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ASJA KARAPANDZA
CUNY City College

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BELOVED OPHELIA OR “LOVE TOO THICK”

WOMAN’S LANGUAGE IN SHAKESPEARE AND MORRISON

BY

ASJA KARAPANDZA

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1. INTRODUCTION

“The limits of my language are the limits of my world.” – Ludwig Wittgenstein

The postmodern/feminist argument holds that gender identities are constructed within a framework of prevailing social possibilities, depending on ideology to no lesser extent than biology. Since Simone de Beauvoir's time, we have known that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (The Second Sex, p. 103) Contemporary feminist theory has gone even further in establishing the notion of gender as an arbitrary and fairly unstable cultural construct reflecting the dominant social norms. In the present paper, I will be using the theories of the French psycholinguistic school, including work of Lucy Irigaray, Helen Cixous and Julia Kristeva, to analyze the impact of the social ties, particularly mother-daughter relationships, as portrayed in William Shakespeare's Hamlet and Toni Morrison's Beloved. I will be applying écriture feminine (Helen Cixous' term for writing "in the feminine voice") to a close textual analysis of these two literary works. Furthermore, I will set out to explore how the mother-daughter relationship impacts the perception of the female body as a medium of discourse, focusing on the type of language available to women to express themselves and share their voice.

In contrasting Hamlet and Beloved, I want to draw some unexpected parallels between the two texts. Although situated in very different historical and sociocultural contexts, both works depict female characters who, reduced to invisible objects in the economy of male desire, revert to their pre-symbolic relation to language at the moment
In my discussion, I will be applying the French feminist approach to women’s language to the analysis of these two texts. In particular, I will rely on the writings of Julia Kristeva, who coined the term *le semiotique*, which is related to the infantile pre-oedipal stage, and Helen Cixous, who devised the term *féminine écriture*. In her writings, Cixous emphasizes the importance of maternal voice and body, often using the image of mother's milk: "*Eternity is voice mixed with milk,“* (*The Newly Born Woman*, 13) In addition, Lacan is another important figure in my discussion, since he introduces the term the *symbolic*, setting the framework for the discussion of the dynamic tension between the symbolic and the semiotic order in language.

First of all, I begin with a discussion of postructuralist theory in order to explain some of the terminology that is used in preserving differences and not the masculine logic which rests on deadly binaries. In this respect, poststructuralists have paid particular attention to the production of the subject through language and systems of meaning and power which is exercised through language. Lacan’s central idea is that the unconscious is being structured as language and that the self emerges when the individual enters the ‘symbolic’ language represented by the father and built on phallic/non-phallic opposition. According to Lacan, this entrance takes different forms for boys and girls: a girl's introduction into language is more problematic. Under this theory, it is the symbolic which requires the division between male and female, feminine and masculine which subordinates, where the father-son resemblance and rivalry is ruled by the primacy of the masculine logic. The woman thus represents a gap or silence: the sex that is:

"Women are identified with the literal, the absent referent, which makes the male child’s
entry into the symbolic Law of the Father possible (Homans, Bearing the Word p 4). Following Lacan, Irigaray recognizes the ways in which subjectivity is shaped by the symbolic order, the realm of the "ideology of womanhood which has been invented by men" (Sara Ruddick, "Maternal Thinking", p. 345).

In her later work, Kristeva introduces the semiotic pre-oedipal phase as a way of circumventing the Lacanian symbolic order. Unlike the Oedipal father, who is typically linked with ego boundaries, the mind, and the order of language, the preoedipal mother is generally associated with fluidity, the creative potential that dwells in the unconsciousness, the body and the non-verbal communication which is manifested through bodily symptoms of Ophelia and Beloved.

Finally, a common thread for the French psycholinguistic school is the emphasis on connecting language, psyche and sexuality. Cixous is perhaps the most optimistic about the possibilities for the Pre-Oedipal or Imaginary phase, which is where she locates feminine writing écriture féminine. The notion of the pre-oedipal which I will also refer to as the pre-verbal, pre-linguistic, or pre-semiotic, is central in my discussion of women’s language. The concept is crucial in the analysis of the two texts because it describes a period before the creation of oppositional binaries, before the imposition of the categories of male and female and most importantly because it is associated with the mother's body and mother’s tongue. In order to be able to discuss women’s experiences in literary texts, I will focus on the preoedipal period, which according to Julia Kristeva, is crucial to understanding female language. Furthermore, my aim will be to show how Shakespeare’s and Morisson’s deal with the emergence of a new female self-consciousness and the attempts by women to appropriate the dominant discourse.
In my first chapter, I will provide a short overview on binarism, where Cixous questions the adequacy of the "either/or" logic of traditional Western societies and the implications of binarism on women's condition as represented in Hamlet and Beloved. In the second chapter, I will examine the fundamental relationship between mother and daughter, being the focus point of the discussion, which connects with the possibility of women’s language. Subsequently, I will examine the role of mother-daughter dynamics play in identity constructs: the absent mother-daughter relationship in Hamlet and the stifling, bordering on the incestual relationship between Sethe and Beloved. Finally, I will end with an analysis of the two female protagonists oscillating between the semiotic and the symbolic in their struggle to remain independent agents. I will examine the manner in which Ophelia and Sethe confront their respective traumas and the reasons Ophelia ultimately fails while Sethe succeeds.
2. DAUGHTERS OF WAR

“Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body stamping it and violently shaping it.” - Monique Wittig

“[Theory of culture, theory of society, symbolic systems in general – art, religion, family, language – it is all developed while bringing the same schemes to light. And the movement hereby each opposition is set up to make sense is the movement through which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield, Each time, a war is let loose. Death is always at work.”](Sorites, p.64)

For my discussion, it is important to analyze the underlying mechanisms of exclusion operating within patriarchy through which woman as the Other is being marginalized. In enforcing uniformity, The Law of the Father solidifies its norms by excluding everything deviating from the set values. In Sorties (1975 essay) Cixous describes a set of hierarchical oppositions which have governed an entire theory of culture, history society, art, religion, family language. Citing oppositions such as culture/nature, head/heart, form/matter; and speaking/writing, she and relates them to the man/woman binary. These binary oppositions, according to Cixous, are based on the repression and subordination of the second element to the first (woman to man) and in turn both locked in violent conflict. Consequently, sexual difference is locked into a structure of power where difference or otherness is tolerated only when repressed. The
dominating element threatens to level the differences, subsuming them within the speech of the Logos, the speech of the Father, and ultimately within the language of Man (Politics of Writing, p.8). Thanks to the discovery of the unconscious as a structural field, feminist theorists have been able to rethink gender identity as the result of a social interpretation, rather than a "naturally given" category. In this regard, the desire for symmetrical, binary differences is seriously challenged, with possible resolution is to be found in poetry or feminine écriture, in the pre-verbal, pre-semiotic stages which the postructuralist feminists see as a way to breaking through the hegemony of the Logos.

In juxtaposing Hamlet and Beloved, I want to illustrate that, regardless of the specific time and place, there are many overarching similarities in the way women are treated in patriarchal society. Ophelia and Sethe both embody the typical fears of male identity and autonomy which is threatening to man: both are linked to fluidity, chaos, and temptation. Hamlet, along with other Shakespeare's plays witnesses a changing attitude toward women, thanks to greater individual responsibility that the Renaissance ideals placed on the individual. The existential burden started to be applied to women as well, although with many caveats and restrictions, and that inevitably led to clashes with the existing social order. Shakespeare was attuned to these profound social changes, as is made evident in his portrayals of female characters who transgress or at least challenge the established boundaries and gain their own voice. For Ophelia, however, assuming her own agency means plunging into death.

While the events described in Morrison's Beloved take place some 250 years after Shakespeare, her characters inhabit a world still uninformed by the humanistic ideals of the Renaissance. In both settings, the female characters seize upon the transgressive
nature of the female language to oppose the patriarchy and find an outlet for self-expression. This results in unexpected commonalities between Ophelia, a literary heroine from the verge of the 17th century inhabiting an (imaginary) medieval castle and characters in *Beloved* inhabiting a (similarly imaginary) haunted house in late 19th-century Kentucky.

