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Feminist theory and postwar American drama

Austin, Gayle, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1988

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FEMINIST THEORY AND POSTWAR AMERICAN DRAMA

by

Gayle Austin

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University
of New York**

1988

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GAYLE AUSTIN

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, "I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?" "You gave the wrong answer," said the Sphinx. "But that was what made everything possible," said Oedipus. "No," she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman." "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think."

Muriel Rukeyser
"Myth"

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Sue-Ellen Case has been my mentor in feminist theory ever since her summer course at NYU in 1984 gave me a germinal bibliography and the belief that feminism and theatre could mix. Jill Dolan has been a supportive and constructive reader of this work as it has evolved and I want to acknowledge her help in my thinking through many ideas of feminism and representation.

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2 FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY: "THE EXCHANGE OF WOMEN" AND FIRST STAGE CRITICISM	38
CHAPTER 3 FEMINIST PSYCHOLOGY: MOTHER-DAUGHTER BONDING AND FIRST AND SECOND STAGE CRITICISM	67
CHAPTER 4 FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM: MADNESS, CONFINEMENT, AND SECOND STAGE CRITICISM	96
CHAPTER 5 FEMINIST FILM CRITICISM: REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND THIRD STAGE CRITICISM	129
CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS	165
APPENDIX A VARIOUS FORMULATIONS OF THE POLITICAL DIVISIONS OF FEMINISM	173
APPENDIX B THREE RECURRING TOPICS IN RADICAL FEMINISM: WOMEN'S CULTURE, LESBIAN FEMINISM, AND "NEW FRENCH FEMINISM"	180
BIBLIOGRAPHY	194

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is the record of a journey. The journey is through feminist theoretical writings which bear on many subjects that might provide points of view, ideas, critical tools, for examining postwar American plays in a constructive way. There are visits to plays that lend themselves to discussion using these theories. The journey is a process, which I hope to keep as flexible and open-ended as possible along the way, while not losing sight entirely of the conclusions in the distance: a goal but not an end.

My starting point is the intersection of several interests: theatre as a process as well as an event; the text that ignites the process; women as subjects, writers, and audiences of those texts; and culture as their context. I am exploring the possibilities of using for dramatic analysis recent developments in feminist analysis in four areas of study: anthropology, psychology, literary criticism, and film theory.

I lived in Manhattan for sixteen years, September,

1969, to September, 1985, attending and working in New York theatre. This dissertation comes out of my observations during that period and my reading of various types of feminist theory. As Literary Manager of The Women's Project at The American Place Theatre, from 1978 to 1984 I read hundreds of new plays written by American women. With the aim of helping more women move into the mainstream of playwriting and directing, we produced staged readings of 130 plays and productions of twenty-six, as well as two published anthologies of plays. My interest in women as writers for theatre developed there.

When I returned to graduate school for doctoral research, it seemed natural to "do" American women playwrights. As I researched their history I discovered many unfamiliar facts, such as the higher percentage of women playwrights on Broadway at the turn of the twentieth century than at any point in the last twenty years, but my interest was in the plays themselves. "What plays?" I was continually asked, as if the list were so small as to be invisible. I found the plays, read a large number from all periods of the twentieth century, but was dissatisfied.

It was when I began an organized review of feminist theory, rather than merely theatre materials, that my excitement rose. In theory, in fiction, in other forms women were expressing ideas and feelings I was looking for in plays. I realized that most of the plays I was looking for had not yet been written. But even in 1984, in non-

commercial plays, why were there so few women's points of view? Or were there more than I perceived? These questions accumulated and my research went more and more in the direction of feminist theory. Finally, I resolved to stay in that territory.

The parameters and emphases of this study are shaped by my own interests, but colored by the kind of critical writing I believe is needed at this time. I shall stress drama rather than all of theatre because of my interest in the influence of text on performance and because of the existence of more scripts than documentations of performance. I shall draw on American drama first produced between 1945 and 1985 because of my own interest in it and because it is the most familiar body of drama to a majority of American theatre practitioners and scholars. My main interest is in explicating and applying unfamiliar theories to familiar plays. After they prove their efficacy, they can then be more widely applied. I have chosen plays written by women and by men to emphasize the breadth of possible application.

The woefully small amount of work combining feminism and theatre makes it difficult to outline a methodology for my work in detail, but I will try to give an idea of how I worked at selecting theories and plays. I want to face the question of theory head-on. The tendency in American feminism, not to mention theatre, has always been to favor action over theorizing, and the bulk of American

scholarship on women and theatre done thus far has been a combination of history and criticism. My own priority will be for a combination of criticism and theory.

The need for this study became clear to me as I searched for a starting point in combining feminism and theatre and found almost nothing. The body of feminist theatrical theory and criticism is, as yet, small. Theatrical theorists and critics are almost exclusively males not working with feminist theory, and few feminist theorists have applied their analysis to theatre. This is a serious omission and has several main causes.

It can be said that there are few role models, and this is certainly true, but what are the reasons? A few of the more obvious ones are: 1) theatre itself has been dominated by men in producing, directing, playwriting; 2) feminist critics have been drawn more to poetry and prose than drama because of the larger pool of works by women from which to draw theories; and 3) academic women studying theatre have tended to prefer performance and history to theory and criticism, perhaps because woman-as-actress and woman-as-keeper-of-records are perceived as more appropriate social roles than woman-as-analyst or woman-as-thinker.

Critics generally deal with the canon of recognized masterpieces of drama. Part of a feminist critic's job should be expanding the canon to include more plays by and about women. This expansion requires some historical knowledge. But describing the past, using traditional

criteria received from the past, can constrict the future. If women have mainly written plays about love and the domestic sphere it does not mean that they have to continue to restrict themselves. An examination of theoretical underpinnings can have an influence on how future plays are evaluated, and even written, by provoking thought and circulating ideas among theatre practitioners.

One factor that has limited theoretical projection is the feminist fear of being prescriptive. Women, told for so long what they should be, resist telling other women what they should be. But there is a point at which being merely descriptive reinforces the status quo and excludes wider possibilities. Given enough repetition and respect, description is taken as prescription anyway (vide Aristotle). Then there is the feminist inclination toward multiplicity over monolith, but theory need not be dictatorial or narrow. I am not saying "This is what all drama by or about women should be," but rather, "This is what I have found and what might be." Just because a prescription is written it does not have to be filled, much less swallowed. The need at this point is to overcome inaction and begin to fill a void. Theatre and feminism have much to offer each other.

Critical tools that will incorporate feminism are also required. Some progress has been made on analyzing the plays of the past twenty years that express an overtly feminist point of view, on defining "feminist drama," on the

history of feminist theatre groups, and on rhetorical aspects of feminist drama, but almost no connections have been drawn between feminism as a critical tool and drama which may, or may not, include feminist themes.

The intersection of feminism and postwar American drama offers little in theory and criticism. The significant books are Women in American Theatre by Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins,¹ which contains some critical essays with a feminist perspective; Karen Malpede's Women in Theatre: Compassion and Hope,² which contains primary source material in the form of essays by women working in theatre (very little in criticism); and Sue-Ellen Case's Feminism and Theatre,³ which deconstructs some male-dominated classic theatre, traces women's contributions through institutions such as salons, traces the influence of political feminism on theatre, and begins to outline a "new poetics" of feminism for theatre. Hers is the only book so far to take a theoretical feminist approach to theatre. Some feminist historical and critical writing has appeared on women playwrights, particularly Judith Olauson's The American Woman Playwright: A View of Criticism and Characterization⁴ and Helene Keyssar's Feminist Theatre: An

¹(N.Y.: Crown, 1981).

²(N.Y.: Drama Book Publishers, 1983).

³(N.Y.: Methuen, 1987).

⁴(Troy, N.Y.: Whitston, 1981).

Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women,⁵ but the theorizing is minimal.

The book-length works using some feminist criticism and theory have mostly endeavored to define "feminist drama,"⁶ analyze themes in women's plays,⁷ present history and criticism of feminist theatre groups,⁸ and explore the rhetoric in "feminist theatre."⁹ None of them deals with plays written by men or, to any substantial extent, with the broad range of feminist theory developed in film, anthropology, and other fields.

Some shorter criticism has moved in the direction I want to follow. In 1981 Nancy S. Reinhardt pointed out how far theatre lagged behind other fields in "New Directions for Feminist Criticism in Theatre and the Related Arts,"¹⁰ and in 1983 Sue-Ellen Case's "Re-Viewing Hrotsvit"¹¹ was the

⁵(N.Y.: Grove, 1985).

⁶Janet Brown, Feminist Drama: Definition and Critical Analysis (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1979).

⁷Beverley Byers Pevitts, "Feminist Thematic Trends in Plays Written by Women for the American Theatre: 1970-1979" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois Univ.-Carbondale, 1980).

⁸Dinah Luise Leavitt, Feminist Theatre Groups (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1980).

⁹Elizabeth J. Natalle, Feminist Theatre: A Study in Persuasion (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1985).

¹⁰In A Feminist Perspective in the Academy: The Difference It Makes, ed. Elizabeth Langland and Walter Gove (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 25-51.

¹¹Theatre Journal 35 (December 1983): 533-542.

first specifically theoretical approach to feminist criticism of drama I had encountered. In 1984 Josette Feral published "Writing and Displacement: Women in Theatre,"¹² and Linda Walsh Jenkins published "Locating the Language of Gender Experience" in the one-year-old journal, Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory.¹³ The year 1986 saw several articles dealing with feminist theory in Theatre Journal and Marie-Claire Pasquier's "Women in the Theatre of Men: What Price Freedom?"¹⁴

The largest stride in my preferred direction so far is the special issue of Theatre Journal entitled "Staging Gender," with essays by Elin Diamond, Sharon Willis, Rosemary K. Curb, and Sue-Ellen Case,¹⁵ all with some theoretical perspective, though only Curb's applies it to American drama.

Two dissertations in progress which deal in some way with feminism and drama are: "Getting Out: The Impact of

¹²Modern Drama 27 (December 1984): 549-563.

¹³Women & Performance 2 (1984): 5-20.

¹⁴In Women in Culture and Politics, ed. Judith Friedlander, et al. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 194-206.

¹⁵Elin Diamond, "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Native Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras;" Sharon Willis, "Helene Cixous's Portrait de Dora: The Unseen and the Un-scene;" Rosemary K. Curb, "Re/cognition, Re/presentation, Re/creation in Woman-Conscious Drama: The Seer, The Seen, The Scene, The Obscene;" and Sue-Ellen Case, "Classic Drag: The Greek Creation of Female Parts," Theatre Journal 37 (October 1985): 273-328.

