This is to certify that the

dissertation entitled

Emphasis Mine: Autobiographical Fiction and the Modernist Woman writer

presented by

Cecilia Konchar Farr

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in English

Kathleen Gissa
Major professor

Date 27 July 1990

EMPHASIS MINE:
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION
AND THE MODERNIST WOMAN WRITER

By

Cecilia Konchar Farr

A DISSERTATION

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1990

ABSTRACT

**EMPHASIS MINE:
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION
AND THE MODERNIST WOMAN WRITER**

By

Cecilia Konchar Farr

I have found, in my study of modernism, that autobiographical fiction was a developing form often used but seldom discussed, even by early feminist critics, although autobiography was often defined as a "feminine" genre by critics who denigrated the personal and the domestic. This dissertation explores the prevalence of the genre among women writers in the 'twenties, focusing on five novels--Woolf's To the Lighthouse, H.D.'s HERmione, Anzia Yezierska's Bread Givers, Radclyffe Hall's Well of Loneliness and Nella Larsen's Quicksand.

The first third of this project sets up a theoretical context for the analysis of the novels which follows by exploring autobiographical theory and the alliances between French and Anglo-American feminist critiques. Chapter One surveys the field of autobiography, including traditional interpretations and recent feminist revisions. Chapter Two

defines autobiographical fiction, paying close attention to the issues of referentiality and subjectivity in a postmodern perspective. Part One concludes with a redefinition of modernism in light of the significant contributions of women's autobiographical fiction to Anglo-American literature of the early twentieth century.

Part Two centers on linguistic interpretations of "feminine language" in modernism and includes analyses of the novels by Woolf and H.D. Part Three explores autobiographical fiction and social change, calling on socialist-feminist theories and demonstrating how marginalized voices, such as Yezierska's, Hall's and Larsen's, can be subversive to the dominant discourse of our culture.

I contend that autobiographical fiction holds a unique place halfway between fiction and "truth" and, because of this, it foregrounds in fascinating ways the central issues of modernism, postmodernism and feminist criticism.

The teacher said to the students:
"Come to the edge."
They replied: "We might fall."

The teacher again said:
"Come to the edge."
and they responded: "It's too high."

"*Come to the edge*"
the teacher demanded.

And they came.
and she pushed them.
And they flew.

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to Katherine Fishburn, teacher and friend.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express my appreciation to the College of Arts and Letters for the summer dissertation fellowship that made completion of this dissertation possible--and for the continued support over my three years at MSU as a Dean's Fellow. Thanks to the English Department, and especially to Katherine Fishburn, Victor Paananen, William Johnsen, James Seaton, Kathleen Geissler, Barry Gross and Lorraine Hart, Lisa Fine of the History Department and Joyce Ladenson of Women's Studies--all of whom helped me in various ways. I would also like to acknowledge Cathy N. Davidson and Linda W. Wagner Martin for recruiting me to MSU and for, along with Dr. Fishburn, nurturing me through my first year. Thanks to the faculty and students at the 1989 School of Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth College, who stimulated the ideas that became this dissertation, and to the irrepressible and ever-exciting Women's Caucus and all of its wonderful members. Special thanks to Dana Nelson Salvino for doing it first and showing me how and to Sherry Wynn for her help with word-processing and printing.

I want to acknowledge Douglas Sego, Rex Neibar, Terry Such and especially Virginia Unkefer for being my dearest friends and, through endless games of "Cutthroat," never letting me take myself too seriously. Thanks to my family who gave me the stubbornness never to give up. Finally, a hearty thanks to Tracy E. Farr and Daley Elaine Farr who were, in different fashions, with me all the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

In 1982, just after I finished my undergraduate degree in English (encountering no more than two or three women writers along the way), I read Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar. Eventually that reading experience inspired me to quit my job in journalism and return to graduate school to study women writers. A few years later, it inspired this dissertation.

At the risk of accusations of being "autobiographical" (i.e. "spontaneous and natural," not "crafted and aesthetic"[1]), I must also add that before I accomplished either of these things, my contacts with Sylvia Plath and Esther Greenwood had introduced me to a new sense of self that has since been revised, rethought and expanded through my study of feminist theory. By acknowledging the brilliant Esther's untenable position in a patriarchal society, Plath named what for me had remained guiltily nameless. The Bell Jar helped me to come to terms with a lingering sense of frustration I'd had since recovering from a bout with severe depression a few years earlier, when my feminist spirit confronted, once and for all, the expectations of my working-class community. For the first time in years I felt "normal"--or vindicated in my neurosis. My insane response to an insane society was, of course, the only sane response.

I needed to see myself not as my (very American) intellectual training had led me to see myself--as self-determined and self-created (with wounds, it follows, that were self-inflicted)--but as a product of my *culture* as well. As we postmodern critics would say, reading Plath "located me historically."

In the several years that have passed since I first read The Bell Jar I have confronted the questions of postmodernist and feminist criticism, questions about historicity, subjectivity, language and difference. As I've studied I've attempted to locate the concepts of "woman" and "female" historically, culturally, philosophically, even biologically. I have asked myself over and over how reading Plath's text--and other texts before and since--affected my sense of these concepts. Because my project began autobiographically, with an affirmation of my "self" through Plath's novel, I have maintained an interest in autobiography, and especially in autobiographical fiction. Even as I've called that selfhood into question, I've maintained that for political, psychological and historical purposes, the autobiographical act is, for women writers and readers, a radical act. Domna C. Stanton, in her study of autobiography, The Private Self, agrees: She concludes, "Although the injunction against writing had somewhat lifted for some women in some contemporary places, autogynography . . . had a global and essential therapeutic purpose: to constitute the female

subject. In a phallocentric system, which defines her as the object, the inessential other to the same male subject--that The Second Sex had proved beyond a doubt--the *graphing* of the *auto* was an act of self-assertion that denied and reversed women's status. It represented. . . the conquest of identity through writing" (14).

I choose to write about the women's autobiographical novel, then, because of The Bell Jar--and because I find it fascinating that, in defiance of the linguistic tradition described by Jacques Lacan, Simone de Beauvoir and Hélène Cixous, the author of an autobiographical novel places herself firmly in a subject position; she assumes both that she has the authority to write and that she can be a subject. Thinly disguised as a fictional character, she also seems more free to question and challenge the limits of her self-perception and her cultural and linguistic repression. Naming women's experiences, the autobiographer gives them legitimacy in our logocentric world; she is, as Margaret Homans writes, "bearing the word."[2]

In this postmodern age it has, of course, become impossible to write naively about "the author" of a text. Contemporary critics can't discuss "the author" without posing a dozen questions about language, subjectivity and the construction of the self. These questions are often aimed at toppling the mysogynistic and ethnocentric tradition of Western humanist discourse, still prevalent in the academy,

which claims the self as a unified whole "man," the "sole author of history and of the literary text" (Moi 8), a concept which has proven dangerous to women and minorities (Moi 8). According to Toril Moi, this traditional concept of the "phallic man" led to an understanding of history or text as "nothing but the 'expression' of this unique individual--all art becomes autobiography, a mere window on the self and the world, with no reality of its own" (8).

James Olney, one of the best-known theorists of autobiography in the United States, reinforces this concept of unified man in Metaphors of Self. "A man's autobiography is . . . like a magnifying lens," he writes, "focusing and intensifying that same peculiar creative vitality that informs all the volumes of his collected works; it is the symptomatic key to all else that he did and, naturally, to all that he was" (4). Olney theorizes that autobiographers attempt to give us access to the universal through study of the particular, i.e. the autobiographer's unique metaphor, through which "like the poet, the autobiographer . . . draws out of the flux of events a coherent pattern" (45)--Montaigne's questing religious spirit, for example, or Mill's reasoned "syllogism on private human experience" (259).

Sidonie Smith, in her feminist study A Poetics of Women's Autobiography, challenges Olney and other male theorists of autobiography. Like Moi, she focuses on recent French criticism to expose the underlying assumptions of Western

humanism in autobiographical theory. These assumptions include "confidence in the referentiality of language and a corollary confidence in the authenticity of the self" (5), two assumptions which American postmodernism has undermined.[3] Smith joins Stanton, Estelle C. Jelinek, Françoise Lionnet, Nancy K. Miller, Carolyn Heilbrun and others in exploring feminist theories of autobiography which allow for a more flexible concept of self, informed not only by French feminisms, but also by the insights of feminist psychological theorists such as Carol Gilligan, Nancy Chodorow, Jessica Benjamin and Dorothy Dinnerstein.

A plural self and more open borders of individual definition characterize these theories. Cixous in "Sorties" and Luce Irigaray in <u>This Sex Which is Not One</u> discuss the multiplicity of femaleness--of female language, sexuality and relationships. In undermining patriarchal practices, we must, as Cixous says, undermine patriarchal thinking--the objective logic, the binary oppositions, the phallic self--that form and inform our thoughts. In doing this, feminist literary critique embraces "a playful pluralism," as Annette Kolodny encourages in "Dancing Through the Minefield"; it locates itself in multiplicity.

On the other hand, as Nancy Hartsock observes, it is disturbing to have the traditional unified subject pluralized and problematized "exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name

ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history" (196). In order to develop theories of gender difference, to understand and identify an alternative tradition in literature and to acknowldege women's experience of oppression under patriarchy, women must be identified as distinctly different subjects from the men who wrote the books and dominated the societies. There is very little comfort in multiplicity and deferral of meaning when necessity and politics demand that we identify women writers, and especially minority women writers, as unique selves with specific interests and a decidedly different position in relation to the dominant culture. Nancy K. Miller, for example, responds to Roland Barthes, by shifting his emphasis on text as "hyphology," which "chooses the spider's web over the spider" and threatens the continued erasure of women's creative production, to an emphasis on production and the writing subject as "arachnology." "By arachnology, then," she means "a critical positioning which reads against the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity; to recover within representation the emblems of its construction" (272).

To talk about women's texts, in other words, we must talk about the gendered subjectivity which constructed them. But we must talk about that subjectivity without reinforcing traditional ideologies of a unified, whole self which were oppressive to women and minorities who were historically

denied such selfhood. To avoid reinscribing our oppression, we must maintain a postmodern view of the self as multiple, as culturally, psychologically *and* biologically defined, as gendered but not in the Western humanistic tradition of binary oppositions of male and female. Because these fascinating theoretical tensions are central to recent feminist studies of autobiography, autobiography has become the field where these ideas are played out to their fullest. It is the field where humanism and poststructuralism meet, where French and American feminist theories form their most useful alliances.

This dissertation project focuses on these alliances by surveying the field of autobiographical theory and its recent feminist revisions, then analyzing and defining the genre of women's autobiographical fiction, with special attention to the intersections of autobiography and fiction and the masking and narrative tricks that often make the line between the two genres difficult to distinguish. Part One concludes with a redefinition of modernism in light of the significant contribution of women's autobiographical fiction to the Anglo-American literature of the early twentieth century.

I have found, in my study of modernism, that autobiographical fiction was a developing form often used at the turn of the century but seldom discussed, even by early feminist critics, although autobiography was sometimes defined as a "feminine" genre by critics who denigrated the

personal and the domestic, as Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate in their study of modernism. Influential modernist women writers--Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, H.D., Dorothy Richardson, Antonia White, Nella Larsen, Anzia Yezierska, Mary Antin, Radclyffe Hall--all used the autobiographical novel to challenge the limits of "fiction" and "Truth," as well as to find their unique voices in a culture still dominated by white male discourse. Parts Two and Three of my project, then, center on these writers and their development of modernist autobiographical fiction.

Chapter Three in Part Two introduces the ideas of French feminism and Lacan on mother-language and demonstrates how Anglo-American feminist critics have claimed the symbolic space of pre-Oedipal "language" for literary and cultural critique. Chapter Four, "Virginia Woolf Writing Her Self," studies the cryptic writing of Woolf's To the Lighthouse and its association with this mother-language. In this chapter I aim to strike a balance between the postmodern position which rejects the ideas of Woolf's texts as a window to her self, and the phallocentric position, which discourages an apprehension of Woolf's contraditions, her complex multiplicity and her "feminine language." I find that, in the pages of To the Lighthouse, Woolf bridged the gap between these two modes of feminist thinking. My thesis is that Woolf, as a result of her fascination with the then-radical ideas of Freudian psychology and her efforts to understand

her place in the world as a woman, had made some discoveries she wanted to articulate in this novel--discoveries about female psychological development, about the stifling nature of patriarchal thinking and about being a woman artist in a phallocentric world. These discoveries prefigure and modify some of the conclusions of contemporary feminist literary and psychological theory. Because my training is in the American feminist/Western humanist tradition I believe that some of Woolf herself is available through this text. But the conclusions of this chapter are only possible through an expansion of that aesthetic, an embracing of the insights of French feminism and what French theorists call "modernity." (See Note 3)

Chapter Five, "H.D. Releasing Her," further examines this tension through a study H.D.'s autobiographical novel, HERmione. I find that in her experimental wordplay, in her attempt to find a language to describe adequately her experience, H.D. in a sense discovers feminine writing by recovering her mother-language. In her attempt to overthrow the scientific, logical law of her own father (represented in its artisitic guise by the Ezra Pound character George Lowndes) H.D. accomplished a cultural and linguistic *coup d'état*, subverting and finally overthrowing what we now define as the Lacanian Law of the Father.

Part Three focuses on marginality and autobiographical fiction, through the novels of Anzia Yezierska (Bread

Givers), Radclyffe Hall (Well of Loneliness) and Nella Larsen (Quicksand). Making use of socialist-feminist theories of fiction I demonstrate how subversive these marginalized voices are to the dominant discourse and discuss the power of subjectivity of ethnic-American, lesbian and black women writers. In my conclusion I will trace the trajectory of autobiographical fiction into contemporary literature, where these marginalized voices have all but conquered the American literary tradition.

In "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," Nancy K. Miller theorizes that the "elsewhere" that is, according to Irigaray, the location of feminine language in phallogocentric discourse is "a form of emphasis: an italicized version of what passes for standard face. Spoken or written, italics are a modality of intensity and stress, a way of marking what has always already been said, of making a common text one's own" (29). In my dissertation, I argue that in autobiographical fiction women claim this "elsewhere" of female language by changing both the discourse they write in and the constructions of self this discourse engenders. This parenthetical "emphasis" is, in autobiographical fiction, more than an "emphasis added"; it is a distinctive emphasis of their own.

Notes

[1] I am quoting here from Domna C. Stanton's distinction between the term "autobiographical" when applied to a woman's text and the same term when applied to a text written by a man (4).

[2] Homans uses this image as the key concept in her impressive study of woman's place in language, Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing (1986).

[3] I use the term postmodernism to indicate recent American literary and cultural theory influenced by, among other things, continental philosophy. For a definition of "modernity" I rely on Alice A. Jardine's helpful study of French theory throughout Gynesis and her clear explanations of how the philosophical questions of French modernity relate to American postmodernism.

PART ONE

A Kind of Wonderment: Toward a Theory of Women's Autobiographical Fiction

We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts.

--Carolyn G. Heilbrun

I confess that in the face of the women's autobiographical novels I will discuss here I still retain "a kind of wonderment" despite the time I've spent researching and studying them. This wonderment, to use George Gusdorf's phrase, is characteristic of a twentieth-century orientation toward autobiographical writings. Says Gusdorf, "the heroism of understanding and telling all, reenforced even more by the teachings of psychoanalysis, takes on, in the eyes of our contemporaries, an increasing value. Complexities, contradictions, and aberrations do not cause hesitation or repugnance but a kind of wonderment" (34). The complexities, contradictions, and aberrations" of the five writers and their novels which are the focus of this study are enough to keep many critics busy for many years. They were enough to set me on the way to what has been an exciting and challenging project--theorizing women's autobiographical fiction.

Chapter One: The Autobiographical Tradition

Though I hesitate to begin "by turning to the male model to see how and where it doesn't work," this "gesture to revise" which Nancy K. Miller regrets in her essay on autobiography in Subject to Change (47) seems an impossible one to avoid at this point in feminist critique. Aside from a political objection to the message communicated by beginning with a male model, my hesitation also has a practical side. As Sidonie Smith suggests, a summary of what has gone before in autobiographical theory does little to set a context for *women's* autobiographical writing--and especially for their fictions--since most traditional theories focus doggedly on male models of "pure" autobiography (7). Estelle C. Jelinek explains, for example, that "critics by and large still have certain expectations of a 'good' autobiography. It must center exclusively or mostly on their authors, not on others . . . It should be representative of its times, a mirror of the predominant zeitgeist. The autobiographer should be self-aware, a seeker after self-knowledge. He must aim to explore, not to exhort. His autobiography should be an effort to give meaning to some personal mythos" (4). Women's autobiographies, she goes on to explain, break nearly every one of these rules. With this disclaimer, then, I will begin by offering a brief summary

(as Smith, Miller, Jelinek and Domna C. Stanton all do[1]) of what has gone before in (male) autobiographical theory. Rather than offer a general review, however, I will focus on the problems that will remain uppermost in this study--the nature of the autobiographical subject, the creation of the "self" through language, and the social and political reverberations of certain constructions of individuality.

Though most theorists trace the beginning of autobiography to a post-Renaissance emphasis on individuality, autobiographical *theory* is mainly a twentieth-century phenomenon, and, as Jelinek points out, "It is only since World War II that autobiography has been considered a legitimate genre worthy of formal study" (1). Before then, autobiographies were considered generally as historical documents, as accurate accounts of the lives of public figures--the more accurate and historically representative the account, the better the autobiography. Smith maintains that this "preoccupation with the *bios* of the autobiographer"--the life of the author--led to the eventual rejection by the next generation of critics of this early mode of theorizing autobiography (4). In all the studies of autobiography from George Misch's 1907 History of Autobiography in Antiquity to the numerous publications of the 1930s, little distinction was made between autobiographies and biographies. Then, in fifties and sixties, critics like Wayne Shumaker, Georges Gusdorf and

Barrett John Mandel began to argue that autobiography should be treated *as literature*, not as biography. Many influential studies have since followed their lead, analyzing autobiography as a distinct literary genre, with an emphasis on the *autos*, or the questions of self-representation, which abound when authors attempt to write their own lives.

Most of these more recent studies of autobiography, which I will identify more specifically in the pages that follow, begin with St. Augustine or Montaigne and trace their almost exclusively Western male heritage through Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Goethe, John Stuart Mill, Benjamin Franklin and Henry Adams, or other similar figures. With their emphasis on self-representation, almost all participate in what Alison M. Jaggar has so lucidly described as a traditional liberal concept of human nature, which focuses on the individual--his self-interest, his need for self-fulfillment, his innate ability to reason (I choose the masculine pronoun purposely, here and elsewhere, to indicate that this philosophy generally excludes consideration of a female gendered concept of "man").[2] In the 1960 Design and Truth in Autobiography, one of the early formal studies of the genre, Roy Pascal writes, "True autobiographies are those whose chief concern is to illuminate a personality" (134). Albert E. Stone, in his 1981 collection The American Autobiography, reinforces Pascal's claim in his discussion of autobiography as "an activity of self-construction." Stone explains: "In the

language of psychoanalysis, autobiography is . . . an overdetermined document; it is simultaneously historical record and literary artifact, psychological case history and spiritual confession, didactic essay and ideological testament. Uniting all these available modes and possible motives for 'telling one's story' is, of course, the self who is both actor and author. *Personal identity* is the root and result of the autobiographical act" (2) [emphasis added].

And Karl Joachim Weintraub in the Introduction to his appropriately-named Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography (1976) insists that his subject matter, "a major component of modern man's self-conception," is "the belief that, whatever else he is, he is a unique individuality, whose life task is to be true to his very own personality. This essay rests on the conviction that this conception of personality, this idea of the individualized person, is a part of the modern form of historical consciousness" (xi). Later he adds prescriptively, "My interest is less in all the varied forms of autobiographic writing than in that *proper* form of autobiography wherein a self-reflective person asks "who am I?" and "how did I become what I am?" I search for condition of self-conscious individuality" (1) [emphasis added].

Though this emphasis on the "seamlessly unified self" of traditional humanism--"potent, phallic and male" (Moi 8)--has the merit James Olney claims for it, of being "largely

responsible for opening things up and turning them in a philosophical, psychological, and literary direction" (19), it has some obvious problems for the recent feminist autobiographical theories which I will discuss in the second half of this chapter. It is also problematic in that it overemphasizes the *autos* of autobiography to the exclusion of considerations of the *bios* and *graphia*, or the life experiences of the subject and the writing itself, or the creation of the text in language. The definition of autobiography which others have most often cited, Philip Lejeune's from his study Le Pacte autobiographique (1975), reflects this: "A retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence *stressing his individual life and especially the history of his personality*" (14) [emphasis added]. Although Lejeune considers all elements of autobiography and develops a theory based on a pact between author and reader, within this one-sentence definition he captures the problem of autobiography's traditional focus on the separated and distinct individual with sharp ego boundaries, the unproblematized "self" of traditional Western discourse.

Georges Gusdorf's influential 1956 essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," translated by James Olney and included in the important 1980 collection Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, contains key statements of the ethno- and androcentricity of recent autobiographical

theory. Since this essay is seminal to contemporary considerations of autobiography, I will quote from it in some detail. Gusdorf posits that "autobiography is not to be found outside of our cultural area; one would say that it expresses a *concern peculiar to Western man*" (29) [emphasis added]. His catechism of autobiography begins "Each of us tends to think of himself as the center of a living space: I count, my existence is significant to the world, and my death will leave the world incomplete" (29). Gusdorf traces this sense of significance to the Copernican Revolution, when man was torn from alignment "to the great cosmic cycles" and found himself, instead, "engaged in an autonomous adventure" (31). According to Gusdorf, this turned "man's consciousness" inward to "reassemble the scattered elements of his individual life and to regroup them in a comprehensive sketch" (35). Without a sense of individuality, of self-conscious awareness, Gusdorf writes, autobiography cannot exist. "The author of an autobiography masters [the turmoil and fascination of Narcissus] by submitting to it; beyond all images, he follows unceasingly the call of his own being" (33). Calling on Hegel's statement that "consciousness of self is the birthplace of truth" Gusdorf describes autobiography as a means to self knowledge "thanks to the fact that it recomposes and interprets a life in its totality. . . . In other words, autobiography is a second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because

it adds to experience itself consciousness of it" (38). A sense of self-conscious individuality and the desire to order experience through a written account of the individual life seem to guide Gusdorf's theory.

Similarly, James Olney, in Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography (1972), sees the desire to order experience as central to the autobiographical project. He writes: "The most fruitful approach to the subject of autobiography, I believe, is to consider it neither as a formal nor as an historical matter, which would be to separate it from the writer's life and his personality, but rather to see it in relation to the vital impulse to order that has always caused man to create and that, in the end, determines both the nature and the form of what he creates." The work, then, no matter what form it takes "will express and reflect its maker" (3). Later he reinforces this point: "What one seeks in reading autobiography is not a date, a name, or a place, but a characteristic way of perceiving, of organizing" (37).

This tendency to theorize about the male autobiographer and his "characteristic way of perceiving the world" leads almost inevitably to the centrality of a certain *type* of writer. In The Examined Self (1964), a study of Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams and Henry James, for example, Robert F. Sayre finds a commonality among his three autobiographers. "One reason they are so absorbing," he suggests, "is that

these increasingly intense examinations somehow account for other men's lives as well; they comment profoundly on the American experience" (vii). Though, he adds later, "the great autobiographer is never really a typical man of his time, . . . he can be an especially acute witness to it" (184). But even with this qualification, Sayre's autobiographer becomes a prototype, a representative man. The theorist's tendency to universalize the singular life experience of the male autobiographer leads to an ethnocentric view of the world, excluding the experiences of non-Westerners, minorities and women. Alice A. Jardine rightly calls our attention to the connection between this process of representation and "the sorting out of identity and difference . . . naming, controlling, remembering, understanding" and to its complicitousness "with a violence as old as Western history itself" (119), a point I will return to in Part Three of this dissertation.

Sayre's carving out of public territory for the male autobiographer has roots in the oldest autobiographies in English. Cynthia S. Pomerleau explains that as early as the seventeenth century women wrote about their private lives, men their public: "The idea that oneself, one's feelings, one's spouse and domestic relations were properly and innately worth writing about was essentially a female idea, however tentatively conceived at the time" (28). This may have been because, as Annette Kolodny argues in her study of

Kate Millet's autobiography, "the fine distinctions between public and private, or trivial and important, which have served as guidelines for the male autobiographer, have never really been available to women" (240).

Carolyn G. Heilbrun, in "Woman's Autobiographical Writings: New Forms," likens women's orientation toward autobiographical writing to what Gusdorf has called a "preautobiographical era in human history." Gusdorf explains: "The individual does not oppose himself to all others; he does not feel himself to exist outside of others, and still less against others . . . the important unit is never the isolated being" (29). Alison M. Jaggar, in Feminist Politics and Human Nature, points out the male bias inherent in the theories that focus on the "isolated being," presupposing solipsism. She argues that it is hard to imagine women developing a theory "ignoring human interdependence and especially the long dependence of human young" (45). As Heilbrun says, women lived in Gusdorf's "preautobiographical era," until very recently. "Though they occasionally wrote about their own lives," she argues, "singularity was hardly to be boasted of. Even in the twentieth century, before the current women's movement, women had only what Patricia Spacks has called 'selves in hiding'(112). Their narratives of self were strictly bound in by convention and scarcely to be compared with those of the male autobiographer expressing, as Gusdorf puts it, 'the

wonder that he feels before the mystery of his own destiny.' Autobiography in that sense has been possible for women only in the last two decades, and then probably not in what theorists of the genre would call its true form" (14).

The stricture that dictates that autobiographies must "center exclusively or mostly on their authors, not on others," of course, not only limited women's tendency to write autobiographies in the traditional form, it also limited the reception of the ones they did write. As Jelinek first observed, women's autobiographies have been, historically, different from men's, often finding their most significant expressions of selfhood not through rugged individualism, but through identification with an "other," as can be seen, for example, in Margaret Cavendish's True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life or in The Book of Margery Kempe. As Susan Stanford Friedman points out, "The emphasis on individualism as the necessary precondition for autobiography is . . . a reflection of privilege, one that excludes from the canons of autobiography those writers who have been denied by history the illusion of individualism" (39). In other words, a sense of distinct individuality, negative and illusory though it may be, was a luxury that women, with their enforced gender-identification, were historically not allowed--and their writings reflect that.

This is especially significant in the development of autobiographical theory because, as Friedman makes clear in

her critique of Gusdorf: "The very sense of *identification, interdependence,* and *community* that Gusdorf dismisses from autobiographical selves are key elements in the development of a woman's identity, according to theorists like [Sheila] Rowbotham and [Nancy] Chodorow. Their models of women's selfhood highlight the unconscious masculine bias in Gusdorf's and other individualistic paradigms" (38). She also argues with Gusdorf's contention that "the consciousness of self upon which autobiography is premised is the sense of 'isolated being,' a belief in the self as a discrete, finite 'unit' of society. Man must be an island unto himself. Then, and only then, is autobiography possible" (36).

Indeed the woman's position in patriarchal culture, defined memorably by Simone de Beauvoir, of being the inessential, the object-Other where the subject is always male, sheds new light on what Gusdorf calls "a new spiritual revolution" which coincided with the appearance of autobiography. Gusdorf posits that when "the artist and the model coincide, the historian tackles himself as object . . . . The subject who seizes on himself for object inverts the natural direction of attention; it appears that in acting thus he violates certain secret taboos of human nature" (32). Gusdorf's autobiographical author/subject begins his new spiritual revolution by, in a sense, becoming woman, by placing himself in her "natural" position. When women take up the pen to write their autobiographies,

however, their *subject* position inverts Gusdorf's "natural direction of attention."[3] The implications of this are especially interesting when considered in light of Catherine MacKinnon's ideas about subjectivity and objectivity introduced in "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State." MacKinnon proposes that women, "having been objectified as sexual beings while stigmatized as ruled by subjective passions . . . reject the distinction between knowing subject and known object--the division between subjective and objective postures" (536). For women, she argues, "objectification *is* alienation." There is no distinction between objectification and alienation, she writes, "because women have not authored objectifications, we have been them" (541-2).

Of course, that makes autobiographical writing in its traditional sense a difficult proposition for women writers. As MacKinnon notes, "the problem of how the object can know herself as such is the same as how the alienated can know its own alienation" (542). In addition, as Smith explains, for the woman writer "to call attention to her distinctiveness is to become 'unfeminine.' To take a voice and to authorize a public life are to risk loss of reputation" (10). Kolodny similarly suggests that women have historically been reluctant to create an "artful invention" of themselves, as William L. Howarth theorizes the autobiographer must do, because women have been "defined, framed, restricted, and

simplified (for their own purposes) by everyone from Norman Mailer to Madison Avenue advertising executives" (240). Woman, who has been placed in the position of object and fixed there by the male gaze, performs a revolutionary act when she writes her story, as I will discuss in further detail later. Again, as Stanton so eloquently states and I emphasize: "Although the injunction against writing had somewhat lifted for some women in some contemporary places, autogynography. . . had a global and essentially therapeutic purpose: to constitute the female subject. In a phallocentric system, which defines her as the object, the inessential other to the same male subject--that The Second Sex has proved beyond a doubt--the *graphing* of the *auto* was an act of self-assertion that denied and reversed women's status" (14) [emphasis in original].

Many feminist theorists of autobiography have taken a similar political stand, calling attention to the strategies woman writers have used to write their stories in spite of cultural prohibitions against doing so. Following the Chodorow model of interdependence as a model of women's self-development, some have posited an other-identification similar to the paradigm first observed by Jelinek in her collection, Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism (1980), the first significant study of a women's autobiographical tradition. In her introductory essay to this volume Jelinek concludes, "In contrast to the

self-confident, one-dimensional self-image that men usually project [in autobiography], women often depict a multi-dimensional, fragmented self-image colored by a sense of inadequacy and alienation, of being outsiders or "other"; they feel the need for authentication, to prove their self-worth" (xiii). Mary Mason (writing the only essay on women's autobiography in Olney's collection) also concludes that "the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some "other" (210).

Spacks finds in the autobiographies of well-known women of the twentieth century a similar tendency to refrain from asserting a unique and independent individuality; instead, women like Golda Meir and Eleanor Roosevelt used their public commitment "to find an acceptable definition of self almost without declaring individuality" (121). She quotes Eleanor Roosevelt: ". . . my interest or sympathy or indignation is not aroused by an abstract cause but by the plight of a single person whom I have seen with my own eyes . . . . Out of my response to an individual develops an awareness of a problem of the community then to the country, and finally to the world." Spacks explains, "Happiness, as these women implicitly or explicitly evoke it, derives from relationship" (122). In an essay on Lillian Hellman's autobiographical writings, Marcus K. Bilson and Sidonie Smith also decide that

"Hellman renders the self through the 'other'" (179).