In the Elizabethan period, and much more so in the social milieu described in Morrison’s novel, daughters, as a rule, lack female models; they cannot inherit from their mothers, in either literal or symbolic sense. However, in the case of *Beloved*, it is important to point out the role model provided by Baby Suggs, who offers a sense of stability to both her granddaughter Denver and the community at large; this is one important factor ultimately ensuring that the fate of Denver is very different from that of Ophelia. By contrast with Denver, Ophelia, already isolated from the beginning of the play, is gradually stripped of all her social ties: she is left with no mother, no father, no lover, no brother and no language to express herself. Although initially exhibiting greater self-control than Hamlet, she is significantly more vulnerable than him because "He has threefold power: he has nature to protect him, law to protect him, and property to protect him." (*Virgina Wolf, Three Guineas* 135). According to Cixous, the inscribing of these experiences in and through language is central to the concept of *féminine écriture*. She insists that women need a different set of tools in order to describe the complex relationships that a woman has with herself, with her mother, and other women. This could be one explanation for keeping the Pandora’s box shut for having no language to unearth this lava of female/maternal power.
According to Marianne Hirsch, the stories of mother-daughter relationships have been written even if they have not been read, but constitute the hidden subtext of many texts. This subtext is what interests me in my analysis of Ophelia's and Beloved's predicament. Interestingly, in Shakespeare’s plays mothers are mostly absent, asexual when there are only daughters (Ophelia, Desdemona, Lear’s daughters) or else they are not present as independent agents (Juliet’s mother). By contrast, in the case of mothers of sons, those mothers are very present. Moreover, there is no mother/daughter conflict anywhere in Shakespeare; there is husband vs. wife, father vs. son, father vs. daughter, mother vs. son, but not mother-daughter conflict. It is the patriarchal order, which the daughter is left to face on her own, that forms the main conflict threatening to her identity. Helen Cixous uses the Hegelian master/slave dialectic to illustrate the form of subjectivity which is threatening and destructive: “a subjectivity that experiences itself only when it makes its law, its strength, its mastery felt (Sorties, p.80). This brings us back to the problematic of binary patriarchy, as illustrated by Christa Wolf in the following quote;

“Inevitably we look upon societies so kind to you so harsh to us, as an ill fitting from that distorts the truth, deforms the mind fetters the will. Inevitably we look upon societies as conspiracies that sink the private brother whom many of us have reason to respect and inflating in his stead a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist.”

(Cassandra, 145).

Further, Virginia Woolf spoke of the influence the Oedipal stage has on women. She found that it was based on the separation of the mothers from daughters and the sacrifice
of women as subjects. In this respect, Virginia Woolf uses the Eleusinian Mysteries associated with the mother-daughter myth of Demeter and Persephone to suggest that, as Susan Gubar explains, "the grievous separation of mother and maiden implies that in a patriarchal society women are divided from each other and from themselves."

Monique Wittig, another French feminist, employs a different methodology from Helene Cixous, choosing to subvert the existing patriarchal myths from within and by challenging the deeply rooted ideology of myths and stereotypes. She joins the "women warriors" (Wittig’s term) to fight the men, which means questioning the past in order to debunk old myths. "It is quite possible for a work of literature to operate as a war machine upon its epoch." It can be argued that both works under discussion, and primarily Beloved, effectively function as such war machines, contesting the prevalent social values.
3. ORIGINS OF WOMEN’S (BODY) LANGUAGE

“Language is the medium in which we carry our past, determine our present, and condition our future.” - Marry Carruthers

“She always had the feeling that it was dangerous to live even for one day.” - Virginia Woolf (Mrs Dalloway)

Since, for much of history, women have operated in a culture represented and enforced by the figure of the father, the question of great significance for feminist theory is what kind of language does a woman speak, since she is always represented within a dominant order organized through a masculine economy of discourse. What is a woman's language? Does she have a language in resisting the dictates of this symbolic order? Unlike Hamlet, Ophelia has no accessible and acceptable space for expressing her thoughts. Instead, she undergoes an immense bodily suffering, which becomes an alternative way of opposing the order and logic of her father’s world. The body suffers and retreats into the pre-Oedipal phase of communication represented by the fluidity of the womb. Ophelia, shown earlier in the play as a highly articulate and sophisticated user of various linguistic codes, retreats into the pre-semiotic space by the way of defiance of the symbolic law. All social and historical differences between these two literary characters notwithstanding, Ophelia and Beloved both use the same tools available to women in resisting the ideologically structured masculine discourse.
According to Kristeva, Ophelia occupies the space of the mother’s body when her syntax resembles rhythm, prosody, pun, non-sense, laughter. Ophelia “speaks things in doubt, speaks things in doubt,/That carry but half sense (III.5.)

Kristeva believes that women are able to oppose the existing concepts of Western thought within the masculine systems of language. Kristeva’s semiotics is related to the infantile pre-Oedipal stage (Freudian) or pre-mirror stage (Lacanian), namely, an emotional field tied to our instincts, which dwells in the fissures and prosody (melodic rhythm and flow) rather than the denotative meaning of words. Kristeva describes the semiotic as 'feminine', a phase dominated by the space of the mother's body. The semiotic overflows its boundaries in those privileged 'moments' which Kristeva specifies in her *triad of subversive forces: madness, holiness and poetry* (*Revolution in Poetic Language*, p.124). However, in spite of the destructive consequences of the paternal, symbolic order, my position (similar to Kristeva’s) is that the only way out is through a narrative made possible within the symbolic order of language by allowing a subject to exercise a degree of control over her story.

Ophelia, by contrast, ends up being physically controlled by her narrative. Hysteria has been documented as a *woman’s condition* which enables telling a story; it is different from the symbolic because it provides access to the semiotic, normally repressed in the dominant order, while staying within the limits of the symbolic.

Accordingly, Irigaray understands hysteria primarily as a form of protest against patriarchal law and locates it outside of and in opposition to what Lacan terms the symbolic order, the rule-governed phallic economy that subjects enter when they acquire language and submit to the *Law-of-the-Father*. Furthermore, Irigaray explains hysteria's
potential to resist and subvert symbolic law in terms of mimicry. According to Irigarary, the hysteric challenges the dominant order by mimicking an imposed idea of femininity. The hysteric does so by following the proscribed expectations to such an extreme or absurd degree that the end result is the opposite of compliance. In the case of Ophelia, her feelings are expressed obliquely through what can be interpreted as hysterical symptoms. Throughout the play Ophelia is not given a soliloquy or much space to express her thoughts; yet the important thoughts and feelings she finally brings to expression dwell in the realm of the semiotic. Not able to present a direct challenge to the dominant codes that are meant to reign in women's emotion, Ophelia retreats into her unconscious, allowing for an eruption of the semiotic:

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember: and there is pansies. that's for thoughts

<...>
O you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy: I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died: they say he made a good end.--

Sings

For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.

Ophelia’s singing may be seen in light of Adorno's remark that “a woman's singing voice cannot be recorded well, because it demands the presence of her body.“ In the case of Ophelia, did we even know she had a body? Hamlet tried to intimate as much (e.g. through erotic innuendos in the Mousetrap scene), but Ophelia herself was not supposed to have an awareness of her own sexuality, in line with the ideals of a time where a
woman’s “virtue” equaled simply “chastity.” Polonius and Laertes see Ophelia’s isolation detachment from the world that surrounds her as the desired norm. On the other hand, Adorno conceives the female voice as 'incomplete', 'ambiguous' and even 'incoherent' without the additional clues supplied by her appearance, gestures and expression. Throughout Western culture, a female's voice is rarely described unless her appearance is also referred to, often taking on exaggerated visual characteristics: the female singer becomes either a threatening monster or an angel. There seems to be an unending supply of “madwomen” and “bad women” to illustrate male-authored fantasies about the female voice. Ophelia becomes such a madwoman, gaining a physical body and, for the first time, her own voice. Irigaray proposes that hysterical discourse has a privileged relation to the maternal body and is linked to pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother (Speculum).

In Beloved, the statement that simultaneously belongs to Sethe and Beloved—“I am Beloved and she is mine” —also signals a withdrawal from the patriarchal symbolic realm and a retreat into a pre-Oedipal state of merger between self and the Other: "I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too" (210). In this sense, hysteria, which comes from the Greek word hysteros, meaning womb, is an ironically an apt description of Beloved's condition, not because she has a wandering womb but because she desires to return to a womblike fusion with her mother. In depicting Sethe who urinates copiously, as if she were in the process of giving birth and her waters had broken, Morrison seems to be trying to simultaneously illustrate the reductionist misogynic stereotype and mimic it ad absurdum. In this episode, Sethe embodies
generations of slave women who were denied the possibility of becoming mothers in a real sense: not only denied the opportunity parenting their children (as was the case of Sethe's own mother), but often losing control even over the choice of their children’s father. Symbolically, Sethe is making up for that absent motherhood in an intentionally exaggerated way.