Female Consciousness on Dramaturgy" by Suzanne McKenna (University of Utah) and "Modes of Patriarchy in the Plays of American Female Playwrights, 1900-1960" by Mary Maddock (Indiana University). Both are more or less thematic analyses of plays by women using one or two feminist theorists but concentrating on, in the former, feminist theatre issues and devices coming to fruition in Marsha Norman's play and, in Maddock, the social pressures upon the principal women playwrights writing before the most recent wave of American feminism. All this exploration is necessary, but does not concern itself with feminism as a critical tool. A third dissertation in progress, "The Feminist Spectator as Critic" by Jill Dolan (New York University), deals very much with feminist theory but applies it to the areas of performance and audience reception rather than drama.

My purpose in this dissertation is to show that a broad range of feminist theories are applicable to postwar American drama. My aims are both theoretical and pragmatic. In theory, I hope to contribute by applying specific feminist theories to well-known American plays in an effort to develop a feminist theoretical approach to drama. For pragmatic purposes, I hope to make a wider range of theories more accessible to theatre practitioners and scholars who may not be familiar with them; to serve as a starting point for theatre and feminist scholars; to give sources of further information in each subject; and to promote use of a

feminist theoretical viewpoint in future research, criticism, production, and playwriting. Eventually, I hope some feminist scholars in other fields will become more aware of the use of drama and theatre in their own work. My first task is to outline a method. The methods generally used in a dissertation have their roots in the scientific method. But the philosophical basis of feminism and that of the scientific method have some basic conflicts.

Sandra Harding clearly states one of the problems inherent in any feminist dissertation:

When we began theorizing our experiences during the second women's movement a mere decade and a half ago, we knew our task would be a difficult though exciting one. But I doubt that in our wildest dreams we ever imagined we would have to reinvent both science and theorizing itself in order to make sense of women's social experience.¹⁶

In her field, the philosophy of science, as in many others, there has been a feminist re-evaluation not only of the subject matter, but of "theorizing itself." The very basis of the "scientific method" has come into question. Modern science, begun after the Middle Ages, put great stress on experimental observation and "rule by method." Today's feminist perspective, however, "reveals the distinctively (Western) masculine desires that are satisfied by the preoccupation with method, rule, and law-governed behavior" (229) found in the methodology in all fields, including

¹⁶Sandra Harding, The Science Question in Feminism (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), p. 251. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

theatre theory and criticism.

The "scientific method" is supposed to be a clearly spelled out way of obtaining "objective," value-free data. The humanities and social sciences have borrowed from science some of its "method" and applied it to their own subject matters. The dissertation form is one such manifestation: a thesis is stated, data is gathered to prove it, and in the case of criticism standards are arrived at for gauging specific examples. While I will be following these steps myself in this work, I must pause here to raise a few questions about a feminist view of methodology.

Harding explodes the idea that "science's uniqueness is to be found in its method for acquiring reliable descriptions and explanations of nature's regularities and their underlying causes" through using the "experimental method." The different branches of science use different methods: "not a great deal is common to the methods of astronomy, particle physics, and molecular biology." In many sciences "controlled experiment plays an extremely small role." And as to the core of the method: "human infants as well as apes and dogs regularly use induction and deduction" (41).

The method, then, is neither unique nor value-free. Harding goes on to show that science is indeed more than a method and that a feminist view of it needs to go beyond finding a new "method." Since feminism asserts that "gender is a fundamental category within which meaning and value are

assigned to everything in the world, a way of organizing human social relations," we need to regard science "as a totally social activity" (57). I would say that this also applies to theatre and to its theory and methodology.

Faced with finding a way of functioning, some women choose silence. I agree with Harding that power cannot be entirely given up to the pragmatists of the world, "while we theorists dream of a world different from the one that co-opts the 'intelligentsia' into the activity of such 'harmless' dreaming" (195). So we struggle along with the old methods, changing and adapting them, questioning everything as we go. As scientist Evelyn Fox Keller puts it, "To know the history of science is to recognize the mortality of any claim to universal truth. Every past vision of scientific truth, every model of natural phenomena, has proved in time to be more limited than its adherents claimed."¹⁷ Harding uses a musical simile to describe the process. She sees feminist theorizing as "illuminating 'riffing' between and over the beats of patriarchal theories, rather than as rewriting the tunes of any particular one."¹⁸

If we attempt to define and codify a "feminist critical methodology," it should not be because our male colleagues accuse us of not having one. As we should have

¹⁷Evelyn Fox Keller, Reflections on Gender and Science (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 178-179.

¹⁸"The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," Signs 11 (Summer 1986): 649.

learned by now, "not having one" is the logocentric definition of femaleness.¹⁹

Carol Sternhell, after surveying a great deal of feminist literary criticism, arrived at her feminist methodology which contains five points: 1) attention to woman as writer; 2) awareness of woman as reader; 3) attention to textual politics (images of women, gender as symbol, ideological nature of literary forms); 4) the investigation of difference itself (this is a concept with wide implications, involving the nature of the difference between male and female but encompassing other types of difference); and 5) "a stance of radical skepticism toward all critical assumptions, including our own" (317-321). Here is an example of the construction of one's own methodology, much of which I accept. Most of all I agree with her statement: "Effective feminist critical theory is more than what is looked at; it is a way of looking" (211).

My own methodology involves using more than one way of "looking" at selected but diverse theoretical material, trying to keep the argument fluid and at the same time organized. Each of the four chapters in the body of the dissertation will begin with a descriptive overview of the field in question over the past fifteen years, a description of the work of one leading theorist in the field, and

¹⁹Carol Ruth Sternhell, "A Whole New Poetics Beginning Here: Theories of Feminist Literary Criticism" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford Univ., 1983), p. 307. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

application of at least one aspect of that theory to three or more plays produced at approximately the same time, at least one play in each chapter by a man and one by a woman. The aim is not to say how "good" or "bad" the plays are, but to show how using a feminist "way of looking" can illuminate the plays. Each chapter will sample the possibilities for analyzing drama but is not intended to be a final word.

The theories have been selected from those written since the latest wave of feminism began (approximately 1970) by writers who identify themselves as feminist. Selection from within this group was based on how influential the theorist has become, and on how fruitful her ideas are when applied to drama.

The sixteen plays come from the period 1945-1985, mostly plays produced on Broadway for the first half of that time and Off- or Off-off-Broadway for the second half. With one exception, they have been published as well as produced. These writers bring up interesting issues of gender. The playwrights include prominent figures in the traditional canon (Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman, Sam Shepard, John Guare, David Mamet, and David Rabe) as well as some women playwrights who would not generally be placed there (Jane Bowles, Carson McCullers, Maria Irene Fornes, Joan Schenkar, Split Britches, and Wendy Kesselman). I admit a bias toward some of the women writers based on personal acquaintance with them. As a student at Hunter College in 1972-73 I knew Hellman; I worked on the

production of Fornes's Fefu and Her Friends at the American Place Theatre in 1977 and have followed her work since; I was Literary Manager during Shenkar's Signs of Life in its original production at the Women's Project in 1979; saw two early readings, as well as the Second Stage production, of Kesselman's My Sister in This House; and have followed the career of Split Britches (Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw, and Deborah Margolin) and had many productive discussions with them since the early 1980s.

Before delving into the four chosen fields, I should describe some general concepts promoted by feminism in all fields, specifically the historical stages of feminist criticism and the political divisions of feminism.

One method of approaching feminist criticism is by chronology. Several writers have divided the criticism that began around 1970 into three successive phases. But even this division into periods requires some examination, for American feminist historians have made many interesting contributions to our understanding of categories and time.

In 1974 Gerda Lerner delivered a paper which, revised and published several times, ended up as a chapter in her 1979 book. In it she outlines three stages in the discipline of feminist history. For the first stage she uses the terms "compensatory history" to denote work on "notable women" and "contribution history" to denote work on women's contributions to movements in male-written history. These writings, she says, "have applied questions from

traditional history to women, and tried to fit women's past into the empty spaces of historical scholarship."²⁰ In the second stage historians have "begun to ask about the actual experience of women in the past," which "leads one to the use of women's letters, diaries, autobiographies, and oral history sources" (153). In its most recent stage, the field has "presented a challenge to some basic assumptions historians make" (154). The dividing of history into periods, for instance, has been largely based on politics and the military, two fields in which women have traditionally held little power.

A classic example of a feminist historian calling for a reconsideration of the periodization of history is an essay by Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Her answer to this question is that "there was no renaissance for women--at least, not during the Renaissance."²¹ This radical idea, first worked out by her in 1972-73, then published in 1977 and republished in a book of her essays in 1984, has come to seem less radical and has gained wider acceptance over the years. It is an example of feminism questioning the basic assumptions of an entire discipline in "third stage" work.

²⁰Gerda Lerner, The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 149. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

²¹Joan Kelly, Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 19.

Before moving on to other theorists' "stages" it is worth pausing at Gerda Lerner's comments on methodology:

Women have always made history as much as men have, not "contributed" to it, only they did not know what they had made and had no tools to interpret their own experience. What is new at this time, is that women are fully claiming their past and shaping the tools by means of which they can interpret it (166).

Very often "third stage" work consists of developing these tools and using them, sometimes going against the grain of very seasoned timber. "For women, the problem really is that we must acquire not only the confidence needed for using tools, but for making new ones to fit our needs" (159). Several feminist critics and theorists have developed that confidence and begun to shape the tools.

One such woman is French critic Julia Kristeva, whose theories have begun to be translated and used in this country. In an essay originally published in 1979, translated as "Women's Time," Kristeva describes three "generations" of European women. In the first, women "aspired to gain a place in linear time" and demanded to be "on an equal footing with men." In the second "linear temporality has been almost totally refused" and women "seek to give a language to the . . . experiences left mute by culture in the past." The third is "the mixture of the two attitudes" (though each of the other two still exist separately), in which "the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as

belonging to metaphysics."²² As in all "three stage" formulations I have found, this third stage is very recent and the most vaguely defined of the three.