This sense of otherness takes on further significance when coupled with the insights of recent French theory, especially that of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, which describe, in opposition to Freudian theories of self-definition, the maintenance of a persistent tie with the mother. Though I will discuss this in further detail in Part Two, I will point out here that these theorists, and others following them, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, credit this link to the mother for a multi-voiced discourse characteristic of much of the experimental fiction writing of modernism. The ("true") fragmented self, so essential to the theoretical writings of the postmodernists, is revealed through fissures in the smooth façade of individuality. This individuality is now seen as only an illusion of Western humanism--an illusion linked in the twentieth century to Freudian constructs of successful individuation. Many of the feminist revisions of autobiographical theory cited herein rely on this observation to critique traditional views of autobiography.

Shari Benstock, for example, in her Introduction to The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings, sees diversity and divisions in women's autobiographical writings as characteristic of the genre. Indeed, she refuses to create a master theory of women's autobiography in order to avoid smoothing over these

divisions which themselves define the texts, as well as the feminist criticisms of the texts. She writes of the authors cited in her collection of essays, "The effort to theorize a paradigm of self that would include each of these women is revealed as naive and critically self-serving. The writing moment that promises to seal the self and to heal a divided subject instead opens a seam in the autobiographical text exposing what Felicity Nussbaum has termed a 'fissure of female discontinuity' that escapes the boundaries of any given theory of selfhood or writing practice" (9).

Stanton builds her theory of "autogynography" on a similar insight into the multiplicity of the self and its connection to others: "The female 'I' was thus not simply a texture woven of various selves; its threads, its life-lines, came from and extended to others. By that token, this 'I' represented a denial of a notion essential to the phallogocentric order: the totalized self-contained subject present-to-itself . . . . autogynography . . . dramatized the fundamental alterity and non-presence of the subject, even as it asserts itself discursively and strives toward an always impossible self-possession" (15).[4]

Interestingly, Jelinek, coming from a political or empirical perspective instead of Stanton's more linguistic and metaphorical one, notices almost the same characteristics of women's autobiographical writing. She observes:

> . . . irregularity rather than orderliness informs

> the self-portraits by women. The narratives of their lives are often not chronological and progressive but disconnected, fragmentary, or organized into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters. The multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write their autobiographies as well, and so by established critical standards, their life studies are excluded from the genre and cast into the 'nonartistic' categories of memoir, reminiscence, and other disjunctive forms. (17)

She, too, concludes that the traditional criterion "of orderliness, wholeness, or a harmonious shaping with which critics characterize autobiography is often not applicable to women's autobiographies" (19). Kolodny makes a similar (characteristic) connection between woman's cultural experience and her writing, tracing an "apparently loose or disjointed sentence style" in Millet's Flying to "the narrator's own 'broken and discontinuous experience'" (258).

Gusdorf, too, perceptively cites the impulse to order as "the original sin of autobiography," undermining and falsifying the text's connection with the author's lived experience. He writes that because "the narrative is conscious, and since the narrator's consciousness directs the narrative, it seems to him incontestable that it has also

directed his life" (41). Even so, Gusdorf himself commits the same sin in his discussion of autobiography, eliding the orderly text with a seamlessly unified author. Many of the revisionist feminist theorists do likewise, a point which Toril Moi makes (rather uncomfortably for American feminists) in Sexual/Textual Politics, where she condemns feminist critics of Virginia Woolf for their Western humanist bias. I will return to this discussion of subjectivity (and further problematize it) in Chapter Two.

Not being without sin myself, I hesitate to cast stones--or dole out blessings. But, returning to the observation that woman's lived experience has been more diverse, characterized by accommodation to a multiplicity of roles and demands, it appears that women's autobiographical texts and the theories which have recently sprung up around them are less prone to Gusdorf's "original sin." As Jelinek points out, "the projection of an image of self-confidence" has been characteristic of men's autobiographies (as any "resisting reader" of Henry Adams could attest). This, she writes, "is contrary to the self-image projected in women's autobiographies. What their life stories reveal is a self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding. The autobiographical intention is often powered by the motive to convince readers of their self-worth, to clarify, to affirm, and to authenticate their self-image. Thus, the idealization or

aggrandizement found in male autobiographies is not typical of the female mode" (15). A corollary lack of confidence in the inevitability of their own destiny seems to follow from this different view women autobiographers have taken of themselves. Thus, the woman writer's narrative is more fragmented, less an "artful invention" than those male texts held up by traditional theorists as exemplary autobiographies.

Interestingly, Susan Stanford Friedman finds the same hesitations which Jelinek cites as characteristic of woman's autobiographies in the autobiographies of minority men (and I would add in the writings of male theorists who have embraced postmodernism, such as Roland Barthes in his autobiographical work, Barthes by Barthes). When these women writers take up the subject position outside of the prescribed cultural boundaries of representations for woman, she posits, they must develop a "dual consciousness--the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription." This dual consciousness "directly parallels W.E.B. Du Bois's identification of dual consciousness for blacks living in a dominant white culture" (39). I will return to this insight in Part Three.

Thus, the feminist critique of traditional autobiographical theory shifts attention away from the idea of a clearly defined individual and a carefully ordered experience, a shift that problematizes subjectivity.

Traditional autobiographical method, as Heilbrun points out, simply doesn't work for women:

> Erik Erikson has said that autobiographies 'are written at certain late stages of life for the purpose of re-creating oneself in the image of one's own method; and they are written to make that image convincing.' As is usual with Erikson's observations about life histories, this applies more easily to men. Women do not look back to recreate themselves in keeping with some finally perceived ideal; rather, they look back towards the moment at which they found the courage to move forward into as yet unnarrated and unexplored ways of living; they have no 'image of one's own method.' (21)

Feminist revisionary autobiographical theory also moves from the narratives of the public man to narratives of women's self-development in private as well as public spheres, because as Spacks points out, "commitment to formal autobiography, a story of the self written with the intent of dissemination, implies also a claim of significance--a fact that troubled early practitioners who felt obliged to defend themselves against the charge of vanity by asserting the exemplary shape of their experience or the didactic intent of their prose. Women, for obvious social reasons, have traditionally had more difficulty than men about making public claims of their own importance" (112). Elizabeth

Winston also notes that woman autobiographers who moved into the public sphere found themselves in an uncomfortable position: "Those whose autobiographies were published before 1920 tended to establish a conciliatory relationship to their readers, by this means attempting to justify their untraditional ways of living and writing so as to gain the audience's sympathy and acceptance. Women who published autobiographies after 1920, however, no longer apologized for their careers and successes, though a few still showed signs of uneasiness at having violated cultural expectations for women" (93).

Finally, feminist autobiographical theory focuses on relationships and on women's cultural identification as Object-other. Again, Jelinek insists that woman autobiographers place emphasis "on the personal, especially on people, rather than on their life work, their professional success, or their connectedness to current political or intellectual history." This, she adds, "clearly contradicts the established criterion about the content of autobiography" (10).

When we review the autobiographical tradition, it becomes obvious that women writers and feminist critics have, indeed, written "in a different voice," altering autobiography and the terms of our discourse about it. Though I see this difference as mainly culturally constructed--women responding to our different cultural roles--nonetheless, I find the

ifference significant enough to warrant the *separate* study
f a women's autobiographical tradition, as many of studies
've cited here undertake. As the feminist critique continues
o develop, it affects traditional autobiographical theory in
ignificant ways. For example, though Olney includes only
ary Mason's essay on woman's autobiography, his introductory
ssay demonstrates a significant shift from the theory of his
arlier Metaphors of Self (1972). He acknowledges the
nfluence of minority and feminist autobiographical theory
nd, with a nod to postmodernism, calls Michel Leiris's
endless, open-ended, labyrinthine [and, of course, male]
ntiautobiography" the "classic autobiography" for our time
27).

As autobiographical theory continues to develop, the
iscourse will continue to change, to focus on different
roblems and different strengths, because just as
utobiography is an act that "alters in some degree the shape
f one's life and leaves one different" (Pascal 183),
heorizing is an act that alters the shape of our discourse.

Notes

[1] All of these summaries are helpful in setting a context for contemporary autobiographical theory; I would suggest turning to Jelinek's Introduction in The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present for a more thorough historical overview than I have thought necessary to develop in this chapter. Also exceptionally useful is James Olney's "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," the opening essay in his collection Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical.

[2] Jaggar's discussion of traditional liberalism can be found in Feminist Politics and Human Nature, especially Chapters Two and Three.

[3] I will return to this point in Chapter Two, but for now I will simply make clear that I am not discussing an unproblematic "subject" position, nor insinuating that this is any way a natural or necessary order of things.

[4] Again, Stanton's explanation of the female "I" is, of course, dependent on the insights of modernity which I will examine in further detail in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two: Autobiographical Fiction

Because the aim of the project is to develop a theory of autobiographical *fiction*, I will now move from my survey of the autobiographical tradition to a look at the intersections of autobiography and fiction. Though this may sound like an easy shift, it brings up complex questions about the nature of fiction and truth, questions which are central to postmodernist literary theory. Indeed, Pascal in his essay "The Autobiographical Novel and The Autobiography" warns that "If one starts with the ideas that the terms 'fictional' and 'true' will serve to distinguish these two forms of writing, one is doomed to disappointment" (134). Many theorists of autobiography have confronted the problems such distinctions hold for their work. I will focus on these problems as they apply to self-representation in autobiographical writing.

Lejeune, in Le Pacte autobiographique, claims that "internally" there is "no difference between an autobiography and an autobiographical novel." The difference comes out only in the reader's *perception* of the difference, he theorizes (52). Darrel Mansell, in an essay on fact in autobiography included in Stone's collection The American Autobiography, also places the distinction between the two genres on an understanding between reader and writer, though while Lejeune's theory weighs heavily toward the reader,

Mansell's centers on the writer and "his intention." According to Mansell, "when we are determining which side of the great fact-fiction watershed a book belongs on, its conforming or not conforming to the facts of reality is irrelevant. We make our determination on the basis of the author's declared or inferred intention, and the probability or plausibility of what he says is merely one of many means at his disposal for establishing his intention. *The genre 'autobiography' seems therefore a matter of the author's intention, nothing more*" (68) [emphasis added].

Like Lejeune, Mansell finds nothing apparently or inherently different in the two genres. He states strongly that "there is no way an author or anybody else could make a distinction between autobiography and fiction that would not crumble in his hands. There is nothing decisive in the relation of word to what happened, nothing decisive in the writer's own mental processes, nothing decisive in the organization of words on the page--nothing that makes an essential distinction between the two kinds of writing" (71). But for some reason we make the distinction, Mansell adds, because "somehow an 'intention' declares itself to us" (72). He concludes by placing the distinction between autobiography and fiction in "the very constitution of the mind" of the writers and readers. He explains: "All texts tend to be a conflation of fact and fiction. But the intending or inferring mind has *got* to declare for one or the other in

spite of the unimpeachable truth that such a distinction does not 'exist' in the texts themselves" (75).

Stone, too, insists that "the reader completes the autobiographical act in much the same way the psychoanalyst's interpretation completes a dream" (6). He cites Mansell, Lejeune and Barrett John Mandel who all agree that writers and readers form a pact "or contractual community" which decides the terms of differentiation between fiction and truth. "They commonly agree," writes Stone, "that the language of autobiography points both *outward* to the world of remembered experience and *inward* to a reflective consciousness. Thus," he concludes, "like all narratives--including of course, histories--autobiography is simultaneously fiction and fact" (7).

Likewise, though on a larger scale, Michael Riffaterre argues in Fictional Truth that *narrative truth* has nothing to do with *factuality* "nor does the interpretation or esthetic evaluation of fictional narrative require that it be verified against reality." Instead, for Riffaterre, truth is tied up with the concept of referentiality. He relies on the agreements that "exist in any language and with which all speakers of that language are familiar" to provide a basis for referentiality--for a relationship between language and reality. Thus, "Words may lie yet still tell a truth if the rules are followed" (xiii).

Though Lejeune, Mansell, and Stone's arguments rely on an

understanding of the relationship between reader and text and Riffaterre's on a perceived foundation of rules all speakers understand, all three deny any inherent difference between fiction and truth. Apparently, Riffaterre would even argue that fiction contains more truth than does nonfiction. Gusdorf makes a similar claim for autobiography, saying that "in autobiography the truth of facts is subordinate to the truth of the man, for it is first of all the man who is in question. The narrative offers us the testimony of a man about himself, the contest of a being in dialogue with itself, seeking its innermost fidelity . . . . The significance of autobiography should therefore be sought beyond truth and falsity" (43). But before we abandon this distinction as irrelevant, what is Gusdorf's "truth of the man" which is superior to a mere "truth of facts"? What is this truth that fiction declares? And how does it relate to the distinction between "novel" and "autobiography" and to the Dewey Decimal classifications of "fiction" and "nonfiction"?

Taking a cue from Riffaterre, I will begin my examination of these questions by confronting the concept of referentiality, the relationship between language and truth. Riffaterre, again, finds a basis for referentiality in the shared system of rules which all speakers of a language share--a characteristically structuralist view. Critics of structuralism argue that this concept, though based on faith

in empirical, scientific analysis of language systems, has as its foundation a Platonic belief in "true originals." In other words, as Plato explains in Book X of The Republic, "Whenever a number of individuals have a common name, we assume that there is one corresponding idea or form" (3). This idea or form is the original thing (or the ultimate "thingness," as some have described it), in the mind of God, if you will, and all reproductions of it are mere imitations hearkening back to the one original. Artists and poets are implicated in Plato's system for being "thrice removed" from the original thing, creating, unforgiveably, an "imitation of an imitation."[1]

This assumption of art as mimesis is, of course, a central concept in the tradition of literature and of literary criticism, one which I only begin to develop here, but for the purpose of this essay suffice it to say that art's ability to reproduce truth has been questioned, revised but, most often, relied upon in Western tradition at least since Plato. Perhaps, then, the most striking characteristic ideology of postmodernism as we've inherited it from Continental theory is the end of this belief. Since World War II in Europe and, in the U.S. at least since Jacques Derrida delivered his highly influential critique of Levi-Strauss and structuralism, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," at Johns Hopkins in 1966 the idea of a "transcendental signified" has been

consistently challenged. Derrida demonstrated that words as signifiers don't refer back to "true originals," but only to other signifiers. As Hazard Adams and LeRoy Searle explain, "Fundamentally Derrida's attack was on the assumption lying behind the whole tradition of Western metaphysics as he saw it. Western metaphysics was the prisoner of the idea of 'being as presence,' that is, the notion of some anchor of being behind language, which was its ultimate truth or referent. He called this notion 'logocentrism' . . . " (8).

Postmodernism, following Derrida, contends that we cannot talk about a transcendent truth beyond language because everything has its being in and through language, and language is subject to the "endless deferral of meaning." A term, then, has meaning only *in relation to* other terms, only in relation to what it isn't. This concept Derrida calls "différance." Steering back to the question at hand, then, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between fiction and truth, since both are equally constructs of language and neither can claim referentiality. Without a transcendental signified, what would they refer to? What would make the fictional world of the novel any more "true" than the "real" world of lived experience?

Paul de Man in "Autobiography as De-facement" finds the fascination of autobiography in this tension--in autobiography's inability to live up to our expectations for it because of the fallacy of logocentrism. "The interest of

autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge--it does not--but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological situations" (922). Autobiography, then, gives no more reliable an access to truth than does any "textual system." Yet even without the possibility of revealed self-knowledge, autobiographical writing, revolving as it does around parallel poles of author and subject, seems to be somehow more "true" than fiction.

This observation to which most of us still cling leads inevitably to the question of subjectivity, what I would call the other major preoccupation of postmodernism. Mandel, for example, relies, again, on the presence of speaking and reading subjects to locate the "truth" of autobiography. He contends that "What defictionalizes autobiography is both the readers' powers of cocreation and the author's animation in the present of his or her past. The author, it may be said, is always present in autobiography" (64). Apparently influenced by the philosophies of Hans-Georg Godamer, he later he adds, "it is the very overlapping of autobiographer's and the reader's horizons that adds to the undeniable aura of truthfulness surrounding the text" (68).

However, Michel Foucault in "What is an Author" (1969) sends the concept of "subjectivity" careening into the same undifferentiated discursive space as Derrida sent "truth."

Arguing that the "author-function" is a construct of "the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses" and not a transcendent "originating subject," he concludes "the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse" (148). Subjectivity, then, is also a function of language, having existence only within language. The idea of the unified, whole "man" of Western humanism which I addressed in Chapter One depends, just as Plato's mimesis depends, on the presence of the transcendental signified which is *beyond language*.

Foucault explains how the notion of 'author' is connected to this concept of Western man. The coming into being of the author, he says, constitutes "the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge and literature, or in the history of philosophy and science" (139). The oral storytelling and folk traditions which preceded this moment found little need to fix "property value" in the name of the author. It is time again, he says, to stop letting our adherence to outdated ideas of transcendence hold us back. "Is it not necessary to draw a line between those who believe that we can continue to situate our present discontinuities within the historical and transcendental tradition of the nineteenth century and those who are making a great effort to liberate themselves, once

and for all, from this this conceptual framework?" (141). Or, as John Barth put it, "It did happen: Freud and Einstein and two world wars and the Russian and sexual revolutions and automobiles and airplanes and telephones and radios and movies and urbanization, and now nuclear weaponry and television and microchip technology and the new feminism and the rest, and there's no going back to Tolstoy and Dickens & Co, except on nostalgia trips" (Jardine 23).[2]

Dragged into this post-Derridean, post-Foucauldian age of postmodernism, autobiographical theory has had to adapt itself to new exigencies. The autobiographical text is no longer an unproblematized historical account of a person's life but, in the words of Roland Barthes, "a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. . . . a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture" (146).[3] Some theorists of autobiography have responded to the demands of these new insights. Returning with them, then, to the distinction between autobiography and fiction, returning without transcendent truth and without the author-subject, where do we go from here?

Shari Benstock, like Alice Jardine, finds a new, postmodern speaking/writing subject the most fruitful field of inquiry in her explorations of autobiography.[4] Focussing on how both text and autobiographical subject are constituted in language, she theorizes, "language is neither an external

force nor a 'tool' of expression, but the very symbolic system that both constructs and is constructed by the writing subject" (16). She writes of the "primordially divided" subject and notes that "The self that would reside at the center of the text is decentered--and often is absent altogether--in women's autobiographical texts" (20). Therefore, the postmodern self, divided and decentered, opens a new series of questions about subjectivity and texts, questions about "the unsettling of the 'I'/the unsettling of self-unity," questions she finds most compelling in recent autobiographical texts by women (21). "Language, she writes, "which operates according to a principle of division and separation, is the medium by which and through which the 'self' is constructed. 'Writing the self' is therefore a process of simultaneous sealing and splitting that can only trace fissures of discontinuity" (29). In Part Two of this dissertation, I will consider in greater detail this concept of "writing the self" through language.

Bernstock also criticizes Gusdorf for his failure to recognize the "unsettling of self-unity" in his notion that the artist and model coincide in autobiography. This so-called coincidence, she says, is itself a fiction, an illusion like the child's image of itself in Lacan's mirror stage. Like the autobiographer, she writes, "The developing child drives toward fusion and homogeneity in the construction of a 'self' . . . against the effects of

division and dissolution" (12). Gusdorf's definition of autobiography as "a mirror in which the individual reflects his own image," argues Benstock:

> . . . overlooks what might be the most interesting aspect of the autobiographical: the measure to which 'self' and 'self-image' might not coincide, can never coincide in language--not because certain forms of self-writing are not self-conscious enough but because they have no investment in creating a cohesive self over time. Indeed, they seem to exploit difference and change over sameness and identity: their writing follows the "seam" of the conscious/unconscious where boundaries between internal and external overlap. Such writing puts into question the whole notion of "genre" as outlined by the exclusionary methods of Gusdorf's rather narrow definition of the auto-biographical. And it is not surprising that the question of "genre" often rides on the question of gender(15).[5]

Domna C. Stanton, too, focuses on the transformation of the divided *female* subject of autobiography through postmodern linguistic theories inspired by Lacan. She critiques Lejeune's "avowed belief in truth value and the identity of the proper name" as "the profound subject of autobiography" and argues that a woman's signature does not attempt to fix meaning in the same way that this proper name

of the male subject attempted to (10). Stanton argues, almost in spite of herself, that "at this symbolic moment the female signature, unlike the generic fixation, had liberating rather than constraining effects" (16), though she hesitates before the contradictions inherent in a belief that "the gender of the author did make a difference, at this discursive point in time" (17). Trapped by the contradictions of both embracing and rejecting gender distinctions and the category "author," Stanton finds herself at an irresolvable impasse.

Nancy Hartsock cites this impasse between postmodernist thinking and feminist politics in her essay "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories" (1987). Looking at the relation between academics and activism, she writes, "Somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at this moment in history, when so many groups are engaged in 'nation-alisms,' which involve redefinitions of the marginalized Others, that doubt arises in the academy about the nature of the 'subject,' about the possibilities for a general theory which can describe the world, about historical 'progress.' Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes 'problematic'" (196)? Hartsock implicates the "transcendent voice of the Enlightenment attempting to come to grips with the social and

historical changes of the middle to late twentieth century" and trying to put the argument on its own terms for this contradiction. Yet her Marxist solution--to transform power relations and "to change the world, not simply to redescribe ourselves or reinterpret the world yet again" (206)--does not solve the problem.

The problem is the competing desires to embrace the liberating concepts of postmodernism, which free us from the oppressive ideologies of Western humanism, and to hold fast to the (finally silencing) traditional principles which allow us to make political arguments in the culture we deal with at this moment in time. And this problem continues to create a dilemma for feminist thinkers.[6] Nancy K. Miller apparently decides in "Arachnologies" that the gendered signature must be maintained. She argues against Barthes's emphasis on the text as "hyphology," which, she says, "chooses the spider's *web* over the spider" and in which "the subject is self-consciously erased by a model of text production which acts to foreclose the question of agency itself" (80). She proposes, instead, "arachnology," which places the spider, i.e., the writing subject, again at the center of the theory. She reinscribes the same subject which Barthes's "Death of the Author" threatens (again) to erase.

I would propose, with Miller, a reinscription of the gendered subject at the moment of creation. In other words, as a woman writes her story, she relies on cultural myths of

self creation, on *stories*. As Heilbrun notes, "We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts." As an autobiographer creates her story, she turns to the stories which have preceded hers to model her own. This, in a sense, makes the unified Western humanist male a self-fulfilling prophecy even in women's texts. She writes not her story, but *the* story. In any case, a subject is present in the creation of the text inasmuch as the writing subject places it there, inasmuch as a subject is present in our cultural mythmaking.

However, if the subject is just that, a cultural myth, then, as Benstock points out, the fascination of autobiography comes in finding the fissures in the smooth façade of that myth. We know the unified self is an illusion, like the illusion of Lacan's mirror image, as Benstock observes. The tension between the presence and nonpresence of the subject becomes, for the postmodernist observer, the driving force behind the autobiographical impulse. This holds especially true for women's texts, as I will explain in Part Two, because of the importance of the nonpresence of the female in Western culture. The fragmented nature of the text--the "tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture"--also seems more applicable to the experience of women and minorities who are (and have been historically) excluded from full participation in the dominant culture and who have created competing traditions of

their own. Woman autobiographers, I will argue, lived with and confronted the postmodernist dilemma long before we identified it.

I find similar tensions in autobiographical texts at the reading moment, when readers also trained in the myths of Western culture, insist on bringing the subject into being as a unified, whole entity. We see the writer writing her story, and we know it's a "true" story, *her* story; yet on another level, we can no longer accept these terms. We are careful when we discuss the author in intellectual circles so that we don't let slip our naive belief in the truth of her existence. This is, after all, an autobiographical *text*. We create the author, the text does not deliver her up fully formed, as Athena from the head of Zeus.

Because these tensions are so much more apparent when the questions of truth and subjectivity becomes central--in the autobiographical text--I find this a most fascinating field of inquiry. The texts that interest me most and that will be the focus of this study are, again, autobiographical novels. When I introduced the concept of fictionality into the equation of truth and subjectivity, my field of inquiry expanded yet again. When an autobiographer fictionalizes her life, she takes liberties with cultural constructs of truth and fiction, breaking taboos and redrawing lines of definition. Her self creation becomes self-conscious in a way the "pure autobiography" would not allow. As Pascal

observes, "A novelistic disguise was necessary, no doubt, in times when writers were more reluctant to be candid about themselves and their acquaintance" (135). I contend that these women autobiographical novelists, freed somewhat by their posture of fiction from the constraints imposed on women and minorities in their post-World War I societies, used the disguises of fiction in order to be more honest about their life experiences. In other words, they were free to create selves in some senses *outside of prescribed culture boundaries*. I will, of course, return to this contention in later parts of this study.

Because I see the dilemma of postmodernism placing feminists in a similar position, where we are "making a great effort to liberate [our]selves from false cultural myths and models, the stories these five women create in their effort to deal with a new twentieth-century world become even more meaningful. For while we deny the truth value of these myths of Western humanism--the myths of the humanistic man and of transcendent truth beyond language--we cannot deny their cultural power nor their hand in our creation. We are socialized to live with them, penalized and restricted by them and constantly subject to their hegemonic power.[7] We cannot speak without reinscribing them. Nor can we move on in our feminisms by denying them without first confronting and deconstructing them. That is, as I see it, the radical purpose of these five novels and of this dissertation.

Thus, I write of the subject of autobiographical fiction, but never an unproblematized subject. I write of the subject who exists in our cultural myths of modernism and that subject which seems much more likely to exist, the fragmented, decentered subject of our postmodern myths, the subject "stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse." I write of the gendered female subject, because she does exist in all of our discourse. Indeed, as I will explain further in Chapter Four, her absence make our language possible. I write of how five women writers rework this subject as they bear her through the Word. I write, sometimes unproblematically, about these "writers," because for me they are very much alive in the lines (and between the lines) of their novels. I have turned about and created them with some degree of confidence in the referentiality of their language and some degree of faith in their existence as (Western humanistic) subjects. No doubt, I write about them with some sense of wonderment.

I also write with some degree of faith in my language to express ideas that others will be able to comprehend. I place the value on women's experience (as mediated by language) which I find in the most responsible of feminist literary criticism. Though I do not find the solution Hartsock proposes above to be wholly workable, I do agree with her Marxian aim "to change the world, not simply to

redescribe ourselves or reinterpret the world yet again" (206). Redescription and reinterpretation, however, seem to me to be a necessary part of the change. We do live by fiction. Gail Godwin writes of autobiography, "I believe our lives shape our fiction just as much as our fiction gives shape to our lives. I'm most comfortable speaking for myself, but I'm convinced that I'm speaking for my favorite writers, as well. . . . They wrote to discover, to work out, to test their ideas in the process of writing. As they worked on their novels, they worked on their lives: on their vision of life. They tested it, revised it, expanded it. . . . They revised their judgments as they became more implicated with their characters, *they stumbled on new connections, they reached new insights, and, as their characters grew and changed, they found themselves growing and changing, too*" (9) [emphasis added].

This writing project, "fictional" in some ways and, of course, autobiographical in others, has had a similar effect on me as I begin to understand, as Heilbrun said, "the way autobiography works in fiction, and fiction in autobiography" (118).

Notes

[1] Riffaterre and other structuralists would most likely deny this connection to Platonism and refer, instead, not to true originals but, again, to shared language rules.

[2] I take the liberty of borrowing this quote from Jardine because I found it so appropriate. She notes, however, that he is here addressing fiction writing specifically. (This may or may not be a legitimate categorization, in terms of this study.) She cites Barth in "The Literature of Replenishment," Atlantic Monthly, January 1980, p.70.

[3] Barthes is discussing texts in general, not autobiographical texts specifically. However, his autobiographical text (Barthes by Barthes), again, makes clear that postmodernism has undermined not only traditional ideas of discourse and texts in general, but of autobiography in particular.

[4] This stance is perhaps reflective of her interest in French theory. Kristeva, most notably, takes the speaking subject as her primary field of inquiry.

[5] Again, I will discuss this point in more detail in Chapter 1, Part Two of this dissertation when I address the relevance of French feminisms and psycho-linguistic constructs of female self-development and language acquisition to autobiographical theory.

[6] Nancy K. Miller and Peggy Kamuf debated this point in Diacritics (Summer 1982).

[7] For a helpful and excellent discussion of this hegemonic power, see Raymond Williams on "Hegemony" in Marxism and Literature (1977).

Chapter Three: Modernism and Autobiographical Fiction

Though "modernism" (like autobiography) is most often defined even today in terms of male writers--Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, Hemingway, Faulkner--it is unquestionable that women writers of the early twentieth century were influential in developing new strategies for literature. H.D. and the Imagist poets, Gertrude Stein and her experiments with form and language, Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes and their innovative novels were often cited by critics of the 'twenties and 'thirties as central to the modernist project.[1] However, as modernism came to be defined and redefined in later years, women writers were written out. David Lodge, in his 1976 Inaugural Lecture on "Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism" for the University of Birmingham, for example, defines all three modernist movements in terms of male writers, speaks of the high "Eliot-Pound modernist mode" and never mentions a woman writer--not even Woolf. In Peter Faulkner's brief introduction to modernism, published in 1977, Woolf is cited along with Eliot, Pound, Joyce and Lawrence as a key figure of that literary period--the only woman to be so recognized. In his 1986 anthology, A Modernist Reader, Faulkner adds Amy Lowell to the ranks, but surrounds her with James, Ford Madox Ford and six new male writers.[2]

As Nina Baym and Gilbert and Gubar point out, in claiming modernism as a male enterprise, critics and writers created their "ideal order" by cutting off or redefining all that was "female" in the literature of the time.[3] Maurice Beebe, for example, defines modernism as:

> . . . an international current of sensibility which dominated art and literature from the last quarter of the 19th century until about 1945--from the Impressionist exhibitions of the 1870s and the first writings of Henry James to about the time of the Second World War. Modernist literature is distinguished by its formalism. It insists on the importance of structure and design--the aesthetic autonomy and independent whatness of the work of art--almost to the degree summarized by the famous dictum that "a poem should not mean but be." Secondly, Modernism is characterized by an attitude of detachment and non-commitment which I would put under the general heading of "irony" in the sense of that term as used by the New Critics. Third, Modernist literature makes use of myth not in the way myth was used earlier, as a discipline for belief or a subject of interpretation, but as an arbitrary means of ordering art. And, finally, . . . Modernist art turns back upon itself and is largely concerned with its own creation and composition. The Impressionists'

> insistence that the viewer is more important than the subject viewed leads ultimately to the solipsistic worlds-within-worlds of Modernist art and literature. (23)

Beebe, too, characterizes modernism via male artists--"Flaubert, James, Conrad, Ford"--and in New Critical terms (which were, of course, created by elite white male academics). Certainly formalism and self-reflexivity are significant aspects of modernism, as evidenced by the experimentations with genre, but the "independent whatness" and "aesthetic autonomy" of the work are principles that women writers, like Zora Neale Hurston, Anzia Yezierska, Nella Larsen and Harriet Arnow, and male writers, like John Steinbeck, Nathaniel West and Richard Wright, rejected through their emphasis on social context. Beebe's ironic "attitude of detachment and non-commitment" characterized only a small portion of modernism. Martha Gellhorn satirizes that attitude with her world-weary foreign press corps in A Stricken Field. Her narrator's story in this autobiographical novel is one of intense involvement and commitment against the backdrop of this stylish detachment, as is Lillian Hellman's story "Julia" from Pentimento. And the use of myth as arbitrary ordering of art in a chaotic world may hold true for "The Wasteland" but it does little to explain the depth of belief beneath the romance myth that is the subject of Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground and, to a lesser

extent, of H.D.'s HERmione. As for solipsism and an emphasis on the viewer rather than the subject viewed, the focus, later in this chapter, on the rise of autobiographical fiction during the modernist period will, I hope, undermine this premise.