On the other hand, hysterical response can also be seen as the inability of language to articulate the immensity of slavery’s horrors. Irigaray asserts that the hysteric "senses something which remains to be said that resists all speech" (Speculum 193). Therefore, hysteria has access to the imagination and creativeness. Hence, narratives that emerge out of hysteria have the potential to create a new perspective on the past and redefine possibilities for the future.

In addition, Cixous's celebration of hysteria's capacity to undermine dominant structures and frameworks makes Beloved's violence--so powerful that the whole house quakes at one point--suggestive of a metaphorical dissatisfaction with the established order (Cixous and Clement 154, 156). On the other hand, I will argue that, in the case of Ophelia, her madness and hysteria also disturb the status quo. While this rupture has no redeeming effects on Ophelia’s own fate, it can be argued that it affects several other characters in the play, including Gertrude. The first time Gertrude is actually seen talking to a woman is in Ophelia’s madness scene; initially, she is reluctant to receive Ophelia and has to be convinced to do so. Following the encounter and Ophelia’s subsequent death, however, Gertrude finally assumes her own maternal role: she laments Ophelia as a potential daughter-in-law ("I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife; I
thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,” V.1.), and starts being protective towards Hamlet, ultimately dying while trying to warn her son of mortal danger.

Ophelia’s outbreak ends tragically for her because, in the absence of the mother, Ophelia has no shelter from the patriarchal, Cartesian, logocentric world and no access to an alternative discourse. She has only herself to turn to. In this respect Beloved has an advantage because Sethe allows Beloved to go “mad “ and express her pain hysterically. By watching over Beloved and protecting her, Sethe creates a safe space, albeit a provisional one.

Ironically, when Sethe, Denver, and Paul D first meet Beloved, Sethe thinks that the young girl looks poorly fed. When Sethe decides to let the newcomer stay, she explains to Paul D that "feeding her is no trouble" (67). However, Denver knows that Beloved is "greedy" (209), and Sethe notes that the longing in her eyes is "bottomless" (58). As is typical of hysterics who, according to Cixous, seem to say "I want everything" (Cixous and Clement 155), Beloved becomes voracious: "She took the best of everything--first. The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate, the brightest ribbon for her hair" (241). However, her desire cannot be abated. Just as Irigaray says of the hysteric, "the 'I' is empty still, ever more empty, opening wide in rapture of soul.... no hands can fill the open hungry mouth with the food that both nourishes and devours" (Speculum 195). Similarly, Beloved is insatiable because nothing can make reparations for her death and satisfy the desires she was denied an opportunity to develop.

The two figures in Beloved have literally merged into one. The reversal of the roles is significant to the very idea of the blending of two “individuals“ in which the boundary between “I” and “the Other” becomes indistinct: ’Beloved bending over Sethe looked the
mother, and Sethe the teething child... The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became... Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur.” (250)

Furthermore, the breakdown of syntax and the absence of punctuation in the following passages create a fluidity that accords with Kristeva's description of the (maternal/feminine) semiotic: “We are not crouching now......we are standing but my legs are like my dead man's eyes.....I cannot fall because there is no room to ....the men without skin are making loud noises... I am not dead...the bread is sea colored....I am too hungry to eat it... the sun closes my eyes......those able to die are in pile....I cannot find my man......the one whose teeth I loved...... a hot thing....the little hill of dead people.“ (p. 260)

In another passage, Beloved, Sethe and Denver speak simultaneously:

I do not eat ...the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink....we have none....at night I cannot see the dead man on my face...daylight comes through the cracks and I can see his locked eyes....I am not big....small rats do not wait for us to sleep.....someone is thrashing but there is no room to do it in ....if we had more to drink we could make tears“(210)

Here too the narrator is interchangeable so that the reader is not able to identify individual voices. These random utterings may be said to form a collective stream of consciousness, transforming polymorphous, unrepresentable, presymbolic sexual drives into rhythms and energies that are characterized by fluidity, multiplicity and
heterogeneity, and that, although repressed within the symbolic, are capable of defying
the Law-of-the-Father when they erupt.

Similarly, a pre-oedipal phase is evoked in Ophelia when she wanders, singing bawdy
songs as a bitter reminder that her innocence, as well as the immense presence of mind
she has shown in III.1., are now gone. Her father, after making her betray her beloved,
suffered a violent end, and Hamlet himself has stooped to the level of a base conspirator
by killing a man without facing him in battle. She also believes that Hamlet is descending
into madness (“O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown!” III.1.) When she can no longer
handle one tragedy after another, she chooses to retreat completely into the semiotic, pre-
verbal world:

How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff
And his sandal shoon.
<...>
He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone. IV.5.23-49

Ophelia may be referring to her banished love, revealing her desire for Hamlet and
perceiving his absence as death. On the other hand, Laertes is at a loss trying to find a
logical pattern in Ophelia's words:

Laertes. A document in madness! Thoughts and remembrance fitted.
**Ophelia.** There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace o' Sundays. O, you must wear your rue with a difference! There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they wither'd all when my father died. They say he made a good end.

*Sings* For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.

As a gentleman of the court unwittingly states, Ophelia’s speech is stripped of its semantic load and attempts to interpret it serve merely as projections of the listeners’ own conflicts:

<...> they aim at it,

And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts.

Ophelia's speech in public is an example of the interplay of language, singing and the body, which, according to Cixous, is specific to feminine discourse:

She doesn’t speak, she throws her trembling body, forward, she lets go of herself, she flies, all of her logic passes into her voice and its with their body that she vitally supports the logic of her speech. This seize the woman from its depths of her lungs, this irresistible use of the body to complement the unmanageable ripple of her voice, is not an inherent feminine essence but a direct result of marginalization and intolerable sexual visibility.
When Sethe loses her job, and Ophelia recoils from her father and Hamlet, both women are effectively withdrawing from society and the symbolic order. For many years, Sethe lives like a recluse in her house, oblivious to the outside world; after the arrival of Beloved, Sethe's withdrawal from the world becomes still more drastic and even life-threatening. However, Beloved serves as a representation of Sethe's subconscious, and, being distinct from Sethe, contributes to healing Sethe's trauma. Ophelia, isolated by lack of family and meaningful social ties, retreats into her own subjectivity; her madness scene shows her being reduced to a projection of her own subconscious. These two episodes represent a subversive defiance of patriarchal law, when a pre-Oedipal realm is evoked to contrast to the well-ordered, regulated and unified symbolic. Thus "124, " Sethe's modest dwelling that, like a person, gets to be referred to by a proper name, becomes a place of "no-time" (191). Sethe and Beloved, by retreating into the semiotic, escape the psychic structures of the dominant socio-symbolic order that cause their pain: "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom. This woman in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims“ (3)

The other place,“ representing the afterworld or non-existence and 124 function as that which Julia Kristeva refers to (in Revolution in Poetic Language) as the "semiotic chora," a pre-verbal, pre-Oedipal space of the mother. The term "chora“ borrowed from Plato's Timaeus, where it designates a discourse space, is utilized by Kristeva to describe her concept of an indeterminate, "unnamable" maternal receptacle-- the "other place“ in which the maternal law supersedes the paternal law (Rivkin and Ryan, 453-54; 460-61, n5). This maternal place is a place to which the women retreat, and to which the
community responds. The maternal is the semiotic which holds and nourishes. However, it needs the symbolic to survive; it needs the community, the world at large, which Ophelia lacks. Ultimately, Sethe and Denver are able to pull through their narrative effort; their semiotic remains within the symbolic, within the community enabling the hysteric to tell her story in a different way, with words rather than her body: “And she has to devise some entirely new combination of her resources . . . so as to absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the whole.” (Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own). It is ironic that Mrs. Dalloway, with a life of ease and privilege, and Sethe, with a life of abjection and poverty, are very similar in that they are not allowed to live for themselves.

When Sethe first becomes free, it is hard for her in the beginning to even plan her daily activities on her own. She literally does not know what to do with her money or how to structure her day. In the existential sense, she is just as adrift: having been denied the existential burden or even a fully human existence, she is struggling with developing a concept of her own discrete identity: “Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it.” (p 250)

We see her struggle to perceive herself as a subject rather than an object, but ultimately she succeeds. Ophelia is able to live dangerously only at the cost of losing her identity, after which there's no return.

In a society that perceives reality only in terms of binary oppositions, members of an oppressed group are perceived as objects, and are therefore outsiders in their own
country. In Beloved, the mother and the daughter are doubly outsiders, because of their race and their gender. Their retreat into the semiotic represents a defiance of the symbolic paternal law, even when the symbolic has enormously destructive consequences, so destructive that Sethe chooses to kill her child rather than have her named by others.