Kristeva's formulation has been used by several feminist literary critics, including Toril Moi, who summarizes the three stages as follows:

- 1 Women demand equal access to the symbolic order. Liberal feminism. Equality.
- 2 Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. Radical feminism. Femininity extolled.
- 3 (This is Kristeva's own position.) Women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical.²³

This summary uses the political categories "Liberal feminism" and "Radical feminism," which Kristeva does not use. Moi's perspective is socialist feminist, and so she interprets Kristeva's chronological categories politically. Moi's summary of Kristeva also points up its general form of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. This is just a small example of the issue of categories and the overlapping and interdisciplinary nature of feminist theory and criticism. Each theorist enters into a dialogue with her predecessors, agreeing with some aspects, rejecting others, and making her own blend of theories.

In its simplest form my own formulation of the stages

²²Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, in Feminist Theory, ed. Nannerl O. Keohane, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 36-38, 51.

²³Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 12.

of feminist criticism is:

1. Images of women (working within the canon)
2. Women writers (adding women to the canon)
3. Questioning entire field (exploding the canon)

This formulation has been influenced by many other theorists and critics.

Hester Eisenstein calls her book, Contemporary Feminist Thought, "a history and critique of contemporary feminist thought, principally in the United States, from 1970 to the present [1983]" and divides it into three parts. Part I deals with writers in the late 1960s and early 1970s, such as Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone, who dealt with sex roles as the source of women's oppression. Part II deals with a "second phase" of theory, beginning in the mid-1970s, in which writers such as Adrienne Rich and Mary Daly stressed the positive aspects of female difference and worked toward a "woman-centered perspective" of the world. Part III deals with the early 1980s and the problems and possibilities for the future, as Eisenstein sees them.²⁴

Looking back to science, Sandra Harding lists three "feminist epistemologies" (or theories of knowledge): 1) feminist empiricism, which says the problems of sexism "are social biases correctable by stricter adherence to the existing methodological norms;" 2) feminist standpoint, which says "women's subjugated position provides the

²⁴Hester Eisenstein, Contemporary Feminist Thought (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983), pp. xi-xii.

possibility of more complete and less perverse understandings;" and 3) feminist postmodernism, which "challenges the assumptions upon which feminist empiricism and the feminist standpoint are based" and contains strains of skepticism about any universals.²⁵

As can be seen by these formulations, categories in disparate fields are in certain ways quite similar when it comes to recent feminism, but not many practitioners read far beyond the literature of their chosen specialization. Some of the most influential formulations of "stages" are in the introductions of three widely-read anthologies of feminist theory and criticism. In 1982 the University of Chicago Press published anthologies of articles from two of its journals: Signs and Critical Inquiry. The introductions provide accessible versions of the stages which have been used in many papers, particularly in literary criticism.

Nannerl O. Keohane and Barbara C. Gelpi, in the Foreword to Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology (essays from Signs), describe, not chronological stages, but three forms of women's "consciousness:" 1) feminine, or "consciousness of oneself as object of the attention of another;" 2) female, or "the deep-rooted, age-old experience of women in giving and preserving life, nurturing and sustaining;" and 3) feminist (again least clear), which "draws attention to the pervasive patterns of subordination"

²⁵Harding, pp. 24-28.

of women and uses "sexuality as a central terrain."²⁶ These categories, like Kristeva's, can be seen as close to political ones. But the terms used (uncredited) by Keohane and Gelpi are those used by Elaine Showalter in her 1977 book A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing. In that book she is describing chronological stages, generalized from studies of other literary subcultures, such as black, Jewish, and American. Her descriptions are: 1) Feminine, "a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition and internalization of its standards;" 2) Feminist, "a phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values;" and 3) Female, "a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity."²⁷ While this was an early book of Showalter's, and her opinions have modified over the years, the formulation is still a useful one for looking at the stages a woman as artist goes through. It is also similar to the thesis-antithesis-synthesis Marxian view expressed by Kristeva. More overlap of categories. But for my purposes Showalter's subdivision is not as useful as some others.

Elizabeth Abel, in the Introduction to Writing and Sexual Difference (essays from Critical Inquiry), based her

²⁶(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. ix-x.

²⁷(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), p. 13.

formulation of stages of feminist criticism on the premise (not universally accepted, as Kristeva's work shows) that the difference between the sexes is more than metaphysical. She sees the first stage as having embraced the idea of the similarity of men and women, focusing on the negative aspects of texts written by men and the limited female roles in their work. The second stage shifted to the importance of female experience and focused on the reading of texts by women, their unique qualities, and the "female tradition" of women writers. The current stage has shifted to "interrelationship as well as opposition, difference between as well as difference from," confrontation through "acts of revision, appropriation, and subversion that constitute a female text," which "translates sexual difference into literary differences of genre, structure, voice, and plot."²⁸ With certain modifications, this is the basis for my own formulation.

Elaine Showalter is arguably the most influential American feminist literary critic and theorist writing today and her Introduction to her 1985 anthology The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature & Theory contains a formulation very similar to Abel's. Her third stage stresses two contributions to American theory, the English and the French, and encompasses more political considerations such as the influence of the women's movement

²⁸(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 1-2.

and women's studies. For her the English have contributed "an analysis of the connection between gender and class, an emphasis on popular culture, and a feminist critique of Marxist literary theory," while the French look at "the ways that 'the feminine' has been defined, represented, or repressed in the symbolic systems of language, metaphysics, psychoanalysis, and art."²⁹ Her slight enlargement of the field is the one I have adopted.

Once again, my own formulation of the stages of feminist criticism, which I will apply to drama, is:

1. Images of women
2. Women writers
3. Questioning entire field

These stages correspond to my preoccupations during the periods before, during, and after my involvement with The Women's Project. First, I was concerned that I was not seeing on stage any of the women I knew or the experiences I had. This seems like a distant memory, but it still underlies much of my thinking. Second, the Project focused on increasing the number of women playwrights and improving their craft, in the hope that they would remedy the lack of images. This did not prove easy and the relationship between women as writers and women's images on stage was nowhere near as clear as I had thought. I bring both of these concerns with me into the present, messily

²⁹(N.Y.: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 8-9.

underdefined third stage, in which I struggle with theory and politics, women and theatre.

The question of female images in plays remains with me, even when moving along to second and third stage work. My interest is grounded in the experience of being an audience member, but also from knowing a number of actresses who cannot find meaningful roles, particularly after the age of thirty. Or consider the fate of that generation of actresses who were born in the 1920-30s, trained in the Method in the 1940-50s, starred in the plays of the early postwar "golden" period, and ran out of roles, other than bitches, by the mid-1960s. I know half a dozen of these women, talented and ready, who get to play mothers now and then, but mostly on television. Where are the sexually active, independent, mature female characters on stage? Are they threatening? To whom? And why? Questions like these deserve answers, even tentative ones.

As previously mentioned, first stage criticism centers on pointing out images of women in the conventional canon and involves work written, for the most part, between 1970 and 1978, though some in this vein continues to be written. Theatre started this work late and so continues to do it more frequently in the present than do some other fields. Examples of literature, art, and film criticism from this period give a more concrete idea of what first stage criticism accomplishes.

Kate Millett's Sexual Politics³⁰ might be taken as the paradigm of this first stage. Though it has sections on the theory and history of "patriarchy as a political institution," its last section analyzes literature, specifically the work of D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer, to make its case. The last chapter, on Jean Genet, shows how a male homosexual portrait of society can contain an analysis of sexual oppression of interest to women. This was the book that set the pace for much of first stage criticism in the arts.

Linda Nochlin was one of several women doing feminist criticism of the visual arts during the early 1970s. In 1972 she co-edited a book with Thomas B. Hess to which she contributed an essay in which she pointed out the frequent use of the apple as breast imagery in famous paintings by males, though for women "there may indeed be a rich underground feminine lore linking food--specifically bananas--with the male organ, such imagery remains firmly in the realm of private discourse, embodied in smirks and titters rather than works of art."³¹

In the next two years two similar books were published which catalogued the images of women in films, moving chronologically from the beginnings of this century to the .

³⁰(N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970).

³¹"Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Art," in Woman as Sex Object: Studies in Erotic Art, 1730-1970 (N.Y.: Newsweek Books, 1972), p. II.

early 1970s. Marjorie Rosen's Popcorn Venus³² appeared first and covered a larger number of films in a breezier writing style. Molly Haskell's From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies³³ was, as its title implied, a more serious indictment of what the movies had done to women. Both covered the whole territory, though the appearance of two such similar books at almost the same time did weaken the impact of Haskell's book.

The movement into examination of women as artists rather than objects began somewhere around 1978, which saw the publication of The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction by Judith Fetterley. In this book Fetterley pointed the way toward the need for another stage by saying that what a woman had to do when reading most male authors was "become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us."³⁴ At this point many feminist critics had tired of resisting so many male works and began turning their attention to the women.

The "first stage" work in theatre has barely begun. In 1980-81 there was a rush of work done on Shakespeare³⁵

³²(N.Y.: Avon, 1973).

³³(Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1974).

³⁴(Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), p. xxii.

³⁵Carolyn R. Lenz, et al., The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press,

which continues to the present³⁶. A recent dissertation applies six types of feminist criticism to Brecht and Shaw.³⁷ Some sporadic articles have discussed women in Ibsen, Strindberg, and O'Neill, but there has been no book with the breadth or incision of Millett's or Haskell's for instance. Perhaps the time for a popular treatment of images of women in world drama is past, or never existed. The point is that groundwork, especially in contemporary American drama, is weak.

Debra A. Gonsher's 1980 dissertation, "Stereotypes of Women in Contemporary American Drama: 1958-1978"³⁸ is one of the exceptions. She chose fifty plays which had won awards and/or had substantial commercial runs and used a descriptive-critical approach to analyze three female stereotypes in them. She focused particularly on eight

1980); Linda Bamber, Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1981); Irene G. Dash, Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays (N.Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1981); and Marilyn French, Shakespeare's Division of Experience (N.Y.: Ballantine, 1981).

³⁶Peter Erickson, Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985); Marianne L. Novy, Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1984); and Phyllis Rackin, "Anti-Historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories," Theatre Journal 37 (October 1985): 329-344.

³⁷Catherine Ann Schuler, "Bernard Shaw and Bertolt Brecht: A Comparative Study Utilizing Methods of Feminist Criticism" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State Univ., 1984).

³⁸Ph.D. dissertation, City Univ. of N. Y. Graduate School, 1980.

which displayed stereotypes and four which did not, though she had to bend her own selection rules to find even those four.

