Nancy Hartsock would remind me that I have indeed created a new and possibly even more dangerous vulnerability. I feel that she is subscribing to the notion that we require a foundation. Her politics is built on a subject/object or male/female antagonism. She stipulates the urgency of a "marginal" epistemology. I feel that her criticism would be more powerfully directed toward a challenge of foundations. Not unlike Haraway, Hartsock does not seem uncomfortable with keeping the "subjugated" or the "objects" in their objective stance, in fact she seems to feel that the subjugated have a

more holistic view of the world. She seems content with the center/margin distinction. On what does she base this assumption--on a belief that women are less hierarchical and more nurturing? In belief that men of color will see the link between their oppression and that of all women? I propose, however, that Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston challenge the notion that counter-hegemonic peoples, or feminist participants, will learn from their oppressions and see power from the bottom up.

I borrow powerful examples from their texts which suggest that "marginal" groups perpetuate repressive borders and blindspots. Wittman can see racial inequities but he fails to see the inherent sexism he expresses with regard to Chinese women. Wittman is blind to his own refusal to move to-and-fro in a conversation with women participants. Why couldn't Guitar, our rebel/activist in *Song of Solomon* get beyond an emasculatory tale of racism? What purpose does a boundary serve and how is it related to Gadamer's horizon?

Boundaries, whether plotted by hegemonic or local forces, must always be malleable within conversation. Instead we have seen boundaries that have either become token strides or oppressive, intolerant barriers to dialogue. In *Beyond Objectivty and Relativism*, Richard Bernstein reminds the critic that:

> In the face of the multifaceted critiques of modernity, no one needs to be reminded of how fragile such communities are, how easily they are

> coopted and perverted. But at a time when the threat of total annihilation no longer seems to be an abstract possibility but the most imminent and real potentiality, it becomes all the more imperative to try again and again to foster and nurture those forms of communal life in which dialogue, conversation, *phronesis*, practical discourse, and judgement are concretely embodied in our everyday practices (230).

Bernstein, however, cautions that a totalizing critique will not achieve effective political action. He instead argues that we need to put conversation at the core to "seize upon those experiences and struggles in which there are still glimmerings of solidarity and promise of dialogical communities in which there can be genuine mutual participation and reciprocal wooing and persuasion can prevail" (230). Unlike Hartsock's center/power pairing, Bernstein employs Foucault's notion of power networking. He further states, "For what is characteristic of our contemporary situation is not just the playing out of powerful forces that are always beyond our control, or the spread of disciplinary techniques that always elude our grasp, but a paradoxical situation where power creates counter-power (resistance) and reveals the vulnerability of power, where the very forces that undermine and inhibit communal life also create, new and frequently unpredictable, forms of solidarity" (228).

The type of community that Bernstein is calling for is not present in most of the community models that Iris Young has documented. In criticizing the ideal community, she writes, it "privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one's own understanding of others from their point of view" (302). In this statement she seems to be quarreling with Bernstein, but I think we can read them as complementing each other's work. Young's discussion documents the community ideals which do not have conversation at their core. In each of these models, whether feminist or not, there is an explicit or implicit totalizing critique present. Bernstein is talking about a language community which would be ever shifting, buoyant; a temporal frame from which to work for change collectively.

As we know, collective action is the key to the success of social programs in a "liberal" society. In understanding Bernstein's concept of community, one would do well to recall the desire to have a politics of postmodernism. This desire is often haphazardly dismissed as divisive. For our purposes, however, this postmodern feminist community would be forged on debate and its foundation would be conversation not ideology. Certain political aims, those particularly of liberal feminism as discussed by Alison Jaggar, would be quickly exposed as having self-defeating aims. Our conversational task is to uncover either an epistemology or understanding of human nature which has been present in our

relations to each other as women, but not contested because of our inability to see the metaphysics of our own politics.

The reason feminists have often been unsuccessful in conversation is that we have, perhaps, misplaced goals. We are still maintaining a compensatory program. We are trying to fit into a problematic subject cloak. We have not often carried our critiques into metaphysics because we wanted to extend the opportunities that subjects, usually considered to be white men, had mapped out for themselves in the rational, Enlightenment tradition of the West. In such attempts we attempted to make our narratives fit, and we encountered many contradictions. Our lives did not seem to fit; the Enlightenment mind/body split could not be achieved by those labeled "the sex."