To explain away the significant achievements of women modernists, critics have had to revise our perceptions of much of the really new work of the period. Faulkner and Joyce become the perceptive men who experimented with language, point of view and narrative style, revealing psychological truths through the way they tell a tale. Little recognition, however is afforded Stein, whose Three Lives was arguably the first of such experiments. Even less attention goes to the writers of the Harlem Renaissance whose experimentations were often paired with a social consciousness that added another dimension to Modernism and perceptively prefigured later Marxist theories of literature.

It is my contention that the autobiographical work of the authors I study in this project opened doors to modernist fiction that authors, until then, had only been tentatively approaching. I will also argue, in the chapters which follow, that Woolf and H.D. experiment with language for a purpose--to find a female language, a woman's sentence in a language that has been dominated and defined by men--while experimental male modernists seem out to prove that language

has no purpose--that it is arbitrary and ultimately meaningless (thus, Eliot's "Shakespeherian Rag" and Joyce's "contransmagnificandjewbangtantiality," which seem almost an absurd sort of one-upmanship on Stein). Finally, I will look at an immigrant writer, a lesbian writer, and a writer of the Harlem Renaissance whose interest in self-exploration, community and social issues debunk some of our favorite myths of Modernism.

The fear that the really new works of art of the women modernists would alter our perception of our literary and thus historical past and our conception of art was a powerful and intimidating force at work in modernism, as Gilbert and Gubar contend in No Man's Land: The War of the Words. It's not surprising, then, that our estimation of those new works and their place in the our past have been so carefully guarded in the academy and by the critical establishment. Gilbert and Gubar, in the first two installments of their projected three-volume work on modernism, make a significant contribution to the redefinition of early twentieth-century literature from the feminist perspective and to the reclamation of what is innovative in modernist art. Other feminist critics--Shari Benstock, Marianne DeKoven, Jane Marcus, Alicia Ostricker, Bonnie Kime Scott--have theorized a female modernism, "a separate, previously buried or discredited tradition (or anti-tradition) of modernist writing by women that is radically different in many ways

from 'high canonical male modernism'" (DeKoven 19). In this chapter, I will continue that project, redefining modernism by restoring some of the original concerns of the writers of the period, concerns that have been obscured as we've viewed modernism from the interested perspective of critics.[4]

The spirit of the age of modernism is usually characterized by the philosophical upheaval brought about through the undermining of our comfortable views of humanity and God. Though I could argue that this began with the Copernican revolution, when humankind stepped down from its safe place in the center of the universe, it seems to have become inevitable by the late nineteenth century in the writings of Darwin, Nietzsche and Freud. Darwin's emphasis on instinct rather than intellect and his placing of human beings along an evolutionary chain that included all other life overturned Enlightenment views of "the rational man" as the rightful ruler of the world. Nietzsche's rejection of Christian morality and embracing of power and the "revision of all values" further problematized the Western sense of self-definition. Finally, Freud's theories of the unconscious and human psychological development placed humankind out of control of our own destiny. Explanations for human behaviors were traced to childhood and infancy and to unconscious "drives."

Freud's first important work was published in 1899, and he visited the U.S. in 1909. Thereafter, his works were

widely read and discussed by mainstream Anglo-American artists. His influence is obvious in the work of many modernist writers, especially Lawrence and the later drama of Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill. However, his influence was much more pervasive, as the concerns of psychological inquiry touched all parts of modern culture. Peter Faulkner contends that "it could be argued that the consciousness of the modern artist has been rendered more self-directed by the influence of psychological investigation, revealing the complexity of the human personality, and of philosophical enquiry, emphasizing the role of the agent in creating the reality that he experiences" (21). Certainly Freud's work did more than give artists new terms to use. It radically and permanently changed their view of themselves and their world. I will explore this in more detail in Part Two of this project.

The writings of Karl Marx also exerted influence on the temper of the times. Gone was the shared sense of reality among the privileged as Marx demanded attention--and power--for the working classes. Faulkner posits that "In general what was happening can be seen as a breaking-up (more or less violent in different countries and areas of activity) of the nineteenth-century consensus" (14). Though I question the existence of a universal consensus in the golden past, it is true that social and philosophical upheavals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries knocked the

foundation from beneath the intellectual traditions of Western humanism. Though many writers still strove for some sense of unity in their art, they had to locate new sources for it. Many, like T.S. Eliot, turned to myth. Guided by Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough, an ambitious anthropological study of humanity's rites, beliefs and institutions, Eliot built his "Wasteland" imagery around traditional motifs of magic and religion.

A second popular characteristic of modernism goes hand-in-hand with philosophical upheaval--disillusionment. Here Stein's epigraph "You are all a lost generation" is an often-repeated refrain. Hemingway's heroes are the epitome of this Lost Generation, the quintessential existentialist stoics.[5] Cleanth Brooks writes of these heroes that they "find little more in which to believe than courage and a certain personal dignity as they look out upon a world bereft of meaning" (1805). Also significant in defining modernism is the fact that most critics place it between two wars, that is beginning just before World War I and ending with World War II. Using these major catastrophic events as starting and ending points attest to the pervasive sense of hopelessness and loss of control which, critics say, characterizes the writing of the periods.

The problem of making meaning also becomes central for the modernist artist, struck by what Peter Faulkner calls "an unremitting self-consciousness" (19) in the face of the

pervasive relativism and subjectivity which resulted from the loss of the transcendent--the loss Nietzsche characterized as the death of God. The modernist mode, as it came to defined, was to beat back relativism and subjectivity with the objectivity and distance of scientific inquiry--to strive for a mature, ironic detachment. This became even more urgent as artists began to see themselves not only as craftspersons, but also as intellectual trendsetters, as the prophets of a new age. Indeed, with religious myths ravaged by Nietzsche and Frazer, only the artist and the intellectual were left to fill the void.

So the artists took their experimentation very seriously, questioning the forms and purposes of literature just as Freud, Darwin, Nietzsche and Marx had questioned other intellectual traditions. Their goal was to make art appear natural and unconstructed, even as they strained over every word and sentence. Lodge argues that modernism "turned its back on the traditional idea of art as imitation and substituted the ideas of art as an autonomous activity" (3). With the sure sense of reality lost, "the effort to capture reality in narrative fiction, pursued with a certain degree of intensity, brings the writer out on the other side of 'realism.'" Lodge explains:

> The writer's prose style, however sordid and banal the experience it is supposed to be mediating, is so highly and lovingly polished that it ceases to be

> transparent but calls attention to itself by the brilliant reflections glancing from its surfaces. Then, pursuing reality out of the daylight world of empirical common sense into the individual's consciousness, or subconscious, and ultimately the collective unconscious, discarding the traditional narrative structures of chronological succession and logical cause and effect, as being false to the essentially chaotic and problematic nature of subjective experience, the novelist finds himself relying more and more on literary strategies and devices that belong to poetry, and specifically to Symbolist poetry, rather than to prose: allusion to literary models and mythical archetypes, for instance, and the repetition of images, symbols and other motifs--what E.M. Forster described . . . as "rhythm" in the novel. (4)

Thus, for many, formalist, symbolist poetry became high modernism; the more a novel or short story resembled poetry, it followed, the better it was. Indeed, some "novels" blended short stories, poetry and vignettes yet retained the symbolic unity so essential to high modernism--Stein's Three Lives, for example, or Hemingway's In Or Time or Jean Toomer's Cane.

The experimentation of modernist writers moved into other areas, beyond pen and paper. With the restrictions of

Prohibition in place in the U.S., young American writers sought the freedom of Europe and established an artistic community of expatriates in Paris. There they notoriously indulged in drinking and in the sexual freedoms of what Fitzgerald called "the Jazz Age," as characterized by Hemingway in The Sun Also Rises. According to Cleanth Brooks, this was also a time for young, American writers to redefine the traditional American idealism of Franklin and Jefferson. "American literature," he argues, "[is] a record of unique value, for in it the reader can live through the fortunes of American idealism as it has to meet the shock of lived experience" (1826). Nick Carraway, the prototypical innocent, agrarian Midwesterner, for example, confronts the corruption of the wealthy as he spends a summer in and around New York City in The Great Gatsby. Recurring images of the city in the mainstream literature of the time demonstrate this same confrontation between the innocent and the contamination of industrialism and wealth--John Dos Passos's Manhattan Transfer, for example, or Lawrence's Sons and Lovers.

Marianne DeKoven also points out that the preoccupation with experimentation, the (in)famous modernist "impulse to 'make it new'" came with both a disgust for the recent past and ""a fear of the 'new' itself: a fear of loss of privilege and power, projected as fear of chaos, anarchy, the disintegration of the self," which often expressed itself as

a fear of women, a view Gilbert and Gubar support (35).

I've already pointed out above how these characteristics of modernism were developed with reference to mostly male literature by critics with an interest in promoting their favorite writers. I won't deny having a similar interest. As I've studied modernism, I have become convinced that the autobiographical mode was influential in helping to incorporate linguistic innovations into modernism and in providing a means to apply the psychological insights into the human personality developed by Freud and his followers. In this sense, the autobiographical fiction of the modern period ushered in postmodernism and the questions central to its development which I discussed in Chapter Two. Women's autobiographical fiction, especially, highlighted multiplicity, fragmentation and decentered subjectivity and was first to capture the cadences of the pre-symbolic language of the infant-mother dyad, a phenomenon I will discuss further in Part Two. Autobiographical fiction also provided a means for writers on the margins of mainstream culture to explore their place in early twentieth-century society--and to change that society in meaningful ways. These, I submit, should be among the key characteristics of modernism.

The sheer number of autobiographical novels from the modernist period adds a lot of literary weight to an argument about their significance. Lawrence and Joyce, Hemingway and

Fitzgerald all wrote important autobiographical novels. In addition, H.D.'s HERmione and Woolf's To the Lighthouse study family relationships with the distance afforded by the use of fictional names and the passage of time--both write of their youth as middle-aged women. Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage is also a fascinating example of the power of this genre. Indeed, Virginia Woolf found her "woman's sentence" in this multi-volume novel. In a review, Woolf wrote that Richardson "has invented or, if she has not invented, developed and applied to her own uses, a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender" (quoted in Marcus, Languages 27). In trying to replicate a uniquely female experience in her "stream-of-consciousness" style (some critics say the term was coined for Richardson), Richardson found psychological sources of a female language.

Though less experimental in language use, Antonia White's novels also use fictionalized personal experience to plumb the depths of female psychology. In Sugar House, the main character's relationships with her father, whom she both fears and loves, and her husband, whom she loves but does not desire, provide a revealing account of how an intelligent, talented woman effaces herself before the forces of her culture. Similarly, Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness explores what it means to be a lesbian in a society which has no place for such a gender category.

Other significant works of Anglo-American autobiographi-

cal fiction include Nella Larsen's Quicksand, the story of the "tragic mulatta";[6] Martha Gellhorn's powerful war novel A Stricken Field; Beryl Markham and Olive Schreiner's African novels; the novels of immigrant writers, such as Mary Antin's The Promised Land and Anzia Yezierska's Bread Givers, as well as numerous other works in the genre by male writers, among them Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, and Henry Roth's Call it Sleep.

But in the effort to redefine modernism with an eye on autobiographical fiction, a list of examples of the prevalence of the genre is not all that's available. As Shari Benstock and Susan Stanford Friedman argue, women writers of the period lived and wrote modernism differently from their male counterparts. Friedman writes of a "Modernism of the margins," while Benstock posits in an essay on "Expatriate Modernism" that women writers in Europe experienced expatriation differently from the male modernists. "For women," Benstock writes, "the definition of patriarchy already assumes the reality of expatriate *in patria;* for women this expatriation is internalized, experienced as an exclusion imposed from the outside and lived from the inside in such a way that the separation of the outside from the inside, patriarchal dicta from female decorum, cannot be easily distinguished" (20). In other words, a woman's lived experiences place her in a unique relationship with the prevailing ideas of a culture. She is

both within and without. In patriarchal culture, no matter what her physical location, her space is always both loyal citizen and expatriate. As Benstock argues, "*Patria* can exist only by excluding, banishing *matria*; *matria* is always ex*patria*ted" (25).

Women's autobiographical fiction, which locates itself in the midst of this tension between the forces that dominate women's lives in patriarchal culture, cultivates the best impulses in women's fiction, and results in some of the best writing of the Modern period. Because of their contradictory relationship with the culture that Modernist philosophy was attempting to rewrite, women writers critiqued both the culture and its modernist critiques, as I will demonstrate. Benstock concludes, "The coming together of an internalized and a lived expatriation gave rise to very special forms of writing that both do and do not share the basic premises assumed to be common to modernism" (28). Whether the Anglo-American women writers I discuss in this volume lived their dual expatriation in the immigrant slums of New York, in the privileged salons of Paris or in the pervasive sense of "otherness" imposed by white racism, the condition seems to describe accurately an aspect of modernism which has yet to be fully understood.[7] Their attempts to do so, through fictional autobiographical accounts of their lives, provide some of the best pieces missing from the larger puzzle.

Several feminist critics, including, again, Benstock,

Friedman and Gilbert and Gubar, have made great progress in providing alternative definitions of modernism which account for the woman writer. One of the concerns of these new definitions is the woman writer's problematic relationship with the Word--with, as Stein writes, "patriarchal poetry." Benstock, in The Private Self, finds that women modernists contended with the problem of subjectivity. She writes,

> The instability of this subject is nowhere more apparent than in women's writings of [the Modernist] period, in texts by Djuna Barnes, Isak Dinesen, H.D., Mina Loy, Anaïs Nin, Jean Rhys, Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf, writing that puts into question the most essential component of the autobiographical--the relation between "self" and "consciousness." The simultaneous exploration of the autobiographical and the probing of self-consciousness in works by each of these writers suggests not that they knew their Freud better than T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, or W.B. Yeats, but that as women they felt the effects of the psychic reality Freud described more fully than did the men. Gender became a determining issue at the point at which culture (broadly defined in both its psychic and social terms) met aesthetic principles. (21)

Not only is woman's relation to language unique, but, as Gilbert and Gubar posit, women modernists had a distinctly

different response to the changing gender relations of the early twentieth century: "For, as is so frequently the case in the history of sex relations, men view the smallest female steps toward autonomy as threatening strides that will strip them of all authority, while women respond to such anxious reaction-formations with a nervous sense of guilt and a paradoxical sense of vulnerability. At the same time, some women, particularly in the modernist period, have felt empowered by every advance toward cultural centrality, so that the female half of the dialogue is considerably more complicated than the male" (66).

Modernist women writers of autobiographical novels, one could argue, began the task of consciousness-raising which was essential to the radicalism of the 'seventies. In the words of Victor Schklovsky, the Russian formalist, they seem determined to render the familiar unfamiliar: "Art exists to help us recover the sensation of life, it exists to make us feel things, to make the stone, *stony*. The end of art is to give a sensation of the object as seen, not as recognized. The technique of art is to make things 'unfamiliar', to make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and duration of perception" (Quoted in Lodge 7). By rendering their psychological and social experiences in their cultural context and, most often, with that context foregrounded and problematized, women modernists changed our perception of both women and culture. Most specifically, modernist women's

autobiographical fiction challenges what Gilbert and Gubar call the "Eliotian theory" of modernist writing as "'an escape from emotion' and 'an escape from personality'" (154). Instead it takes on the challenge of exploring emotion and understanding personality especially in relation to others.

Despite these premises of escapism through modernism, William Spengemann in his study of autobiography, sees modernism as it is traditionally defined (the "Eliotian theory") as an impetus to the development of the autobiographical novel. He writes of autobiography's "apparently increasing tendency to assume fictive forms in the modern era," then contends that "the modernist movement away from representational discourse toward self-enacting, self-reflexive verbal structures and the critical theories that have been devised to explain this movement conspire to make the very idea of literary modernism synonymous with that of autobiography" (xiii). Though his conclusion--that literary modernism and autobiography are ineradicably intertwined--is sound, I disagree with its premises. Women's autobiographical novels in the modernist period for the most part *did not* give up representational discourse, nor did they understand language to be self-enacting, self-reflexive or liberating for their writing. (It also goes without saying that the critical theories which explained modernism conspired *against* women's autobiographical writing.) Women modernists often used autobiographical novels, the genre of

both self-revelation and intricate disguise, to wrestle with the contradictory messages of patriarchy. The question of their success--to what extent the viewer becomes the viewed, the subject the object--are ours to explore.

Samuel Butler, in 1897, argued that literary arts are "more naturally left to women." He contends, according to Gilbert and Gubar, that "If the truth were known, we might very likely find that it was man rather than woman who has been the interloper in the domain of literature" (131). Though my goal is not to write male writers out of modernism, I think a more careful study of the modernist movement might lead to just such a conclusion--that women writers, because of their dual "expatriation," their placement in the psychological and philosophical discourse of the time, and their situation in patriarchal language and culture, were the true adventurers, leading the way in defining the new literary domain of modernism.

Notes

[1] Shari Benstock notes in "Expatriate Modernism" that these writers are often selected because of their place "within the boundaries of the old definitions" of modernism (34). She suggests, with reference to Celeste Schenck's essay in the same volume on Women's Writing in Exile, that modernism needs to reformulated with sympathy toward writers who "did not pursue Modernist experiments" (37n).

[2] Robert Kiely includes essays on Woolf and Willa Cather in his 1983 collection Modernism Reconsidered, which also contains studies of 15 male writers. Lawrence B. Gamache and Ian S. MacNiven allow only late modernist figures Doris Lessing and Margaret Drabble in the ranks of Lawrence, Joyce, Eliot, Faulkner, Forster and Hemingway in their 1987 volume entitled The Modernists. This tallying could, of course, go on and on. These examples, however, seemed characteristic of the recent devaluation of women's contribution to modernism.

[3] I refer here to Gilbert and Gubar's No Man's Land and to Nina Baym's important essay, focusing mostly on nineteenth-century American literature, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood." Also, I place the word *female* between quotation marks to call attention to its problematic nature. I do not subscribe to the position that there is a mysterious, essential, biological femaleness inherent in all women, though I do hold to gender distinctions which seem predominantly cultural. I find Alison Jaggar's Marxist explication of this perceived dichotomy most helpful. She explains that "in the Marxist view, human nature is not conceptually distinct from non-human nature, so Marxists do not see a line between the biological and social components of human nature. Instead, Marxist theory views human biology and human society as related 'dialectically.' In other words, biology and and society are not, in the end, conceptually separable from each other; rather they are related in such a way that each partially constitutes the other. . . . So Engels writes, 'the hands is not only the organ of labour, *it is also the product of that labour.*'"(55).

[4] Not, of course, that my perspective is disinterested. It is, however, *openly* interested in women writers and in autobiographical fiction. I do not pretend that the theories I propound are in any way universal or inevitable. Indeed, with an eye toward the feminist pluralism I praised in the preceding chapter, I welcome expansions and critiques of my view.

[5] Hemingway seemed quite fond of Stein's characterization and used it as the epigraph to The Sun Also Rises.

6 From Barbara Christian's explanation of this category in Black Women Novelists (1980).

7 A collection of essays edited by Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram, Women's Writing in Exile, goes a long way toward filling this gap by developing an understanding of the condition of expatriation in modernism, especially in its early essays by Benstock, Broe, Friedman, Susan Hardy Aiken and Judith Kegan Gardiner.

PART TWO

The Not-Known as We've Known It: Mother-Language in Modernism

We are as voyagers, discoverers
of the not known.

--H.D. in Trilogy

Chapter Four: The Possibility of Feminine Language

Despite what Domna C. Stanton cites as the "age-old pervasive decoding of all female writing as autobiographical," contemporary feminist critics are now asking if it has ever been possible in our patriarchal culture for women to write their life stories. As Carolyn G. Heilbrun asks, "How can women create stories of women's lives if they have only male language with which to do it?" (40).

The idea of the language we speak being male, or dominated by the same patriarchal power structures that dominate our culture, is a fairly recent one, inspired in part by Michel Foucault's writings on power.[1] It is also a concept which recent feminist criticism has examined carefully and taken quite seriously. Mary Jacobus, for example, observes that our language "may reinscribe the

structures by which [women] are oppressed" because "women's access to discourse involves submission to phallocentricity, to the masculine and the symbolic: refusal, on the other hand, risks reinscribing the feminine as a yet more marginal madness or nonsense." Jacobus's solution is to work within male discourse but "work ceaselessly to deconstruct it" (45).

Margaret Homans explains in Bearing the Word that when women decide to write their own stories they confront cultural myths "that situate them as the silent and absent objects of representation." Even if they don't believe in the myths, they are affected by them and must develop ways of dealing with them because Western culture has for so long subscribed to and retold them. Within these male-centered myths, women cannot represent themselves as subjects without revisionary or revolutionary tactics (6).

Both Jacobus and Homans use the terminology of Jacques Lacan, who retells Freud's phallocentric myth with an emphasis on how children acquire language. Since Lacan's formulation is also the basis of French feminist theories of a female space in (or beyond) language to which Jacobus refers and which will be essential to this discussion, I will review these theories briefly in the next several pages.

According to Lacan's theory, which though based on a male model claims universality, "all children, irrespective of gender," are at first "engaged in a dyadic relation with the mother in which they find themselves whole and unitary"

(Homans 6). This mother-infant relationship is pre-linguistic, characterized by exchanges of body language and non-representational sounds. Freud called this the pre-Oedipal stage in which "no gap has yet opened between signifier and signified, subject and world" (Eagleton 166). Everything is one thing to the child; everything is part of the unified mother-self. In Lacanian theory this stage of psycholinguistic development is called the Imaginary Order, "in which there is no difference and no absence, only identity and presence" (Moi 99).[2]

This stage ends when the child is about eighteen months old, Homans explains, when "two changes occur simultaneously: the child begins to acquire language, and he (and I use the pronoun advisedly here) becomes aware of sexual difference." This stage "is the mythic equivalent" to the Freudian Oedipal crisis, when the father "intervenes in the potentially incestuous dyad of mother and child" and forbids the child access to the mother's body. According to Lacan, because the father is marked by possession of the phallus, "the phallus becomes the mark of sexual difference, that is difference from the mother" (Homans 6). And because this awareness of difference generally corresponds with language acquisition (when the child discovers everything is not self, the other things must be named), Lacan connects the two as marking the entrance into the Symbolic Order, when signs gain meaning only through the *absence* of the objects they signify. Homans

explains, "Thus the child leaves behind the communication system he shared with his mother, which required no difference, and enters . . .the 'Law of the Father,' or the symbolic order, which is simultaneously the prohibitions of incest with the mother, the non [no] of the father, and the sign system that depends on difference and on the absence of the referent, the nom [name] of the father, that complex of signifying systems and laws that make up Western culture" (7). It becomes clear, then, that the absence of the mother--the absence, indeed, *of the female*--is the basis of this cultural model.[3]

Because the phallus would restore unity between mother and child in sexual connection--a connection denied the child by the father--the desire for the forbidden phallus and the incestuous union with the mother become another key to the Symbolic Order. Homans writes, "It is, by this logic, because of the lack of the phallus, not its possession, that the child enters with such enthusiasm into the Law of the Father, for it is symbolic language alone that can approximate the bridging of the gap between child and mother opened up by the simultaneous arousal and prohibition of incest." In this way, language becomes the equivalent of sexual desire. "Replacing the forbidden phallus, language's system of differences and absences becomes a system for generating substitutes for the forbidden mother" (Homans 7). Because the phallus, the symbol of sexual union with the

mother, is forbidden by the father, the representational system of language springs from unsatisfied desire for both the phallus and the mother's body.

Homans points out that this myth has been the basis of Western cultural tradition, as male writers since classical Greece have repeatedly killed, married or otherwise searched unsuccessfully for union with the mother (or a reasonable substitute thereof), a union that would bring on the father's punishment. Quest literature, male individuation and initiation stories, as well as romantic tributes to inaccessible women, all fit into and reinforce this myth, as Joseph Campbell's popular study of archetypes, Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949), makes clear. Women are consistently identified as "other" in the Symbolic Order where only the father's voice can be the subject. They figure into Western tradition as the silent signified, the inaccessible literal--a tradition in which men under the Law of the Father are the signifiers, those in control of the powerful and privileged figurative, the power of naming. In other words, "Women must remain the literal in order to ground the figurative substitutions [for her which] sons generate and privilege" (Homans 9). This connection of the female to the literal is quite clear in the poetic imagery of our culture, where woman is inevitably identified with nature and the earth, as well as with the body and its sexual and biological functions.[4] Men, however, come down through the classical

tradition as the keepers of culture, lords of logic, science, and intellect. They lay claim to the abstract and figurative.

Thus, this formulation of a subject/other polarity becomes the foundation of Western language and thought. As Simone de Beauvoir explains, "the subject can be posed only in being opposed--he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object" (45). And further, "[Woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--she is the Other . . . Otherness," she concludes, "is a fundamental category of human thought" (44). Hélène Cixous reiterates:

> Activity/passivity,
> Sun/Moon,
> Culture/Nature,
> Day/Night,
>
> Father/Mother,
> Head/heart,
> Intelligible/sensitive,
> Logos/Pathos
>
> Form, convex, step, advance, seed, progress.
> Matter, concave, ground--which supports the step,

receptacle.

Man

———

Woman

> Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it transports us, in all of its forms, wherever a discourse is organized. The same thread or double tress leads us, whether we are reading or speaking, through literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation of reflection. Thought has always worked by opposition . . . By dual, hierarchized oppositions. Superior/Inferior. ("Sorties" 90-91)

Obviously the Freudian-Lacanian myth is a masculine model, a "hierarchization" which "subjects the entire conceptual organization to man" (Cixous 91). As Homans points out "it is only those who lack [the phallus]--those who might once have had it . . .--who are privileged to substitute for it symbolic language; daughters lack this lack" (9). Because the daughter does not experience sexual difference in the same way, Nancy Chodorow suggests, she does not experience as completely as the male child the separation from the mother which would place the daughter in opposition to the mother. In other words, she doesn't enter as completely into the Symbolic Order and, thus, is not

completely initiated into the male model of the world. She doesn't readily adopt the set of polarities based on the concept of male self and female other. She remains one with the mother, even while she reaches out to the father--not because she covets his phallus and wants one of her own, but because *she covets his connection with the mother.* Chodorow concludes with a significant revision: "A girl's libidinal turning to her father is not at the expense of, or a substitute for, her attachment to her mother." Instead, she explains, "a girl develops important oedipal attachments to her mother *as well as* to her father" (127).

Freud held that the female child's failure to separate completely from the mother is a sign of her weakness, inferiority and lack of successful psychological adjustment. It is incomplete individuation. Homans, however, claims that this continued pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother allows the daughter to speak two languages at once--both the symbolic language and "the literal or presymbolic language that the son represses at the time of his renunciation of his mother" (13). This "daughter's language" may value the literal and base figurations on *presence* rather than *absence* (14).

This revision of psycho-linguistic theory has powerful implications for women writers. If the Lacanian model is "true," and it is to the extent that it has been believed, repeated and reinforced culturally, then our language has

been hostile to a female subject. Feminist thinkers since de Beauvoir have, of course, repeated this assertion. They have attempted to overcome the barriers in language to write themselves out of objectification. Chodorow's revisionary female psychology (reinforced by similar studies by Carol Gilligan, Dorothy Dinnerstein and Jessica Benjamin) and Homans' fascinating interpretation of it, would open more space in language for women beyond that which has belonged exclusively to us--the presymbolic "language" of the infant-mother dyad.[5] In contrast, this biologically-centered "*l'écriture féminine*," "semiotic" or pre-Oedipal literal language of the mother, has been the center of French feminist thought.[6]

In "The Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous explains the liberating effects of recovering this mother-language: "[The woman] must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" (250). Likewise, Xavière Gauthier argues that *l'écriture féminine* is the only avenue open to women who want to write: "As long as women remain silent [signified], they will be outside the historical process. But, if they begin to speak and write as men do, they will enter history subdued and alienated" (162-3). They will be forever relegated to the position of signified other. In other words, as long as

women attempt to write without significantly altering phallogocentric language, they will perpetuate their oppression, an oppression that is woven into the very fiber of our language.

Many French feminists have argued passionately against the possibility of women combining phallogocentric language with their own, as Homans advocates. In Les Guérrillères, Monique Wittig's women lament: "Unhappy one, men have expelled you from the world of symbols and yet they have given you names, they have called you slave, you unhappy slave. Masters, they have exercised their right as master. They write, of their authority to accord names, that it goes back so far that the origin of language itself may be considered an act of authority emanating from those who dominate. . . . the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you" (112).

This psycho-linguistic repression of the female is, for French feminists, the crux of any discussion of women in Western culture. Political oppression is secondary; it cannot be overcome until its foundations in language are destroyed.