In the second stage, women are artists rather than images, and often the question is asked, "Is there a female aesthetic?" The main period for critical writing in this vein was the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, though it continues into the present, as does first stage writing. In music some theoretical activity began on women practitioners around 1978 and, again, theatre started most recently, in 1981. The only exceptions to this late start for theatre were several anthologies of plays by women published beginning in 1973. I will use examples from music and theatre here, though there was a wealth of publication in literature, art, and, to a lesser degree, film in this period.

One topic I will touch on only lightly is the question of the female aesthetic. This reservation reflects my pragmatic side; I have spent hours participating in and listening to panels and private discussions on the topic, all to little avail. One person who has addressed this question is Lucie Arbuthnot, who devotes an entire chapter to "The Female Esthetic" in a broad survey of feminist criticism trends. Her summary on the subject reflects my experience as well:

I suggest a variety of ways in which gender often influences the kinds of art made by women. These range along a spectrum from art which is consciously

"feminine" in form and/or content, (including, for example, some domestic novels by women writers, portraits of women and children by women artists, romantic melodramas by women filmmakers), to works that are consciously "feminist" in form and/or content (works such as Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party" or Barbara Hammer's erotic films). Between these two ends of the spectrum is, on the one hand, art by women who tried to hide the fact that they were women by choosing themes in their art (and sometimes noms de plume) which could pass as men's; and, on the other hand, art by women who appeared to restrict themselves to a "feminine" voice, but who in reality subverted that restriction: artists such as Emily Dickinson, Artemesia Genteleschi, and Dorothy Arzner.³⁹

The examples of work on women as writers in theatre began with the anthologies of plays published between 1973 and 1981⁴⁰. The introductions and the plays themselves produced an awareness that there were women playwrights other than Lillian Hellman and made the plays more accessible for production.

The next group of books to appear were bibliographies. In theatre there was (and is) only one: Brenda Coven's American Women Dramatists of the Twentieth Century: A Bibliography.⁴¹ This listed 133 writers, all of whom had a

³⁹Lucie Arbuthnot, "Main Trends in Feminist Criticism in Film, Literature, and Art History: The Decade of the 1970s" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York Univ., 1982), pp. 257-258.

⁴⁰Victoria Sullivan and James Hatch, eds., Plays By and About Women (N.Y.: Random House, 1973); Honor Moore, ed., The New Women's Theatre (N.Y.: Random House, 1977); Rachel France, ed., A Century of Plays By American Women (N.Y.: Richard Rosen Press, 1979); and Judith E. Barlow, ed., Plays by American Women: The Early Years (N.Y.: Avon, 1981), among others.

⁴¹(Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1982). Some bibliographies also appeared within other books, such as the one edited by Chinoy and Jenkins.

least one play produced on the New York stage in this century. Errors and omissions abound, but it was a drop of water in the desert of 1982. The work on women composers had started four years earlier, with Susan Stern's Women Composers: A Handbook⁴² and continued into the 1980s.⁴³

Other books that first appeared around 1980 were group biographies and criticism, supplementing the individual biographies that were also being done. In theatre there were books such as Nancy Cotton's Women Playwrights in England c. 1363-1750⁴⁴ and Louise Cheryl Mason's dissertation "The Fight to be an American Woman and a Playwright: A Critical History from 1773 to the Present."⁴⁵ In music a number of group biographies of composers and performers appeared in the 1980s as well.⁴⁶ Though the quantity of work increased, the feminist theoretical

⁴²(Metuchen, N.Y.: Scarecrow Press, 1978).

⁴³Adrienne Fried Block and Carol Neuls-Bates, Women in American Music: A Bibliography of Music and Literature (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979) and Joan M. Meggett, Keyboard Music by Women Composers: A Catalog and Bibliography (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), among others.

⁴⁴(Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1980).

⁴⁵Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Calif.-Berkeley, 1983.

⁴⁶Christine Ammer, Unsung: A History of Women in American Music (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980); Jane Weiner LePage, Women Composers, Conductors, and Musicians of the Twentieth Century: Selected Biographies (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980); and Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds., Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950 (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1986), among others.

component was virtually always minimized or missing, with the exception of Mason's dissertation, which makes the case that becoming a woman playwright in this country has always been a "fight."

In 1981 the books of feminist criticism and books of original source materials mentioned earlier started to appear. The first of these was Women in American Theatre: Careers, Images, Movements. It contained a wide range of essays, including a group on women playwrights, and a Sourcebook that included a Playlist of works by American women. This was the beginning of scholarship published on a level accessible to more than an academic audience.

The other commercially published book of criticism is Helene Keyssar's Feminist Theatre, which deals with a large number of women, particularly treats Megan Terry and Caryl Churchill, and provides a large bibliography of plays by contemporary British and American women. She uses some feminist theory from various fields as well, admitting, "A number of books and essays never directly mentioned in these pages have contributed significantly to what I say about the plays themselves."⁴⁷ Her brief list includes British, American, and French writers in psychology and politics. In my work I do "directly mention" these theorists, hoping to bring their applicability to drama into the open.

The books of source material are Women in Theatre:

⁴⁷Keyssar, pp. xv-xvi.

Compassion and Hope and Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present⁴⁸. Both are worthy additions to the field, but the criticism is muted since the aim is presentation of documents for future research use.

All these books fall into the second stage of criticism, as their main focus is female creators of drama and music. While publication continues in this stage, it is time to look at drama from a more theoretical perspective.

Third stage criticism is now evolving. At a greater distance in time there may seem to be more than three stages. Since this is the stage on which I concentrate, I can only say that stage three now appears to have several general traits: 1) an emphasis on theory, 2) basic reshaping or at least reexamination of methodologies used, and 3) an evolving new view of its entire field of study.

One of the ways this stage has begun to function is in the use of feminist modifications of some man-made tools, such as semiotics. In film, for instance, Arbuthnot says that semiology "underlined the importance of the reader/viewer of a work of art as co-creator of the meaning of that work: the decoding of a film by a feminist might very likely be different from the decoding of the same film by anyone else."⁴⁹ Other writers have pointed out the

⁴⁸Carol Neuls-Bates, ed. (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1982).

⁴⁹Arbuthnot, p. 260.

connections between feminism and postmodernism.⁵⁰

Not all critics agree that feminist criticism should go in the direction of theory and the borrowing of man-made tools. In literary criticism, for example, while Jane Marcus favors the move toward feminist theory in "Storming the Toolshed,"⁵¹ Nina Baym argues against it in "The Madwoman and Her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Literary Theory," by saying that theory "addresses an audience of prestigious male academics and attempts to win its respect," and Laurie Finke, in "The Rhetoric of Marginality: Why I Do Feminist Theory," counters by arguing that Baym and others against theory are in actuality using a theory (structuralism) without acknowledging it.⁵² While the warnings of (American) anti-theorists, that we should not get too far away from the diversities and practicalities of the women's movement, should be heard, they need not stop forward movement. Theory may be "male" at present but it can be modified; as may be said about language: it's flawed, but it's all we've got, for the moment at least. The alternative is a new language or silence, and for now I am not ready to choose either of those alternatives.

⁵⁰For a brief introduction see Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," Signs 12 (Summer 1987): 623-626.

⁵¹In Feminist Theory, ed. Nannerl O. Keohane et al. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 217-235.

⁵²Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 3 (Spring/Fall 1984): 45 and 5 (Fall 1986): 251-272.

The possibilities for third stage drama criticism are already in view. I can give two brief examples of articles applying theories involving semiotics and deconstruction to a play in the conventional canon, by a man, and to a playwright not in the conventional canon, a woman.

In the first case, questions raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak⁵³ in psychology and deconstruction are applied to Moliere's Tartuffe.⁵⁴ Patricia Cholakian analyzes Dorine, the maid in Tartuffe, as one who fills the void until the point that Tartuffe appears in the third act, a point made by many previous critics. But her essay deals with the fact that Dorine is still speaking with a male voice, is a woman as seen by a man. The route through deconstruction gives this argument much more depth and power than a simple "image of woman" analysis would.

In the second case, points made by Sue-Ellen Case and Jeanie K. Forte⁵⁵ about the feminist use of deconstruction are applied to the plays of Rosalyn Drexler, from the 1960s to the present⁵⁶. Rosette Lamont quotes a Case/Forte essay

⁵³"Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," in Displacement: Derrida and After, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 169-195.

⁵⁴Patricia Francis Cholakian, "The Itinerary of Desire in Moliere's Le Tartuffe," Theatre Journal 38 (May 1986):165-179.

⁵⁵"From Formalism to Feminism," Theater 16 (Spring 1985):62-65.

⁵⁶Rosette C. Lamont, "Rosalyn Drexler's Semiotics of Instability," Theater 17 (Winter 1985):70-77.

to the effect that when women on stage speak as female subjects rather than objects of male desire they create a new "discourse" not seen in plays by men. She discusses several of Drexler's plays in this context, pointing out the ways her "discourse" shows aspects of women's lives not generally seen on stage. Again, the discussion rises above a simple "woman as artist" or "female aesthetics" approach. As deconstruction has been adapted here, so can many other tools which then serve "third stage" criticism.

Turning now to the second general concept that spans feminism in all fields, describing the political divisions of feminism is a complex process. There are many books and articles on the subject, a few of which are described in Appendix A. In summary, my own interpretations of the three divisions are:

Liberal ["there is no difference between men and women"]

1. Minimizes differences between men and women
2. Working within system; reform not revolt
3. Individual more important than the group

Radical ["difference is all"]

1. Stresses superiority of female attributes and difference between male and female modes
2. Favors separate female systems
3. Individual more important than the group

Socialist ["a theory of difference is needed"]

1. Minimizes differences between men and women
2. Stresses changing capitalist system to socialist one will help women, uses theory
3. Group more important than the individual

I feel it can be useful to keep these distinctions in mind while developing feminist criticism. The majority of feminist criticism of the arts in this country thus far is liberal and therefore there is a larger body of that work to

consider than of the others. Liberal feminist criticism tends to be full of examples and short on bringing generalizations out of those examples. Radical feminism can be useful in that it expresses the most extreme emotions and points of view in the field, and tends to be visionary or absurd, but not dull. It very often makes one reconsider. A few topics raised by radical feminism are discussed in Appendix B. Socialist feminism brings up telling points about the interplay of art and the larger society, getting one outside of the text itself and into the wider world, a place theatre tends to take us to as well.

There is said to be less overtly political drama in America than in Europe, with its more extensive Marxist background. However, a look at apparently apolitical American work through a feminist lens may detect the influence of patriarchal, capitalist attitudes. It is also possible to point out plays' political impact through structure rather than content.