On the other hand, Baby Suggs understands the power of the masculine discourse: she stays within the symbolic by insisting on using the name that matters to her (her husband's affectionate name for her and his last name, as if their marriage had legal validity) rather than on what’s in her legal papers underscoring her position as property.

Seizing the symbolic discourse is an essential part of Baby Sugg's struggle for an independent identity. When Stamp Paid remembers talking to Baby Suggs, this is what he focuses on: "Listen here, girl" he told her, “you can't quit the Word, It's given to you to speak. You can't quit the Word, I don't care what all happen to you.” and she responds 'That's one other thing took away from me: (177,178)

According to Bakhtin, in order to speak and own a language one has to bend language to one's own purposes. Language is situated on the borderline between self and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speakers populate it with their own intentions, adapting the words to their own semantic and expressive intentions. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language, but rather in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: the word must be seized and appropriated by the speaker. This process is challenging and fraught with risks. Throughout the play, Ophelia struggles to become an independent agent, but when the repression becomes too strong, she retreats completely into the pre-linguistic language.
By foregoing the symbolic and completely surrendering to the semiotic, she heads for the tragic end. Kristeva argues that, in order to be revolutionary, the semiotic must combine with the symbolic because complete withdrawal into the semiotic leads to psychosis or death (82,102,139). This is exactly what we see when Sethe and Beloved stay locked up in 124, losing all sense of reality or when Ophelia, her personality disintegrating, finds an escape in death. Ultimately, there is no language that is purely outside the symbolic; the semiotic has to erupt within the symbolic, and that is what ultimately sets Ophelia's and Sethe's destinies apart. In spite of all the violence and humiliation experienced by the female protagonists in Beloved, they are nevertheless able to overcome their trauma and continue to live thanks to what Kristeva would call incorporating the semiotic within the symbolic.
4. FEMININE ECRITURE OR A WAY OUT

“We must master how to speak the other’s language without renouncing our own.” - Jack Derrida

“So I want to write as a woman, I want to say the things that a woman wants to say, but all I've got to say it with is a man's sentence.” - Virginia Woolf

In the present chapter, I will show why I view hysteria, mimicry, masquerade, the semiotic, revision of the myths as various manifestation of feminine écriture, that is, an expression of women's subversive language. In analyzing the novel Beloved, my primary focus is on its stylistic experimentation and on the female protagonists’ successful retreat into the maternal semiotic; in Hamlet, my focus is on Ophelia’s shattered attempt to cling to the symbolic realm and her eventual retreat into the pre-verbal and pre semiotic. Elaine Showalter has pointed out that „women’s literature has the same phases of development as the literature of Afro-Americans, as a long suppressed group from the white male European literature of universal values which strives to unmask the particularism hiding behind the so-called universal ideals which are in fact mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization.“

“Monique Wittig, who explores language as an oppressive tool in the hands of patriarchy in her text Les Guerilleres (1969), asserts the need for a “womanist culture” by reworking androcentric myths that men have devised as eternal myths“ “As the women (elles) in Les Guerilleres say, Men have expelled you from the world of symbols and yet they have given you names . . . . 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 . . . they have attached a particular word to an object or a fact.” In Judeo-Christian epistemology, logos implies power, both sociopolitical power (Adam's naming of the animals signifies his dominion over them) and creative power (“God said 'Let there be light' and there was light” (Gen 1:3) “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God (John 1:1). With the use of language assigned such heavy symbolism, the privilege of interpreting the world is traditionally reserved for men. In the Nunnery scene (Hamlet, III.1.), Hamlet recites standard misogynic complaints against women, which might as well have been taken verbatim from a medieval moral tractate: using cosmetics („God gave you one face and you make yourselves/Another“), dancing, employing affected gestures—all activities associated with idleness and seductive powers. However, one of the charges he voices is rather different from the rest: “You <...>/ Nick-name God’s creatures. “ This may arguably imply that women are taking part in revising the myth, transforming the absolute fixed meaning and thus challenging what Bakhtin would call the monologic discourse.

In Virginia Woolf’s terms, a woman’s sentence is not so much about the grammatical construction of language as about overturning the idea that a sentence is final, judgmental, or complete, “by which woman has been kept from feeling that she can be in full command of language” (523). Woolf envisions a future when women will reclaim this power for themselves: “And she has to devise some entirely new combination of her resources . . . so as to absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the whole.” (A Room of One's Own). Furthermore, it was Virginia Woolf who a century ago commented on the construction of female
language, anticipating later feminist literary theory. With the term feminine écriture not yet in circulation, Woolf proposed a completely new philosophical perspective linking the social position of woman to the sub-conscious and writing which remains a cornerstone of contemporary feminist theory. Similar to Woolf’s affiliation for poetic language, Julia Kristeva privileges poetry because of its willingness to play with grammar, metaphor and meaning: “Not a language of the desiring exchange of messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communication and desire beyond want, but a language of want, for the fear that edges up to in and runs along its edges.” (Powers, 35)

Assuming an even more radical position, Adrienne Rich argues that language is encoded as a privilege of man and as such does not reflect women’s experience: the Law of the father transforming the daughter into an invisible woman in exile, a muted woman whose desire for autonomous expression is invariably met with disapprobation. This view, however, is not one that is universally accepted within feminist criticism. I would argue that, even though this perception of women in society is accurate, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Helen Cixous, Monique Wittig all contend that women operating within the patriarchal order can in fact reclaim language for themselves through employing various tools of feminine écriture: by dwelling in the semiotic within the symbolic, by miming a hysterical response, and so forth. Kristeva coins the term “semiotic” (le semiotique) to describe somatic and aural qualities of language she associates with the maternal and with musical effects of poetry (p.519). The semiotic thus represents a break with the paternal order. Because of her preoedipal relationship with her mother, a woman has special access to the semiotic, which, as the locus of the unconscious, entails both a
privilege and an identity threat. This becomes evident whenever the order of language is disrupted (rupture, blank space metaphors, multiple narratives and the poetics). The dual nature of this disruption, its destructive and regenerative potential, is a major theme throughout *Beloved*: “I come out of blue water.....after the bottoms of my feet swim away from me I come up.....I need to find a place to be...the air is heavy......I am not dead........I am not..... there is a house.... there is what she whispered to me... I am where she told me.. I am not dead.... I sit.... the sun closes my eyes.....when I open them I see the face I lost.....” (Beloved, 263)

Likewise, Margaret Homans explores an alternative path for women in the pre-symbolic relation to language,..... *even while they are forced to conform to the fathers law...The daughter therefore speaks two languages at once.”* (p. 13). This would be an apt description of Ophelia who, at the beginning of the play, is very good at speaking two languages, the symbolic and the semiotic. In his emotional disorganization, Hamlet fails to realize that Ophelia is in fact acting independently, within the formal constraints placed on her. He has lost his dialogical capacity and is unable to analyze her words and separate the stilted expressions she self-consciously uses in order to “outdo the patriarchal discourse” and warn him from her usual mode of talking. “*Rich gifts grow poor when givers grow unkind”* (III.1) can be seen as one such example of exaggerated discourse. This overdoing of the language is what Irigaray refers to as mimicry or masquerade which women employ as a way out of the symbolic order. Although Ophelia feels the weight of the language much stronger, as a woman objectified by patriarchal discourse, she is able to achieve at least a brief release by retreating into the pre-semantic.
Similarly to Kristeva’s semiotic, Irigaray’s way out of this phallogocentric, oppressive world is for a female subject to establish a definitive position of difference by working within the dominant masculine parameters and mimicking their conceptions of the feminine in an attempt to parody and so deconstruct the symbolic. In this respect, Ophelia doesn’t just go quietly mad, like Lady Macbeth—with her incongruent bawdy songs and exaggerated language, she can almost be said to perform a parody of her own former speech. This is her reaction to that extremely oppressive world, the only way out of which is a retreat into the semiotic by exaggerating the symbolic. She plays with mimesis, trying to recreate the oppressive discourse without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. Her apparently meaningless utterings reflect the atmosphere that Irigary illustrates in *Key Writings*:

A voice which creates passages – between the universe, the world and the beating of one’s own heart, the pulse of one’s own blood, ....A song which restores and allows a solitude without dread, a virginity not limited to refraining from carnal acts. The vocal message is written with the body itself. A music made from breath and soul, of which the body is the tool. A message which occurs before and after any word, whose meaning always runs the risk of remaining too partial and biased, too mental, to restore life. A message sent out by a human, but so mingled to the music of the universe that it seems to come from a remote planet, from the stars, some angel or deity. Which, in a way, is
the case - it mixes with all that, takes charge of all that, through the air which transmits it carries it, makes it resonate.