Even attempts to describe a female subjectivity were prescriptive. Women of color, lesbian women, and working class women started contesting the new definitions. But it was understood, by diverse groups of feminists, that we had to define ourselves lest men continue to do it for us. We remained convinced that we were indeed the "other." The desire to have a conversation was overshadowed by the uncontested metaphysics. Instead of critiquing the necessity of a metaphysical core, a new core was stipulated to represent women, and of course it met the same criticism that was levied at sexism.

We seem adept at treating the symptom, at creating a new paradigm, but we seem unable or uninterested in critiquing

the blindspot of our definitions. The voices speaking through Morrison and Kingston's narratives do not reinscribe a dominant voice or racial mandate; that is why I categorize them as postmodern. Kingston and Morrison do not ignore or reduce political and material circumstances.

I am hesitant to suggest that conversation is our salvation but since I am aware that I know my world only through language and that I organize my experiences and dreams through narrative, I must claim conversation. I may insist, however, that there are problems with the notion of sincere intention which makes possible buonancy. I have outlined an approach for a feminist politics. I remain deeply concerned that a feminist language of resistance must be forged through a hybrid construction of sorts. In fact, it is. In resistance to the narratives inscribed upon us, all women have been complicitous in our parodying. We are "Shape Shifters"[13] in that we must enter into a dialogue not intended for us. In the to-and-fro of the conversation we may find it necessary to co-opt the word that is half someone else's in order to parody their supposed good intention. However, we must always remember that when we do we are guilty of rejecting the I-lessness of the game. In Gadamer's conversation model, a refusal to lose one's self in the game is poor sportsmanship. I cannot forget Carol Gilligan's

---

[13]Linda Hutcheon uses this term to signify women, postmodernist writers. For a further explanation see *The Canadian Postmodern*, Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988.

model, however, of how many young girls learn not to play the game. In her case studies, refusing to play, to lose one's self to the rules, has reinforced women's inability to achieve ultimate business success. Our [women's] attention to removing ourselves from the game when I-lessness seems to accomplish, not better understanding, but erasure, might better prepare us to be in tune to the dynamics of the conversation, not a "historical-natural attidute" (Caputo, 262). In this I suggest a new game. One more attune to the politics of conversation. Gadamer understood authority in terms of Aristotelian logic, and although I do agree that "acceptance or acknowledgement is the decisive thing for relationships to authority," I must disagree with his contention that authority must therefore be legitimate, either within or outside of feminist institutions. Why? Because the metaphysical model from which most feminist organizations took their governing guidance was based not on good intention but on hierarchy and power. Authority can only be legitimated on the basis of a subject/object dualism. If we follow Foucault in lobbying for subverting that subject, and if we employ his understanding of the author and genealogy, we can therefore de-author authority as a univocal essence and explore it through a hermeneutics which never stops re-figuring. We can attempt to acknowledge the hybrid constructions within our discourses, and critique attempts to suppress them?

It seems to me that we will never locate the fulcrum

Myra Jehlen proposed we use to insert ourselves from the outside. We must instead, work from within. An objective standard cannot be called forth in a new methodology because this would only consist of language being used to characterize the limits of language. Just as we cannot conceive of a subversion of time, using the tools of telling time, we cannot subvert our languaged being by trying to locate a desensitized literal, descriptive language. Therefore efforts by feminists to look outside the texts of our lives, the fictional outpouring of those lives, cannot be as rich as the intertextuality and multiplicity of our existence as re-figured by Morrison and Kingston.

LIST OF REFERENCES

LIST OF REFERENCES

Alcoff, Linda. "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis In Feminism," Signs 13.3 (1988): 405-436.

Asian Women United of California. Making Waves: An Anthology of Writing by and about Asian American Women. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Awkward, Michael. "Negotiations of Power: White Critics, Black Texts, and the Self-Referential Impulse." American Literary History 2.4 (Winter 1990): 581-606.

Baker, Houston A. "There Is No More Beautiful Way: Theory and the Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing." Ed. Houston A. Baker and Patricia Redmond. Afro-American Literary Study In The Nineteen- Nineties. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989. 135-155.

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. The Dialogic Imagination. Ed., Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P,1981.

Bernstein, Richard. Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science Hermeneutic, and Praxis. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1983.

___. "The Rage Against Reason." Philosophy and Literature 10.2 (1986): 186-210.

Butler, Judith. "Conclusion: From Parody to Politics." Gender Trouble:Feminism And The Subversion Of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Caputo, John D. "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique." Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter. Ed. Diane M. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer. New York: State U of New York Press, 1989.