There is a growing awareness among anthology editors that some of the interests of radical and socialist feminists need to be addressed. In Showalter's The New Feminist Criticism (previously cited) and Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism,⁵⁷ both published in 1985, the former by an American and the latter by a British

⁵⁷Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, eds. (N.Y.: Methuen, 1985).

publisher, there are essays dealing with French, lesbian and black feminist criticism, none of which has been a traditional liberal concern. However, both anthologies use the same writers on French and lesbian feminist criticism, so there is a narrowness in their concern with those subjects.

The three stages of feminist criticism and the three political divisions of feminism outlined here will appear here and there in the next four chapters. As stressed before, categories overlap and need to be used very loosely in developing a feminist methodology. In each of the next chapters I shall consider work in a single discipline applied to one or more stages of feminist drama criticism. Most of the work cited will be liberal feminist, but radical and socialist (sometimes called materialist) influences will be noted.

CHAPTER 2

FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY: "THE EXCHANGE OF WOMEN" AND FIRST STAGE CRITICISM

Aspects of the field of anthropology have been applied to theatre by several writers, among them Victor Turner¹, and, as I shall demonstrate, a considerable body of writing has applied feminism to anthropology. So far, however, only a small number of critics have applied feminism to anthropology and then to theatre. In this chapter I shall give a brief overview of feminist anthropology, an account of Gayle Rubin's application of Marx, Freud, and Levi-Strauss to the idea of the exchange of women among men through marriage, and summarize Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's application of Rubin's work to the idea of male homosocial desire in The Country Wife. I shall then apply my understanding of Rubin and Sedgwick's work to first stage criticism of Miller's Death of a Salesman (1949), Hellman's

¹From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (N.Y.: Performing Arts Journal, 1982).

Another Part of the Forest (1946), and Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire (1947).

The course of feminist anthropology can be traced through several anthologies of articles published between 1974 and 1981. In general, researchers in the field did first and second stage work simultaneously, criticizing male bias in previous anthropological theorizing and reporting and inserting the experience of women into the work where it had not previously appeared. By the 1980s it had begun what I would call third stage work, questioning basic assumptions of the field, investigating the entire question of gender construction, and moving toward heavier use of symbolic anthropology and linguistics. There has been a strong Marxist input from some practitioners and a generally higher level of socialist/materialist awareness than in many other fields.

The first anthology was Women, Culture, and Society, edited by Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. Its sixteen essays do four things, according to their editors: "suggest that sexual asymmetry [between females and males] is not a necessary condition of human societies but a cultural product accessible to change," that asymmetry "means different things in different places," that variations from culture to culture "can be accounted for by particular social and economic factors" especially women's contributions to subsistence, and that they "present a

challenge to future thinking in anthropology."² The first three essays are the most theoretical, with Rosaldo, Nancy Chodorow and Sherry B. Ortner all presenting aspects of the idea that biology is not necessarily destiny for women, but that culture constructs their roles. This theme is dominant through much of feminist anthropology, from these early essays up to the present.

The second anthology came out one year later: Toward an Anthropology of Women, edited by Rayna R. Reiter. The collection had many similarities with the first, aiming to "subject our notions of male dominance to specific analysis, and push us to understand that it is anything but natural."³ It contains several essays with a Marxist perspective, including the most widely influential of all: Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex."

The movement toward a linguistic approach to anthropology could be seen five years later in the essays in Women and Language in Literature and Society, edited by Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, and Nelly Furman⁴. The three editors represented three areas of study: linguistics, anthropology, and literary criticism. Each contributed an essay on her specialty, with Borker's surveying research

²(Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 13.

³(N.Y.: Monthly Review Press, 1975), p. 19.

⁴(N.Y.: Praeger, 1980).

done up to the late 1970s on language and anthropology. The next year an anthology devoted to symbolic anthropology was published: Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality, edited by Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead. In their introduction the authors point out that in most cultures "the differences between men and women are in fact conceptualized in terms of sets of metaphorically associated binary oppositions" and proceed to describe several: "nature/culture," "self-interest/social good," and "domestic domain/public domain," in each of which female is associated with the former and male with the latter.⁵ Symbolic anthropology uses semiotic methods which are similar to those used in film theory.

In a 1982 review essay in Signs, Jane Monnig Atkinson summarized some of the topics and trends in feminist social and cultural anthropology from 1979 to 1982. She points out that feminist anthropologists have begun to question each other's assumptions and some find that "dichotomies such as domestic/public and nature/culture, and premises such as universal sexual asymmetry, are ideological constructs that have their history in Western European society," making them less broadly useful than originally asserted. At the same time these concepts, especially universal sexual asymmetry, continue to have supporters who counterargue the attacks.⁶

⁵(Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), p. 7.

⁶"Review Essay: Anthropology," Signs 8 (Winter 1982): 238. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

Atkinson outlines four trends in recent work: 1) the assertion that "sex roles and gender concepts must be seen as products of history and society, not as reflections of inherent human sexual natures," a long-standing idea going back to Margaret Mead; 2) a "strong commitment to historical analysis, which Marxist analysts have been calling for for some time;" 3) "the non-Marxist camp has displayed a strong commitment to comparative study," such as much of the work in the Ortner and Whitehead anthology; and 4) "the growing concern among anthropologists with the interplay of situation, context, and meaning," which is being seen in new ethnographic studies whose field work and writing reflect a feminist theory from their inceptions (245-247). She ultimately calls for what I would consider a third stage approach, "not simply to supplement our knowledge but indeed to realign our disciplinary approaches" (255).

One essay which appears again and again in virtually any discussion of feminist anthropology and often in application to many other fields is Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women (1975)."⁷ For instance, in the October 1985 "Staging Gender" issue of Theatre Journal, Rubin was quoted in three out of six articles.⁸ There are several things which may account for the article's popularity. In

⁷In Reiter, pp. 157-210. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

⁸Diamond, p. 275; Case, p. 319, and Rackin, p. 337.

it she gives brief, accessible explanations of some of the theories of Marx, Levi-Strauss and Freud (as interpreted by the French analyst Lacan, an interpretation used often by feminists in psychology and film theory). Written while the author was still a graduate student, the essay conspicuously avoids the dense jargon which often mars such writing. Clear explanations are rare even today, let alone in 1975, when many women beginning feminist research were in great need of them. She relates the theories to each other and criticizes each for its weakness vis-a-vis women, such as the fact that both Freud and Levi-Strauss describe systems in which women are treated as objects and never comment upon the fact that there is anything wrong with that. This is a simple act, but one which, like saying the emperor has no clothes, powerfully questions a flawed assumption. Because of the number of disciplines included in her work there is indeed "something for everyone" here and hers is a model of interdisciplinary possibilities. Politically, she brings up socialist issues which the average liberal or radical feminist would not think about, though for some materialists she is not sufficiently socialist.

The main points of the article cannot be easily summarized, since much of it is itself a summary of a number of complex and difficult theories. She states at the beginning that in reading the works of Claude Levi-Strauss and Sigmund Freud "one begins to have a sense of a

systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products," though neither man "turns a critical glance upon the processes he describes" (158). She feels that in feminist hands Levi-Strauss and Freud can provide tools with which to describe oppression of women and others in the "sex-gender system" of a society. The Marxian description falls short of doing this because, according to Marx, "human beings are workers, peasants, or capitalists; that they are also men and women is not seen as very significant" (160). In fewer than four pages three sacred bulls are, if not killed, severely wounded. She does, however, pick up on Engels's methodology in The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, because he deals with sexuality as an issue. Though she disagrees with his results, she adapts some of his method, namely the examination of kinship systems.

In discussing the anthropological view of the kinship system, Rubin mainly uses Levi-Strauss's The Elementary Structures of Kinship, which further developed the idea first advanced by Marcel Mauss of the giving and receiving of "gifts" as an organizing principle of a society. Levi-Strauss added the ideas that "marriages are a most basic form of gift exchange, in which it is women who are the most precious of gifts" and that "the incest taboo should best be understood as a mechanism to insure that such exchanges take place between families and between groups" (173). Rubin goes on to state the core of her contribution in this piece:

If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it. . . .

To enter into a gift exchange as a partner, one must have something to give. If women are for men to dispose of, they are in no position to give themselves away. . . .

The "exchange of women" is a seductive and powerful concept. It is attractive in that it places the oppression of women within social systems, rather than in biology. Moreover, it suggests that we look for the ultimate locus of women's oppression within the traffic in women, rather than within the traffic in merchandise. . . . Women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favors, sent as tribute, traded, bought, and sold. Far from being confined to the "primitive" world, these practices seem only to become more pronounced and commercialized in more "civilized" societies (174-175).

The difference between Rubin and Levi-Strauss is that she takes the time to say that the exchange of women is not a cultural necessity, and neither is the phallic privilege of most psychoanalysis. Lacan discusses Levi-Strauss in a 1968 essay and, according to Rubin, "suggests that psychoanalysis is the study of the traces left in the psyches of individuals as a result of their conscription into systems of kinship" (188). Rubin gives a brief account of Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud, which is a good starting point for much work in psychology and film, as well as anthropology:

In Lacan's scheme, the Oedipal crisis occurs when a child learns of the sexual rules embedded in the terms for family and relatives. The crisis begins when the child comprehends the system and his or her place in it; the crisis is resolved when the child accepts that place and accedes to it. . . .

. . . The phallus is a set of meanings conferred upon the penis. The differentiation between phallus and penis in contemporary French psychoanalytic terminology emphasizes the idea that the penis could not and does not play the role attributed to it in the classical terminology of the castration complex. . . .

. . . Castration is not having the (symbolic) phallus. Castration is not a real "lack," but a meaning conferred upon the genitals of a woman. . . . The presence or absence of the phallus carries the differences between two sexual statuses, "man" and "woman" (189-191).

In a section titled "Oedipus Revisited" Rubin describes the Freudian Oedipal phase, as seen by Lacan, and the differences between the boy's and the girl's experience of it. The boy "gives up" his mother in exchange for which "the father affirms the phallus in his son." In this way the boy "exchanges his mother for the phallus, the symbolic token which can later be exchanged for a woman" (193). The girl, however, "has no 'phallus,' she has no 'right' to love her mother or another woman, since she is herself destined to some man." The girl turns from the mother to the father, but "the father does not give her the phallus in the same way that he gives it to the boy." When she realizes that she has a "lack" she takes her place in society. "She can 'get' the phallus--in intercourse, or as a child--but only as a gift from a man. She never gets to give it away" (193-195).