*Key Writings*, p.40.

According to Woolf and her contemporary Helen Cixous, women’s struggle is located in writing; it is therefore only in writing/body language that the women can fully engage in resisting the immutable logocentric order. For Helen Cixous, women and men enter the Symbolic order/language structure in different ways. Since culture is always a phallogocentric order, where the entry into the Symbolic requires the subordination of the female, this new type of feminine writing will serve as a rupture, or a site of transformation or change (*Sorties*) Cixous uses "rupture" in the Derridean sense, as a locus where the totality of the system breaks down, and the system previously perceived as an immutable truth is exposed as an arbitrary construct. Consequently, feminine writing will expose the structure of the Symbolic allowing for its deconstruction. Even before Lacan, Virginia Woolf recognized the ways in which subjectivity is shaped by the symbolic order, the realm of culture and ideology. Virginia Wolf was among the first feminists to probe this issue by asking "whether the whole structure of ‘hierarchized’ oppositions that some of us have thought essentially patriarchal has been historically erected as a massive defense against the deep throat of the mother and the astonishing autonomy of that mother tongue which is common to both genders" (*Gilbert & Guber, Sexual Linguistics, 538*). And so, in order for Ophelia to remain in the symbolic, patriarchal world she has to subordinate herself, to the demands and expectations of the
exclusively male-dominated world. In so doing, she transforms her subjective, individual and private problems into a representation of social, class and gender problems.

Of course it would be anachronistic to apply the term *écriture feminine* to the analysis of Shakespeare’s works. Nevertheless, I would argue that Shakespeare indeed reaches into semiotic in order to give voice to Ophelia. According to Virginia Wolf, Shakespeare was able to access this maternal center. („Anon“ 102, 422) In her *madness*, in her retreat into the semiotic, Ophelia is finally able to establish a real relationship with her inner self, albeit a tragic one. Her speech is fragmented with ballads, traditional legends and songs and infused with the themes of seduction and betrayal:

_Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day_

_All in the morning betime,_

_And I maid at your window,_

_To be your Valentine_

_Then up he rose, and donn’d his clo’es,_

_And dropp’d the chamber door_

We already know that Ophelia is very good at two languages, the symbolic and the semiotic. She masters the different cultural codes very well, using them more adroitly than Hamlet, who, thanks to his privileged social position as well as his gender, may afford to treat such codes with disdain. She plays the part of a good daughter. “I shall obey, my lord” (III.1..) yet dares to contradict Polonius when defending Hamlet:
he hath Importuned me with love/ In honourable fashion.

And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord, With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

When talking to Laertes, she offers the expected dutiful response of an obedient female: “I shall the effect of this good lesson keep,/As watchman to my heart.“(I.3)—only to juxtapose this answer to her own warning exposing her brother's hypocrisy:

Do not, as some ungracious pastors do, Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven; Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine, Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads, And recks not his own rede.

This remark shows she does not accept Laertes' admonitions uncritically, just as she did not led herself influence by Polonious' cynical remarks. Later, when Polonius uses her as bait to spy on Hamlet for King Claudius, she does exactly what she is told, even as she may be argued to warn Hamlet through her unusually stilted and detached speech (III.1.4). She abides by the rules of her father and the symbolic order. Although Ophelia
is fully aware of the subservient place accorded to her in the patriarchal society, she is able to use language as her only means of defense:

**Hamlet:**

I did love you once,

**Ophelia:**

Indeed my lord, you made me believe so.

**Hamlet:**

You should not have believ’d me for virtue cannot so

Inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I lov’d you not.

**Ophelia:**

I was the more deceive’d.

In this highly charged emotional interaction, Ophelia is able to maintain self-control and project a critical distance, as if she were a third-party observer rather than an immediate participant of this dialogue. She reacts to Hamlet’s railings without aggression or frustration, instead seeing them as a manifestation of his troubled mental state: “O heavenly powers restore him!” Resigned to her own fate, she lament over what she perceives as Hamlet’s deteriorating condition: “O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!”
Through much of the play, Gertrude dissociates from the feminine and the maternal, aligning with the symbolic order. She only acknowledges the possibility of a marriage between Hamlet and Ophelia after Ophelia is safely dead, even though Hamlet’s feelings for her have long been known. Even when Polonius relates his conversation with his daughter to the royal couple "Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of your star..." (Act II, scene 2), he is clearly expressing a hope to be contradicted in his false modesty and hear the official approbation of his daughter’s union with Hamlet. Gertrude, however, refuses to see this hint and consider marriage as a “cure” for Hamlet’s unstable emotional state, as Claudius and Polonius appear to do. It is almost as if Gertrude has the same idée fixe as the one Hamlet express in the nunnery scene "I hereby declare we will have no more marriage." She wishes for the world to stop, the procreation cycle to come to an end. It's as only the death of Ophelia forces Gertrude to be maternal, protective of Hamlet and her last words will be an expression--finally--of maternal care for Hamlet, warning him of poison. She too has finally "lived for a day," in Virginia Woolf's words, and it has proved dangerous. When Hamlet calls Claudius “dear mother,” and of course in other scenes throughout the play (including the famous “Words, words, words” in II.2), he expresses his deep frustration at what Derrida would refer to as being imprisoned in language: the lack of an intrinsic connection between the signifier and the signified. Railing against Ophelia (in the nunnery scene) as well as against Gertrude ("Frailty, thy name is woman!” I.2.), he is not able to express his disenchantment in terms others than the traditional narrative of the original female sin. By making recourse to these myths, he succumbs to what Bakhtin calls a “homogenizing power…over language.” Ultimately,
Hamlet fails at his attempts to overcome the limits of language —arriving only at the “rest is silence.”

Beloved’s story is also "not a story to pass on" (274-75). It seems too terrible to find a resolution in the logic of narrative; therefore, not only cannot it be passed on from teller to teller, but it also cannot "pass on," or die (35). "Listening to the semiotic is necessary for hearing Sethe's side of the story and for critiquing the white/paternal line, but, because the semiotic finally limits human possibility, the novel needs also to bring its story to an end, “ (Homans, p.12). Thus, within psychoanalytically-inflected feminist narrative theory, Hamlet and Beloved have a main underlying theme in common—the dialectic between the symbolic and the semiotic, fraught with enormous existential risks yet also endowed with new expressive potential. The semiotic continues to haunt the borders of a symbolic order that excludes, just like the ghost of Hamlet continues to haunt the walls of Elsinore that have confined Ophelia to eternal silence.
5. TO DREAM IN KENTUCKY, TO DIE IN ELSINORE

“Devoutly to be wish’d. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there’s the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come..” - Hamlet III.1.

“Watch out for her; she can give you dreams” - Beloved (p 266)

In Hamlet, Shakespeare demonstrates that is attuned to the times when an awareness of the unconscious is emerging, as the Renaissance ideals gradually begin to gain hold on the Elizabethan society. In the Renaissance, introspection, dreaming and reverie start to be seen as a higher reality, a privileged medium allowing the characters to analyze the world around them. In his plays, particularly in Hamlet, Shakespeare understands this "idea of darkness where things shape themselves," as Virginia Woolf puts it (Orlando, 327). Furthermore, it is exactly when the notions of Italian Renaissance humanism and individualism become more widespread in England that Hamlet’s Ophelia assumes an existential burden of her own—something that is still relatively new for a woman and is reserved for “educated daughters” of the wealthy. Ophelia, who belongs to the upper echelons of her society, has to fight her battles alone. We see through her rare soliloquies to what extent she is alone and vulnerable. Even though she has her father and brother to protect her, their speech and behavior reveal that Ophelia’s significance for them is
limited to that of an object of exchange. Ophelia's virginity is a family affair where her sexuality is a subject to her father’s ambitions:

Ophelia:

*I shall the effect of this good lesson keep,*

*As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,*

*Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,*

*Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;*

*Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,*

*Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,*

*And recks not his own rede.*

III.1.

Ophelia says that she will take his "good lesson" to heart, but she tries to stand up for herself a little, too, saying that he should walk his talk and not tread "the primrose path of dalliance" (1.3.50). However, in spite of her compliance, I want to argue that Ophelia understands her place in society and the game she has to play. Even though, during the Renaissance, women gained more individual freedoms than previously, they were considered inferior to the men in status. In the following scenes that take place between Ophelia, her father and brother, we see to what extent she is objectified and reduced to a pawn in the machinations of her father:

Lord Polonius:
Affection! pooh! you speak like a green girl,
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.
Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?