Anglo-American feminists, however, have opted out of this seemingly bleak linguistic determinism, asserting that women *can* successfully unite two worlds/words, the pre-Oedipal *l'écriture féminine* and patriarchal language. By treating Lacanian language acquisition theory as Homans does, as a

cultural model, we escape the oppression of its linguistic determinism and disrupt (and eventually destroy) its phallogocentric foundations, as Jacobus suggests.[7] While Cixous insists that, with very rare exceptions, "there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity," these American feminists have demonstrated that women writers *have* written as women, from a subject position, despite formidable cultural, psychological and economic opposition. They describe a socially constructed "feminine language," in which biology is only one factor in determining difference, instead of a "female language" which is determined (despite the theorists' protests to the contrary) almost exclusively by biology. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language and Sexuality," Rachel Blau DuPlessis's Writing Beyond the Ending, Patricia Yaeger's Honey-Mad Women, Sidonie Smith's A Poetics of Women's Autobiography and Homan's book are examples of this area of exploration. They uncover the strategies with which women writers have confronted phallogocentrism and written "in a different voice," a voice that, ironically, is best understood through the psycholinguistic descriptions of female language which French feminisms contain.[8]

Women's autobiography has become increasingly important in this discussion of female language because the genre is unabashedly self-representational. The woman writer "steals" autobiographical writing, as Smith points out, "seeking

thereby to represent herself rather than to remain a mere representation of man" (41). All women's autobiographies "testify to the reality that, despite the textual repression of woman that supports the phallic order, woman has chosen to write the story of her life, thereby wresting significance and, with it, autobiographical authority out of cultural silence" (42). Autobiographical writing amplifies anxiety of authorship because the writer claims significance not only as writer, but also as subject.[9] A woman cannot take up the pen to write her own story without assuming, first, that she has the authority to write and, second, that she *can be a subject*. Again, I would also point out that this involves a belief, as it has come done through our cultural tradition, in a self that can be reproduced. As I noted earlier, this has been problematic for the woman writer, whose legitimate selfhood was always in question. The woman writer was, in other words, placed in the midst of what we've defined as the postmodern dilemma--the loss of firm boundaries around the self--long before postmodernism existed.

In this light, To the Lighthouse and HERmione, the novels which I will study in the pages that follow, stand as witnesses to the Anglo-American feminist position--that women *have* found ways of speaking in their own voices, of escaping the cultural relegation of women to Object, even while negotiating the boundaries of their culturally-restricted subjectivity and selfhood. Woolf and H.D. were both

painfully introspective, having suffered nervous breakdowns and undergone psychotherapy, and both were, of course, literary, given to sorting through their lives on paper. This combination results in language that is startlingly close to the French feminist descriptions of mother-language--a language discovered, I will argue, at least half a decade before it was defined.

Notes

[1] An excellent discussion of "the friendship" between Foucault and feminism is found in Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, edited by Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, Boston: Northeastern UP, 1988. Diamond and Quinby note in their introduction that "the crucial role of discourse in its capacity to produce and sustain hegemonic power" is key to both feminist and Foucauldian analysis.

[2] For clarity, these citations and the ones which follow call on Margaret Homans, Toril Moi and Terry Eagleton and their concise, abbreviated versions of Lacan's obscure primary material.

[3] This idea of the absent mother is closely associated with the concerns of modernism, as they've been revised in recent years. Shari Benstock, for example, theorizes that "The internalization of female exclusion provides . . . the psychic and literary space out of which women Modernists write" ("Expatriate" 29).

[4] This binary opposition is also the basis of Susan Griffin's fascinating study of pornography in her Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature, New York: Harper, 1981.

[5] It is not entirely accurate to call the infant-mother exchanges of the Imaginary Order a language, per se, since it is, again, presymbolic. For lack of a substitute for the word "language," I call attention to it with quotation marks.

6 The term "semiotic" belongs, of course, to Julia Kristeva's linguistic theories, which, though tied to the Imaginary Order and the mother's body, are not defined as gender-distinct. "*L'écriture féminine*," however, as Cixous explains, is biologically female: "I maintain unequivocally," she writes, "that there is such a thing as marked writing" ("Laugh" 249). I address the two together because of their similar origins in the pre-symbolic stage of development, though clearly the theories of Kristeva and Cixous should not be conflated under a single label of "French feminism."

7 Gilbert and Gubar, avoiding the "immoderately mystical" language of French feminisms, also posit a "social" rather than a "symbolic contract" such as Kristeva identifies in her Lacanian theories. They call on empiricism and on literary history "to argue that the female subject is not necessarily alienated from the words she writes and speaks" (229). They go on to suggest, radically, that "the idea that language is in its essence or nature patriarchal may be a reaction formation against the linguistic (as well as the biological) primacy of the mother" (264).

8 Benstock also theorizes a language of modernism influenced by French feminist thinking. She writes, "This Modernist writing is not a form of *écriture féminine* that can be practiced by either males or females because its common denominator is linguistic experimentation. Instead it is a genderized writing that situates itself creatively, politically, and psychologically within a certain space and time" ("Expatriate" 29).

9 The term "anxiety of authorship" is taken from Gilbert and Gubar's Madwoman in the Attic.

Chapter Five: Virginia Woolf Writing Her Self

I think Virginia Woolf, for example, early realized, deeply if unconsciously, that the narratives provided for women were insufficient for her needs. Her life and her works, the equal to any by her contemporaries, have been until recently less studied academically because we quite literally did not have the language, the theory, or the perceptions with which to analyze them.

--Carolyn G. Heilbrun

A breakthrough for me in my struggle to identify the relevance of the category "autobiographical fiction" in its setting of contemporary feminist (especially French feminist) thought about the female self came with my own reading of Virginia Woolf, coupled with Toril Moi's insightful observations early in Sexual/Textual Politics. Woolf's easy shift from the cryptic language of To the Lighthouse to the straightforward tone of A Room of One's Own, with its clear rhetorical purpose and strategies, struck me as significant. Clearly the language of her novels is encoded for a reason, or she could have written them just as she wrote her nonfiction prose. With this distinct shift in writing style, Woolf bridges the gap between Showalter's reading of her as revealing a unified, phallic self and Moi's reading as revealing a self in flux, embracing complex contradictions

and multiplicity. One could study Woolf's autobiographical impulse through either To the Lighthouse or A Room of One's Own and arrive at different conclusions--both relevant, because both are founded on Woolf's own self-revelation. Some have concluded that Woolf, of necessity, spoke the "double-voiced" discourse of women--both the dominant, patriarchal language of our culture and a suppressed, secret women's language. Conrad Aiken, in an early review of To the Lighthouse, marvels that Woolf is both "old-fashioned" and boldly experimental (15). Certainly, like all women, Woolf lived in two worlds--the male-dominated, phallocentric society in which she was educated and in which she learned to write, and a self (female)-centered inner world where, I believe, she trained herself through intense introspection to hear the cadences of what Hélène Cixous's later described as rhythmic mother-language.[1]

For me, Woolf's complexity opened a space in contemporary critical theory to fit autobiographical fiction. There is an "I" to identify, but it's a complex "I" with roots in patriarchal culture *and* in *l'écriture féminine*. Thus, all women's autobiographical fiction is creating a fictionalized self to correspond with a (fictionalized, created) cultural self, but I also find, especially in the more experimental women's autobiographical fiction, an attempt to get at an often hidden, culturally prohibited psychological self.

Virginia Woolf's agenda can hardly be described as

hidden. She wrote openly of her anti-patriarchal politics and hopes for feminist freedoms.[2] Even in this postmodern age of Derridean deconstruction and Barthean dead authors, I maintain that Woolf the writer is trying to communicate something to us--as certainly in her novels as in her nonfiction prose. Nor am I alone in taking this anti-postmodernist stand. Numerous critics have found that "something" in Woolf's novels--be it pacificism, homo-eroticism, aetheticism and high modernism or feminism. To dismiss any of these "-isms" as unintentional or grafted on to the texts by critics is to underestimate Woolf. Most critics see her as a purposeful and perceptive writer, capable of both searing cultural critique and acute self-awareness. This self-awareness, what I will call the autobiographical impulse in Woolf, is the "something" I have found in her novels, most obviously in To the Lighthouse.

Louise DeSalvo, too, finds this autobiographical impulse in Woolf, especially in connection with Woolf's efforts to sort through her experience of childhood sexual abuse. DeSalvo's description of the dangers of this enterprise demonstrate how significant it was for Woolf to "write her self." When Woolf began to write her autobiography, "A Sketch of the Past" in April 1939, twelve years after the publication of To the Lighthouse, "It was the bravest writing task that she had ever set out to accomplish, because she knew that for her introspection was a dangerous and difficult

enterprise, and that if she probed too deeply into the past, she could pay dearly for it by becoming agitated, depressed, and even suicidal," DeSalvo contends. Woolf feared, too, that writing about her younger years would end her writing altogether, DeSalvo points out. "Nonetheless, she began . . . to rethink the relationship between childhood experiences and personality," perhaps spurred on in her autobiographical project by her readings of Freud, which began just a few months before she took up "A Sketch," DeSalvo explains. "So," DeSalvo concludes, "late in her life, she began a project that she came to describe as autoanalysis" (99).

Influenced by Freud's theories, Woolf, with "A Sketch of the Past," resumed her lifelong project, one that first took shape in To the Lighthouse--examining her life through her relationships with her family and from the position of woman artist in patriarchal society.[3] Woolf herself wrote that with To the Lighthouse "I suppose that I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it away and then laid it out to rest" (Sketch 81).

Certainly, like most other modernists especially in England, Woolf had thought for years about Freud's theories before she began her autobiography, but, as Elizabeth Abel points out, her "knowledge of psychoanalysis, she repeatedly declared, came not from 'study' but from 'superficial talk'" (13). Such talk, we know from her diaries, occurred while

she wrote To the Lighthouse, when "the event that captured the attention of the British psychoanalytic world," Melanie Klein's 1925 lectures providing an alternative to Freud's Oedipal cycle of gender-identification, took place at the nearby home of her brother Adrian (Abel 143). Woolf's press (Hogarth) published Freud, but she resisted reading him, often spoke up (in those superficial talks) against psychoanalysis and insisted that she never read him until 1939. However, as H.D.'s companion Bryher noted, "You could not have escaped Freud in the literary world of the early twenties. Freud! All literary London discovered Freud about 1920[;] . . . the theories were the great subject of conversation wherever one went at that date. To me Freud is literary England . . . after the first war. People did not always agree but he was always taken in the utmost seriousness" (Abel 17).[4] Evidently, Woolf was one of those who didn't agree, and, as Abel so skillfully argues in Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis, Woolf was out to provide alternative readings to the Freudian myths that were gaining so much power in her culture.[5] She did so by reexamining her own life--first, safely, behind the mask of fiction, then later in her openly autobiographical works.

To locate Woolf's self-awareness or speak of an autobiographical impulse, however, the contemporary critic must, as I discussed in Part One, come to terms with the idea of the patriarchal or phallic self, the unified whole "man"

of the Western humanistic tradition. Toril Moi insists that the effort to see Woolf as a unified self with a rhetorical, purposeful text is reductive. "In this humanistic ideology," she argues, "the self is the sole author of history and of the literary text. History or text become nothing but the 'expression' of this unique individual: all art becomes autobiography, a mere window on the self and the world, with no reality of its own" (8). The text, to Moi, is either representative of a unified and phallic self, or it is multiple and diffuse. But just as there is a text which the author cannot contain nor solely signify, there is, unquestionably, a self behind the text which the text cannot reproduce nor contain. Woolf, with the clear, purposeful writing of A Room of One's Own and the rhythmic musicality of The Waves, refuses to be contained or categorized. She is both integrated and diffuse. She is both phallic and female. And the womanhood which she allied herself with and defended encompasses both. She is not a neuter or an androgyne, but a woman--a multi-faceted and complex woman.

Woolf was nothing if not intensely introspective. And some of her works are clearly autobiographical. Because of these two factors, I've found that her works contain the keys to unlocking some of the theoretical dilemmas of postmodern feminism which I described in Part One. She bridged the gap between the phallocentric position on her writing, which disallows an apprehension of her contradictions, her

multiplicity and her "female language," and the postmodern position, exemplified by Moi, which rejects the idea of Woolf's works as a window on the self. My route toward this bridge is to examine Woolf's self-examination in To the Lighthouse. I believe that Woolf, as a result of her fascination with psychology and her efforts to understand herself and her place in the world as a woman, had made some discoveries she wanted to articulate in this novel--discoveries about female psychological development, about the stifling nature of patriarchal thinking, about the violence of the paternalistic Victorian family and about being a woman artist in a phallocentric world. Those discoveries prefigure and modify some of the conclusions of contemporary feminist literary and psychological theory.

Since Moi wrote her introduction to Sexual/Textual Politics, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?", in which she criticized American feminists (specifically Elaine Showalter) for their failure, because of an unconscious humanist bias, to recognize Woolf's strengths, many feminist readings have appeared in the U.S. that would reverse Moi's claim.[6] Margaret Homan's examination of Lacan in Bearing the Word, for example, begins with an analysis of To the Lighthouse and cites the significance of the absent mother in Lily Briscoe's inability (or unwillingness) to distinguish between subject and object. Homans, again, rejects culturally constructed binary oppositions and the humanist view of the phallic self

and credits Woolf with having done the same.

In addition, as I mentioned above, Elizabeth Abel's Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis is a fascinating and revealing historically-based examination of Woolf's encounters with Freudian thought and Melanie Klein's matricentric revisions of it; Shari Benstock, in The Private Self, develops a theory of Woolf's sense of subjectivity in relation to Lacan's mirror stage; DeSalvo's landmark work Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work makes use of psychoanalytic and postmodern theory to illuminate Woolf's multiplicity and her "neurosis"; Makiko Minow-Pinkney uses Lacanian and Kristevan theory in Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject to describe Woolf's dance between semiotic and symbolic language; and Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, in The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother-Daughter Relationship, looks at Woolf's psychological ties with her biological mother. Prominent Woolf scholars--Jane Marcus, Peggy Kamuf, Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Carolyn Heilbrun--have also begun to mine the resources of postmodernism for further insights into Woolf's writing.

The approach that I propose has, then, begun to be a fruitful field of inquiry in Woolf scholarship, adding strength to Heilbrun's contention that Woolf's "life and her works, the equal to any by her contemporaries, have been until recently less studied academically because we quite

literally did not have the language, the theory, or the perceptions with which to analyze them" (120). Apparently, postmodernism and feminism are providing some of those missing terms. As I pursue this analysis of Woolf's recovery of mother-language through the autobiographical impulse, I will call on these feminist studies; before I begin, however, I wish to acknowledge their influence. Because the field of "Lycanthropy," as Jane Marcus playfully calls Woolf studies, is so broad and diverse, it will be impossible to acknowledge all the theorists who have influenced my thinking on Woolf. However, I must say that the feminist work, both in Woolf studies and in literature in general, which has blossomed since the early seventies, is what brings my work into existence. Without it, this project would be impossible.

Woolf sets her stage by establishing early in To the Lighthouse a dread of patriarchal power that is pervasive in the novel. She begins with Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, on vacation in the Hebrides with their eight children and several guests, arguing over whether or not "it will be fine" enough the next day to go on a boat excursion to a nearby lighthouse. Their youngest son James's response to both parents focuses the argument, which is mostly unspoken. Marital patterns, developed over long years of communication and lack of it, are strikingly revealed in Woolf's careful plotting of the

thoughts of these three, intertwined with the silent musings of other characters.

James's violent response to Mr. Ramsay's "But, . . . it won't be fine" exemplifies the dread of patriarchal power which Woolf foregrounds in this first part and again in the final section, "The Lighthouse" (10). Mr. Ramsay's powerful, insistent presence permeates the novel and casts a shadow, literally and figuratively, over the actions of its characters as he paces up and down the terrace. Mrs. Ramsay "could feel his mind like a raised hand shadowing her mind" (184), and she tries to deflect his presence, softening the harsh judgment he makes about the weather: "But it may be fine--I expect it will be fine" (10). But James knows that what his father says "was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children . . . " (11). In Mr. Ramsay's world, the phallogocentric world Cixous writes of, the hierarchies are in order; one must simply follow through with "courage, truth and the power to endure" (11).

Woolf puts Mr. Ramsay's value system up against Mrs. Ramsay's in their exchange over the lighthouse trip that makes up Chapter One of the novel, "The Window." While "the folly of women's minds," their "hopeless vagueness," their "extraordinary irrationality" and their flying "in the face of facts" enrages him, Mrs. Ramsay has a different standard

for evaluating her husband's arguments. She feels that "to pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings" is Mr. Ramsay's horrible outrage (50-51). She sees a world, as Carol Gilligan describes it, "comprised of relationships rather than people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules (29). In Lacanian terms, Mr. Ramsay's world of rules and logic, of finding the way past "Q" (to "R", or to the letter that begins his own name) is the world of the Symbolic Order, while Mrs. Ramsay's empathic identification represents the lack of separation of the Imaginary Order, when there is no difference, only connection. Mr. Bankes, in collusion with Mr. Ramsay and the Symbolic Order, also uses logic and order to stave off the chaos of the natural, the biological, the female. He muses that "the sight of [Mrs. Ramsay] reading a fairy tale to her boy had upon him precisely the same effect as the solution of a scientific problem, so that he rested in contemplation of it, and felt, as he did when he had proved something absolute about the digestive system of plants, that barbarity was tamed, the reign of chaos subdued" (74).

Several feminist critics have pointed out the devastating effect of the Victorian patriarchal family from which Freud and, by association, Lacan theorized. DeSalvo, in her study of Woolf's response to the sexual abuse of her half brothers, discusses how the Victorian family gave the father "immense

powers of his wife and children--an unrestricted right of physical control, the right to control behavior, and sexual rights" (9). He made demands on the daughters, as Mr. Ramsay's demand for sympathy, to which his daughter Cam succumbs. In the final section of the novel, Cam laments silently to her brother, "you're not exposed to it, to this pressure and division of feeling, this extraordinary temptation"--the temptation to give up her desire to "resist tyranny to the death" and, instead, to give her father what he wants (253). Beverly Ann Schlack points out that fathers in general in Woolf's fiction "are oppressive or ineffectual. In either case they manage to burden, demean or disappoint their women" (53).

Mrs. Ramsay, however, though she bows her head and accepts Mr. Ramsay's words, rejects the self-centeredness of separation and the phallic self when she observes with disapproval Tansley wanting "'to assert himself': . . . so it would always be with him till he got his Professorship or married his wife, and so need not be always saying, 'I--I--I.' For that was his criticism of poor Sir Walter, or perhaps it was Jane Austen, amounted to 'I--I--I.' He was thinking of himself and the impression he was making" (160). Indeed, the thing most irritating to Mrs. Ramsay is separation--"strife, divisions, differences of opinion"--in her children (17).

Lily Briscoe, "Woolf's closest fictional representative"

(Abel 1), reinforces our impression of the masculine Symbolic Order by rejecting Mr. Ramsay's insistent "I--I--I" ("Why should she look at the sea when I am here?") and by acknowledging its stifling influence on her female artistic spirit. Living in a world dominated by one type of impressions--Mr. Paunceforte's "pale, elegant, transparent" paintings, she is encouraged to distrust her own vision. She struggles "against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: 'But this is what I see,' and so clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from it" (32). Her struggle is also apparent in the following passage: "She could have wept. It was bad, it was bad, it was infinitely bad! She could have done it differently, of course; the colour could have been thinned and faded; the shapes etherialized; that was how Paunceforte would have seen it. But then she did not see it like that. . . . [What she saw] would never be seen; never be hung even, and there was Mr. Tansley whispering in her ear, 'Women can't paint, women can't write" (75).

In this revealing passage, the autobiographical impulse seems clearly at work, as Woolf, the woman artist who sees language and novel-writing differently from the male modernists of her day, writes of what it means to have her work devalued. Significantly, Lily's artistic vision is vivid and concrete--"colour burning on a framework of steel; the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a

cathedral," "clamped together with bolts of iron"--as opposed to Paunceforte's abstract impressionism. As with her image of the kitchen table, Woolf bases Lily's figurations on the concrete presence which characterizes *l'écriture féminine*, rather than the absence of the female that is the Symbolic Order, a point which I will illustrate further later in this chapter.

The reader comes to feel the dread of Mr. Ramsay's patriarchal power through Lily who cannot paint when Mr. Ramsay approaches her. "He made it impossible for her to do anything," Woolf writes, echoing her oft-repeated confession about her father's effect on her. "Let him be fifty feet away, let him not even speak to you, let him not even see you, he permeated, he prevailed, he imposed himself. He changed everything" (223). With his immense need for sympathy (which Lily finally resists, commenting on his "beautiful boots"), Mr. Ramsay "was like a lion seeking whom he could devour" (233). Through Lily, Woolf is speaking both autobiographically and generally, psychologically and politically--as a daughter and as an artist in patriarchal culture. She perceives that women are devoured or erased by the power of the phallocentric Symbolic Order.

Acknowledging this power, Woolf sets out to undermine and get beyond it. She pulls together Mr. Ramsay's "subject and object" polarity with the unifying influence of "a scrubbed kitchen table" (38). She has Mrs. Ramsay yearning for the

unity, the harmony, the "pure joy, of the two notes sounding together" (62) which she finds lacking in her marriage. Lily, too, seeks unity--in fact, strives for, above all else, a unity that cannot be contained, significantly, in "*any language known to man*" (emphasis added). She sought "not knowledge but unity, . . . not inscriptions on tablets . . . but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee" (79). Here Woolf prefigures what contemporary American psychological theorists have identified as perhaps the greatest difference between male and female models of psychological development: Woolf *connects* Lily with a mother figure, Mrs. Ramsay, who reinforces her desire for unity and intimacy, *not for separation*. And, most significantly, Woolf has Lily insist that in this *connection is knowledge*. Self-knowledge, she indicates, comes from connection with the mother, not separation from her.

DuPlessis posits that To the Lighthouse expresses "yearning for a female bond" in "the yearning love Lily felt for Mrs. Ramsay" (60). Woolf, DuPlessis points out, poses "pre-Oedipal alternatives" to the female child's rejection of the mother in the Oedipal scenario through her depiction of the lesbian bonding of Mrs. Dalloway and the mother-child dyad of To the Lighthouse (61). Woolf, indeed, writes of Lily's desire to dissolve into Mrs. Ramsay "like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the

object one adored" (79)--an image Abel calls "Woolf's most celebrated figure of the daughter's desire to dissolve into the mother" (19).

Some critics speculate that Woolf's early loss of her mother (She was 13 when Julia Stephen died) may have intensified this desire for connection she felt for her throughout her life. This loss is perhaps best expressed by Nancy Ramsay who observes Minta crying over her lost brooch and concludes that "she wasn't crying only for that. She was crying for something else. We might all sit down and cry, she felt. But she did not know what for" (117). However, here I would make a separation between the *metaphorical or mythic* desire for connection with the lost pre-Oedipal mother which all children, in the psychoanalytic model, experience, and the lived experience of need for nurturance. Though the two are related, in that we live by the stories our culture gives us, they cannot be conflated without leading to biological determinism or the mother-blaming that is so often the result of Freudian psychology. In fact, Woolf's relationship with her mother is a clear illustration of this. In her diary and in "Reminiscences" Woolf presents an ambivalent view of her mother. Rosenman notes that "The powerful image of maternity spawned equally powerful frustrations as the promise of perfect, all-encompassing mother-love was, inevitably, unfulfilled. Whatever the nature or adequacy of Julia's actual mothering . . . Woolf

describes deprivation as well as bliss in her childhood" (137).

Woolf is even able to condemn her mother for her complicity in the victimization of her half sister, Stella. As DeSalvo asserts, "Woolf stresses that Julia had trained Stella [As Mrs. Ramsay did Prue and Cam] for submission and victimization. She described that as a child, Stella had been 'suppressed'; that Stella lived in her mother's shade, that she imputed to herself 'an inferiority' which her mother both instilled and encouraged. . . . Woolf did not romanticize her mother; she described the process whereby a self-sacrificing mother, responding to the demands for care made upon women, turns to her daughter and, in turn, enslaves her" (65).

Still, Woolf urges thinking back through our mothers. She holds fast to a vision of female development that rejects the misogyny of the castration complex. She values connection with other women, especially through Lily's yearning for Mrs. Ramsay. What are we to make of this apparent contradiction? Jane Marcus questions, "Are we then to murder in our minds our own mothers (and all the messages they give us about how to live in the patriarchal world) in order to think back through the mothers of literature and history? Is mental matricide necessary for the woman artist? No, Woolf tells us. Abandoned, motherless daughters must find new mothers, real and historical, a linked chain of

sisterhood over past time in present space, and rescue and redeem their own mothers' lives from their compromises with the patriarchy" (21). Clearly, Woolf understood the power of cultural myth-making and didn't simplemindedly valorize her own mother to suit her myths. It seems apparent that Woolf, here again, bridges the gap between phallocentric thinking and postmodernism. She sees her mother's behavior clear-sightedly, almost disinterestedly, and assesses it, yet she continues to *create* her Mothers in her personal myth-making--through her stories. DeSalvo notes, "This reforming of the mother/daughter dyad Woolf saw as an urgent and compelling necessity if women were to move beyond passing on their own enslavement to their daughters" (66). Woolf, it seems, might argue, as Cixous does in "The Laugh of the Medusa," that women must pursue a radical, alternate form of knowledge *through their connection with their mothers* because "In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes" (252).

Despite her radical position, however, Woolf still had to confront the cultural myth that "the death or absence of the mother sorrowfully but fortunately makes possible the construction of language and culture" (Homans 2). Or, more pointedly, that the death of the mother makes art possible. Rosenman writes of Woolf's complicity with that myth and "the

sense of loss in which art originates" for her: "When the 'centre' of the unifying maternal presence becomes a 'centre of complete emptiness' with her death, as it does in To the Lighthouse when Mrs. Ramsay dies, art asserts itself as a source of compensation. Lily Briscoe's attempt to paint Mrs. Ramsay after her death . . . is also a central attempt in Woolf's work: to recover the dead mother, to fill the empty center" (138).

Marcus, too, theorizes that the brief second section of To the Lighthouse, "Time Passes," is Woolf's "lament for the dead mother. The figure of the empty house, the questioning of the meaning of life, the horror and chaos of the universe, devastation and meaninglessness, is a portrait of the dead mother's body and the daughter's appalling sense of loss. . . . Woolf drew To the Lighthouse as two blocks connected by a tunnel. In the tunnel, time is fluid and personality is stable, while in the flanking blocks, personality is fluid and time is stable. Time is experienced according to the mother's presence or absence" (6).

Woolf's task of recovery, of finding the mother's voice, is Lily's task in the novel. For Lily, Mrs. Ramsay (significantly Mrs. Ramsay writing "under the rock," perhaps of patriarchal authority) "resolved everything into simplicity; . . . she brought together this and then that and then this" (240). Luce Irigaray writes of this pulling together of forces as diffuse as Lily and Tansley within one

woman in This Sex Which is Not One:

> It is therefore useless to trap women into giving an exact definition of what they mean, to make them repeat (themselves) so the meaning will be clear. They are already elsewhere than in this discursive machinery where you claim to take them by surprise. They have turned back within themselves, which does not mean the same thing as "within yourself." They do not experience the same interiority that you do and which perhaps you mistakenly presume they share. "Within themselves" mean *in the privacy of this silent, multiple, diffuse tact*. If you ask them insistently what they are thinking about, they can only reply: nothing. Everything. (103)

Lily, too, exemplifies this multiplicity which cannot be contained in language. She notes in at least three separate instances that everything and nothing coincide: "For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing--nothing that she could express at all" (217). "And she wanted to say not one thing, but everything" (265). "For nothing was simply one thing" (277).

Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay "may have said," and Lily remembers, that the intimacy of human relationships is spoiled by trying to contain it in speech. "Who knows what we are, what we feel?" Lily asks. "Who knows even at the moment of intimacy,

This is knowledge." Led by her memories of Mrs. Ramsay, Lily wonders if we aren't more expressive in silence side by side (256).

Because patriarchal language and logic, as Irigaray contends, cannot contain the female experience, this silence becomes significant in the novel. Mrs. Ramsay's desire for silence, in fact, is what Lily finally captures in the artistic vision of her. The "wedge-shaped core of darkness" of lost personality which Mrs. Ramsay desires to become is exactly the image of her which Lily reproduces in her painting. Mrs. Ramsay yearns "To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others" (95). And Lily paints Mrs. Ramsay as a "triangular purple shape" with no attempt at a likeness, no resemblance to "a human shape," as Mr. Bankes points out (81).

To understand and express herself, to say "not one thing, but everything" (256), Lily reaches for Mrs. Ramsay's silence. She cries out for Mrs. Ramsay in a language she knows won't reach her. "'Mrs. Ramsay,' she said aloud, 'Mrs. Ramsay!' The tears ran down her face" (268). Abel proposes that "the object of desire is the mother who has died, but its origin is ancient--for the longing, like its language, is repetitive. . . . Never adequately available, Mrs. Ramsay

confirms in death an absence that begins at birth" (69). Here, she posits, Lily reaches, through her art, into the semiotic, the traces of the infant-mother language of the Imaginary Order. "In painting," she writes, "Lily seeks a mode of representation outside of the father's symbolic universe" (47). Indeed, in the end, it is Lily's silent vision of Mrs. Ramsay "standing lightly by her side" and "raising to her forehead a wreath of white flowers" which allows her to complete her art--to fill in the "formidable space" and feel the rhythm of her painting.

Homans, too, argues for this experience of pre-Symbolic mother language; however, she finds it in "the pleasure Cam and Mrs. Ramsay share in the rhythm and feel of words, which I would argue derives from and constitutes a myth of a daughter's never having lost the literal language she shared with the mother" (18). However, Homans would distinguish this jouissance from Kristeva's semiotic of the male modernists because, she argues, Kristeva always maintains, as Lacan, that the child is male. She writes, "If the mother-daughter language I am discussing is continuous from childhood and is therefore, unlike Kristeva's semiotic, neither repressed nor capable of a dangerous return, it is, instead, *socially and culturally* suppressed and silenced, but silencing and suppression are a very different matter from repression" (19).[7]

Marcus, too, finds traces of pre-Oedipal "language" in To

the Lighthouse. "Mrs. McNab," she asserts, "is the voice of the semiotic. Her lurching and rolling rhythms of working are the origins of language" (7)--the language and the rhythm of the female body. Finally, DuPlessis finds Woolf returning to the unity of the infant-mother dyad through the "cackle, rattle, and yaffle" of her novels--the ballads, the Celtic counting-out rhymes, Mrs. McNab's song. Significantly, all of these theorists find legitimate sources for this rhythmic mother-language in the pages of To the Lighthouse. I believe it is because Woolf was, in fact, reproducing it with some accuracy.