The rest of the article points out the good "fit" between the Freudian and Levi-Strauss systems and proceeds to develop the beginnings of a "political economy of sex" in the manner of Marx and Engels. Nancy Hartsock, in her book on feminist historical materialism, admits Rubin's popularity and influence, but objects to her argument's being too abstract, rather than materialist based. She questions "the extent to which feminists can borrow from

phallocratic ideologies without their own analyses suffering in consequence" and calls for a "specifically feminist epistemology."⁹ In essence, she prefers the sexual division of labor to the more symbolic "exchange" as a basis for analysis. But many other theorists have taken Rubin as a starting point for their own theories.

In the field of feminist literary criticism, for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has used Rubin's "exchange of women" paradigm in her book Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire¹⁰. In an earlier article on the same subject, Sedgwick defines "male homosocial desire" as "the whole spectrum of bonds between men, including friendship, mentorship, rivalry, institutional subordination, homosexual genitality, and economic exchange,"¹¹ and illustrates how the "traffic in women" takes place in consonance with these bonds in two examples from English literature: Wycherley's play The Country Wife and Sterne's novel A Sentimental Journey.

Sedgwick makes several points about The Country Wife which will later be useful in analyzing Salesman and Streetcar:

⁹Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism (N.Y.: Longman, 1983), p. 295.

¹⁰(N.Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985).

¹¹"Sexualism and the Citizen of the World: Wycherley, Sterne, and Male Homosocial Desire," Critical Inquiry 11 (December 1984): 227.

"To cuckold" is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man. Its central position means that the play emphasizes heterosexual love chiefly as a strategy of homosocial desire. . . . I will discuss it [The Country Wife] as an analysis of several different paths by which men may attempt to arrive at satisfying relationships with other men.

. . . The most common image for a cuckolding relationship in The Country Wife is one man cheating another at cards. . . .

. . . The status of the women in this transaction is determiningly a problem in the play: . . . their ambiguous status of being at the same time objects of symbolic exchange and also, at least potentially, users of symbols and subjects in themselves. The play teaches that women are in important senses property, but property of a labile [unstable] and dangerous sort.¹²

Sedgwick's book deals mainly with eighteenth and nineteenth century novels written by men, but her use of Rubin, combined with the idea of "erotic triangles" taken from Rene Girard, does have some application to contemporary American drama. The core of her approach is that "patriarchal heterosexuality can best be discussed in terms of one or another form of the traffic in women: it is the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men."¹³ About erotic triangles she notes Girard's observation that "the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved," and that most of the triangles he discusses are "those in which two males are rivals for a

¹²Ibid., pp. 228-229.

¹³Sedgwick, Between Men, pp. 25-26.

female."¹⁴ Today, of course, it is possible to trace many other kinds of triangles as well.

In many ways Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman is the Daddy of contemporary American drama. It has achieved both critical and popular success and a continuous record of production since its Broadway opening in 1949. Its basic family structure, that of father, mother, and two dissimilar sons, is a classic one. From the first family in the Bible to Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night (written before, but produced after Salesman), this family structure has been a popular one for serious writers of all genres. From a feminist perspective the biggest problem with this family structure is the absence of the daughter. Woman is portrayed only as wife and mother and, with a few exceptions, her drama is not central to the action of the plays. Salesman is not one of the exceptions.

The main action of the play involves the triangle of Willy and his two sons, Biff and Happy. The wife and mother Linda is restricted before the play begins by her description in the very first stage directions. She is characterized as loving and admiring of her husband, who overtly demonstrates his longings, "which she shares but lacks the temperament to utter and follow to their end."¹⁵ That is the end of the possibility of that woman acting on

¹⁴Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁵Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman (New York: Viking, 1949), p. 12. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

her own behalf. She was traded long ago and has no "temperament" to change the terms of the deal. Though at times a triangle may include Linda, for the most part Biff-Willy-Happy is the connection that is dramatized and has the greatest importance attached to it. Both sons love the father and have competed for his love in different ways since childhood, never receiving enough of the right kind. Biff has a pattern of "stealing" and Happy one of "whoring" to try to compensate for the lack of satisfactory paternal relationship. One has turned to merchandise, the other to women as objects of exchange.

Neither son has married, though at 34 and 32 they are at an age which, were they women, would lead them to be called "old maids." Both the sons reveal their attitudes toward women and marriage in the scene between them in their old bedroom early in Act I. Biff concedes: "Maybe I oughta get married. Maybe I oughta get stuck into something," while Happy lists among the objects his money can buy "My own apartment, a car, and plenty of women" (23). Women are clearly objects of exchange for Happy. Several times in the play he "gets" a girl for his brother or offers to do so in order to gain his brother's favor. Before the play begins they have been out on a double date, and the restaurant scene in Act II shows Happy in the act of picking up one girl and arranging another for his brother. He does not get satisfaction, however, from his conquests. He admits to Biff that "it gets like bowling or something. I just keep

knockin' them over and it doesn't mean anything" (25). He admits that one of his reasons for conquest is competition with the other men at his office. The girl he was out with before the play begins was engaged to a man "in line for the vice-presidency of the store" where he works, and "maybe I just have an overdeveloped sense of competition or something, but I went and ruined her, and furthermore I can't get rid of her. And he's the third executive I've done that to." He even admits "I don't want the girl, and, still, I take it and--I love it! (25)" What he loves is winning something that the men "better" than he is don't have--yet. He is still competing with his brother, and winning on that front, but it is not enough.

The reason Happy competes using women is to try to gain some relationship with the other man involved in each instance. In the case of the executives he even goes to their weddings. The reason he offers "any babe you want" to Biff is to try to gain his approval. But Happy has always come out second in the race for his father, and he knows it. His whoring is a (perhaps) unconscious patterning after his father, which he can still do because he was not scarred, as was his brother, by the climactic "primal scene" Biff witnessed in a Boston hotel room at the age of seventeen. That scene has put Biff off women almost entirely, except for the gestures he makes to reciprocate the "gift" of women he receives from his brother. Biff tries to gain his father's approval through setting up a business deal. Happy

has already "succeeded" at work; when he feels needy or guilty he says he will get married. At the end of Act I, after Willy has encouraged Biff in his business endeavor, Happy says out of nowhere "I'm gonna get married, Mom. I wanted to tell you" (68). And after Biff and Willy have their last exhausting confrontation, ending with Willy's strong feeling that Biff loves him, Happy adds his contribution: "I'm getting married, Pop, don't forget it. I'm changing everything. I'm gonna run that department before the year is up" (133-134). He will bring home a woman for his parents in exchange for their approval of him.

The play is structured toward that primal "climax" when Biff found his father in a hotel room with "The Woman" (she has no name; mythic but also anonymous, like the sex Willy enjoys with her). The message of that scene, and of the restaurant scene which comes just before it, is that women are what come between men and their fathers. "The Woman," Miss Forsythe, and Letta are whores, with no power and almost no characterization. They are objects who can be traded but, since they are not wives, are not totally under the men's control. They can "tempt" sons to desert their father in a restaurant, or worse, cause a father to alienate his son. Women are indeed property of a dangerous sort.

The overpowering impression the play leaves is that, for men, sex with women is empty, mothers and wives are necessary but ineffectual, and the most important thing is to bond successfully with other men. The problem is that

this play has become a paradigm for what the "serious American play" should be. Next to some of O'Neill it is the most lauded play in the canon, and the most imitated. Most playwright "sons" of Arthur Miller try to beat the old man at his own game sooner or later. Even Sam Shepard's "family" plays can trace some of their roots to this play. It is the Oedipus Rex of American drama for many people and the continuation of its centrality effectively cuts women's experience out of serious consideration for "serious" drama. Some of the old patterns must be changed to allow for woman-as-subject, not traded object, to be seen on the stage.

One play from this same period that begins to point the way is Lillian Hellman's Another Part of the Forest (1946), which gives an unusual view of the exchange of women: she allows the female "property" to act and speak for themselves as subjects, even as we see them being exchanged by the men on stage as if they were objects.

Produced seven years after The Little Foxes (1939), the play shows some of the same characters as its better-known sister, but at a point twenty years earlier in their lives. In Foxes, set in 1900, Regina has married Horace Giddens, has a daughter, and schemes to gain some economic control of her life, which has always been circumscribed by her brother, Benjamin. Her other brother, Oscar, is overbearing toward his wife, Birdie. Back in the 1880 setting of Forest, Regina is a girl of twenty in love with Birdie's cousin. In the course of the play the family

balance of power shifts from her father, Marcus, to her brother, Ben. The reason for the shift is the revelation to Ben by their mother, Lavinia, of damaging evidence against her father. Owing to this shift, Ben gains the upper hand in his siblings' love lives, and it is foreshadowed that Regina will be forced to marry Horace, and Oscar, who loses his "working-girl" love, Laurette, will be forced to marry Birdie, whose family is in desperate financial straits.

Like Salesman, Forest is a family play, with a mother, father, and two dissimilar sons, but in this case the missing daughter is added. Unlike Salesman, this is a "history play," set in an earlier period of American history, but it deals with some of the same post-World War II issues of American materialism that Miller used three years later. Both are basically passing-along-of-the-phallus plays, but, unlike Miller, Hellman chooses to keep the father alive at the end of the play, pushed to the side but still a physical reminder of the passage of power. (Perhaps sons, more than daughters, actually need to "kill off" the father to achieve their climax.)

Previous first stage feminist criticism of Forest is not extensive. In a 1977 dissertation, Sharon P. Friedman states: "The three central women of this play--Lavinia, Birdie, and Regina--live, more or less, according to the dictates of men," and that "the social and economic

powerlessness of women puts them at a disadvantage."¹⁶
About Lavinia she says, "this fictional 'mad woman' is seen to create her own visions as a means of self-determination. What Marcus has not allowed her, she will, at least, imagine for herself" (313). About Birdie she says she is "unable to acknowledge even to herself that her bargaining position is weak through no fault of her own" (314). Of Laurette, she says Oscar "spends his time with a woman who earns her living by humoring him" (304). And her observations on Regina include the fact that she "is considered a marketable asset by her brother" (305). Regina tries to "beat the men at their own game" but "when the financial power is transferred from father to son, Regina, despite her plotting, is, as always, excluded from these transactions" (314).