Carby, Hazel." 'Women's Era': Rethinking Black Feminist Theory." Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. 3-19.

Chin, Frank, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong, Ed. Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers. Washington, D.C.: Howard UP, 1974.

Clayton, Jay. "The Narrative Turn in Recent Minority Fiction." American Literary History 2.3 (Fall 1990): 375-393.

Collins, Patricia Hill. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

___. "Women's Studies: Reform or Transformation?" Sojourner: The Women's Forum, (February 1990).

Dallmayr, Fred R. "Conservation, Discourse, and Politics." Polis and Praxis: Exercises in Contemporary Political Theory. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984. 192-223.

Dirlik, Arif. "Culturalism as Hegemonic Ideology and Liberating Practice." The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse. Ed. Abdul R. JanMohmed and David Lloyd. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. 394-431.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. Writing Beyond The Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers. Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1985.

Felski, Rita. Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change. Cambrige, MA: Harvard UP, 1989.

Fields, Barbara Jeanne. "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America." New Left Review 181 (1990): 95-118.

Fish, Stanley. "What Makes An Interpretation Acceptable," Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980.

Foster, Thomas. "History, Critical Theory, And Women's Social Practices: "Women's Time" and Housekeeping," Signs 14.1 (1988): 73-99.

Foucault, Michael. The Archaeology of Knowledge. trans A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972

___. "Truth and Power." (From Power/Knowledge, 1977) The Foucault Reader. By Foucault. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984. 51-75.

Fraser, Nancy. Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse And Gender In Contemporary Social Theory. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Fuss, Diana. "The Risk of Essence." Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference. New York: Routledge,1989. 1-22.

___. " 'Race' Under Erasure? Poststructuralist Afro-American Literary Theory." Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference. New York: Routledge, 1989. 73-96.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Part I: The Scope of Hermeneutical Reflection." Trans. and ed. David E. Linge. Philosophical Hermeneutics. Berkeley: U of California P, 1976. 1-104.

___. Truth and Method. (Second, Revised Edition). Trans. and revision Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Crossroad.

Giddings, Paula. When And Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America. New York: Bantam, 1984.

Gilligan, Carol. In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1982.

Goellnicht, Donald C. "Minority History as Metafiction: Joy Kogawa's Obasan. Tulsa Studies 8.2 (Fall 1989): 287-305.

Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." Feminist Studies 14.3 (Fall 1988): 575-99.

Harding, Sandra, and Merrill Hintikka. Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1983.

Harding, Sandra."Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques." Feminism/Postmodernism. New York: Routledge, 1990. 83-106.

Harding, Sandra. "Introduction: Is There A Feminist Method?" Feminism And Methodology. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987. 1-14.

___. "The Instability of The Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," Signs 11.4 (1986):

Hartsock, Nancy. "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories." Cultural Critique 7 (Fall 1987): 186-206.

Hawkesworth, Mary E. "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth." Signs 14.3 (1989): 533-557.

Henderson, Mae Gwendolyn. "Speaking In Tongues." Changing Our Own Words. Cheryl A. Wall, Eds. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989.

Hogue, W. Lawrence. "Chapter Seven: The Song of Morrison's Sula: History, Mythical Thought, and the Production of the Afro-American Historical Past." In Discourse and the Other: The Production of the Afro-American Text. Durham: Duke University Press, 1986. 132-157.

Hutcheon, Linda. A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction. New York: Routledge, 1988.

___. Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfred Laurier University Press,1980.

___. Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1991.

___. The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988.

Jaggar, Alison. Feminist Politics and Human Nature. Totowa: Rowman and Allanhold, 1983.

Jehlen, Myra. "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism." Signs 6.4 (1981): 575-601.

Joyce, Joyce A. "Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism." New Literary History 18, 1986-87: 335-344.

Kellner, Hans D. Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked. Madison: U of Wisconsin P,1989.

Kim, Elaine H. Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1982.

___. "Defining Asian American Realities Through Literature." The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse. Ed. Abdul R. JanMohmed and David Lloyd. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. 146-170.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. China Men. New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 1980.

___. "Cultural Misreadings by American Reviewers." Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue: New Cultural Identities. Ed.,Guy Amirthanayagam. London: Macmillian, 1982: 55-65.

___. Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book. New York: Vintage

Books,1989.