In the center "Time Passes" section this is especially evident. Here Woolf comes closest to finding her "woman's sentence"--to reproducing the "language" of the Symbolic Order. For example, Woolf here undermines concepts like linear time and space. She writes (parenthetically), "(for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together)"(203). She also puts the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue and Andrew in parentheses, shifting the focus of the novel from the characters, who had been central in "The Window," to the all-powerful and uncontrollable forces of nature. "What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?" (207) she asks. In this section Woolf also stops privileging speech and favors sounds and silence, as in the following passage:

> And now as if the cleaning and the scrubbing and the

> scything and the mowing had drowned it there rose that half-heard melody, that intermittent music which the ear half catches but lets fall; a bark, a bleat; irregular intermittent, yet somehow related; the hum of an insect, the tremor of cut grass, dissevered yet somehow belonging; the jar of a dorbeetle, the squeak of a wheel, loud, low, but mysteriously related; which the ear strains to bring together and is always on the verge of harmonising, but they are never quite heard, never fully harmonised, and at last, in the evening, one after another the sounds die out, and the harmony falters, and silence falls. (212)

In addition, Woolf introduces female body images and "those pools of uneasy water" (198); she repeatedly mentions mirrors; and she describes accurately (again) the lack of difference characteristic of the Symbolic Order. In the abandoned house, she writes, "there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, 'This is he' or 'This is she'" (190); "At length, desisting, all ceased together, gathered together, all sighed together" (191).

Indeed, Woolf invokes these and other aspects of mother-langague in several passages in the novel. Water, for example is a constant image, not only with the rolling rhythms of the ocean waves, seemingly always in the background, but also when Mr. Bankes observes Mrs. Ramsay: "Never did anybody look so sad. Bitter and black, half-way

down, in the darkness, in the shaft which ran from sunlight to the depths, perhaps a tear formed; a tear fell; the waters swayed this way and that, received it, and were at rest" (46). Mrs. Ramsay, too, connects waters with herself: "She often felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions" (51). Later in the novel, Lily, too, "seemed to be standing up to the lips in some substance, to move and float and sink in it, yes, for these waters were unfathomably deep. Into them had spilled so many lives" (286).

Woolf also uses the language of sexuality and the female body, as when Mrs. Ramsay sits with James standing between her knees: "James felt all her strength flaring up to be drunk and quenched by the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy" (59) until there is nothing left of Mrs. Ramsay "All was so lavished and spent" and everything left of Mr. Ramsay, "Filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied" (60).

In listening for her woman's sentence, Woolf also reproduces the rhythms which Kristeva describes as remnants of the pre-Symbolic semiotic, for example, the "long, steady stroke of the Lighthouse" which was Mrs. Ramsay's stroke (97) and the steady beat of Mrs. Ramsay's life--"Domesticity triumphed; custom crooned its soothing rhythm" (49). Indeed, Lily, remembering how Mrs. Ramsay "opened bedroom windows" and "shut doors," tries to "start the tune of Mrs. Ramsay in

her head" (76). Mrs. Ramsay both represents and creates these rhythms, as when she reads the story of "The Fisherman and His Wife" to James and when, after the big family dinner which concludes "The Window" section, she hears her guests speak but fails to identify words: "the voices came to her very strangely, as if they were voices at a service in a cathedral, for she did not listen to the words. The sudden bursts of laughter and then one voice (Minta's) speaking alone, reminded her of men and boys crying out the Latin words of a service in some Roman Catholic cathedral. She waited. Her husband spoke. He was repeating something, and she knew it was poetry from the rhythm and the ring of exultation" (166).

Not only does Woolf give us, in Mrs. Ramsay, someone who hears the rhythms of mother-language, she also gives us someone who feels ambivalence for patriarchal language, especially in its academic robes. Early in the novel, Mrs. Ramsay does not "catch the meaning, only the words" of Tansley's "ugly academic jargon," for example (22). She sees Mr. Ramsay's "phrase-making was a game" (106), and she continues throughout "The Window" her habit of exaggeration, which her daughter Cam picks up (to her father's irritation, of course) in "The Lighthouse." Woolf contrasts one final time in "The Window" the differences between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as they sit reading in a room together--his thoughts continue to progress from A to Q, while she listens to the

rhythms underneath the words. Words "began washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically, and as they washed, words, like little shaded lights, one red, one blue, one yellow, lit up in the dark of her mind, and seemed leaving their perches up there to fly across and across, or to cry out and to be echoed" (178). Again ignoring meaning, Mrs. Ramsay "did not know at first what the words meant at all" (179), her mind, instead, catches the rhythms of language, "going up and down, up and down with the poetry" while her husband "was still feeling very vigorous, very forthright, after reading about Steenie's funeral" (183).

Mrs. Ramsay's train of thought lacks the linearity of Mr. Ramsay's alphabetized logic. Irigaray describes this jumble of impressions and observations and interruptions in <u>This Sex Which is Not One</u>: "'She' is indefinitely other in herself. That is undoubtedly the reason she is called temperamental, incomprehensible, perturbed, capricious--not to mention her language in which 'she' goes off in all directions and in which 'he' is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning" (103). Woolf accurately reproduces this diffuseness in the following passage where Mrs. Ramsay contemplates her house: "Mats, camp beds, crazy ghosts of chairs and tables whose London life of service was done--they did well enough here; and a photograph or two, and books. Books, she thought, grew of themselves. She never had time to read them. Alas! even the books that had been given her and inscribed by the hand

of the poet himself. . . . And Croom on the Mind and Bates on the Savage Customs of Polynesia ('My dear, stand still,' she said)--neither of these could one send to the Lighthouse" (43).

Lily inherits Mrs. Ramsay's ambivalence for patriarchal language, separating herself from it and wondering about the meaning arbitrarily "attached" to the words "like" and "dislike" (40). Lily "felt rather inclined just for a moment to stand still after all that chatter, and pick out one particular thing; the thing that mattered; to detach it; separate it off; clean if of all the emotions and odds and ends of things, and so hold it before her, and bring it to the tribunal where, ranged about in conclave, sat the judges she had set up to decide these things. Is it good, is it bad, is it right or wrong?" (169).

Perhaps the most expressive passage pertaining to woman's placement in language--her yearning for the absent mother and the physicality of the Imaginary Order, as well as her ambivalence toward patriarchal laws--is the following, when Lily muses:

> The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low. Then one gave it up; then the idea sunk back again; then one became like most middle-aged people, cautious, furtive, with wrinkles between the eyes and a look of perpetual apprehension. For how could one

> express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? . . . It was one's body feeling, not one's mind. . . . To want and not to have, sent all up her body a hardness, a hollowness, a strain. And then to want and not to have--to want and want--how that wrung her heart, and wrung it again and again! Oh, Mrs. Ramsay! (265-266)

I would argue, then, that Woolf's revision of cultural myths and destruction of patriarchal hierarchies takes place not only in the plot but also within the language of the novel. For example, it is almost impossible to identify a single consciousness with the apparently omniscient third-person narrative voice of To the Lighthouse. What we have, instead, is a collective consciousness which moves effortlessly in the most intimate corners of all the characters's minds. Jane Marcus's "Collective Sublime" extends this relationship to the reader.[8] Through this collective consciousness Woolf stands up against the unified, phallic self of Western humanist tradition. The characters's lives and thoughts bleed into one another, even become one, as Prue, Cam and Lily, in some sense, become Mrs. Ramsay, and as James, Tansley and Andrew inherit the father's character.

The novel's form also circles and turns inward, like the waves Woolf likens it to: "She felt . . . how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore

one up with it and threw one down with it, there, with a dash on the beach" (73). Woolf later pursues this metaphor with the interconnectedness of the characters of The Waves. In fact, while Woolf composed The Waves, she wrote to a friend, "though the rhythmical is more natural to me than the narrative, it is completely opposed to the tradition of fiction and I am casting about all the time for some rope to throw the reader' " (Abel 27). Apparently, the Lighthouse with its rhythmic echoes of the semiotic, was a starting point. Woolf finally found her voice in The Waves, which she called "the first work in my own style" (Woolf Diary IV: 157).

Woolf's curiosity about what it takes for her, a woman artist, to understand and value her female experience leads her to undertake the autobiographical project of To the Lighthouse. Because Woolf is an astute and hypercritical observer, fascinated with the ideas of psychoanalysis, her novel reveals some striking insights into female psychology, insights which are especially illuminating when considered in terms of contemporary feminist thought. Using personal, lived experience, Woolf describes what it is like to struggle with a patriarchal culture while trying to maintain a sense of her self which is uniquely female. She successfully uses (patriarchal) language to describe a female experience, as Anglo-American feminist argue women writers have done, but she adapts that language. Her use of pre-Symbolic "language"

is, then, empowering. It does not silence her or reduce her to a primal scream. Marcus writes, "Some contemporary critical theorists describe women as outside of language. Virginia Woolf's whole *oeuvre* disproves this claim" ("Thinking"10). Woolf, she argues, can "untie the Mother Tongue" to free language from patriarchal patterns (14).

Indeed, because of Woolf's introspection and questioning, feminists have a resource for understanding the connection, as Lacan describes it, that women continue to feel with the mother-centered Imaginary Order. Also because of To the Lighthouse, we can begin to identify and recover "female language" as it has existed (and it *has* existed) historically.

Notes

[1] Though Woolf herself tried to integrate these two worlds through the Bloomsbury group's celebrated claims of androgyny, she later rejected the group's view as not a compromise but a reinscription of masculinity.

[2] Several essays in Jane Marcus's collection Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant place Woolf politically in relation to the feminist movement of her time. See especially Gillespie and Black. Also J.B. Batchelor's "Feminism in Virginia Woolf" in Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays, Claire Sprague, ed.; Prentice-Hall, 1971.

[3] DeSalvo finds Freud's influence on Woolf to be profound: "I believe that reading Freud precipitated a crisis, plunged her into the 'whirlpool,' by irrevocably damaging her belief in the logic of what she had established. I believe that it eroded her sense of self. If she was right and Freud was wrong, she was not a

madwoman, but a woman whose response to her childhood was appropriate, though painful. But if Freud was right [about his drive theory] and she was wrong, she was, indeed, a madwoman, a prey to uncontrollable urges and forces" (128).

[4] Abel quotes here from Bryher (Winifred Ellerman) to Susan Susan Stanford Friedman, cited in Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981), 18.

[5] Woolf's negative attitude about Freudian theory is wittily expressed in To the Lighthouse when she has the simple-minded Minta Doyle explain that "she thought she must have been tossed in her perambulator when she was a baby" making her afraid of bulls (113). Mrs Ramsay "pitied men always as if they lacked something--women never, as if they had something" (129).

[6] Though I find Moi's work on Woolf insightful, I also find her view of Anglo-American feminist criticism reductive, especially in relation to Woolf criticism. Even *before* Showalter and before Moi Woolf scholarship was alive and well among American feminists, certainly most often in what Moi would call the humanist camp where most were trained, but also on the margins of that camp, pushing the limits of humanist thinking. Indeed, since I began my study of Woolf, I have been repeatedly delighted to see the diverse and radical feminist work that Woolf's work inspires.

[7] Homan's distinction here hearkens back to the difference I cited between Anglo-American and French thinking in Part One and, again, in the preceding chapter. I find her work an admirable example of the American feminist reworking of the potentially destructive patriarchal bias in contemporary thought.

[8] Allen McLaurin also discusses group consciousness in Woolf, modifying the modernist definition of stream-of-consciousness writing in his essay "Consciousness and Group Consciousness in Virginia Woolf" in Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective, Eric Warner, ed; New York: St. Martin's, 1984.

Chapter Six: H.D. Releasing HER

Early in her autobiographical novel HERmione, H.D. reveals her ambitions for language:

> Words may be my heritage and with words I will prove conic sections a falsity and the very stars that wheel and frame concentric patterns as mere very-stars, gems put there, a gift, a diadem, a crown, a chair, a cart or a mere lady. A lady will be set back in the sky. It will be no longer Arcturus and Vega but stray star-spume, star sprinkling from a wild river, it will be myth; mythopoeic mind (mine) will disprove science and biological-mathematical definition. (76)

Word-play was obviously more than an experiment in modernist technique for "H.D., Imagiste." In this insightful female *künstlerroman* written in 1927 about her experiences of 1907-1911, H.D. undertakes a project more radical than Woolf's revisions of cultural myths. She subverts and overthrows what Jacques Lacan later named the "Law of the Father," the phallogocentric foundation of Western culture. Using words, her patriarchal "heritage," she unseats the Father, sets "a lady" in the sky and transforms the universe from the ordered, named territory of male astronomers to "star sprinklings from a wild river." The source of this

river for H.D. is, as for Virginia Woolf, mother-language, the feminine "mythopoeic mind (mine)," which she claims as her own.

With HERmione, and indeed to a lesser degree with her early poetry, H.D. began a task that is today central to feminist thinking. Before Simone de Beauvoir wrote The Second Sex identifying woman's place as "object-Other" in a philosophic system where the male is always subject, before Lacan built his language acquisition theory on Freudian phallocentrism, before Anglo-American and French feminists began their debate on the nature of women's oppression/ repression by language in androcentric society, H.D. confronted these problems perceptively in HERmione. H.D. used modernism's experimental pairing of language and psychotherapy for a different, more radical purpose and with decidedly different results from other modernists. Celeste Schenck observes that for Woolf and H.D. experimental language, "the notion of breaking sentence and sequence," was central. It "was a way of rupturing political assumptions of great pertinacity and of making a radical criticism of power and status" (246n).

Significantly, HERmione was H.D.'s first attempt at autobiographical fiction. She was, as Hélène Cixous says, writing her self, attempting to wrest meaning and order from a particularly formative time of her life, a time that encompassed her failure at Bryn Mawr, her engagement to Ezra

Pound, her lesbian relationship with Frances Gregg and her subsequent nervous breakdown and recovery. This novel was, like To the Lighthouse for Woolf, a personal and self-exploratory endeavor for H.D., so personal that it was not published until years after her death, so female that it seems exceptionally free from oppressive cultural gender ideologies. In her attempt to overthrow the specific structures of the scientific, logical law of her own father (what she calls the Gart theory of mathematical-biological definition) and its artistic counterpart, the demanding masculine order of the Ezra Pound character, George Lowndes, she accomplished a cultural and linguistic *coup-d'état*, subverting and finally overthrowing what we now know as the Lacanian Law of the Father.[1] In finding a language to describe adequately her experience she, in a sense, *discovers l'écriture féminine* by *recovering* her mother-language and returning to the Imaginary Order; in addition, she uses the phallocentric language of the Symbolic Order, turns it inside out and successfully subverts it to make a place for her female subject. In this way, HERmione powerfully exemplifies what Homans calls a dual daughters' language. From a subversive position within and beyond Lacan's father-centered Symbolic Order, H.D. takes language beyond the deconstructive, psychological experimentation of other modernists by questioning not only its power to represent reality, but also its complicity in the creation of an

androcentric reality. Thus, her novel rattles the very foundations of Western culture in a way none of the "great (male) texts" of modernism could.

Interestingly, H.D.'s fictional autobiography, like Woolf's, takes place before her study of Freud and her psychoanalysis with him began in 1933, but, again, in the atmosphere of literary London where Freud was on every tongue. This seems significant in that both writers seem more free to trust their *own* understanding of their personal experience before they began formal study of psychoanalysis; after their study, both seem more willing to trust the authorities than themselves, and, for this reason, I find their later writings less insightful. For example, Freud tried to steer H.D. away from her "dangerous" feelings of transcendence and mysticism because he saw them (insightfully) as "a form of nostalgia for the time when the ego did not seem distinct from the external world: when the infant was nursing at her mother's breast." He commented on her dangerous "desire for union with the mother" (Fields 34). But in HERmione, under the protective guise of fiction, H.D. delved into these dangerous areas.

Passage after passage in HERmione attest to the protagonist's recognition of the patriarchal bias and power of language. Hermione Gart, nicknamed "Her," repeatedly calls her words "a gambler's heritage," something she won somehow illegitimately for herself and must continue to use.

As she sits at the dinner table listening to her father and brother talk unintelligibly of their scientific theories--of Minnenberg and Coppard and the Copenhagen volume--Hermione observes, "They hurl things at one another across the tablecloth like two arctic explorers who have both discovered the North Pole, each proving to the other, across chasms of frozen silence, that his was the original discovery. They would drag up people and things from Ptolemy to Pericles to Phidias" (36). And in those "chasms of frozen silence" are Hermione's mother and sister-in-law, "keeping up a secondary line of dialogue" about salt and what the maid should wear. Hermione, left out of both the combative, scientific figurative of male language and the frozen, passive, salt-of-the-earth literal of female language, must use her gambler's heritage to integrate the two worlds.

She must tread lightly, however, around the immense destructive power of the masculine Symbolic Order on which her language is founded. Appropriately, the word that threatens to destroy Hermione is 'father': "Words beat and sizzled and a word bent backward like a saw in a sawmill reversed, turned inward, to work horrible destruction. The word 'father' . . . reversed itself inward, tore at the inner lining of the thing called Her Gart. It tore her inner being so that she stood stiff, alert" (15). Language also has supernatural power to "carve and set up solid altars" (76). Indeed, as Monique Wittig says, "They write, of their

authority to accord names, that it goes back so far that the *origin of language itself* may be considered an act of authority emanating from those who dominate" (43). As Hermione reads in her Bible, "In the beginning was the Word." H.D. writes, "This frightened her. God is in a word. God is in a word. God is in HER. She said, 'HER, HER, HER. I am Her, I am Hermione . . . I am the word AUM.' This frightened her" (32).

Obviously, this phallocentric language of the Symbolic Order and its claim to historical and divine authority poses serious problems for a woman writer. In a sensitive study of H.D.'s perception of her "Otherness" in language and culture, Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes:

> The difficulty of establishing female identity as subject is signalled by H.D.'s cunning nickname for her main character, Hermione. That object case, used in subject place, exactly locates the thematics of the self-as-woman: 'surveyor and surveyed,' who pointedly explores the selfhood she can make from articulating her Otherness. (61)

For example, the book begins with Hermione Gart's declaration "I am Her, Her, Her" and a fascinating shift of pronouns--from "*Her* Gart," to "*she* grasped," "*her* fingers slipped," "*she* cried in *her* dementia" (3) [emphasis added]. A few chapters later (and throughout the book), H.D. writes, "Her stooped to the springhouse door . . . Her bumped her head on

the low door . . . Her rarely thought . . ." (11-12). Later, as S. Travis explains perceptively, Hermione confuses Her-self with Fayne Rabb/Frances Gregg, playing again with subject and object. "I will not have her hurt. I will not have Her hurt. She is Her. I am Her. Her is Fayne. Fayne is Her. I will not let them hurt HER" (181).

In Freudian and Lacanian cultural models the separation of Self and Other is an essential stage in linguistic and psychological development. Hermione, however, wants to integrate Self and Self, fusing the influences of both of her parents. But, "In Hermione Gart the two never fused and blended, she was both moss-grown, imbedded and at the same time staring with her inner vision on forever-tumbled breakers. If she went away, her spirit would break; if she stayed, she would be suffocated" (9). This dilemma parallels the problem of the developing female child faced with initiation into Lacan's phallocentric Symbolic Order while retaining attachment to the Imaginary Order and to the mother. Eventually, for Hermione, this pull toward the "moss-grown" suffocation of "staying" joins with the inviting, socially acceptable passivity of domesticity and marriage and remains a central conflict in her development. Throughout the first half of the book Her weighs the benefits and drawbacks of marrying George, whose sexuality "smudged [her] out" (73). She must resist his powerful pull toward passive objectivity, her approved place in society and in the

Symbolic Order, so she can be Her, the object as active Subject. In this moving and sensuous passage, for example, Hermione tries to integrate the cultural vision of the passive, feminine "good girl" with her desire for self determination:

> She wanted George as a child wants a doll, whose other dolls are broken. She wanted George as a little girl wants to put her hair up or to wear long skirts. She wanted George with some uncorrelated sector of Her Gart, she wanted George to correlate for her, life here, there. She wanted George to define and to make definable a mirage, a reflection of some lost incarnation . . . She knew sooner or later that George would begin his prodding and sooner or later, she must make up her mind. She wanted George to make the thing an integral, herself integrity. She wanted George to make one of his drastic statements that would dynamite her world away for her. She wanted this, but even as she wanted it she let herself sink further, further, she saw that her two hands reached towards George like the hands of a drowned girl. She knew she was not drowned. Where others would drown--lost, suffocated in this element--she knew that she lived . . . she wanted George to pull her out, she wanted George to push her in, let Her be drowned utterly. (63)

Hermione's decision to marry George is constantly

undermined by this ambivalence--and by her recognition of what he, as the representative of the phallocentric Symbolic, will do to her. First, his sexual nature is threatening and aggressive. It victimizes her: "George was like a great tawny beast, a sort of sub-lion pawing at her, pawing with great hand at her tousled garments" (85). And "the face of George looked like a wolf, was a wolf, it was a wolf mask on a man's body" (174). George tears her clothes and "breaks, slashes and tatters [her] weeks." Second, and more significant, George wants to make her an object-muse, "a Her that he called decorative" in order to more fully define himself as subject and as poet (172). Of the last revealing scene with him, H.D. writes, "Burst up, up said George Lowndes, dance under a pink lampshade. You are essentially feminine, said George Lowndes, dance and dance for you make me feel a devil" (219).

Generally, Hermione's relationships with her parents and other characters in the novel, male and female, focus on her identification with them--suggesting the unity of the Pre-Oedipal, mother-centered, Imaginary Order, rather than the sense of difference inherent in the Symbolic. Her encounters with George, however, are revealing in the urgency they arouse in Hermione not for fusion, but for identification and self-assertion. She senses that George would make her like the "Hans Anderson mermaid" who "sold her glory for feet and then couldn't speak." "I will not sell my

glory," Hermione insists (120). She recognizes that "George does not know what [she] is" (84) and that "George could never love a tree properly" (73). In her delirium near the end of the novel she wants to confront George with what he's done to her. She says, with quintessential modernist irony: "Can't you see you've tampered with me like an ill-bred child with a delicate mechanical instrument? You have no respect for science" (191).

In spite of her serious doubts about George, Hermione's initial decision to marry him seems an obvious step in her move toward self-revelation. Marriage is, even today, a socially acceptable way to obtain a new identity by taking a new name. Because she, as Hermione Gart, failed to live up to the academically successful reputation of the Gart name, Hermione feels she is nothing: "She could no longer struggle. Clutching out toward some definition of herself, she found that "I am Her Gart" didn't let her hold on. Her fingers slipped off; she was no longer anything. Gart, Gart, Gart and the Gart theorem of mathematical biological intention dropped out Hermione. She was not Gart, she was not Hermione, she was not any more Her Gart, what was she" (4)?

She turns her gaze in on herself and decides that "She must have an image no matter how fluid, how inchoate. . . . 'People want to marry me. I don't want to marry people.' But, she concluded, 'One has to do something.' . . . Names are in people, people are in names" (5). Later she observes,

"Hermione Gart. I am Hermione Gart and will be Hermione Lowndes. . . it wasn't right. People are in things. Things are in people. I can't be called Lowndes"(112).[2]

Throughout the novel Hermione Gart grasps at the father's power to name by renaming herself *Her, Tree, Aum* and *Fayne*. In the end, she rejects marriage and patrilineage and insists on her own identity, telling her nurse, "My name's Hermione." She explains the significance of this naming in the conversation which follows: "'It seems quite too beautiful a name to be used in conversation.' 'Yes isn't it? They call me Her. I am called Her.' 'That seems a little--I mean a little too short.' 'Yes. That's my way. I am too--too remote you know and too--too silly. I am both' " (200). Similarly, H.D. herself rejected the name Hilda Doolittle that was her inheritance in the patriarchal system. Adalaide Morris states that "H.D. used her signature not to fix but to extend and disperse her identity" (497). H.D.'s (and Hermione's) self-affirmation and embracing of multiple names/selves which disrupts the ordered Law of the Father is characteristic of *l'écriture féminine*.

Not only does H.D. recognize the naming and defining powers of phallocentric language, but she also confronts her entrapment in and alienation from it. The powerful image of Hermione's mother sitting in a darkened corner of a room while Gart "collected all the light to fall just there on just that microscopic slide or just that bowl of little

sizzling acids" (81) clearly defines women's place in Hélène Cixous's patriarchal binary opposition--Man/Woman, Light/Dark, Activity/Passivity, Culture/Nature. Indeed, images of entrapment, suffocation, drowning and death abound in the novel. Toril Moi explains that "for one of the terms to acquire meaning, [Cixous] claims, it must destroy the other. The 'couple' cannot be left intact: it becomes a general battlefield where the struggle for signifying supremacy is forever re-enacted" (105). H.D. understands who set up the battlefield: "God, some sort of Uncle Sam, Carl-Bertrand-Gart God, shut us up in a box, with temperatures too high and temperatures too low to breed new specimens like Bertrand Gart, like Carl Gart in their aquariums" (96).[3] She also recognizes women's role in the battle. According to Cixous, in this patriarchal paradigm, "either woman is passive or she doesn't exist" (92). There is no space in language to record women's struggles because woman enters language as the defeated passive, where activity is equated with victory. For example, H.D. writes of Hermione, "The catch was that her perception was ahead of her definition. She could put no name to the things she apprehended, felt vaguely that her mother should have insisted on her going on with the music" (13). This vague resonance of a rhythmic mother-language again takes H.D. into the realm of *l'écriture féminine*.

Hermione's continual gravitation toward her mother and

her fierce identification with other female characters prefigures Cixous's revisionary psycho-linguistic theory, which has the female maintaining significant ties with the Imaginary Order. Cixous explains that "in woman there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes" (252). Hermione's choices justify also Nancy Chodorow's contention that the female child never completely breaks her ties with the mother, nor does she reject the mother in order to enter the Symbolic Order. Thus, she never integrates fully into her thinking the subject/object polarity. Nor does she learn to devalue the literal and base figurations on absence. Instead, she finds expression and identity in the *presence* of others. For example, "One I love, two I love, three I love" is a repeated refrain in HERmione, significant in that it positions Her in what Carol Gilligan calls "a web of relationships," rather than in a binary opposition of male and female. Hermione rejects this opposition and stands up against separation by seeing her brother as her double. "She did not know why and how she loved her brother. He did not know how and why he loved Hermione. They stared at one another like two hawk-moths, like two hummingbird beetles, like two long-throated cranes . . . " (17). She would be one with Bertrand" (18).

Though H.D. is known (some critics say *best* known) in

connection with famous men--Pound, D.H. Lawrence, William Carlos Williams, Richard Aldington and Freud--her most significant relationship was with Bryher, the woman with whom she lived for much of her life, and who adopted H.D.'s daughter Perdita. Significantly, in the novel, Hermione also stands up against separation by identifying passionately with other women, most obviously Fayne Rabb, the Frances Gregg character. Mirror images surround Fayne--images of identification and connection, of presence, not, as with George, of differentiation and absence. When Hermione meets Fayne she is "astonished to perceive how she could turn, perceive as a mirror the whole of the fantasy of the world reversed and in that mirror a wide room opening" (76). She identifies Fayne as "a sort of reflection of a stormcloud seen in water" (133) and insists, "I know her. Her. I am Her. She is Her. Knowing her, I know Her. She is some amplification of myself like amoeba giving birth, by breaking off, to amoeba. I am a sort of mother, a sort of sister to Her" (158).

It is finally this stand against separation which allows Hermione to claim a place in language, to conclude that "It was George with his volumes who was wordless, who was inarticulate" (170). It allows her to reject cultural constructions, to undermine the patriarchal binary opposition: "A twist, a turn. Men are not strong. Women are stronger. I am stronger. I turn and twist out of those

iron arms. . . . She said, 'Please put the light on'" (173). It allows her to pull her mother-self out of darkness and rediscover her pre-Oedipal language.

After a severe storm Hermione and her mother, Eugenia, are flung together in the morning room, in "profound intimacy like shipwrecked mariners after the heavy sweep of waves has numbed them past consciousness of former quarrels" (88). Here they relive Her's birth in a transformational scene in which Eugenia takes on generative powers and induces Hermione's rebirth in language. Hermione observes the creative power of mother-language: "Words of Eugenia had more power than textbooks, than geometry, than all of Carl Gart and brilliant 'Bertie Gart' as people called him. Bertrand wasn't brilliant, not like mama. Carl Gart wasn't brilliant like Eugenia" (89). She insists that "one should sing hymns of worship to [Eugenia], powerful, powerless, all-powerful" (81). Following this scene, Hermione finally takes her mother's advice and writes a poem.

Eugenia's story of Hermione's birth into the arms of Demeter, the nurse who "was so much better than the doctor," is ironically juxtaposed with the failure of Bertrand and Carl Gart's "creation/experiment" which is flooded out of the laboratory by the rains. "Now Bertie and I will begin another breeding," Carl Gart says. "That took ten years, fifteen in all if you count the first experimental failures" (92). Their masculine infertility reduces their science and

language to something tiny and inept in the face of Demeter, the goddess of fertility, who "had driven the raging storm back . . . had saved [Eugenia and Hermione] from the numbers" (90).

This passage perceptively demonstrates Hermione's recognition of both maternal creative energy and female linguistic authority, both of which resist "biological-mathematical definition," and which, in French feminist theory, are inevitably related. According to Cixous, "Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse" (256). In order to save themselves "from the numbers" of that reserve-discourse "that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word 'silence,'" women tap into maternal power. Indeed, as Moi explains, "The mother's voice, her breasts, milk, honey and female waters" are all part of Cixous's invocation of the eternally present maternal power (117). H.D. locates this power and identifies it with Hermione's writing: "Almost for a moment, repudiating that earlier mystic genealogy, her soul had gone further, almost she had found her mother--wood-goddess on a woodpath. Almost words would work charm . . . but not yet (67).

Hermione eventually defers to the originality of this mother-language and, thus, counters phallogocentrism. "So

you think I have so little spunk, so little character that I would repeat (like a foul parrot) words, words, words out of someone else's mouth, spew back words that have been already chewed and chewed?" (95). Deborah Kelly Kloepfer also notes HERmione's preference for *l'écriture féminine*. She discusses H.D. in terms of Julia Kristeva, saying that her discourse in HERmione and the other autobiographical novels comes *before paternal sign and law*. "The rhythms and repetitious pulsing prose, associated with the heritages of maternal and homosexual otherness, proposes not only a polarity between (male) speech and (female) silence but a new speech, the speech of the Other."[4] Though Cixous associates this Other-language more closely with the female body than Kristeva, the focus in both theories is the pre-Symbolic Language of the Mother.