Sara Hurdis Shaver, in her 1984 dissertation, goes into more detail of character analysis from the point of view of the potential performer. She notes that "Lavinia plays two roles: the crazy but knowledgeable fool and the submissive wife," and that "it is ironic that for years Lavinia held within herself the power to win over Marcus and yet never gave herself permission to use it."¹⁷ Birdie

¹⁶"Feminist Concerns in the Works of Four Twentieth-Century American Women Dramatists: Susan Glaspell, Rachel Crothers, Lillian Hellman, and Lorraine Hansberry" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1977), p. 312. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

¹⁷"Feminist Criticism as Role Analysis for the Interpreter: Women in Lillian Hellman's Major Plays" (Ph.D.

"assumes several roles, all of which require her to act subservient and helpless. One of these is the 'dutiful daughter' " (144). Laurette "flaunts society's restrictions and uses sex as a career through which she gains money, independence, and power," and she also "is the only one to stand up to and tell off Marcus. In addition, she is the only woman to actually leave town without the help of a man" (155, 157). One of Shaver's interesting points about Regina is that she loves her mother and invites her to go along with Regina to Chicago, in her plan to marry John. "Regina cannot be wanting her mother along as a chaperone. Perhaps she is unconsciously trying to liberate her mother along with herself from the tyranny of Marcus" (124-125).

Most published criticism of Hellman's plays has not declared itself feminist. One major exception to this is the section in Helene Keyssar's Feminist Theatre in which she attacks several of Hellman's plays for providing poor role models for women. Another Part of the Forest is not specifically mentioned (a common fate for the play), but in her attacks on the other plays she repeats her simplistic thesis that Hellman's plays "confirm stereotypical images of women and establish little affection or respect for female characters," while of the women in The Little Foxes she adds: "none of them suggests a constructive or alternative

dissertation, University of Arizona, 1984), pp. 136, 143. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

way of being a woman in American culture."¹⁸ Somewhere between overvaluing the plays for their "premature feminism" and undervaluing them for not providing positive role models, there are other ways to see the feminism in and between the lines of Hellman's female characters.

By using the idea of the exchange of women to examine the images of the four main women in the play, we can see that all four have enough characterization and perform significant enough actions to be seen as active agents, even though by the end of the play two have left town and the other two are to be married off at Ben's discretion. We see them struggle within their circumscribed roles, even though they are overcome in the end. Like Miller, Hellman shows the rise of son over father, but she underlines the fact that it is due to social and accidental factors, not the inevitable superiority of sons over daughters. Regina is just as worthy a successor to her father as Ben, but due to the fact that Ben was around when Lavinia decided to share her secret, Ben received the tool with which to overpower the old man. Despite Keyssar's argument, the women in the play need not be taken as idealized role models for female behavior, any more than Willy, Biff, or Happy are male role models. Putting that demand on a woman playwright in order to consider her play feminist is unrealistic and

¹⁸Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women (New York: Grove, 1985), p. 29.

counterproductive. But the way the women behave in this play at least allows women to be participants in the game.

Lavinia embodies several aspects of stereotypical female behavior, but at the same time tells truths and determines the outcome of the play. Hers is the last presence in each of the first two acts, leaving a lasting impression. Her leave-taking is the next to last moment of the play. But she appears to be both passive and crazy. The figure of the madwoman is a common one in literature, and she has been particularly significant in several nineteenth-century novels by women, as I shall discuss further in Chapter 4. There are many reasons suggested for Lavinia's madness in the play, her husband's brutality being one of them. Her passivity, which has been called the "deception of passivity" by one critic,¹⁹ may also be seen as a response to her husband and has a well-suppressed anger under it. In Act III she tells Ben that she has always been afraid of Marcus and of Ben, too. "I spent a life afraid. And you know that's funny, Benjamin, because way down deep I'm a woman wasn't made to be afraid."²⁰ For one moment we see the strong young woman she once must have been and the painful self-awareness she has of her subjugation. Gayle Rubin offers some insight into Lavinia: "the creation of

¹⁹Mary L. Broe, "Bohemia Bumps into Calvin: The Deception of Passivity in Lillian Hellman's Drama," Southern Quarterly 19 (Winter 1981): 26-41.

²⁰Lillian Hellman, The Collected Plays (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), p. 382.

'femininity' in women in the course of socialization is an act of psychic brutality" and it "leaves in women an immense resentment of the suppression to which they were subjected" but also "few means for realizing and expressing their residual anger."²¹

Regina, Birdie, and Laurette are all twenty years old: a peak age for being exchanged. The irony is that Laurette, who is looked down upon as socially inferior to every other white person in the play, is the only woman who is in a position to trade herself, and does so. She goes to the highest bidder, but she herself controls the transaction. Regina and Birdie have Ben trading them, cementing the social and economic bonds among three families as he does so. Birdie tries to do some trading herself, in asking for a loan on property which is not hers to transact. In the end Ben gives her the loan for his own reasons, but it is made clear that the only commodity that will successfully be traded will be Birdie herself, in marriage to Oscar, arranged by Ben.

Regina tries to resist her mother's fate of a loveless marriage by trying to arrange for her own marriage to John Bagtry. She uses sex to lure him, but in the end lacks the economic power to carry out her plans and is forced to align herself with Ben. In this way we see that Ben will have the

²¹Rubin, p. 196.

power to trade her to the Giddens family in return for their money and prestige, which, along with Birdie's cotton, will make him even more powerful than his father had been. By the end of the play it is clear that both Ben and Regina will not allow love to stand in their way to power. The action of The Little Foxes, held in the back of the mind while reading or seeing this play, bears out the lovelessness of their lives. But Forest gives an understanding picture of how both got that way, and how Regina's options were limited by her gender.

Eve Sedgwick, in discussing Gone with the Wind, sums up Regina's predicament as well:

. . .in the life of Scarlett O'Hara, it is expressly clear that to be born female is to be defined entirely in relation to the role of "lady," a role that does take its shape and meaning from a sexuality of which she is not the subject but the object. For Scarlett, to survive as a woman does mean learning to see sexuality, male power domination, and her traditional gender role as all meaning the same dangerous thing. To absent herself silently from each of them alike, and learn to manipulate them from behind this screen as objects or pure signifiers, as men do, is the numbing but effective lesson of her life.²²

This description is applicable not only to Scarlett and Regina, but to a certain extent to Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire (1947). The difference is that Blanche, while she is indeed the object, not subject, of sexuality, never does learn successfully to manipulate either sexuality, male power domination, or traditional gender role, but instead is the victim of them

²²Sedgwick, Between Men, p. 8.

all. While Blanche and Stella are relatively large female roles, compared to those in plays such as Salesman, and while they both have more influence on the action than characters like Linda Loman and "The Woman," they are not active female subjects, but traded objects in a male homosocial world.

Blanche has been a high school English teacher with, presumably, some economic independence, but her life has been dominated by the roles of dutiful daughter and failed wife. While she has been married, it was not a successful trade because her husband was not really "male" and killed himself owing to Blanche's "disgust" at his homosexuality. The most serious fate in the play is reserved for the misunderstood male homosexual, while the "crazy" female heterosexual is shown to have a less serious fate, one in which she is complicitous. Blanche's madness is not a result of repressed anger, and as madwoman she does not tell truths or in any way influence events. She is merely an oversexed woman who irritated her brother-in-law so much that, given the right opportunity, he raped her. This pushed her mind over the edge to insanity and in the end she is traded by Stanley to her final "home," a lunatic asylum.

The difference between Blanche and many other Southern "ladies" is that for a period of time, between her failed marriage and her final subduing by Stanley, she tried to trade herself to a variety of men. But she was indiscriminate about her partners and never got any security

(or perhaps even money) in the trade. We get two versions of the story, Stanley's in Scene 7 and Blanche's in Scene 9, but the result is the same. According to Stanley, she was known at the nearby army camp as "Out-of-Bounds" and she was fired from her teaching job because of a "seventeen-year-old boy--she's gotten mixed up with!"²³ According to Blanche, she "had many intimacies with strangers . . . hunting for some protection . . . even, at last, in a seventeen-year-old boy," and when young soldiers passed her house, drunk, and called her name, "sometimes I slipped outside to answer their calls" (386-389). Previously, in Scene 5, we had seen her attempt to seduce the paper boy, an incident ending with a quick kiss. Unlike Regina, Blanche is a total romantic, incapable of using herself to serve herself.

Blanche attributes her behavior to her exposures to death--that of her husband and of the other family members she watched die. Compared to death, "the opposite is desire. So do you wonder? How could you possibly wonder!" (389). Of course Mitch should understand that this drove her to "answer the calls" of multiple soldiers. Desire, the streetcar that brought her to Stanley's front door, is an issue of much discussion in feminist psychology. One question raised by the character of Blanche is that of actual female desire versus female desire as portrayed by a

²³Tennessee Williams, The Theatre of Tennessee Williams, vol. I (New York: New Directions, 1971), pp. 361-362. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

heterosexual male playwright, by a homosexual male playwright, and by heterosexual and homosexual female playwrights. There are many varieties of desire, which are large issues for feminist analysis. Blanche's expression of desire, and the sadomasochistic overtones of her relationships with men, including Stanley, have much to do with a male homosexual perception of women.

Anca Vlasopolos sees the play as a demonstration of how, in effect, history is written by the winners, not the losers. Taking a deconstructive point of view, she sees the play as a series of "readings" and interpretations as two people struggle to write their history:

Only when Stanley taps into the dominant discourse of patriarchy and is thus able to reduce Blanche's story to an all-too-common denominator can he vanquish her. From the end of Scene Four to the climax of Scene Ten, Stanley proceeds to gather the evidence he needs for an interpretation of Blanche which is as reductive of her as her evolutionary claims have been of him. . . .