Ophelia:
I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

Lord Polonius:
Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself a baby;
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly;
Or--not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Running it thus--you'll tender me a fool.

He calls her a "green girl" and a "baby"; in a stream of what he thinks are witty remarks, he tells her that he is not about to let her make a fool of him. As for Hamlet and his love for Ophelia, Polonius is quite sure that he knows a liar when he sees one; Hamlet's vows, in his view, are meant only to "beguile." Here too, the language is something that beguiles and imprisons; the signifier and the signified are disconnected. Polonius forbids Ophelia to see Hamlet again; he has so browbeaten her that all she can say is "I shall obey, my lord" (I.3.136). In the scene following directly afterwards, Laertes counsels his sister Ophelia as he prepares to leave for France—presumably to enjoy all the pleasures
the French capital had to offer a wealthy young bachelor—to guard her chastity and reject the romantic advances of Prince Hamlet.

Laertes:

Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,
And keep you in the rear of your affection,
Out of the shot and danger of desire.
The chariest maid is prodigal enough
If she unmask her beauty to the moon.
Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes.
The canker galls the infants of the spring
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed,
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
Contagious blastments are most imminent.
Be wary then; best safety lies in fear.
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

Although Laertes may have genuine affection for his sister, he does not have a very high opinion of her, either. He compares her to springtime flowers, which may be diseased even before they start to bloom. Finally, he reminds her that she is young, and "youth to itself rebels, though none else near" (I.3). Christa Wolf points to the damaging and destructive influence of the division of gender roles:
In inevitably we look upon societies so kind to you so harsh to
us, as an ill fitting form that distorts the truth, deforms the mind,
ketters the will. Inevitably we look upon societies as
conspiracies that sink the private brother whom many of us
have reason to respect and inflating in his stead a monstrous
male, loud of voice, hard of fist. (Cassandra, 45).

In patriarchal structures, regardless of the specific epoch, the mechanisms of exclusion
and marginalization are the same. Even though the ideas of the Renaissance and the
emancipation of the self in both literal and metaphorical sense—reach Kentucky only in
the late 19th century, it is worthwhile to trace the emergence of self as applied to women
as the underprivileged social class. Unlike Ophelia, Sethe is completely stripped of
social status and has no place in the community. However, in the universe of Beloved the
relationship between the self and community is strong, which that’s why the mother-
dughter relationship eventually reaches a resolution. This doesn’t happen in Hamlet:
Ophelia is left to her own devices, with nobody to support her. Furthermore, in Beloved
Sethe has Baby Suggs to rely on, later the grown Denver, and even a white girl, Amy,
who selflessly assists Sethe during childbirth in spite of not being free of racial prejudices
herself. In other words, there is a bond among women, a sort of feminine network and
sisterhood that feels strong. Furthermore, the Grandmother Baby Suggs provides a
structure for their lives and establishes a lineage in the community. This is portrayed in
the feasting at the end of community labor, when they all traditionally gather together and
spend time away from work. According to Bakhtin, the sharing of food is also closely associated with free speech and with the defeat of time; festive talk looks towards a utopian future. (Bakhtin Reader, 226).

By contrast, no such female lineage, sharing of food and networking exist in the case of Ophelia. Although at first Denver’s defense mechanisms are somewhat comparable to that of Ophelia: she too reduces communication to a minimum. Denver suppresses the memory of what she has learned about the circumstances of Beloved’ death: she shuts herself away from the world, stops hearing, stops going to school, and leads a semi-autistic life. We sense that her development has been impeded, and she has a whole array of unfulfilled emotional and intellectual needs. However, at the end she is able to heal by reaching out to the community which operates as a network of mutual aid: “To belong to a community of other free Negroes is to love and be loved by them <…> to feed and be fed.“ (100, 177) She moves into the symbolic, reaching out to the society, taking responsibility for herself for the first time and finding a job. And all the while she had the voice of Baby Suggs to support her in her healing process. She crosses the threshold into the social discourse only when the voice of Baby Suggs, the ancestor, speaks out: "You mean I never told you . . . nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps?" (243-44).

The double emphasis on women's consciousness and traditions is a constant thread in Beloved. Throughout the novel, Morrison underscores the importance of female lineage and acts of maternal care. Denver, the daughter of war, pulls through the
difficulties thanks to her mother’s care, Baby Suggs and the people around her who offer her aid and protection.

On the contrary Ophelia, as the educated daughter, has been reduced to an object, alienated and alone. She lacked the necessary tools to transcend safely from the pre-verbal world into the symbolic. Grave diggers recall Ophelia as once having been a woman:

**HAMLET**

What man dost thou dig it for?

**First Clown**

For no man, sir.

**HAMLET**

What woman, then?

**First Clown**

For none, neither.

**HAMLET**

Who is to be buried in't?

**First Clown**
One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul, she's dead.

Ophelia’s objectification has thus been fully completed. Hamlet lets Ophelia die almost as an expression of his own suicide wish which he later fulfills through the duel with Laertes. He has already chosen “not to be” and is just looking for a way out – maybe one that is not condemned by the church as an outright suicide would be. Hamlet sees mankind is sinful and corrupt, speaking a language that cannot be trusted; he hates himself for being part of it, but he also started including Ophelia as part of his proper self. It is here that I would like to make a parallel between Beloved and Ophelia. Like Beloved Ophelia dies because of this fusion, because she is not recognized as the Other, with an existence independent of the person loving her. Consequently, in both works, the disregard for the other as a free subject, the appropriation of the other to one's own desires, leads to violence and death.

Unlike Sethe, who is ultimately saved by the community, Ophelia has nobody; she is alone, a victim of alienating circumstances in which her individual self has no place. In light of this, I would like to focus on representation of women as the gap, as the lack or unsaid system of exchange. Consequently, what's important in Ophelia's world is to produce a legitimate heir. The "fool" that Polonius does not want Ophelia to “tender him” is also a reference to a bastard child. Thus even maternity is deindividualized. It is a part of the socially enforced role that is reduced to the action of producing a heir and not yet related to the moral, emotional (and later academic as well) education a mother is expected to provide—an ideal that will arise in the Renaissance and become widespread by the time of Romanticism. However, in Ophelia's world, what is expected of her is
merely to find herself "‘tween the lawful sheets” (*King Lear*, IV.6.) at the time of conception.

In addition, Ophelia is denied both a mother and a possibility of becoming a mother herself. Interestingly, Morrison sees that the mother role as potentially threatening to individual identity but at the same time also a path out of patriarchal objectification, simply by virtue of providing the *Other*. Sethe overcomes this danger of personality disintegration -- "*I don't want you dead inside me.*" The novel portrays this symbolic giving of birth and a symbolic death, meaning that the life circle can resume again.

Unfortunately, for Ophelia, who has not gone through a similar death-and-rebirth cycle, there is no return to earthly existence. "The rest is silence"; at the end of the play, almost all characters remain in the extra-semantic space. The cataclysmic encounter with the patriarchal order ends tragically for Ophelia. Nevertheless, the world around her is crumbling as well. Virginia Woolf said that Anon/Shakespeare "rescues [her] from silence" and "tunes the trembling strings and brings forth the song." (Jane Marcus, 96, 104. Ophelia's doomed struggle to combine the semiotic and the symbolic is being rescued from silence by having found its representation, its "rememory," within the realm of Shakespeare's play.)
6. LIAISONS DANGEREUX OR “LOVE TOO THICK”

"And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this; that in giving me life, 
you still remain alive”

And the One doesn’t stir without the Other, p.67

"Why did I have to drink the entire sea to discover myself at the bottom 
of my thirst? ” Vesna Krmpotić, Croatian poet

There can be no study of women in patriarchal culture that does not take into account woman’s role as a daughter of mother and as a mother of daughters within an economic symbolic structure of family and society’

Marianne Hirsch, Mothers and Daughters

In the case of Morrison’s Beloved, I am tempted to view the complexities regarding the mother-daughter relationship in terms of bondage rather than a relationship. This may have to do with the fact that the book is set during the time of slavery. The main mother-daughter dyad in the novel is enslaved by love in a culture that believes in slavery in a very literal sense of the word. Due to Sethe’s terrible predicament she allows Beloved to invade her circle of identity. Gradually, Beloved starts devouring that circle, advancing to the very core of the Sethe’s individual identity. This complete surrender of oneself is only possible in the mother-daughter dynamic where one life surrenders into the other one, violating all norms of integrity and selfhood. Ego boundaries between mothers and daughters definitely have a potential to become blurred, fluid, undefined
almost non-existent. Morrison demonstrates this by turning the dialogue between Sethe and Beloved into a series of monological statements that cannot be ascribed to an individual character with certainty:

\[
\begin{align*}
&You\ left\ me, \\
&I\ waited\ for\ you, \\
&You\ are\ mine \\
&You\ are\ mine, \\
&You\ are\ mine\ (216)
\end{align*}
\]

This disregard of the other as subject--whether a mother or a daughter--can be seen not only as a tragic void in itself but also a threat to one’s identity that is in danger of being lost, dissolved in the established social order. In this respect, Sethe faces an existential threat in allowing Beloved complete freedom to destroy her household and relationships.