Like Cixous, Irigaray connects this language to the female body. While male sexuality and, in the Lacanian construction, language acquisition center on the single sex organ, the phallus, Irigaray insists that the female language of the Imaginary Order has no center but is multiple and diverse: "A woman 'touches herself' constantly without anyone being able to forbid her to do so, for her sex is composed of two lips which embrace each other continually" (100). She adds, "*woman has sex organs just about everywhere*. She experiences pleasure almost everywhere" (103). Thus, "Woman would always remain multiple, but she

would be protected from dispersion because the other is part of her, and is autoerotically familiar to her" (104). The idea of multiplicity is essential to French theories which insist that women must write the body. Because Freud and Lacan base their theories on biological differences, French feminists undercut those theories by embracing female sexuality. By seeing the negative lack of phallus as a positive multiplicity of sexual response, the idea of femaleness becomes positive. Irigaray explains that woman encompasses male and female in her identification with both father and mother, "Thus woman does not have a sex. She has at least two of them, but they cannot be identified as ones. Indeed she has many more of them than that. Her sexuality, always at least double, is in fact *plural*" (102).

This multiplicity of female psychological and sexual response parallels Hermione's experience. At one point H.D. describes Hermione as an octopus: "Hermione let octopus-Hermione reach out and up and with a thousand eyes regard space and distance and draw octopus arm back, only to replunge octopus arm up and up into illimitable distance" (71). Clearly Her's doubling identifications with her brother, with the family's servant Mandy, with her nurse and with Fayne are indicative of the multiplicity of *l'écriture féminine*.[5]

The "rhythms and repetitious pulsing prose" which Kloepfer locates in HERmione can also be characterized as the

echoes of pre-linguistic mother-language, what Cixous calls "the resonance of fore-language," which duplicates the diversity of the female body. For Hermione, "Words beat and formed unformulated syllables" (25). She is attuned to the inner pulsations of Kristeva's semiotic, which H.D. describes in mystic terms as an "ouija-board feeling" that "was saying something but she couldn't comprehend the something that something in her kept repeating. . . . Something far and far within kept repeating something that had no words, to which words fitted. A sort of ouija-board sensation to which words fitted" (122). The language of the female body is apparent not only in these rhythms, but also in the recurring circular images and in the circularity of H.D.'s prose. The first line of the novel, for example, is "Her Gart went round in circles."

Interestingly, H.D.'s use of the language of the female body intensifies with Hermione's powerful attraction for Fayne. Hermione associates a "steady rhythmic clap clap clap" with Fayne (137) and describes the "concentric intimacy" of their relationship (164). The rhythms are even more apparent when she reads her poems to Fayne: "Her Gart spoke and read, read and spoke, her words made rhythm to the poem, the poem made rhythm suitable to her swift words. Words came from nowhere, tumbled headlong somewhere" (179). Fayne, in fact, functions as an intimate, violent muse in this passage which prefigures the language of Wittig's The

Lesbian Body: "The words were (as it were) dragged out of her long throat by a small hand, by a tight hand, by a hard, dynamic forceful vibrant hand. The hand of Fayne Rabb dragged words out of the throat of Her Gart" (145). And, while sexuality with George is associated with heat and fire, Fayne is described in archetypal images of female fluids. When Hermione tells George she loves "Her, only Her, Her, Her," he replies, "Narcissus in the reeds, Narcissa" (170). Hermione tells Fayne," You are not myself but you are some projection of myself. Myself, *my* self projected you like water" (146).

This linguistic emphasis on female sexuality can also explain more fully Hermione's rejection of traditional logical structures and chronologies. Irigaray explains that because of the plurality of female sexuality "'she' is indefinitely other in herself." She "goes off in all directions" in a language "in which 'he' is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning" (103). Hermione's language, then, comes from a mind that H.D. describes as "a patchwork of indefinable association" (24). "Science, as Bertram Gart knew it, failed her" (6) and "her mathematics and her biology hadn't given her what she dreamed of" (12). In another key passage, H.D. exposes this terrible failure of science and phallogocentrism in the cold detachment with which Carl Gart receives his daughter (much like Mr. Ramsay's possessive observation as Mrs. Ramsay and James): "Carl Gart

brought his mind by a superhuman effort to readjustment to the thing before him. He saw an odd fury-ridden creature with white face and flame-lipped face and a face where two lips were drawn tight almost like dead lips across a skeleton. He saw ridges in the face, fine bones beneath the face" (99).

Still, Hermione tries to work through her female "dementia," to pin her indefinable associations down in patriarchal terms with the constant repetition of such words as *exactly* and *precisely*. She finally discovers that only art will allow her to work with her "odd distorted images," because "art was what science wasn't. Art was the discriminating and selecting and bringing odd distorted images into right perspective"--Her own perspective (139). Music, like language, is, to Hermione, "notes beamed and shot star and meteor and shooting star, reflection of star and meteor and shooting star seen in the polished top of the piano" (109), not music like science "all made to a pattern." Hermione rages, "I am tired of things that make molecule pattern and pattern like planets rotating round the sun and planets making just so much of a slight variation in their so set circle (110). She insists on "stray star-spume, star sprinkling from a wild river" (76).

And here Hermione's perspective overlaps obviously with H.D.'s. The organization of the novel is a reflection of Hermione's "patchwork of indefinable associations." The

story unfolds somewhat chronologically, somewhat hierarchically, but always by associations rather than in obvious structures. For example, when Hermione first meets George's mother, she focuses suddenly and intensely on a statue of a praying boy on the piano. As people enter and leave the apartment, play music, speak to her and of her, Hermione continually returns to the image of the ceramic boy with his hands reaching toward heaven. The central action of the scene comes across as background for the tiny statue and the associations it sends "whirling in [Hermione's] head" (106). For Hermione, an "inevitable word-reaction followed her least thought but reaction was under everything" (224).

Time also has a fluidity in HERmione which defies traditional chronology. Despite frequent references to heat and cold and to the changing of the seasons, it is difficult to decide just how long the episodes of the novel last in linear time--especially the wandering delirium of Hermione's breakdown in the final pages of the novel. For Her, "There is the slightest screen door between today and last year. Everything goes on with everything" (209). Claudine Herrmann explains that woman's "most mortal enemy" is time--"man lives in an organized, temporal perspective," but woman's time "responds to the mind's rhythm, which is at one with the biological rhythm." HERmione exemplifies this French feminist approach to time. Her "claims the right to the present moment, [and] affirms the refusal of a life alienated

in social time which is so hostile to interior time" (172).

At the conclusion of the novel, Hermione includes a rejection of America in her dismissal of Western philosophical traditions: "There was nothing in America for them but rows of desks and stabilization and exact formalization (Uncle Sam pressing things down in test tubes), there was nothing but standardization or dancing at a carnival" (233). Hermione realizes that she is unusual, a carnival freak in a country that values the math and science she failed to apprehend at Bryn Mawr. In other words, she never fully accepts the Symbolic Order, never enters completely the Law of the Father. The insightful self-examination and subsequent self-acceptance which lead her back to the pre-Oedipal Language of the Mother also lead her inevitably out of traditional society.

Because H.D. undertook such a merciless psychological self-examination as both woman and author in her writing of HERmione, the text represents both feminized patriarchal language and feminist mother-language more completely than any text which preceded it and most which have followed. As Hermione/H.D. attempted to negotiate the polarities of self and society, mother and father, artist and muse, her personal endeavor comes to reflect and amplify the female position in male-dominated, figurative culture. Because of her run-ins with that culture--conic sections at Bryn Mawr, her father and brother at home, George in the forest--she suffers a

breakdown, a loss of self. "I'm too strong and I'm nothing and I'm frightened," Hermione says. "She achieved a very ugly voice that blubbered unbecomingly from somewhere, saying it over and over like a prayer wheel. 'I am frightened. I am the word Aum, I am Her. I am Her. . . . I am so --so--very--frightened' " (176). Even with her naming prayer-chants Hermione can't recover what she lost with her integration into the foreign, phallocentric Symbolic Order. "What did one take, as they say, 'up' after one had been banged on the head and sees triangles and molecules and life going on in triangles and molecules" (51). Triangles and molecules and parallelograms don't accommodate a woman/artist who perceives concentric patterns and stray star-spume.

Hermione fears--and rightly--that her patriarchal linguistic heritage will destroy her as it destroyed many woman writers before her: "I will be caught finally, I will be broken. Not broken, walled in, incarcerated. Her will be incarcerated in Her" (215). Yet she stands up against "incarceration" in phallogocentrism. And "before discarding" it, she must "get it right" (147). Words were indeed "her plague and her redemption," and she uses them to "prove conic sections a falsity." Though she is trapped by them, though they often fail her, it is through them, finally, that she reclaims the creative powers of *l'écriture féminine*. And with the redemption of *l'écriture féminine*, she is able to break the patterns of silence and

objectification that were her plague in phallogocentrism.

Hermione's blank page is "virginal for one purpose, for one Creator. Last summer [when she was reborn] the Creator had been white lightning brandished against blackness. Now the creator was Her's feet, narrow black crayon across the winter whiteness" (223). H.D. compares Hermione's usurpation of patriarchal language with the hard-earned, unnatural feet of the Hans Christian Anderson mermaid--and her first faltering steps on them are the crayon smudges of a child. Unlike the mermaid, however, Hermione has not been seduced by the unfaithful lover, the Law of the Father. Through the power of her "mythopoeic mind (mine)" and her identification with (and as) women, she has succeeded in recovering her pre-symbolic female self and setting an *unnamed* lady back in the male-defined sky. Even as she embraces the lover, she is, as Monique Wittig says, killing him with the words she speaks.

According to Toril Moi:

> As far as the study of sex differences in language goes, any analysis of isolated fragments (sentences) in literature, as for instance in the much-quoted case of Virginia Woolf's theory of the 'woman's sentence', will warrant no specific conclusions whatever, since the very same structures can be found in male writers (Proust, for example, or other modernists). The only way of producing interesting results from such texts

> is to take the whole of the utterance (the whole text) as one's object, which means studying its ideological, political and psychoanalytical articulations, its relations with society, with the psyche and--not least--other texts. (155-6)

As with the preceding analysis of To the Lighthouse, an examination of H.D.'s HERmione, the "whole text," certainly reveals a panorama of female psychological concerns and cultural issues, as well as a distinctly female focus and sense of composition. HERmione, however, will also handle close-ups even more ably than To the Lighthouse. H.D.'s sentences pulse with the rhythms and images of the female body. They recur and circle back on themselves. They delight in subversive word-play, as in the confusion of subject and object. They revel in presence and deny difference. They affirm the female self in its unique psychological position between Imaginary and Symbolic. In short, they accomplish what no male modernist's sentences, for all their experimentalism, accomplished. HERmione, like To the Lighthouse, challenges Cixous's contention that there has been no writing which inscribes femininity. Years before *l'écriture féminine* was defined, H.D. found it a powerful tool for self-definition in this autobiographical novel.

Notes

[1] Although, obviously, Lacan's language acquisition theory predates H.D.'s writing, I will assume for the purpose of this discussion that he defines as accurately as anyone a pre-existent cultural and psychological phenomenon. I use his terms to discuss that phenomenon.

[2] In transcribing passages of the novel my use of ellipses is problematic because of H.D.'s frequent use of them within her own passages. I refer readers back to the novel for clarification.

[3] George, as I have noted, is also tied to the patriarchal order of Uncle Sam, Carl and Bertrand Gart. On page 98, for instance, he is described as "George Uncle-Sam-in-whiskers."

[4] I am referring here to DuPlessis's use of Kloepfer's argument (from DuPlessis, p.55).

[5] For further discussion of Hermione's identification with Mandy, see Friedman's "Modernism of the 'Scattered Remnant': Race and Politics in H.D.'s Development" collected in Benstock's Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987. Hermione's identification with her nurse, though not discussed in detail here, is clearly the center of their conversations (see pp. 200-212,) culminating in Hermione's statement: "I want to take up nursing" (215).

PART THREE

Writing Beyond The Stories: Autobiographical Fiction and Social Change

"Women's Stories have not been told. And without stories there is no articulation of experience. Without stories a woman is lost when she comes to make the important decisions of her life. She does not learn to value her struggles, to celebrate her strengths, to comprehend her pain. Without stories she cannot understand herself."

--Carol P. Christ

One of the most persistent aims of feminist theory, especially in the several years since I first encountered it, has been to avoid the violence that generalization and categorizing inflict on those who are exceptions to "The Rules." Psychoanalytic theory, for example, has been especially vulnerable to feminist critique because of its obvious bias toward white, middle-class, heterosexual subjects and values. Also vulnerable to feminist critique are the language and aims of literary criticism, especially in its recent incarnation as Theory. Theory by definition categorizes and generalizes; it *invents* The Rules. Nevertheless, young scholars (including me) are quite often

fascinated by Theory, absorbed in its intriguing play of ideas and, sometimes, appropriated by its power. I confess: I am a feminist literary theorist. This is not a contradiction in terms, though I've encountered it as such repeatedly as I've worked on this project. I was not surprised to encounter skepticism for the "feminist" part from young (mostly male) graduate students and older (mostly male) professors. I *was* surprised when feminists warned me away from theoretical work. French feminist theories, they told me, are studies in immasculation.[1] The theorists worship the Fathers (especially that great misogynist father, Freud), reinforcing their violence and power. Then, when I started to combine French feminist observations with American feminist political agendas and make direct connections with women writers' lives, theorists warned me away from such naive empiricism and traditional thinking. I kept forgetting the non-referentiality of language and the problematic nature of subjectivity.

These final chapters are an attempt to answer the criticism from all sides--to integrate the best of what I've learned about feminism and theory through readings of three novels I find exemplary of several trends in autobiographical fiction as it grew up with modernism. However, I make no apologies to empiricists or feminists for the theoretical work of the preceding two chapters on Virginia Woolf and

H.D., for which I had the same goal. Nor should I apologize for the graduate-school training which led me to value their experimental language and modernist aesthetics even while it reinforced their positions as privileged, elite, white women; this training also gave me the critical skills to challenge their positions and their meanings. These critical skills inform my use of Theory, which I perceive as mainly positive, though I see where it often forces its practitioners to repeat the oppressions of our culture. I find the opportunities for discovery in some theoretical work to be worth the risks involved, as long as its practitioners remain constantly on guard and try ceaselessly to deconstruct its biases. As Linda Kauffman contends, "it is precisely the act of theorizing which has enabled [feminists] to frame . . . questions in ways that have radically altered our means of articulating perceptions of domination, subjugation, exploitation, and repression" (2). Toril Moi, too, holds, that we cannot separate ourselves from our intellectual context--Wollstonecrafts's theories, for example, are intimately connected with Rousseau's, so much so that "without Rousseau, there would have been no Wollstonecraft."[2] As we make ourselves more aware of the problems and shortcomings of where we're located (not that we can ever be *completely* self-aware[3]), we are better able to use that context to strengthen our work. Like it or not, it seems

literary and critical theory are the context in which we now function--intellectually and academically. Ignoring that context limits feminist critique.

Though I have described in some detail what I see as the modernist context of the novels I interpret as well as the postmodernist context of my interpretations, I will, in the next three chapters, expand that context further. Shari Benstock warns that "our feminist rereadings of Modernism cannot remain comfortably within the limits of the old logic, within the boundaries of the old definitions, within the conventions of the old strategies" ("Expatriate" 34). In other words, we shouldn't celebrate only the women modernists such as H.D. and Virginia Woolf who fit into traditional categories of modernism. By so doing, Benstock explains, "feminist critics have--unwittingly I think--played into the hands of a conservative critical establishment that has rewarded the revolution in poetic language, overlooking contributions by women whose writings stayed within traditional genre boundaries" (36n).

The final three writers that I consider--Anzia Yezierska, Radclyffe Hall and Nella Larsen--are three whose writings "stayed within traditional genre boundaries" but broke from tradition in other significant ways. I examine each of these three autobiographical novels individually, with reference to the view of postmodernism laid out by Nancy Fraser and Linda

J. Nicholson in "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism." Fraser and Nicholson maintain that, to avoid the violence of generalization, "postmodern feminists need not abandon the large theoretical tools needed to address large political problems" (34). But Fraser and Nicholson do, however, insist that "not just any kind of theory will do. Rather, theory here would be explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within societies and periods." Theory, they write, should be "nonuniversalist" and "attuned to changes and contrasts instead of to covering laws" (34). In Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography, Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck pull together a collection of essays that, as much as possible, heeds this advice, avoiding the tendency to universalize. Included are discussions of autobiographies by Native-American, Latin-American and African-American women, Quebecois and Egyptian women from various historical moments and from various critical perspectives. Similarly, in Autobiographical Voice: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture, Françoise Lionnet is attuned to cultural specificity. She centers her discussion of autobiography on *métissage*, or miscegenation--the intersections of race and culture in bi- or multi-lingual writers.

Sidonie Smith, in A Poetics of Women's Autobiography, focuses on marginality and how it affects women autobiographers. Smith posits that "Choosing to write autobiography . . . unmasks [the woman writer's] transgressive desire for cultural and literary authority" (50). Woman, she says, has no public story to tell "Since the ideology of gender makes of woman's life script a nonstory, a silent space, a gap in patriarchal culture" (50). The dictum against autobiography is even more prohibitive if the autobiographer is a woman of color or a working-class woman. Then, "she faces even more complex imbroglios of male-female figures: Here ideologies of race and class, sometimes even of nationality, intersect and confound those of gender. As a result, she is doubly or triply the subject of other people's representations, turned again and again in stories that reflect and promote certain forms of selfhood identified with class, race, and nationality as well as with sex. In every case, moreover, she remains marginalized. . . . In her doubled, perhaps tripled, marginality, then, the autobiographer negotiates sometimes four sets of stories, all nonetheless written about her rather than by her" (51). This multiple marginality is an especially relevant concept for the three woman writers who make up Part Three of this project.

Taking my cue, then, from the work of Smith, Lionnet,

Brodzki and Schenck and other admirable (mostly socialist-feminist) texts, I examine three autobiographical novels, looking at their transgressions and transformations, how they modify rather than characterize traditional modernism--Yezierska, for example, telling the American immigrant woman's story while other modernists lived as expatriates in Europe; Hall regretting rather than celebrating the painful experience of alienation that her lesbianism brought on; and Larsen exposing racism and undermining the American dream in a very different way from Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald or William Faulkner. Finally, I examine how the challenges these three novels made to modernism have changed not only our literature, but also our world.

Notes

[1] I'm not sure where this term originated because I've encountered it frequently in feminist theory but have yet to locate it in Webster or the Oxford English Dictionary. I believe it first appeared on page xx of the Introduction to Judith Fetterley's The Resisting Reader (1977). It serves as a convenient antonym for "emasculation," and means making a man of a woman.

[2] From a seminar with Moi at The School of Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth College, Summer, 1989.

[3] With thanks to Stanley Fish who made this point quite emphatically at the same School of Criticism and Theory and in his essays "Consequences" and "Being Interdisciplinary Is So Very Hard to Do." Despite his objections, I maintain that it is possible (*and* ethically necessary) to step out of one's cultural limitations and attain a certain level of self-awareness--and, most importantly for feminist critics, to change one's behavior in reference to this increased self-awareness. See also Myra Jehlen's "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism" for further discussion of this problem.

Chapter Seven: Yezierska Valuing the Struggle

Though recent years have seen a revival of interest in Anzia Yezierska and her works, the popular writer of the 'twenties still suffers censure for her reliance on autobiography as subject matter for her novels and stories. This reliance, critics assume, leads to a lack of authorial detachment, a tendency toward melodrama, and, the ever-present condemnation of women writers, a proclivity for sentimentalism.[1] Carol B. Schoen, in several essays and in her book Anzia Yezierska argues that critics must "move beyond the autobiographical level" in order to appreciate Yezierska's "concern for the craft of writing" and with "esthetic considerations" ("Cinderella" 5-6). Schoen maintains that "If the reading of her works is restricted to autobiographical--to sociological, rather than literary analysis--there is a real possibility that our potential understanding [of her works] may be limited" (11). She insists that "Yezierska was not an illiterate immigrant who miraculously found words to describe her life; she was an educated, highly conscious artist who struggled to develop the tools of her trade" (3). Yezierska's daughter Louise

Levitas Henriksen agrees that Yezierska exaggerated her connection with such uneducated characters as the young Sara Smolinsky in Bread Givers. "It should have been obvious," she writes in her biography of her mother, "that to write as she did in the guise of an untutored immigrant took a certain sophistication" (6).

In the effort to reclaim Yezierska from simplistic autobiographical criticism and open her works up to a more objective formalist analysis, however, critics often fail to value just how much Yezierska's close identification with her characters adds to her work. As Schoen points out, Yezierska *wanted* to be a spokesperson for her people--immigrant working-class Jews. Indeed, because Yezierska had experienced first-hand the hardships of poverty and ignorance, her central purpose in writing was not to create works of art, but to increase the reading public's awareness of and sympathy for the plight of struggling immigrants.[2] This does not, as critics contend, weaken her works. Her skillful combination of autobiography and fiction is, rather, her greatest strength. It is from this combination that she wrests "cultural and literary authority" (Smith 50).

Through Sara Smolinsky in Bread Givers, Yezierska retells, with poetic license, the stories of her youth--women's "Horatio Alger" stories which had never been the topic of serious "literature."[2] Sara is the youngest of

four daughters of an immigrant Polish Jewish family living in a "dark, airless tenement railroad flat" in New York City (Henriksen 14). Her father is a scholar, and, in the Eastern-European Orthodox Jewish tradition, studies Torah and depends on his wife and daughters for financial support. Sara's struggle against her father's tyrannical authority parallels Yezierska's similar struggle with her father, though to increase the tension in the novel, Yezierska eliminates her six brothers from the story and simplifies the characterizations of her three sisters. Indeed, in selecting the details and incidents and in carefully paring down characters Yezierska heightens the "struggle between a father of the Old World and a daughter of the New" that is the subtitle of her novel.

Sara's conflicts with her father are not only literal--the daughter challenging her father's right to dictate her choices--they are also figurative. As Schoen points out, the sense of community and heritage of the Jewish people "are embodied in the person of the father so that Sara's alternate rebellions and regrets have psychological as well as social validity" (Anzia 73). In other words, Sara challenges her religious and cultural heritage via her father, a point to which I will return later. It is clear that Yezierska faced similar cultural and religious barriers when she chose to write Bread Givers. Not only is she,

through autobiography, telling a woman's life, making of a "silent space" a story, but she is also, through fiction, *creating* a story. This creation poses a serious dilemma for Jews because, in their tradition, this sort of artistic work violates the Second Commandment--to have no other gods. As Cynthia Ozick explains, "The writer of fiction is really a kind of idolator, or, worse, divinity-seizer. The writer of fiction intends to become a small-scale god, a creator, setting herself or himself in competition with the Creator. That, after all, is the warning inherent in the Second Commandment. Whoever sets up an image-making shop is in competition with the Maker of the world" (259-260).

In an essay on Jewish autobiography, Alvin H. Rosenfeld also addresses "the problem of Jews and fiction." Rosenfeld explains, "we are not allowed to indulge ourselves ultimately in fabrication" (133):

> The Will of the Imagination is a powerful and seductive one, but it is not Jewish Will. It knows nothing of history and cares nothing for the Lord of History. Indeed, it has declared history void of a Master and has arrogated to itself the sole powers of Creation. Its only piety is pleasure, it only wish, to be indulged. Indulge Imagination and you can have what you will--the riches of magic and mystery, the transforming powers of illusion, the obliteration of

> all precedence and priority, a momentary triumph over conscience, sense, and time. (154)

Rosenfeld theorizes that when Jews undertake to break this prohibition, there must be a powerful motivation present. For Mary Antin, a contemporary of Yezierska, for example, Rosenfeld argues that "Autobiography. . . [was] equivalent to an act of exorcism: like the Ancient Mariner, Mary Antin would tell her tale to be rid of it" (136). Antin, he posits, embraced the traditional Jewish "pursuit of an intellectual life" to resolve painful conflicts in her private life (141). Alice Kessler Harris argues that Yezierska's motivation for telling her story is similar to Antin's--to justify herself, "to seek absolution" for her life. She explains that "Yezierska, like Sara, opted for self and built her life around her own authentic needs. She freed herself from a tradition few of her countrywomen could ignore in that first generation, and she did it against the heaviest odds" (xvii).

I propose that Yezierska did indeed have a powerful motivation to write her life--not only to plead her own case, but to plead the case of the immigrant to a country that, just before the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, appeared to be increasingly apathetic to it. Autobiographical fiction gave Yezierska the tools to plead this case most effectively. Using her life as a blueprint, she built fictions that were

so true to life that she could escape the religious prohibition against fiction. Using fiction, she disguised her life to escape the cultural prohibition against telling a woman's "nonstory." In addition, by pleading the case of the immigrant woman in a novel, Yezierska avoids, in some measure, accusations of being strident or political, charges often leveled against women writers who aim to have influence outside the domestic sphere. She expands her field, placing value on the immigrant life experience in general. Her depictions of the poverty Sara and her family lived in, for example, are vital and moving; the girls' pathetic attempts to make their dirty, cluttered room more presentable when their suitors visit or Sara's visions of food as she stands starving at her ironing board are not easy to forget. "A terrible hunger rose up in me," Sara says, "--a hunger I had been trying to forget since my lunch of two stale slices of bread and a scrap of cheese. Just when I had to begin saving more from eating, the starvation of days and weeks began tearing and dragging down my last strength" (167). Sara imagines her stomach is "like some clawing wild animal in me that I had to stop to feed always" (173).

Yezierska replicates not only the constant hunger, both literal and figurative, of the immigrant's life, but also its tension, lack of privacy and constant noise. Sara muses, at one point, about what her parents' life could have been like

without "the haggling and the cursing, the tearing at each other's throats for pennies" which she sees at the fishmarket (141). "If only there was plenty of money between them," she says, "how happy they would be together, fighting in fun, instead of nagging and galling each other fighting over pennies'" (117). When she finally escapes her parents' home and finds a room of her own, she glories, most of all, in its privacy: "As I sat there, in the stillness of the morning, I realized that I had yet never been alone since I was born. This was the first time I ate by myself" (156). Later she describes the "terrible racket" that was a constant backdrop to immigrant life in New York. "Phonographs and pianolas blared against each other. Voices gossiping and jabbering across the windows. Wailing children. The yowling and shrieks of two alley cats. The shrill bark of a hungry pup" (164). When finally she graduates from college, with her "Dark night of poverty over" (239), Sara joys in "the leisure and the quiet" of her life and revels in "my precious privacy, my beautiful aloneness" (241).

Yet the peace of solitude away from the racket of the ghetto also has its downside for Sara--the loneliness of alienation from the new world in which she's chosen to live. Henriksen discusses these feelings that, for Yezierska, also came as part of her experience as a working-class immigrant girl. This sense of alienation, Henriksen points out, was

like that of other members of the "lost generation" --yet quite different (6). Yezierska writes that Sara watched life "from the outside" (218). When she attends a college dance, Sara sits on the sidelines "cold, lifeless, like a lost ghost. I was nothing and nobody. It was worse than being ignored. Worse than being an outcast. I simply didn't belong" (219). This sense of not belonging was not, as it seemed for other modernists, something she was proud of or cultivated; it was not, for her, an indication of superiority or uniqueness. It was, in fact, her greatest trial. "'Why is it,' she asks her dean at college, "that when a nobody wants to get to be somebody she's got to make herself terribly hard, when people like you who are born high up can keep all their kind feelings and get along so naturally well with everybody?'" (231).

"Making herself terribly hard" was a necessary part of Sara's break with her family and her decision to devote all of her time to study and work. She says, "More and more I began to think inside myself, I don't want to sell herring for the rest of my days. I want to learn something. I want to do something. I want some day to make myself for a person and come among people. But how can I do it if I live in this hell house of Father's preaching and Mother's complaining?" (66). Yet coming among people meant leaving behind not only the "hell house" but also the people and the traditions with

which she was raised. It involved a break with and a rejection of her family, especially her father, and of her religion.

Sara's break with her father becomes the central theme of the novel, and in it Yezierska captures many of the hardships and sacrifices involved in adapting to a new world. Though it would be easy to see the father as the bad guy of the story, representing all that is old and outdated, it was not that simple for Sara. As Schoen explains, Sara's father "is never simply a villain. He, like his daughters, is caught between two opposing ways of life" (Yezierska 69). While the younger Sara is eager to adapt to the new world and must *learn* to value tradition, her father does all he can to hang on to the old ways he's used to and avoid the new. He throws out lines like "women have long hair and small brains" (122), "Women were always the curse of men but when they get older they're devils and witches" (96), and "It says in the Torah: What's a woman without a man? Less than nothing--a blotted-out existence. No life on earth and no hope of Heaven" (205).

Against this negative influence, Sara struggles to identify herself as "a person among people," despite the "handicap" of having been born female. Yezierska explains:

> Of course we all knew that if God had given Mother a son, Father would have permitted a man child to

> share with him his best room in the house. A boy could say prayers after his father's death--that kept the father's soul alive forever. Always Father was throwing up to Mother that she had borne him no son to be an honour to his days and to say prayers for him when he died.
>
> The prayers of his daughters didn't count because God didn't listen to women. Heaven and the next world were only for men. Women could get into heaven because they were wives and daughters to men. Women had no brains for the study of God's Torah, but they could be the servants of men who studied the Torah. Only if they cooked for the men and washed for the men, and didn't nag or curse the men out of their homes; only if they let the men study the Torah in peace, then, maybe, they could push themselves into Heaven with the men, to wait on them there. (10)

The father's tyranny, in this passage as throughout the novel, carries the weight of religious edict, forming a dual oppression for Sara and her sisters. Rejecting her father would mean, for Sara, rejecting her religious tradition because, as he constantly reminds his family, "The whole world would be in thick darkness if not for men like me who give their lives to spread the light of the Holy Torah" (24). Similarly, Kamel connects Yezierska's experience of

separation from her parents with her continued belief in the religious teachings of her youth. Yezierska failed as a screenwriter in Hollywood, she argues, because "she feared the success which would prove her parents wrong about their 'Daughter of Babylon' who chose to separate herself from the orthodoxies of her family" (48).