___. The Woman Warrior. New York: Signet, 1977.

Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time," The Kristeva Reader. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.

LaCapra, Dominick. History and Criticism. Ithaca and London: Cornell U Press, 1985.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. The Savage Mind. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966.

Lugones, Maria C. and Elizabeth V. Spelman. "Have We Got A Theory For You! Feminst Theory, Cultural Imperialism And The Demand For 'The Woman's Voice,' " Women's Studies International Forum, 6.6 (1983): 573-581.

Longfellow, Pamela. "Monkey Wrenched: Ranting and raving, Maxine Hong Kingston puts the reader through the wringer." MS. (June 1989): 66.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1989 (1979). Theory and History of Literature , Volume 10

McDowell, Deborah E. "Boundaries: Or Distant Relations and Close Kin." Afro-American Literary Study In the Nineteen-Nineties. Ed. Houston Baker, Jr. and Patricia Redmond. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1989. 51-77.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. After Virtue: A Study in Moral theory. 2nd. ed. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1984.

___. "Rationality and the Explanation of Action." Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and

Philosophy. 1971. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1978. 244-59.

Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, Cohen. "The Postmodernist Turn In Anthropology: Cautions From A Feminist Perspective," Signs 15.1 (1989): 7-33.

Meese, Elizabeth A. (Ex)Tensions: Re-Figuring Feminist Criticism. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois Press, 1990.

___. "Crossing Cultures: Narratives of Exclusion and Leslie Silko's Ceremony." (Ex)Tensions: Re-Figuring Feminist Criticism. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1990. 29-49.

Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye. New York: Pocket Books, 1970.

___. Song of Solomon. New York: Signet, 1977.

___. Sula. New York: New American Library, 1973.

Owens, Craig. "The Discourse Of Others: Feminists And Postmodernism." The Anti-Aesthetical Essays on Postmodern Culture. Ed. Hal Foster. Washington: Bay Press, 1983. 57-82.

Pollard, D.E. Review in Far Eastern Economic Review, 27 July 1989.

Poovey, Mary. "Feminism and Deconstruction." Feminist Studies 14.1 (Spring 1988): 51-65.

Przybylowicz, Donna. "Toward a Feminist Cultural Criticism: Hegemony and Modes of Social Division." Cultural Critique 14 (Winter 1989-90): 259-301.

Rabine, Leslie. "A Feminist Politics of Non-Identity." Feminist Studies 14.1 (Spring 1988): 11-32.

Rabinow, Paul. "Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology." Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.
234-61.

Scott, Joan W. "Gender: A Useful Category Of Historical Analysis." American Historical Review 91.5 (December 1986).

___. Gender and The Politics of History. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Silko, Leslie. Ceremony. New York: Signet, 1977.

___. "Here's an Odd Artifact for the Fairy-Tale Shelf." Review of The Beet Queen by Lousie Erdrich. Studies in American Literature 10 (1986): 177-184.

Smith, Valerie. "Black Feminist Theory And The Representation Of The "Other." Changing Our Own Words. Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989.

___. "The Quest for and Discovery of Identity in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon." Afro-American Writing Today: An Anniversary Issue of the Southern Review. Ed. James Olney. Baton Rogue: Lousinia State UP, 1987.

Spelman, Elizabeth V. Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought. Boston: Beacon Press,

1988.

Tan, Amy. "Double Face." Home to Stay: Asian American Women's Fiction. Eds., Sylvia Watanabe and Corol Bruchac. New York: The Greenfield Review Press, 1990.

Tate, Claudia. "Reshuffling the Deck; Or, (Re)Reading Race and Gender in Black Women's Writing." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 7.1 (1988): 119-132.

Taylor, Charles. "Rationality." Philosophy and the Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers 2. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1985. 134-51.

___. "Understanding and Ethnocentricity." Philosophy and the Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers 2. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1985. 116-133.

West, Cornel. "The New Cultural Politics of Difference." October 53 (Summer 1990): 93-109.

Wynter, Sylvia. "On Disenchanting Discourse: 'Minority' Literary Criticism and Beyond." The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse. Ed. Abdul R. JanMohmed and David Lloyd. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. 432-469.

Yeatman, Anna. "A Feminist Theory of Social Differentiation." Feminism/Postmodernism. New York: Routledge, 1990. 281-299.

Young, Iris Marion. "The Ideal Community and the Politics of Difference." Feminism/Postmodernism. New York: Routledge, 1990. 300-323.