“The limitless, all-inclusive, multiple and multiply desiring self simply allows no place “outside,” precisely where difference must be located. “ (Gasbarrone, p.14). Morrison stresses that the relationship between Sethe and Beloved does not fit with a traditional family framework: the roles of mother and daughter are completely reversed. "Was it past bedtime, the light no good for sewing? Beloved didn't move, said, 'Do it', and Sethe complied.”

Similarly, in Hamlet Gertrude enters into a fusional relationship with Claudius, surrendering her own identity and her maternal self-identification: “You are the queen, your husband’s brother's wife/ And would it were not so, you are my mother” (III.4). The
maternal bonds that connect Sethe to her children inhibit her own individuation and impede her personality development. Sethe’s maternal passion proves dangerous, resulting in the murder of one daughter, her “best self,” and nearly leading to the death of Denver and her own. While enslaved, Sethe had been denied the experience of motherhood as a meaningful life stage. Once Sethe becomes free, she overcompensates, losing herself in a fusional relation with her supernatural child. “Tell me the truth. Didn’t you come from the other side? Yes. I was one the other side. You came back because of me? Yes. I rememory me? You never forgot me? Your face is mine.” (p.265)

Beloved, in taking shape of a young woman rather than the immaterial ghost she had been presumed by Sethe to be, continues this confusion of identities. She cannot be translated into the symbolic and relegated to memory because she is the other that invades and constitutes the self: "You are my face; I am you. Why did you leave me who am you? / I will never leave you again / Don't ever leave me again / You will never leave me again / You went into the water / I drank your blood / I brought your milk" (p. 216). The milk and blood suggest the embodiment (as opposed to the symbolization) of loss, while the confusion of pronouns--the "I" that is at once Denver, Sethe, Beloved, and the slaves of the Middle Passage--renders fluid the barriers between self and the Other. Sethe perceives no boundaries and surpasses all limits in trying to find adequate expression for her love. The more Sethe gives, the more Beloved takes. In line with feminine écriture, which Cixous views also in terms of childbirth as a metaphor for feminine creativity, imagery of mother’s voice/body/milk permeates Beloved.

The extended identity of the mother mirrors itself in the daughter. Irigaray offers a powerful portrayal of this condition:
Who are you? Who am I? Who answers for our presence in this translucency, before this blind obstacle? You’ve gone again. Once more you’re assimilated into nourishment. We’ve again disappeared into this act of eating each other, Hardly do I glimpse you and walk toward you, who you metamorphose into a baby nurse. Again you want to fill my mouth, my belly, to make yourself into a plentitude for mouth and belly. To let nothing pass between us but blood, milk, honey, and meat (no, no meat; I don’t want you dead inside me).

Beloved becomes a symbolic womb, threatening to swallow the world (the embodiment of the archetypal male fear, yet here extended to her female kin). Sethe too, in her fusional union with Beloved, represents the womb. They may be said to simultaneously embody the reductionist misogynic stereotype and make up for generation of slave women who were denied the possibility of becoming mothers in a real sense and parenting their children (as Sethe’s own mother had been denied that opportunity).

Sethe, who is not yet ready to assume an independent identity, goes through this symbiosis as if through a gestational period. However, at the end of the novel, she gives symbolic birth to her own future self and buries the past, simultaneously distancing herself from her dead mother and her dead daughter. Aware of the force of the maternal omnipotence, Luce Irigaray comments: “The bond between mother and daughter, daughter and mother must be broken so that the daughter can become woman” *(Ethique* p.106). Irigaray is, in fact responding to the ideas expressed by Freud in his essay on ‘Negation’ saysthat the elimination of the mother is only a recognition and corroboration
of her overwhelming importance. Within Freudian theory, the pre-oedipal identification with the mother must be overcome for the child to cross from the emotional sphere into the intellectual.

Margaret Homans further elaborates on this issue when she says that “language and culture depend on the death or absence of the mother and on the quest for substitute for her.” We see an illustration of this in Morrison when Denver too is released from the symbiotic relationship with her mother and gains an independent existence. She assumes responsibility for her own and her mother’s well-being, reaches out to the community. At the end of the novel, we see her emotionally mature, well-adjusted, no longer resentful of Paul D, earning her own income and having an admirer of her own, suggesting that she is now capable of forming her own romantic attachments without being held captive by her family’s past. Morrison very clearly demonstrates that women cannot assume their proper roles without first resolving their mother--daughter relationships. In Hamlet, the absence of a mother or any other supporting female role is symptomatic of Ophelia’s fate, in my view. Ophelia was left with no choice other than recoil in horror from the court and its machinations by plunging into the semiotic void.

It seems that the journey of becoming a woman entails surviving the mother-daughter relationship which is fraught with all kinds of norms and demands posed by the social dynamics of the patriarchy. The mother may project onto her daughter her own insecurities about being a female in a male-dominated society and, in line with internalized social values, give preference to male offspring. According to Jean Baker, the pre-oedipal differences and exclusive female parenting are the source of women’s exclusion from history. She argues that woman is the other only because she is the
“mother” and that patriarchy itself is a reaction against female alienation in infancy. Maternal omnipotence is so great a threat that women are willing to acquiesce to male rule instead. (Toward a New Psychology in Women,) Similarly, Benjamin and Dinnerstein also reflect on the lethal effects of the asymmetry of the pre-oedipal period. I would propose that this could very well be the reason why so few dramatic plots in the Elizabethan period on mothers and maternal power and, more specifically, why is there an absence of mother-daughter relationships in Shakespeare’s dramas. Is it then possible to talk about a construction of Mothers’ Tongue? In my analysis of the dramatic mother-daughter relationship in Beloved and the absence of any comparable relationship in Ophelia, I would venture that, since the ego-boundaries between women are fluid and undefined (as shown in Beloved), the language takes on the same contours: fluid, pre-verbal, subversive and subliminal. “I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop” (210). In this respect, Irigaray has conveyed some of the most powerful thoughts possibly ever written about a mother-daughter relationship:

But we have never never spoken to each other. And such an abyss now separates us that I never leave you whole, for I am always held back in your womb. Shrouded in shadow. Captives of our confinement, And the one doesn’t stir without the other. But we don’t move together. When the one comes into the world, the other goes underground. When the one carries life, the other dies. And what I wanted from you Mother, was this; that in giving me life, you still remain alive’

And the One doesn’t stir without the Other p.67).
This description resonates strongly in Toni Morrison’s novel, in which Beloved and Sethe enter a symbiotic relationship that only one of them will be able to survive.

Bakhtin felt we required a dialogical interaction with others before we could develop a unified image of self and engage in morally and aesthetically productive tasks (Bakhtin Reader, 40).
What is most true is poetic

*Cixous. Rootprints*

I begin the chapter by introducing the concept of *jouissance* (pleasure of the senses) in order to explore the mother-daughter relationships as a subtext of the world at large, the community and the self, since it is the archetype of all human relationships. In French feminist theory, the concept of jouissance represents an additional path out of the patriarchal dichotomy. Just as the English translation of this term, the exact interpretations of it vary. Michael Montrelay, for example, distinguishes between desire that is masculine and *jouissance* — a transgressive feminine desire which is not sanctified by society and exists outside of linguistic norms, in the realm of the poetic. The concept allows for the language to oscillate between the Imagery (poetic) and the Symbolic.

People have always been able to refuse the identity proposed by the dominant ideology and use the body as a means of negotiating morality, discipline and control. “The body is where the power bearing definitions of social and sexual normality are, literally, embodied, and is consequently the site of discipline and punishment for deviation of those norms” (Fiske 1987, p.248). In this light, Denver recalls Baby Suggs’ words:
slaves were not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that but they have to have as many children as they can please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down. She said for me not to listen to all that. That I should always listen to my body and love it.

Sexual enjoyment for women was not just seen as subversive; it was not even supposed to form part of a woman’s experience. In a way, the same view has been applied to women across socioeconomic strata. The jouissance concept offers an alternative to the male libido of classical Freudian psychoanalysis.