Sara, however, manages to challenge these orthodoxies, first by confronting her father, then by rejecting his religious rites. She says, "More and more I began to see that Father, in his innocent craziness to hold up the Light of the Law to his children, was as a tyrant more terrible than the Tsar from Russia" (65). When her father reminds her again that "No girl can live without a father or a husband to look out for her. It says in the Torah, only through a man has a woman an existence. Only through a man can a woman enter Heaven," Sara openly rejects his message. "I'm smart enough to look out for myself," she tells him. "It's a new life now. In America, women don't need men to boss them. . . . I've got to live my own life. It's enough that Mother and the others lived for you" (137). After he chases away Fania's suitor because he has no money, Sara turns the tables on her father, confronting him with his own preaching:

> "How long [her father asks] will love last with a husband who feeds you with hunger? Even Job said, of all his suffering, nothing was so terrible as poverty.

> A poor man is a living dead one. . . ."
>
> "Father, I broke in, 'didn't you yourself say yesterday that poverty is an ornament on a good Jew, like a red ribbon on a white horse? . . . But didn't you say that the poorest beggars are happier and freer than the rich?" I dared question Father. . . .
>
> "Blood-and-iron! Hold your mouth!' hollered Father. 'You're always saying things I don't ask you." (70)

Later, she questions, "What are you always blaming everything on the children?" Again, he silences her "And he walked away as if I was nothing" (85).

After her mother's death, Sara extends the challenge to her father's authority to the religion he represents. The undertaker arrives and "with a knife in his hand, cut into Father's coat and he rent his garments according to the Biblical law and ages of tradition." Her sisters follow, tearing their dresses as required by the rites of mourning. But when the undertaker turns to Sara, in her expensive new suit bought with her first earnings as a teacher, she turns him away: '"No,' I cried. 'I feel terrible enough without tearing my clothes. . . . I don't believe in this'" (255).

Because of Sara's daring rejection of patriarchal authority and tradition, it often comes as a surprise when, at the end of the novel, she invites her father to live with

her husband and herself.[3] But Yezierska actually prepares the reader for this ending, with several references to Sara's identification with her father. "I am flesh of his flesh and blood of his blood," she laments at one point. "Why can't he understand me? Why don't we understand each other?" (206). And again, "Wild with all that was choked in me since I was born, my eyes burned into my father's eyes. 'My will is as strong as yours'" (138). Sara's sisters also notice the similarity between their father and Sara. "Let's leave her to her mad education," one sister says. "She's worse than Father with his Holy Torah'" (178). Even Sara's father points out their intellectual kinship when he introduces her to her mother's doctor near the end of the novel. He boasts, "And this, my youngest, is a *teacherin*. She has a head on her. Takes after her father, even though she's only a girl" (249).

Most significant, however, is when Sara herself finally realizes the power of this connection. Though Bread Givers doesn't employ experimental language as did the previous two novels I discussed, this passage is powerful in its evocation of the lack of separation that characterizes the mother-language which feminist critics have theorized. You will recall from Chapter Four that Nancy Chodorow and others hold that the female child retains a sense of connection from the pre-linguistic Imaginary Order. Sara says: "How could I have hated him and tried to blot him out of my life? Can I

hate my arm, my hand that is part of me? Can a tree hate the roots from which it sprang? Deeper than love, deeper than pity, is that oneness of the flesh that's in him and in me. Who gave me the fire, the passion, to push myself up from the dirt? If I grow, if I rise, if I ever amount to something, is it not his spirit burning in me?" (286).

Sara experiences a similar sense of oneness with her sisters throughout the first third of the novel. When Bessie, the oldest, comes home tired and depressed after an unsuccessful day of job hunting, Sara "felt only the dark hurt of her weary eyes" (1). Later, when their father sends away the man Bessie loves, Sara watches Bessie crying silently. "I couldn't stand to look on her," she says. "Tears came into my eyes. So I ran out of the bedroom to the kitchen not to cry" (46). Then, she follows the weeping Bessie into the bedroom "and hid myself behind the door of the bedroom and I cried and cried" (51). When Mashah, the second daughter, also experiences heartbreak, the whole family shares her pain--except the father: "We found Mashah with her head on the window sill, her whole body shaking with sobs--sobs that could not cease--and could not be consoled. Like dumb things, we all cried with her--all through the night. With so many women weeping in the house, Father could not sleep any more" (60).

Most significantly, Sara shares this connection with her

mother, whose nurturing pulls her homeward even while her father's tyranny pushes her away. When Sara finally does leave, she observes her mother "clutching at her heart in helplessness, her sorrowful eyes gazing at me. All the suffering of her years was in the dumb look she turned on me. Bending over, she took out from her stocking the red handkerchief with the knot that held her saved-up rent money. And without a word, she pushed it into my hand" (136). This nurturing continues when Sara is alone, starving and cold, and her mother appears miraculously with a warm feather bed on her back. "She threw her arms around me and kissed me hungrily . . . 'All the way from Elizabeth for you to carry it,' I cried. In the sputtering light of the candle, her sunken eyes gleamed out of their black sockets with a dumb, pleading love that made me hate myself for my selfishness. It seemed to me I never knew till now how close to my heart my mother was" (170). When Sara stands at her mother's death bed, she completes her connection with her mother through a mystic experience, much like Lily's spiritual oneness with Mrs. Ramsay or H.D.'s artistic bond with her mother, "wood goddess on a woodpath": "Suddenly the sorrowful eyes became transfigured with light. Her lips moved. I could not get the words, but the love-light of Mother's eyes flowed into mine. *I felt literally Mother's soul enter my soul like a miracle. . . . She's in me, around me.* Not in that clay"

(252-253) [emphasis added].

This spiritual link with the mother introduces a similar problem in Bread Givers as it did in To the Lighthouse; that is, the mother, in reality, is often her daughters' betrayer. Herself co-opted by the patriarchy, the mother sells her daughters over to the father's power. Sara's mother is especially guilty of this in her worship of her husband. "Mother licked up Father's every little word, like honey," Sara says. "'I'm only a sinful woman,' Mother breathed, gazing up at him. Her fingers stole a touch of his hand, as if he were the king of the world" (12). When Reb Smolinsky decides to sell Bessie in marriage to the repulsive Zalmon, the fishpeddler, for example, his wife colludes with him, multiplying Bessie's betrayal and her unhappiness. Sara, to some extent, understands this trap and her need to escape it. She perceptively construes her mother's life story as her own possible future. As her mother tells her daughters how beautiful she once was, with "cheeks like red apples, skin softer and finer as pink velvet. Long, thick braids to my knees. Eyes dancing out of my head with the life in me," Sara compares her description with the woman before her--"Mother's faded eyes, her shape like a squashed barrel of yeast, and her face black and yellow with all the worries from the world" (30). Sara, of course, turns away from her mother's path.

Or does she? Rachel Blau DuPlessis proposes in Writing Beyond the Ending that a female main character's self-development, constituting the novel's quest plot, ends where the marriage plot begins. In other words, "Soon after she accepts the man in the love plot, the female [questing] hero becomes a [passive] heroine, and the story ends" (8). DuPlessis discusses the "tension between selfless love and self-assertion" that animates many nineteenth-century novels--a tension that is quite present in Bread Givers, as Sara repeatedly laments the selfishness of her own life compared with her mother's selfless existence. Most often in novels this tension was resolved by reinforcing social convention through marriage--again, as it is in Bread Givers. "In short," DuPlessis concludes, "the romance plot, broadly speaking, is a trope for the sex-gender system as a whole" (5). Yezierska's ending, then, is problematic in that it reinforces convention not only through Sara's marriage to Hugo Seelig (who is, of course, her superior as principal of her school), but also through Sara's reconciliation with her father. Significantly, her father has not changed at all, nor in any way contributed to their reunion. Sara even goes so far as to reinforce his self-centered behavior--"He who all his life had his own way must continue to have it to the end of his days" (291)--while she continues to condemn her own selfishness. She can't forget that when her mother asked

her to visit she replied, "I have no time. I can come and see you later, but I can't study later" (244). Indeed, her final embracing of her father is partially in penance for this neglect. She takes her mother's place as her father's caretaker: "I saw in him only the child who needed mothering--who must be protected from the hard cruelties of the world" (285).

Schoen, too, implicates Yezierska for the happily-ever-after romance ending of Bread Givers. "The child Sara was based on Yezierska's own life," she argues, "but the created self stands detached from its creator. But when the main character became a woman, Yezierska's need to justify her own life forced her to identify too closely with the fictional self. The result was to diminish the credibility of her heroine and to retreat into a vision of an impossibly perfect world with only the awareness of the burden of the father to tinge its Utopian quality" (75). Despite Sara's independent spirit, despite her rejection of oppressive religious and cultural traditions and despite her refusal to be ruled by her tyrannical father, she apparently succumbs in the end to the romance myth. It is also in the ending of this autobiographical novel that Yezierska parts company with autobiography. Having herself left two marriages ten years before she published Bread Givers, she seems to credit marriage with accomplishing things for Sara

which it never accomplished for her.

Apparently, like many women writers, Yezierska dared take her rebellion only so far without fear of condemnation and marginalization. On the other hand, perhaps she calculated her position well. Perhaps because of the culturally acceptable outcome of Sara's story, Bread Givers gained immense popularity. Yezierska had her audience. To this audience Yezierska's voice speaks clearly as a challenge to the established order, despite the novel's ambiguous ending. Through Sara, Yezierska confronts the tyranny of a patriarchal religion and of a selfish father. She claims cultural authority and significance for the story of an immigrant girl--and of all immigrants. She brings into vivid focus the hardships of poverty--of hunger, dirt and noise, of overcrowded tenements and overworked shopgirls. She describes the longing to learn that motivated her heroine and herself to leave the ghetto. And she shows what passion and sacrifice went into making a "Horatio Alger" story in a real-life America. In speaking her own experience and in creating Sara's, Yezierska values what, until then, had been insignificant--the immigrant's struggle. In part because of Yezierska, this struggle is, today, no longer ignored; it is a much-discussed part of the American experience.

Notes

[1] These accusations are culled from several sources, including Schoen, Henriksen, Harris and others, including my own classroom experience as a student and a teacher.

[2] Though Yezierska took her work very seriously, she never considered her novels to be "literature." See Kamel, 43, and Schoen, Anzia, 14.

[3] Both the first chapter of Bread Givers and the first chapter of the more autobiographical Red Ribbon on a White Horse are called "Hester Street."

4 I will return to this discussion of the novel's ending in more detail later in the chapter.

Chapter Eight: Radclyffe Hall Speaking the Forbidden

Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel The Well of Loneliness, the thinly disguised story of her life, has been a lightning rod for controversy since it was first published in 1928. Then, the novel's most vehement critics instigated its trial on obscenity charges both here and in England, where it was banned. Today, it is condemned by some feminist critics for presenting the lesbian central character, Stephen Gordon, as biologically deviant and full of self-hatred. As Gillian Whitlock ruefully points out, the novel "denies joy and choice in lesbian relationships" (569). Hall's central theme is, as the title suggests, the loneliness and alienation of homosexuals in early twentieth-century society.[1] As such, it is a daring book, which speaks openly of the lesbian experience. So daring is this novel, in fact, that it still moves critics to ask why Hall would risk a promising literary career to write it.

Like Yezierska, Hall had a case to plead before the public. And she chose the form of the popular novel to do it, perhaps, again, in order to reach a wider audience than did more experimental lesbian novels of her time by Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West. That Hall's was a political choice and a personal mission becomes clear in Vera Brittain

and Lovat Dickson's biographies.[2] In Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity?, for example, Brittain writes, "She recognized that such a book might mean the end of her career, but the conviction that she must do it became very strong" (Brittain 75). But because her topic was so taboo, so potentially volatile, Hall appears to have thought she could write her life only if she could be shielded by fiction. So she insists on the fictionality of her characters. In a note at the beginning of the novel, Hall asserts:

> All the characters in this book are purely imaginary, and if the author in any instance has used names that may suggest a reference to living persons, she has done so inadvertently.
>
> A motor ambulance unit of British women drivers did very fine service upon the Allied front in France during the later months of the [First World] war, but although the unit mentioned in this book, of which Stephen Gordon becomes a member, operates in much the same area, it has never had any existence save in the author's imagination.

Yet as her own letters and the journals of her longtime companion Una Troubridge prove, the characters in the novel, especially Stephen herself, *did* exist beyond fiction, outside of the author's imagination--in England, in the Allied ambulance corps and in post-war Paris.[3] And, as the novel's

obscenity trials prove, the shield of fiction was not strong enough to protect Hall in a culture where women's writing is traditionally treated as inevitably self-referential.

Hall consciously draws a distinction between fiction and truth in her autobiographical novel. It was the freedom to do this--the freedom of autobiographical *fiction*--which allowed her to attempt autobiography. This freedom was especially important to Hall, whose story was, culturally, not just ignored like Yezierska's, but prohibited. Her "desire for cultural and literary authority" was especially transgressive because, as C.H. Rolph explains, "the denial of homosexuality, in particular the determined pretence that it could not exist among women" was vital in the post-Victorian twenties, despite that decade's pretense of sexual liberation (20). Indeed, the scientific and medical discourse of the time insisted on explaining away lesbianism as biological deviance, an "affliction" termed "congenital inversion." The gist of this theory is, as Whitlock explains, that "women do not become lesbians by choice or circumstance" but by biology (556).[4]

Richard von Krafft-Ebing, a notable proponent of this theory, took on the patriarchal task of naming this women's experience. He "scientifically" divided inversion into four categories, each increasingly more masculine and more "deviant." Havelock Ellis modified Krafft-Ebing's theory to

include passionate female friendships as another category of inversion. This categorization is also significant as an exercise of patriarchal authority over women, considering the prominence of the language of science and of psychology among the modernists that I pointed out in Chapter Three. As Esther Newton explains, Ellis's "inclusion of such friendships in a discussion of inversion inevitably marked them with the stigma of 'abnormality'" (Newton 567). Ellis's naming was, in fact, so powerful and influential that Hall herself was apparently convinced by it--so much so that she asked Ellis to write an introductory note to The Well of Loneliness, thereby accepting his naming of her experience. This note still appears at the beginning of Hall's text each time it is reprinted.

In this commentary Ellis affirms that Hall's novel "is the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us today," meaning, of course, inversion. Even while Ellis appears to be sympathetic to Hall's story, he exerts his scientific and cultural authority by holding to an absolute and very narrow concept of normality. He writes: "The relation of certain people--who, *while different from their fellow human beings*, are sometimes of the highest character and the finest aptitudes--to the hostile society in which they move, presents difficult and

still unresolved problems" [emphasis added]. Literary critics and biographers of Hall followed Ellis's strategy of using a subtle language of condemnation while appearing to be sympathetic. Lovat Dickson, for example, uses phrases like "unnatural union," "unholy love" and "strongly sexed" woman in his study Radclyffe Hall at the Well of Loneliness.

Surprisingly, Radclyffe Hall also uses this subtle language of condemnation in her description of Stephen Gordon, making it clear that she was unusual *from birth*--through either fate or biology. Either Hall had truly accepted the Krafft-Ebing theory of biological inversion, and she invoked it here as an explanation of herself, or she used it as a political and narrative device--to avoid the burden of having *chosen* to be a lesbian, a choice which would have certainly been condemned by her readers and critics alike in 1928. Thus, she introduces the the long-awaited first child of Sir Philip and Lady Anna Gordon's ten-year marriage as "a narrow-hipped, wide shouldered little tadpole of a baby, that yelled and yelled for three hours without ceasing, at though outraged to find itself ejected into life" (13). Already named "Stephen," because Sir Philip was so sure he was going to have a son, the baby girl is christened with this masculine name. This foreshadowing of the life Stephen would later lead operates on two levels--as textual anticipation and as part of Stephen's narrative telos of becoming a

lesbian.

Hall immediately identifies little Stephen with Sir Philip in appearance and in attitude. They ride horseback and foxhunt together, sharing the outdoors and their love of the land. Anna and Stephen, on the other hand, "were strangely shy with each other--it was almost grotesque this shyness of theirs, as existing between mother and child" (15). There are even times when Anna's feelings for Stephen move beyond timidity, "when the child's soft flesh would be almost distasteful to her" (16). Sir Philip senses this or, Hall suggests, some other mysterious injustice--"it was almost as though he divined by instinct that his daughter was being secretly defrauded, was bearing some unmerited burden" (16).

This other mysterious injustice begins to take shape when seven-year-old Stephen develops a passionate crush on Collins, the housemaid. In light of Nancy Chodorow's theories of female self-development as I outlined them in Chapter Four, wherein female children develop a sense of self through identification with others and male children do so through separation and individuation, the fact that Stephen's crush takes the form of intense identification with Collins becomes significant. Indeed, so strong is her empathy that Stephen tries to develop "housemaid's knee," and prays that she can "bear Collins' pain" for her (21). Then, when

Stephen sees Collins kissing the footman, she responds violently, throwing a flowerpot at them, and Collins is dismissed.

Hall builds the anticipation of Stephen's difference after this incident. She points out that, unlike other little girls, Stephen rides "with a leg on each side of [her] horse" (42), she loves to dress up like "William Tell, or Nelson, or the whole Charge of the Balaclava" (19), and she is tall and physically strong. When she learns to fence "She discovered her body for a thing to be cherished, a thing of real value since its strength could rejoice her" (58). As a young woman she is awkward at social gatherings, uncomfortable in women's clothes and uninterested in romance. She develops a strong friendship with Martin Hallam, a young man who shares many of her interests, but when he proposes she responds with "terror," "outrage" and "deepest repulsion" (98). When, trying to understand herself, she confides this response to her Father, his suspicions are confirmed. Convinced by his reading of Krafft-Ebing that his daughter is a "victim of inversion," he responds desperately: He "wanted to cry out against God for this thing; he wanted to cry out: 'You have maimed my Stephen!' (106).

Shortly after this revelation of Stephen's narrative destiny, Sir Philip dies in an accident, depriving his child "of three things; of companionship of mind born of real

understanding, of a stalwart barrier between her and the world, and above all of love--that faithful love that would gladly have suffered all things for her sake, in order to spare her suffering" (121). Left alone, Stephen falls in love with Angela Crossby, the American wife of a nouveau-riche neighbor. The self-indulgent Angela encourages Stephen for a while, perhaps to stave off boredom or, more likely, to take advantage of the expensive gifts the wealthy Stephen brings her, but when her husband becomes suspicious about an affair she is having with another man, Angela betrays Stephen's love to divert his attention. She gives him a love letter Stephen wrote to her and asks him how to discourage Stephen's attentions. Angela's outraged husband then sends Stephen's love letter to Anna Gordon, who confronts her daughter: "All your life I've felt very strangely toward you. . . . I've felt a kind of physical repulsion, a desire not to touch or be touched by you--a terrible thing for a mother to feel--it has often made me deeply unhappy. I've often felt that I was being unjust, unnatural--but now I know that my instinct was right; it is you who are unnatural, not I" (200).

Upset by her mother's denunciation of her, Stephen seeks refuge in her father's study. There she stumbles on his marked-up copy of Krafft-Ebing's writings on inversion. She is immediately as convinced by his theory as her father had

been and responds with similar desperation--and with self-condemnation: "Oh, Father . . . there are so many of us--thousands of miserable, unwanted people, who have no right to love, no right to compassion because they are maimed, hideously maimed and ugly--God's cruel; He let us get flawed in the making" (204). When Stephen turns to the Bible for comfort she finds only further condemnation, as the book falls open to a passage about the mark set upon Cain's head. As Whitlock explains, "the medical texts are immediately placed alongside the Bible, which translates their language into that of another patriarchal discourse and process of labeling--the mark of Cain" (Whitlock 572).

Thus accepting the future which has been foreshadowed in the novel, to spare her family shame Stephen leaves home for London, taking her governess and teacher, Miss Puddle, with her. The loyal Puddle addresses Stephen in the Biblical language of the Ruth and Naomi story: "Where you go, I go, Stephen. All that you're suffering at this moment I've suffered. It was when I was very young like you--but I still remember" (205). In London, Stephen becomes a successful writer, but suffers painful loneliness and alienation. Realizing that there are many women like her who love other women, she decides to seek them out. At the advice of her friend, the playwright Jonathan Brockett, she goes to Paris where he introduces her to his circle of friends--writers,

artists and intellectuals--all homosexual.

Stephen, having embraced her "abnormality," still feels alienated and alone until, serving as an ambulance driver on the French front in World War I, she meets Mary Llewellyn and the two fall deeply in love. Though Mary returns her affection, Stephen hesitates to begin a relationship with her. She faces her dilemma in an imagined exchange with Mary:

> If you come to me, Mary, the world will abhor you, will persecute you, will call you unclean. Our love may be faithful even unto death and beyond--yet the world will call it unclean. We may harm no living creature by our love; we may grow more perfect in understanding and in charity because of our loving; but all this will not save you from the scourge of a world that will turn away its eyes from your noblest actions, finding only corruption and vileness in you. You will see . . . unfaithfulness, lies and deceit among those whom the world views with approbation. You will find that many have grown hard of heart, have grown greedy, selfish, cruel and lustful; and then you will turn to me and will say: "You and I are more worthy of respect than these people. Why does the world persecute us, Stephen?" And I shall answer: Because in this world there is

toleration only for the so-called normal."(301)
It is passages like this, in which Hall, through Stephen, deals openly with the forbidden subject of lesbianism, that give this autobiographical novel its power. Newton points out that The Well of Loneliness, which has been known as *the* lesbian novel, has "continuing meaning to lesbians because it confronts the stigma of lesbianism--as most lesbians have had to live it. . . . Most lesbians have had to face being called or at least feeling like freaks" (560).

Stephen overcomes these feelings, and she and Mary return to Paris after the war to live together. There she also renews her friendship with Martin Hallam, who had once proposed to her. At the end of the novel, however, Stephen reverses her earlier decision to pursue her relationship with Mary. She gives Mary up so that Mary and Martin can be together and lead a "normal," happy life, accepted by their society. Stephen, on the other hand, is left alone in a house full of "a jibing, grimacing, vindictive silence" (434).

It is here at the end of the novel that Hall most notably parts company with autobiography. Until her death, Hall enjoyed a long-term committed relationship with Una Troubridge, who had been married but rejected that life to be with Hall. Yet Hall denies Stephen a similar resolution. Why would Hall have the protagonist of her autobiographical

novel suffer an isolation which she herself didn't endure? Perhaps, as with Bread Givers, the ending of this novel reveals Hall's surrender to social convention--removing Stephen from the romance plot allows her to move the more conventional Mary and Martin into it. Or perhaps Hall wanted to reinforce for her readers the effects of the intolerance that lesbians encounter in our society. Her readers, familiar with the form of the popular novel, would miss a happily-ever-after ending for Stephen. Perceptive readers might even recognize the havoc that Martin and Mary's happily-ever-after wrecks on both Mary and Stephen.

This manipulation of the romance ending reveals how Hall artfully used the tools of her trade to reinforce her message, a skill some critics recognized and censured Hall for. An anonymous reviewer for the Annual Register, for example, criticizes Hall for mixing poetry and politics. The book, the reviewer writes, "has too much the air of a personal crusade" (Brittain 20). Rolph, too, suggests that Hall is too close to her subject, calling The Well of Loneliness Hall's "big, rambling, overwritten and *desperately sincere* book" (27) [emphasis added]. Even Whitlock, who defends the novel's importance to lesbians, calls it "sentimental and at times florid and clumsy in its prose and characterizations" and concludes that it is "not great literature" (560).

Dickson affirms this separation between the novel's aesthetics and its politics. He comments that The Well "is a book of importance in the history of the unending struggle with censorship. It was the stone that loosened the avalanche" (21). Then he, too, insists that it "isn't a great literary work." He compares it with Uncle Tom's Cabin, another novel, he implies, with relatively little "literary" merit, but important political clout. Both, he points out, appeared at "just the right moment" to have great influence (22). Dickson does, however, recognize that "Radclyffe Hall had been a successful writer, who had published several volumes of verse before turning to novels. She had scored a considerable *succés d'estime* with Adam's Breed, which in 1926 carried off the two great literary prizes in England, a feat accomplished only once before, with E.M. Forster's Passage to India" (14). The Well of Loneliness was apparently a different story altogether.

Brittain discusses this dual assessment of Hall's novel.

> Miss Radclyffe Hall's important, sincere and very moving study demands consideration from two different standpoints. In the first place, it is presented as a novel, and it is therefore open to criticism as a work of imagination, a creative effort which challenges comparison with other examples of fiction. In the second place it is a

> plea, passionate, yet admirably restrained and never offensive, for the extension of social toleration, compassion and recognition to the biologically abnormal woman, who, because she possesses the tastes and instincts of a man, is too often undeservedly treated as a moral pariah.
>
> Many critics maintain that propaganda, of whatever kind, impairs a work of art. True as this aesthetic canon may be for the majority of such works, the fact remains that it is the problem which it discusses, rather than its rank in fiction, which lends to Miss Hall's book its undoubted significance. (48)

Obviously the book's stand midway between autobiography and fiction posed a problem for its reviewers. But here Brittain comes very close to valuing the novel for its "cultural power," an argument Jane Tompkins makes for Uncle Tom's Cabin in her study, Sensational Designs. Tompkins "self-consciously reverses the negative judgments that critics passed on . . . popular fiction by re-describing them from the perspective of an altered conception of what literature is." Instead of attending to traditional aesthetic categories for evaluating a novel, Tompkins attends instead to "the way a text offers a blueprint for survival under a specific set of political, economic, social or

religious conditions" (xvii). Viewing The Well of Loneliness from this perspective, it is more than an important book, it is significant literature.

It is, to its credit, political literature.[5] Whitlock proposes that it is "a political intervention in which Hall starts the process of producing a 'reverse discourse,' a space for other lesbians to speak for themselves and so move toward self-definition" (560). In other words, because Hall dared speak "the love that dared not speak its name," others have been able to define themselves through the discourse she began. Brittain recalls in her memoir about Hall "the pale, intense face of the woman whose contours suggested those of a handsome man in early middle age courting martyrdom, with a determined identification of herself with the misunderstood minority, which she regarded as her mission in life to explain and defend" (Brittain 36).

Hall lived with the alienation that her lesbian lifestyle brought on--an alienation certainly more tangible and more culturally-imposed than the existential isolation or artistic solitude of other modernists. But she didn't, as Brittain says, "court martyrdom" or celebrate that alienation. Hall wrote The Well of Loneliness as a plea for an end to the alienation of homosexuals and she makes this plea through Stephen, who, like Hall, suffers painfully at the hands of a society that will not accept her. In addition, *the act of*

writing this autobiographical novel was, for Hall, a rejection of alienation. She will not accept that her story should not be told. She claims legitimacy for her self by writing her experience. In fact, Stephen, though she must sacrifice her romance plot at the end of the novel, embraces what DuPlessis describes as its incompatible alternative--the quest plot. Though she loses Mary, she embraces a vision of herself as the spokesperson for others like her. Hall's book becomes the embodiment of that vision.

The magnitude of Hall's defiant act of speaking her experience becomes obvious when considered in historical perspective. One contemporary reviewer of The Well of Loneliness wrote in the New Statesman (24 November 1928) in response to Hall's novel: "people who desire tolerance for pathological abnormalities certainly should not write about them" (Rolph 25). Hall disagreed, if not with the terms at least with the premise. Through her disagreement she helped initiate a change in legitimate discourse about homosexuality from which we benefit today. And because she believed she should write her story and claim her experience as legitimate, she gave voice to the culturally forbidden and lifted the sentence of silence for many women who followed her.

Notes

[1] Though I recognize that the author was actually named Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall, I have chosen to follow her style and use her literary designation, Radclyffe Hall, when discussing her as an author.

[2] Both Lovat Dickson's Radclyffe Hall at the Well of Loneliness and Vera Brittain's Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity? biographies of Hall are first-person accounts by her contemporaries which center on the obscenity trial in Britain. By far the most insightful biography, however, is Una Troubridge's brief, informal one, written shortly after Hall's death.

[3] This is not to say that all of the characters in the novel are simply reproductions of people Hall knew. Though critics and biographers have identified Mary Llewellyn as Una Troubridge, Valérie Seymour as Natalie Barney and her mentor and governess Miss Puddle as her maternal grandmother other characters, such as Sir Philip Gordon, are invented and still others are significantly altered.

[4] Though a debate continues on whether or not lesbianism is, in some cases, biologically determined, many lesbians have gone beyond determinism and declared they are lesbians *by choice*. When I refer negatively to the theories of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, I do so with reference to the inevitability of their arguments and the assumption of deviance which underlies them.

[5] I use the term "political" here and throughout this discussion in a feminist and rhetorical sense, as Judith Fetterley defines it in The Resisting Reader--meaning persuasive, value-laden and concerned with the issues of power.

Chapter Nine: Nella Larsen Claiming a Voice

"Participation in the autobiographical tradition," Regina Blackburn declares, "is a declaration of selfhood" (148). In an essay on black women's autobiography, Blackburn explains how this declaration challenges power structures in our culture which would have the voices of women, and especially black women, remain marginalized or silenced. And, as Sidonie Smith asserts, it will be recalled, the black woman is "doubly or triply the subject of other people's representations, turned again and again into stories that reflect and promote certain forms of selfhood." When a minority woman takes up her pen to write her story, Smith explains, she must negotiate "sometimes four sets of stories, all nonetheless written about her rather than by her" (Smith 51) [see Introduction to this section]. To declare selfhood and give voice to her silence, then, a black woman must reclaim her stories for herself, reworking the representations of her in our culture--representations created by black and white men and by white women.

Perhaps the most difficult of these stories to negotiate is that of black woman as object. Doubly commodified by race through slavery and by gender as an object of man's sexual desire, the black woman must defy the strictures of

objectification and claim the subject position in order to write her autobiography. By choosing to write an autobiographical novel, Nella Larsen, with Quicksand, artfully obfuscates the polarity of subject and object. As subject, she claims her story, her version of the "tragic mulatta." And as artistic object she replaces herself with Helga Crane, a beautiful, perpetually dissatisfied version of Larsen as subject.[1] Through this once-removed perspective Larsen is able, like Yezierska and Hall, to fill in a gap in patriarchal culture and tell her story. But, again like Yezierska and Hall, she could not write her autobiography without this shield of fiction. Larsen's was also a forbidden story, a story of "race intermingling." As she points out in Quicksand, "among black people, as among white people, it is tacitly understood that these things are not mentioned--and therefore *they do not exist*" (39) [emphasis added]. Just as early twentieth-century society had an interest in maintaining that homosexuality did not exist, it also insisted on never mentioning mixed marriage. Miscegenation was, in fact, illegal in many states. But Larsen, as both black and white, both subject and object, transgresses cultural prohibitions in Quicksand. She claims a voice for her "nonstory" through autobiographical fiction.