Moreover, Kristeva views jouissance as linked to the maternal and the semiotic chora; for her, art is "the flow of jouissance into language" (p. 79). Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language). Ultimately, jouissance is aimed at the feminine interpretation of the body (motherhood, female sexuality, intuition as meaningful signifiers, rhythm as meaning etc.) and acceptance of the “bodily root of the thinking process”.

By using the term jouissance, Cixous rejects the binary models that silence women and define her as “lack”. Instead she celebrates “woman as excess”, a woman who speaks the body and threatens patriarchy. In addition, jouissance, in the feminine/mother context, can also be viewed as the pain of extreme love the mother feels for her child (a bond so full of joy pleasure that it becomes painful, even torturous, especially if the child is in danger or otherwise separated from the mother). In Beloved, Morrison juxtaposes silence and voice and uses the maternal body as a source of myth.
and metaphor to understand the realities of female experience: „fantastic earthy realism“maternal jouissance which tends to disrupt the symbolic order of patriarchal society. "Beloved ate up [Sethe's] life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur." (Beloved, 239).

Just as Kristeva and other theorists tie jouissance to the “chora” (place of emergence of meaning) and the unnameable and rhythm (the womb) to meaning of language, I propose to link jouissance to the carnivalesque. Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque can be usefully applied in the context of feminist literary theory since it is also connected to challenging the existing social structures through privileging the body. According to Bakhtin, „grotesque and exaggerated images of food, excrement lower regions of the body are profoundly inter-related and ambivalent as they signify a world that dies to be born, devouring and devoured, continually growing and multiplying; the body that is also the earth, the grave, the womb.“ (Bakhtin, Reader). Bakhtin also insists on the body's grotesque and subversive power. In Morrison, Beloved's desire for sugar is matched only by her craving for the sweetness of mother love. Her hunger for food and affection soon merge as she develops a cannibalistic appetite and begins to devour Sethe metaphorically. Beloved cannot take her eyes off her mother: "Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (57). Beloved draws her sustenance from Sethe and grows "plumper by the day" (239). The boundaries between the physical and the metaphysical blur.

Bakhtin uses the carnivalesque to express the notion of subversive and democratizing discourse, a refusal to yield to a repressive hierarchy. This approach is close to Kristeva’s interpretation of laughter as a bodily eruption that "lifts inhibitions by
breaking through prohibition . . . to introduce the aggressive, violent, liberating drive.” In *Beloved*, the carnivalesque episodes appear throughout to mark a key narrative stage. From the beginning of the novel, with Beloved not yet “materialized”, the ghost starts to throw things upside down, raising some, bringing down others. The traditional structures that Bakhtin calls “the unity of the vertical discourse” will be broken and space for the carnival will open up. Once Paul D enters the narrative, the first outing he, Sethe and Denver have together is a visit to a local carnival. Sethe has not been to any such event for almost as long as Denver has been alive. Trying to win Denver’s support, Paul generously pays for all treats she wishes for and does his best to make the occasion memorable for Denver and Sethe. Ironically, it is within the unreal world of the carnival that the three of them are seen playing the part of a „normal family,“, which feels strange because this kind of normalcy had always been denied to them. Surely it is not by coincidence that the day of the carnival is exactly when Beloved first appears. Later in the novel, when Sethe leaves her job and remains locked up in the house, she and Beloved are said to live like “carnival ladies”:

> The 38 dollars of live saving went to feed themselves with fancy food and decorate themselves with ribbon and dress good<…> like they were going somewhere in a hurry. Bright colors – with blue stripes and sassy prints. <…>By the end of March the three of them looked like carnival women with nothing to do.
Finally, I am interested in exploring the notion of the carnivalesque in terms of its relationship to utopian vision of society and its relationship to French feminist theory searching for a way out of the binary structures. According to Bakhtin, the carnival expresses a utopian belief in a future time in which fear and authority are vanquished. Carnival and the grotesque are anti-hegemonic strategies to escape the dominant social structures. Consequently, the characters in the novel restore their social lives by venturing out into the carnival: the carnivalesque element aids them to transgress existing boundaries. Bakhtin at one point says that during such carnivalesque celebrations the participants were reborn for new purely human relations. Bakhtin shares with the feminist literary theorist an interest in different means of using language while remaining within the symbolic, in order to dismantle the established binary oppositions.

Through a variety of approaches, these theorists both deconstruct patriarchal ideologies and imagine an alternative model of a society that is free of sexism of oppression. Irigaray insists that, in order to challenge the patriarchal system, women need to establish a definitive position of difference, a necessary pre-condition for women to reposition themselves as socio-symbolic subjects within the patriarchy. However, Irigaray insists that this repositioning needs first to take place vis-a-vis the mother and only then in relation to other women. In this respect, Morrison uses the maternal body as a metaphor not only for love and sacrifice but, most importantly, for its potential to overcome oedipal patterns. From this angle, Toni Morrison in *Beloved* may be said to participate in the feminist project, providing an alternative to the patriarchal model, and reconceptualizing maternity. Another way out of the binary structure of the patriarchy
proposed by Irigaray is masquerade, an activity women consent to in order to participate in men’s desire at the cost of giving up their own.

What do I mean by masquerade? In particular, what Freud calls ‘femininity’
The belief, for example, that it is necessary to become a woman, a ‘normal’ one at that, whereas a woman has to become a normal woman, that is, has to enter the masquerade of femininity. In the last analysis, the female Oedipus complex is woman’s entry into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can “appear” and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men.

Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p 134.

Similarly, another feminist theorist, Toril Moi, employs the notion of *mimicry*, understood as the attempt to undo the patriarchal discourse by overdoing it (140). We can see instances of this idea of outdoing most strikingly illustrated by Shakespeare's tragic heroines (Desdemona, Ophelia, and Lady Macbeth, among others).

The specificity of these psycholinguistic feminists lies in their analysis of the concept of language which is poetic and tied to the female body, sexuality, love and the maternal. It celebrates flux, the moment and sensation as opposed to the fixed structures of the symbolic. Beloved is associated throughout the novel with water and other liquids: blood, urine, sweat, amniotic fluid, the sea water of Middle Passage and the salty water of tears which rust the iron and create the flakes of rust falling away from Paul D’s “tobacco tin heart” when he makes love to Beloved. This water has a regenerating
capacity. In the same way, Ophelia is associated with the river, which represents the cosmos her drowned self enters. She is the wounded child of the men in her world, and so is Gertrude, the only other female character in the play.

My attempt has been to analyze Hamlet and Beloved through the lenses of psychoanalytically-inflected feminist narrative theory, focusing on various approaches to woman’s language which aims to reject patriarchal authority and question the prescribed cultural identities. In Kristeva’s terms, woman’s language is situated in the pre-verbal semiotic register, where communication is intuitive, wordless, and negotiated through the mother's body. In Irigaray' and Moi’s terms, it is located in masquerade and mimicry; for Helene Cixous, it is *écriture feminine*, also referred to as "writing the body". Another important term which finds illustration in both Shakespeare and Morrison is the concept of hysterias as a temporary subversive strategy against patriarchal oppression.

This feminist project has found support in the psychoanalytic theories of the subject and post-structuralist insights into the "decentered" nature of language. What sets the French feminists apart from other poststructuralist thinkers, at the most essential level, is their concept of language which is poetic and associated with the female body, sexuality, love and the maternal. The sentences focus on interior experiences and sensation, female body, sexuality, love and the maternal. The sentences focus on interior experiences and sensations, emotion and reflection, and rely on the physicality of the female body.

It would seem that the mother’s body is also the medium for expressing woman’s language but that the mother-daughter bond is the defining factor for a woman’s place in the world at large and the type of language she uses. The question that this work poses is
whether the language existing between mother-daughter relationship is “too thick” to be contained within the limits of the restrictive logocentric structures. It seems that the physical sensations and preverbal emotional universe of mother’s love constantly overtake both the vocabulary and structure of language: they provide access to the subconscious, with its enormous creative potential, but at the same time present a threat to self-identification as they erase the borders between subject and object within the maternal body. On the other hand, without achieving a healthy relationship with one’s mother and the community at large, one cannot exist within the decentered walls of one’s psyche. The recognition of the other’s presence is necessary for the self to emerge. “It is only from a position outside something that [the self] can be perceived in categories that complete it in time and fix it in space.” (Holquist, 31). The maternal language becomes something greater than a medium of sharing stories and connecting generations of women; it becomes central to the issue of identity and difference within the social order.
8. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**