Larsen had a strong tradition of black autobiography to call on, as Blackburn points out in her essay "In Search of

the Black Female Self: African-American Women's Auto-biographies and Ethnicity." Blackburn traces three recurring themes in black women's autobiography: first, identity, "defining and understanding this black self"; second, "assigning... some value to the black self" and third, "the bind of double jeopardy, being both black and female" (136). Larsen's handing of each of these themes is complicated by the fact that she (like her protagonist) is not only both black and female, but also both black and white--and, of course, that her story is both autobiography and fiction. Helga Crane searches throughout her life for a way to define and value herself as a member of one race or the other. She searches for an identity that will allow her complete self-acceptance. In Quicksand, Larsen gives the appearance of trying to work through for herself the problems of alienation, self-hatred and dissatisfaction that this search inevitably brings on.

The novel opens with Helga's decision to leave Naxos, "a composite of Larsen's experiences at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and at Fisk University in Tennessee" (McDowell xxxiv). For the past two years she has been a teacher at this all-black institution, but she decides that "she could no longer abide being connected with a place of shame, lies, hypocrisy, cruelty, servility, and snobbishness" (14). She finds the rules, which encourage students to "know their

place" (3) and behave like "automatons" (12), too restrictive, the atmosphere of "self-righteousness" (5) and the general air of intolerance and "dislike of difference" (5) unbearable. In these first pages, Helga Crane is described as disgusted and defiant, and seething with anger and resentment.

Leaving Naxos also means, for Helga, breaking off her engagement to James Vayle, a fellow teacher and the son of a prominent Atlanta family. Through James, she admits, she had hoped to gain the respect she missed as the illegitimate daughter of a black father and a Scandinavian mother. Feeling rebellious, lonely and dissatisfied, Helga has already begun to dislike James in the same way she will later dislike her friend Anne Grey in New York, the young artist, Axel Olsen, who proposes to her in Copenhagen and the Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green, who will become her husband. This dislike--which Larsen even describes at times as "loathing" and "aversion"--is seemingly an extension of Helga's feelings about herself onto those closest to her.

Because Helga leaves school in mid-semester, she is unable to find work when she moves to Chicago, though she spends weeks searching. Rejected by white relatives to whom she goes for financial help, she soon finds her meager funds depleted. "She felt horribly lonely too. This sense of loneliness increased, it grew to appalling proportions,

encompassing her, shutting her off from all of life around her. Devastated she was, and always on the verge of weeping" (34). She is, in short, alone and desperate--until she meets up with Mrs. Hayes-Rore, a traveling lecturer who addresses "the race question." Mrs. Hayes-Rore takes Helga to New York, where she finds her a job and lodging in Harlem in the home of Anne Grey, a young widow who quickly becomes Helga's dear friend.

Secure and comfortable, surrounded by friends, Helga is happy in Harlem for two years. Then the familiar feeling of dissatisfaction returns: "All interest had gone out of living. Nothing seemed any good. She became a little frightened, and then shocked to discover that, for some unknown reason, it was of herself she was afraid" (47). Apparently it was the black side of herself she feared because "abruptly it flashed upon her that the harrowing irritation of the past weeks was a smoldering hatred. . . . Why, she demanded in fierce rebellion, should she be yoked to these despised black folk?" (55). Unable any longer to identify herself as black, Helga decides to leave New York and live among her white relatives in Copenhagen.

But in Copenhagen she finds she cannot escape her race identification. She is "a curiosity, a stunt, at which people came and gazed" (71). People on the street call her "*Den Sorte*," the black one. At first Helga appreciates this

attention and passes two happy years in Copenhagen with her aunt and uncle, but soon she begins again to feel alienated and alone. She decides to return to Harlem, ostensibly to attend Anne's wedding. Back in New York, Helga joys in being among blacks again. She decides that "*These* were her people" (95). Soon, however, inevitably, she "felt alone, isolated from all other human beings" (109). When Dr. Robert Anderson, Helga's former principal from Naxos and now Anne's husband, denies their mutual attraction, the depressed Helga stumbles into a church where she is caught up in religious fervor and "swept by the tide of unsuppressed emotion and libidinal release" (Giddings 192).

The next day, still riding the wave of that experience, she marries the Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green, and he takes her to "the tiny Alabama town where he was pastor to a scattered and primitive flock" (118). Three years and four children later, Helga again finds herself overcome by deep depression: "she had to admit that it wasn't new, this feeling of dissatisfaction, of asphyxiation. Something like it she had experienced before. In Naxos. In New York. In Copenhagen. This differed only in degree" (134). Just as she recovers enough to plan her next escape, she finds herself pregnant with her fifth child. Finally, it seems, there is no escape for Helga. As Paula Giddings notes, "the reader assumes that she will spend the rest of her life in mental anguish"

(192).[2]

Helga's recurring "mental anguish" and gnawing dissatisfaction are, as Blackburn explains, linked with her experience as racial other in a culture dominated by whites. "As a consequence of lacking power, of being victims of racism, and of the failure to develop a positive sense of self, African-American women . . . often suffer psychologically and spiritually from self-hatred" (143). Helga is six years old when her mother marries a white man, and she grows up despised by her step-father and her step-brothers and sisters. The narrator informs us that her relatives all "feared and hated her" (6). And she returns their antipathy. When Helga is 15 her mother dies, and she is sent away to an all-black school where, for the first time, "she discovered that because one was dark, one was not necessarily loathsome, and could, therefore, consider oneself without repulsion" (23).

Helga apparently doesn't learn this lesson well enough, as she comes, while in Harlem, to again hate her blackness and long for an escape from her race identification, as I noted above. Helga's inability to own and value herself as a black woman is, as we have already seen, a problem for the autobiographer in the black woman's tradition, where this recognition of blackness is a key theme. But Helga insistence that she wants to belong "to herself alone and not

to a race" (64) is further problematized by black cultural tradition, which values community. As Elechi Amadi explains in his study of Nigerian culture, in the African tradition an (American) emphasis on the individual is harmful: "Extreme individualism," he writes, "only generates despair and antisocial behaviour" (110), two characteristics, clearly, of Helga's behavior. As Elizabeth Schultz explains, "Characteristic of the black autobiography . . . is the fact that the individual and the community are not polarities; there is a community of fundamental identification between 'I' and 'we' within any single autobiography" (110). Stephen Butterfield, in his writings on black autobiography, also discusses this sense of community, African in origin, which characterizes this genre: "The 'self' of black autobiography, on the whole . . . is not an individual with a private career, but a soldier in a long, historic march toward Canaan. The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group, with ties and responsibilities to the other members" (xx).

Without these ties to connect her story with a community, Helga, as Larsen depicts her, is set loose, unable to define herself. She wonders: "Was there, without her knowing it, some peculiar lack in her? Absurd. But she began to have a feeling of discouragement and hopelessness. Why couldn't she be happy, content, somewhere?" (81). Vernon J. Dixon

explains that "Implicit in the unity of the African-oriented world view is the nonseparation of man in relation to his fellow men. The individual's position in social space is relative to others. *He does not and cannot exist alone* except corporately. The individual is not a human being except as he is part of a social order" (63) [emphasis added]. These theories of the black African and autobiographical tradition take on further significance when seen in the light of Nancy Chodorow's theories of female development through connection, as I outlined them in Chapter Four. As a black *woman* without a community, Helga is doubly cut off from herself. Her avenues toward self-knowledge are blocked.

Further complicating Helga's problem with self-knowledge is her constant identification as object. Deborah E. McDowell posits that "Helga is alternately defined by others (primarily men) as a 'lady' or a 'Jezebel.' Neither designation captures her as a sexual subject, but simply as an object" (xix). At her first meeting with Dr. Anderson, he says, "'You're a lady.' You have dignity and breeding" (21). But Axel Olsen informs her that she has "the soul of a prostitute" (87), and a woman in the church she visits at the end of the novel calls her "a scarlet 'oman" (112). Neither virgin nor whore, Helga is again trapped, her roads toward identity blocked by limited definitions of woman in

patriarchal language.

Helga is further objectified as an artistic creation. Twice in the novel she is called "a decoration," the first time by a female teacher at Naxos who tells her, "We need a few decorations to brighten our sad lives" (14). And in Copenhagen she literally becomes a decoration, as Axel Olsen's artistic gaze dissects and appraises her piece by piece while she sits silent: "Superb eyes . . . color . . . neck column . . . yellow . . . hair . . . alive . . . wonderful . . ." (71) Even her aunt and uncle, Fru and Herr Dahl, address each other as they speak of Helga in third person: "She's beautiful; beautiful!" (69).

Helga's identification as object does not carry through in her relationship with Dr. Anderson, who, again, denies his sexual attraction to her, though he had once professed it with a passionate kiss. His singular perspective apparently leaves Helga so confused that when she realizes that Rev. Green does see her as a sexual object, she embraces this identification by marrying and, we are to assume, sleeping with him. She realizes too late that, as McDowell reminds us, "for women, and especially for black women, sexual pleasure leads to the dangers of domination in marriage, repeated pregnancy, or exploitation and loss of status" (xiv). The thoroughly depressing ending of Quicksand reinforces this. Helga is held captive by her children

because "to leave them would be a tearing agony, a rending of deepest fibers. She felt that through all the rest of her lifetime she would be hearing their cry of 'Mummy, Mummy, Mummy,' through sleepless nights. No. She couldn't desert them" (135). And, by association, she couldn't desert the repulsive (and ironically named) Pleasant Green.

Again, as with Bread Givers, the ending of this autobiographical novel is interesting for the tensions it fails to resolve. Helga's aberrant romance ending is the marriage that not only circumvents the quest plot, as I discussed in Chapter Seven, but which also destroys the chance for any happiness in Helga's future. McDowell discusses Larsen's "unearned and unsettling endings" that "sacrifice strong and emerging independent female identities to the most acceptable demands of literary and social history" (xi), explaining them in the context of her study of black female sexuality in novels.[3] Why would Larsen have the protagonist of her autobiographical novel suffer a fate worse than any she ever had to endure?

One explanation is that, however negative the ending may appear, Helga is, for the first time, connected to someone--so much so that she can't leave when the familiar mood of dissatisfaction strikes her. She finally has a community with which she is identified, even if that community consists only of her four children. Alasdair

MacIntyre explains that such familial identifications as "mother" are "not characteristics that belong to human beings accidentally, to be stripped away in order to discover 'the real me.' They are part of my substance, defining partially at least and sometimes wholly my obligations and my duties" (33). Given this, one could argue that Larsen conceived this as a positive ending for Helga. However, it is difficult to see her communal experience as positive when her community is headed by Rev. Green, for whom Helga feels, again, only deepest aversion.

More likely, as I see it, Larsen's ending is, like Hall's, political. There was no happily-ever-after for Larsen, nor could there be for a woman of mixed race in Larsen's society. And Larsen wanted to reinforce this point through the bleak ending of Quicksand. Butterfield theorizes that "The autobiographical form is one of the ways black Americans have asserted their right to live and grow. It is a bid for freedom, a beak of hope cracking the shell of slavery and exploitation. *It is also an attempt to communicate to the white world what whites have done to them*" (xx) [emphasis added]. Blackburn, too, notes, that "The world described in these women's autobiographies reveals a great deal about the writers' perceived place in it" (148). By diverging from her own life story and providing an obviously negative ending, Larsen was, most likely, making a

point about the black woman's place in our culture.[4]

In her discussion of Quicksand, McDowell calls on W.E. B. DuBois's contention that "All art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists" (xxxiii). Larsen's autobiographical novel, like Yezierska's and Hall's, speaks from between the gaps of patriarchal language and cultural authority and is, therefore, easily dismissed as too "personal" or "political." It is, of course, both personal and political, as is all literature. But Larsen, as McDowell states, "has to be regarded as something of a pioneer, a trailblazer in the Afro-American female literary tradition" (xxxi). She claims the tragic mulatta as subject, not object, and tells her story in all its bleakness, without romance, rewriting cultural myths along the way.

Notes

[1] Again, I take this term, its definition and its spelling from Barbara Christian's Black Women Novelists. Larsen, however, has Helga refer to herself as "Helga Crane, a despised mulatto" (18).

[2] Helga's fate is very much like that of the anonymous narrator in an earlier James Weldon Johnson novel, The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man (1912).

[3] McDowell's excellent discussion of Quicksand and Passing in the context of black female sexuality serves as the Introduction to the American Woman Writers Series edition of the novels. She notes that "The questions confronting [Larsen] might well be formulated: How to write about black female sexuality in a literary era that often sensationalized it and pandered to the stereotype of the primitive exotic? How to give a black female character the right to healthy sexual expression and pleasure without offending the proprieties established by the spokespersons of the black middle class?" (xvi).

[4] Very little is known about Nella Larsen's life, and, as of this writing, no biography of Larsen is yet available. One is, however, forthcoming from Louisiana State University Press.

Conclusion

If, as W.E.B. DuBois said, all art is propaganda, then all criticism is political as well. And this dissertation is no exception. I maintain that the novels I analyze in this dissertation are the equal of any that are traditionally included in modernism classes in the university. The cultural work these autobiographical novels accomplish with the tools of autobiographical fiction is, to me, endlessly fascinating. The confusion of subject and object, the blurring of the distinction between public and private, the subversive word play, the courageous claiming of cultural significance, the insightful anticipation of the issues of postmodernism, the unblinking assessment of woman's place in early twentieth-century society--these and other aspects of modernist autobiographical fiction make it a subject I found worth studying and certainly worth writing about.

Throughout this dissertation my aim has also been to modify traditional conceptions of literature. I would argue that the "pure aesthetic experience" in the Kantian sense on which our critical categories of literature are based does

not exist. There is no "entirely disinterested" perspective from which to view art, nor does there exist any art which is not, in some way, interested. Art only appears to be universal when the dominant voices of a culture have agreed on the terms of its universality. This agreement has serious implications for the voices which aren't dominant, as Edward Said points out: "the discursive situation," he writes, "is . . . usually like the unequal relation between colonizer and colonized, between oppressor and oppressed" (48). Criticism, as Terry Eagleton demonstrates, "is not an innocent discipline" (Criticism 17). When we agree on artistic categories, when we define "universal," there are always silenced "others" on the margins of our discourse. In our culture it is women and minorities who haven't had the luxury of detachment, the sure sense of self as central to our stories, nor the positive relationship with literary authority which has been the privilege of white men who defined the aesthetic experience.

As Pierre Bourdieu argues in Distinction, "aesthetic perception is necessarily historical, inasmuch as it is differential, relational, attentive to the deviations which make styles" (4). What we appreciate, he demonstrates in this extensive study, is what we have been trained to appreciate by our upbringing and our education. Or, as Annette Kolodny maintains, "we read well, and with pleasure,

what we already know how to read" (154). Since our training directs the aesthetic perceptions of our culture, it follows that we can change those perceptions by changing our "training," i.e., through education.

I believe that the women authors I've discussed, at some level, accepted that premise, and they set out to change their world by contributing to its literature. They added their voices to the dominant ones and dared to be recognized. They formed a new community of women writers, as Nina Auerbach has shown, a community which self-consciously sought to send a women's literary tradition "forward into the past" (Gilbert and Gubar, I, 167). Yet many of them were silenced or ignored until feminists literary critics in the 1970's started listening for the hidden harmonies around our stories. When our categories of aesthetic appreciation were modified, these harmonies became counterpoint, each with a unique solo voice to contribute to the dominant discourse of our culture.

Perhaps most importantly, however, others on the margins were emboldened by these subversive women who dared tell their stories in autobiographical novels. Because of The Well of Loneliness and Quicksand, we have Toni Morrison's Sula (1973) and Richard Wright's Black Boy (1945), Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982) and Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place (1983). Because of Yezierska we have

Grace Paley and Cynthia Ozick and even Saul Bellow, though he would probably not see it that way. Because of H.D. and Virginia Woolf we have a tradition of women writers and a language in which to discuss them. And because of the popularization of the genre of women's autobiographical fiction, we have Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior (1976), Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook (1962) and Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar (1971).

So while I use "Emphasis Mine" to refer to the autobiographical fictional mode, I also use it to underscore that I write from an interested perspective of my own--a perspective that embraces and advocates modernist women's autobiographical fiction. I do so because I find that these novels lead us to accomplish what is the goal not only of most feminist theory but also of much of postmodernist theory: they liberate us from our old ways of thinking. They take us out of binary thought by asserting their difference. They lead us to reconceive aesthetic and cultural categories by centering the marginal, by claiming recognition as different but not "Other"--as different *and as subject*--thereby presenting a way of "conceiving difference without opposition," as Craig Owens advocates in his study "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" (62). Naming their experience in these autobiographical novels, these women writers escape the "master narratives" of our

culture, as Jean-Francois Lyotard defines them, by denying their right to mastery. Their autobiographical fiction leads us, as critics, to do likewise.

WORKS CITED

Works Cited

Abel, Elizabeth. Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.

Adams, Hazard and Leroy Searle, eds. Critical Theory Since 1965. Tallahassee, FL: Florida State UP, 1986.

Aiken, Conrad. "The Novel as Work of Art." in Critical Essays on Virginia Woolf. Morris Beja, ed. Boston: Hall, 1985. 15-17.

Amadi, Elechi. Ethics in Nigerian Culture. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1982.

Barthes, Roland. "Authors and Writers" in A Barthes Reader. Susan Sontag, ed. New York: Noonday, 1982. (1960). 185-93.

_____ . Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes. Richard Howard, trans. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977 (1975).

Batchelor, J.B. "Feminism in Virginia Woolf." Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays. Claire Sprague, ed. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971.

Beebe, Maurice. Literary Symbolism: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Literature. San Francisco: Wadsworth, 1960.

Beja, Morris, ed. Critical Essays on Virginia Woolf. Boston: Hall, 1985.

_____, ed. Virginia Woolf: To the Lighthouse (Casebook Series). London: MacMillan, 19770.

Benjamin, Jessica. "Authority and the Family Revisited." New German Critique 13 (1977).

Benstock, Shari. "Authorizing the Autobiographical" in The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings. Shari Benstock, ed. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1988. 10-33.

_____. "Expatriate Modernism: Writing on the Cultural Rim" in Women's Writing in Exile. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela

Ingram, eds. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1989. 19-40.

_____ , ed. The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1988.

_____. Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940. Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 1986.

Billson, Marcus K. and Sidonie A. Smith. "Lillian Hellman and the Strategy of the 'Other'" in Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism. Estelle C. Jelinek, ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1980. 162-179.

Black, Naomi. "Virginia Woolf and the Women's Movement." in Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant. Jane Marcus, ed. Lincoln NE: U of Nebraska P, 1983. 180-197.

Blackburn, Regina. "In Search of the Balck Female Self: African-American Women's Autobigraphies and Ethnicity." Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism. Estelle Jelinek, ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1980. 133-148.

Bourdieu, Pierre. Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste. Richard Nice, trans. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984.

Brittain, Vera. Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity? London: Femina, 1968.

Brodzki, Bella and Celeste Schenck, eds. Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1988.

Broe, Mary Lynn and Angela Ingram, eds. Women's Writing in Exile. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1989.

Brooks, Cleanth, R.W.B. Lewis and Robert Penn Warren. "The Moderns: Founders and Beyond, 1914-1945" in American Literature: The Makers and the Making. Volume II. New York: St. Martin's, 19xx. 1803-1826.

Butterfield, Stephen. Black Autobiography in America. Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1974.

Chodorow, Nancy. The Reproduction of Mothering:

Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender. Berkely: U of California P, 1978.

Christ, Carol P. Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest. Boston: Beacon, 1980.

Christian, Barbara. Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition 1892-1976. Westport, CN: Greenwood P, 1980.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." New French Feminisms. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. New York: Schocken, 1981. 245-264.

_____ . "Sorties." New French Feminisms. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. New York: Schocken, 1981. 90-98.

DeKoven, Marianne. "Gendered Doubleness and the 'Origins' of Modernist Form." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 8.1 (1989): 19-42.

Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences" in Critical Theory Since 1965. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, eds. Tallahassee, FL: Florida State UP, 1986. 83-93.

DeSalvo, Louise. Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work. London: The Women's P, 1989.

Dickson, Lovat. Radclyffe Hall at the Well of Loneliness: A Sapphic Chronicle. New York: Scribner's, 1975.

Dinnerstein, Dorothy. The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise. New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

Dixon, Vernon J. African Philosophy: Assumptions and Paradigms for Research on Black Persons. Chapter IV. Lewis W. King, Dixon, Wade W. Nobles, eds. Los Angeles: Faron Center, 1976.

Dodd, Philip. "Criticism and the Autobiographical Tradition. Prose Studies 8.2 (1985): 1-13.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. H.D. The Career of That Struggle. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1986.

_____. Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers. Bloomington IN: Indiana UP, 1985.

Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: An Introduction. London, Verso, 1975.

_____. Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Theory. London: Verso, 1975.

Faulkner, Peter, ed. A Modernist Reader: Modernism in England 1910-1930. London: Batsford, 1986.

_____. Modernism. London: Methuen, 1977.

Fetterley, Judith. The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction. Bloomington IN: Indiana UP, 1981.

Fields, Kenneth. "Introduction" to H.D. Tribute to Freud. Boston: Godine, 1974.

Fish, Stanley. Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric and the Practice of Theory in Literature and Legal Studies. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1989.

Flax, Jane. "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory." Signs 12.4 (1987): 621-643.

Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" in Critical Theory Since 1965. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, eds. Tallahassee, FL: Florida State UP, 1986. 138-147.

Fraser, Nancy and Linda J. Nicholson. "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism" in Feminism/Postmodernism. Linda J. Nicholson, ed. New York: Routledge, 1990. 19-38.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Modernism of the 'Scattered Remnant': Race and Politics in H.D.'s Development." Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship. Shari Benstock, ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987. 208-232

_____. "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice" in The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings. Shari Benstock, ed. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1988. 34-62.

Gamache, Lawrence B. and Ian S. MacNiven, eds. The Modernists: Studies in a Literary Phenomenon (Essays in

Honor of Harry T. Moore). London: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1987.

Gauthier, Xavière. "Is There Such a Thing as Women's Writing?" New French Feminisms. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. New York: Schocken, 1981. 161-164

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

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century. Volume 1: The War of the Words. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1988.

_____. No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century. Volume 2: Sexchanges. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1989.

Gillespie, Diane Filby. " Political Aesthetics: Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson." in Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant. Jane Marcus, ed. Lincoln NE: U of Nebraska P, 1983. 132-151.

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

Godwin, Gail. "The Uses of Autobiography." The Writer 100:3 (March 1987): 7-9, 22.

Greening, Thomas C. "The Uses of Autobiography" in Therapy and the Arts: Tools of Consciousness. Walt Anderson, ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1977. 90-112.

Gusdorf, Georges. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical. James Olney, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. 28-48.

Hall, Radclyffe. The Well of Loneliness. New York: Avon, 1981 (1928).

Harris, Alice Kessler. "Introduction" to Bread Givers. New York: Persea, 1975.

Harrison, Nancy R. Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's Text. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1988.

Hartsock, Nancy. "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories." Cultural Critique 7 (Fall 1987): 187- 206.

H.D. HERmione. New York: New Directions, 1981.

_____. Tribute to Freud. Boston: Godine, 1956.

Heilbrun, Carolyn G. "Non-Autobiographies of "Privileged" Women: England and America" in Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1988. 62-76.

_____ . "Woman's Autobiographical Writings: New Forms" Prose Studies 8.2 (1985): 14-28.

_____ . Writing A Woman's Life. New York: Norton, 1988.

Henriksen Louise Levitas. Anzia Yezierska: A Writer's Life. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1988.

Herrmann, Claudine. "Women in Space and Time." New French Feminisms. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. New York: Schocken, 1981. 168-173.

Homans, Margaret. Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.

Irigaray, Luce. Excerpts from This Sex Which is Not One. New French Feminisms. Elaine Marks and Isabelle deCourtivron, eds. New York: Schocken, 1981. 99-106.

Jaggar, Alison M. Feminist Politics and Human Nature. Sussex: Harvester, 1983.

Jardine, Alice A. Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985.

Jelinek, Estelle C. The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present. Boston: Twayne, 1986.

_____ , ed. Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1980. (CT 25 W6)

Kamel, Rose. "'Anzia Yezierska, Get Out of Your Own Way': Selfhood and Otherness in the Autobiographical Fiction of Anzia Yezierska." Studies in American Jewish Literature 3 (1983): 40-50.

Kant, Immanuel. "Selections" in Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, eds. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1964.

Kiely, Robert, ed. Modernism Reconsidered. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983.

Kloepfer, Deborah Kelly. "Flesh Made Word: Maternal Inscription in H.D." Sagetrieb 3.1 (Spring 1984): 27-48.

Kolodny, Annette. "The Lady's Not for Spurning: Kate Millett and the Critics" in Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism. Estelle C. Jelinek, ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1980. 238-260.

_____. "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism." The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory. Elaine Showalter, ed. New York: Pantheon, 1985.

Larsen, Nella. Quicksand and Passing. Deborah E. McDowell, ed. (American Women Writers Series) New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986.

Lejeune, Philippe. Le pact autobiographique. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975. (CT 25 L4)

Lionnet, Françoise. Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1989.

Lodge, David. Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism. Birmingham: U of Birmingham, 1977.

Lyotard, Jean-François. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, trans. Minneapolis: U of Minnesotal P, 1984.

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

MacKinnon, Catharine. "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 7.3 (1982): 515-544.

Man, Paul de. "Autobiography as De-facement." Modern Language Notes 94 (1979): 919-930.

Mandel, Barrett, J. "Full of Life Now" in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical. James Olney, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. 49-72.

Marcus, Jane, ed. New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf. Lincoln NE: U of Nebraska P, 1981.

_____. "Thinking Back Through Our Mothers." New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf. Jane Marcus, ed. Lincoln NE: U of Nebraska P, 1981. 1-30.

_____., ed. Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant. Lincoln NE: U of Nebraska P, 1983.

_____. Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy. Bloomington IN: Indiana UP, 1987.

Mason, Mary G. "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers" in Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1988. 19-44.

Mason, Mary Grimley and Carol Hurd Green, eds. Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979.

McDowell, Deborah E. "Introduction" to Quicksand and Passing. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1986.

McLaurin, Allen. "Consciousness and Group Consciousness in Virginia Woolf." Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective. Eric Warner, ed. New York: St. Martin's, 1984. 28-40.

Mehlman, Jeffrey. A Structural Study of Autobiography: Proust, Leiris, Sartre, Lévi-Strauss. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1971. (B 2421 N4)

Miller, Nancy K. The Poetics of Gender. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.

_____ . Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing. New York: Columbia UP, 1988.

Moi, Toril. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory. London: Routledge, 1988.

Morris, Adalaide. "A Relay of Power and of Peace: H.D. and the Spirit of the Gift." Contemporary Literature 27.4 (Winter 1986): 493-524.

Newton, Esther. "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 9.4 (1984): 557-575.

Nicholson, Linda J., ed. Feminism/Postmodernism. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Olney, James. "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction" in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical. James Olney, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. 3-27.

_____ , ed. Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980.

_____ . Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1972. (CT25 O44)

Ozick, Cynthia. Interview with Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick. Texas Studies in Literature and Language 25 (Summer 1983): 255-265.

Panken, Shirley. Virginia Woolf and the "Lust of Creation": A Psychoanalytic Exploration. Albany NY: State U of New York P, 1987.

Pascal, Roy. "The Autobiographical Novel and The Autobiography." Essays in Criticism 9 (1959): 134-50.

Peel, Ellen. "The Self is Always an Other: Going the Long Way Home to Autobiography." Twentieth Century Literature 35.1 (Spring 1989): 1-16.

Pomerleau, Cynthia S. "The Emergence of Women's Autobiography in England" in Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism. Estelle C. Jelinek, ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1980. 21-38.

Riffaterre, Michael. Fictional Truth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.

Rosenfeld, Alvin H. "Inventing the Jew: Notes on Jewish Autobiography." The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays. Albert E. Stone, ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981. 133-156.

Rosenman, Ellen Bayuk. "The 'Invisible Presence' in the

Creative Process of Virginia Woolf." American Imago 43.2 (Summer 1986): 133-150.

Said, Edward W. The World, the Text, and the Critic. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1983.

Sayre, Robert F. The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry James. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1964. (CT 25 S2)

Schenck, Celeste. "Exiled by Genre: Modernism, Canonicity, and the Politics of Exclusion." Women's Writing in Exile. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram, eds. Chapel Hill NC: U of North Carolina P, 1989. 225-250.

Schlack, Beverly Ann. "Fathers in General: The Patriarchy in Virginia Woolf's Fiction." Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant. Jane Marcus, ed. Lincoln NE: U of Nebraska P, 1983. 52-77.

Schoen, Carol. Anzia Yezierska. (Twayne's United States Authors Series, Kenneth Eble, ed.) Boston: Twayne, 1982.

_____. "Anzia Yezierska: New Light on the 'Sweatshop Cinderella.'" MELUS 7.3 (1980): 3-11.

Schweickart, Patrocinio P. "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading." Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart, eds. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986. 31-62.

Showalter, Elaine. A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing. Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1977.

Smith, Sidonie. A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1987.

Spacks, Patricia Meyer. "Selves in Hiding" in Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism. Estelle C. Jelinek, ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1980. 112-132.

Spengemann, William C. The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre. New Haven, CN: Yale UP, 1980. (CT 25 S63 1980)

Sprague, Claire. Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971.

Stanton, Domna C. "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?" in The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century. Domna C. Stanton, ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987. 3-20.

_____ , ed. The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Stone, Albert E., ed. The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981. (PS 169 A95 A5)

Tompkins, Jane. Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.

Travis, S. "A Crack in the Ice: Subjectivity and the Mirror in H.D.'s Her." Sagtrieb 6.2 (Fall 1987): 123-140.

Warner, Eric, ed. Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective. New York: St. Martin's, 1984.

Weintraub, Karl Joachim. The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978.

Whitlock, Gillian. "'Everything is Out of Place': Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Literary Tradition." Feminist Studies 13.3 (Fall 1987): 555-582.

Williams, Raymond. Marxism and Literature. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977.

Wittig, Monique. Les Guérrillères. Peter Owen, tr. New York: Avon, 1971.

Woolf, Virginia. Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings. Jeanne Schulkind, ed. New York: Harcourt, 1985.

_____. To the Lighthouse. New York: Harcourt, 1955 (1927).

Yezierska, Anzia. Bread Givers. New York: Persea, 1975 (1925).

_____. Red Ribbon on a White Horse. New York: Persea, 1987 (1950).