Whereas Blanche wants to write Stanley out of history by relegating him to the savage, distant past of pre-history, Stanley is not satisfied with a reductive reading of Blanche; he moves to inscribe, to author, not only her past, but her future.²⁴

This much of her argument I agree with, but she goes on to conclude that because the play does not end with the rape, but with the banishment of Blanche under the tacitly approving gaze of almost the entire cast of characters on stage, that Williams is criticizing the writing of history

²⁴Anca Vlasopolos, "Authorizing History: Victimization in A Streetcar Named Desire," Theatre Journal 38 (October 1986): 332.

by the brute winner. Her conclusion is:

Unlike generically pure tragedy, A Streetcar Named Desire leaves us unpurged of the emotions it elicits. We resist being sucked in by Blanche's stories, for that way madness lies; while Williams makes us see and hear like Blanche, and perhaps feel like her, the authority of history is on Stanley's side. The power of A Streetcar Named Desire rests in our experiencing the ability of that authority to redact [edit] history and therefore to determine the future. The force of this "problem" play is to disquiet us so that perhaps we might hear, if not speak for, those whom history has silenced.²⁵

Unfortunately, I am not as optimistic as Vlasopolos about the ultimate effect of the play on its audience. The presence of other characters on stage in the final scene does not undo the effect of the other ten scenes in building a case against Blanche and making Stanley's actions seem both inevitable and natural. Looking through Rubin's perspective, it is clear that the play shows women as traded objects and the world as inevitably homosocial. Exceptions to the social order are rooted out and the family trinity of husband, wife, and baby is the last image seen in the play. The last line is "This game is seven-card stud" (419).

The game is indeed one played by men. As Eve Sedgwick pointed out, cuckolding is an act that bonds men, and cards are often a metaphor for this bonding. Just as Happy in Salesman sleeps with his co-workers' girlfriends to gain both camaraderie with them and a feeling of superiority, so Stanley rapes Blanche and gets what Mitch has not gotten all summer. The poker game is a dominant

²⁵Ibid., pp. 337-338.

image in the play, setting tone and action in scenes 3 and 11. The men are all at ease with each other and consider women intrusions. When Stanley hits Stella, he is first restrained by his pals and then, "They speak quietly and lovingly to him and he leans his face on one of their shoulders." There is no stage direction at this point to indicate a corresponding comforting of Stella, the object of abuse. Mitch merely says, twice, "Poker shouldn't be played in a house with women" (303, 305).

In many ways, from a feminist perspective, Streetcar is similar to Salesman. Though the former is usually considered "feminine" in style and subject and the latter "masculine," actually both present powerful male views of female characters as objects. Both have been influential on subsequent postwar American drama and on defining what "serious" drama is and should be. Hellman's play, Another Part of the Forest, written during the same period, presents women as objects struggling to be subjects, not trying to be better objects. In all levels of criticism, from the 1940s to the present, its name would never be spoken in the same breath as the two "greats." This is a problem of canon formation. If terms are defined by plays which are most resonant for male critics, producers, and directors, where are the models for what a woman might write? In this chapter I have made the case that a closer look at Hellman's work in comparison with plays written by men at the same time gives directions toward a more woman-centered model,

and at the same time questioned the value of canon formation. I also hope that one can begin to see the usefulness of a feminist anthropological approach and its close relationship to the subject of the next chapter, feminist psychology.

CHAPTER 3

FEMINIST PSYCHOLOGY: MOTHER-DAUGHTER BONDING AND FIRST AND SECOND STAGE CRITICISM

The field of psychology has often been applied to theatre, but, as with anthropology, the use of feminist psychology to analyze plays has been restricted. In this chapter I will give a brief overview of some topics of feminist psychology and an account of Nancy Chodorow's interpretation of the mother-daughter bond formed during the first years of life and its effects on the later life of the daughter. I shall then apply Chodorow's work to first and second stage criticism of Jane Bowles's play In the Summer House (1953), and contrast that play with Carson McCullers's The Member of the Wedding (1950) and Williams's The Glass Menagerie (1945).

Feminist psychology has created a much larger, harder-to-summarize literature than that of the other social sciences, but several overview essays begin to give an idea of the issues addressed. In a review essay in Signs in 1979, Mary Brown Parlee described four basic areas of

research in the psychology of women: 1) critiques of traditional psychological research on women; 2) empirical research from a feminist perspective; 3) theoretical contributions to psychology arising from feminist research; and 4) theoretical contributions to problem-centered research (of an interdisciplinary nature, such as rape).¹

In an article published six years later, Parlee continues to use the same four subdivisions, going into more detail, and then discusses what she calls three "promising problems" currently being addressed by the psychology of women:

1) power, sex, nonverbal communication, and conversational interaction; 2) connectedness versus separation from others; and 3) psychology of female reproductive processes. Under the second "problem" she mentions Nancy Chodorow's "very important book" which "describes the way social arrangements whereby females are the primary caregivers for both girls and boys come to produce fundamental psychological differences between women and men."²

The introduction to a recent book of essays on feminist psychoanalytic literary criticism summarizes some of the specific topics taken up: the ambivalent relationship of feminism and Freud, feminist interest in Freud's case of

¹"Review Essay: Psychology and Women," Signs 5 (Autumn 1979): 123-128.

²"Psychology of Women in the 80s: Promising Problems," International Journal of Women's Studies 8 (March/April 1985): 200.

Dora, object-relations theory and Nancy Chodorow's work, the influence of Jacques Lacan's rereading of Freud on French feminists, and the relationship of feminism and deconstruction. The writers acknowledge the usefulness of Chodorow's work but say what is lacking is "the particular consideration of the relation between gender as she describes it and representation," and add that the subject of representation is taken up by French feminists.³

Several names are repeatedly mentioned in articles on object-relations feminist psychology, especially those related to feminist literary criticism. The three which occur most regularly in discussing work of the 1970s, or work in the area of mothering, are Adrienne Rich, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Nancy Chodorow. Each wrote a book, published between 1976 and 1978, which has become a classic in the field.⁴ Coppelia Kahn summarizes what the three have in common:

To begin with, they all regard gender less as a biological fact than as a social product, an institution learned through and perpetuated by culture. . . . Second, they describe the father-absent, mother-involved nuclear family as creating the gender identities that

³Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether, eds., The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 15-25.

⁴Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (N.Y.: Norton, 1976); Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1976); Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley, Calif.: University of Calif. Press, 1978).

perpetuate patriarchy and the denigration of women. . . . Third (and most important), because a woman is the first significant other through whom both girls and boys realize subjectivity, women in general become charged with the ambivalence of fear and desire which is the inevitable by-product of that process.⁵

Judith Kegan Gardiner does a good job of summarizing both object-relations theory and the gist of these three theorists in yet another overview essay:

Object-relations theory explains how the child becomes a person. It stresses the construction of the self in social relationships rather than through instinctual drives. In this terminology, 'objects' include everything that the self perceives as not itself. That is, the maternal object is not the mother but the child's mental representation of its mother. . . .

According to Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976), the fact of female mothering means that both boys and girls learn to associate women as a class with infancy's powerful irrational needs and fears. Children fantasize a perfectly responsive mother, and adults criticize women for not being that person. . . . Children also project against women their earliest rage at life's frustrating realities. Repressed male fear of women accounts for western men's endemic aggression, misogyny and technological folly, though girls learn they may some day share maternal power, and therefore they fear it less than boys do. . . .

Nancy Chodorow explains the cycle whereby women wish to be mothers and succeed at their role. She believes that societies ensure an adequate supply of child-tenders by encouraging all women to be empathic and nurturant. . . . As symbiotic mothers, they will perpetuate the cycle by distancing their sons while intimately merging with their daughters. As a result, the "masculine sense of self" is separate; the "feminine sense of self remains connected to others in the world" (Chodorow 1978, p. 169). . . . Adrienne Rich celebrates the power of mother love and sees all women as originally and potentially lesbian because all women first love another woman. She also describes lesbian relationships as invested with the intensity and

⁵"The Hand That Rocks the Cradle: Recent Gender Theories and Their Implications," in The (M)other Tongue, ed. Garner, et al., p. 73.

ambivalence of the mother-daughter bond.⁶

Gardiner points out that there are theorists who take a negative rather than positive view of this close mother-daughter bonding, stressing the fact that the daughter must struggle to separate out from the mother. Among these theorists are Jane Flax and Jessica Benjamin. Flax discusses the nature of the struggle for individuation in a patriarchal society in an essay published the same year as Chodorow's book.⁷ Benjamin, in a more recent essay, discusses what she sees as the weaknesses in some mother-daughter theories and suggests going beyond these theories to stress, among other things, the father-daughter bond. She argues that "women lack a desire of their own." She goes beyond the theories that stress the father as agent for separating from the mother to the idea of both women and men as subjects (intersubjectivity) rather than object and subject:

Woman's desire, I believe, can be found not through the current emphasis on freedom from: as autonomy or separation from a powerful other, guaranteed by identification with an opposing power. Rather, we are seeking a relationship to desire in the freedom to: freedom to be both with and distinct from the other. This relationship can be grasped in terms of intersubjective reality, where subject meets subject.⁸

⁶"Mind Mother: Psychoanalysis and Feminism," in Making a Difference, ed. Greene and Kahn, pp. 130-134.

⁷"The Conflict Between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and Within Feminism," Feminist Studies 4 (June 1978): 171-189.

⁸"A Desire of One's Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective Space," in Feminist Studies/Critical

On the specific topic of mothers and daughters, Marianne Hirsch pointed out three main trends in research in 1981: 1) object-relations psychology, 2) Jungian studies, and 3) French feminist theory. But in all three cases "at the source of each of these important and useful feminist theoretical studies we find not only a male theorist but a developed androcentric system,"⁹ a frequent criticism of non-radical feminist theories in many fields. She does a brief survey of interview books and of literary criticism on the subject, naming Nancy Friday's bestseller My Mother/My Self: A Daughter's Search for Identity as responsible for much of the popularity of the subject of mothers and daughters, while criticizing its lack of scholarly rigor. In the end she cites the need "to invent new theoretical frameworks that allow us, in our study of relationships between women, truly to go beyond patriarchal myths and perceptions."¹⁰

Nancy Chodorow wrote a number of articles before she published The Reproduction of Mothering in 1978. All of them are interdisciplinary in nature, but there was a movement over the years (1971 to 1978) from a sociological approach that used anthropology and psychology about equally

Studies, ed. Teresa deLauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 83, 97-98.

⁹"Review Essay: Mothers and Daughters," Signs 7 (Autumn 1981): 205.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 221.

to deal with all family relationships, to a more purely psychological approach, and finally to one using psychoanalysis almost exclusively to explore mainly the mother-daughter relationship. A 1971 mass market anthology contains her early essay exploring sex roles cross-culturally and developmentally, trying to get at the root of how women are oppressed. She relied heavily on Margaret Mead (anthropology), Karen Horney (psychology), and Simone de Beauvoir to develop her idea that female identity is devalued by society and women must live through their children. She felt that as long as this model prevailed women would continue to "bring up sons whose sexual identity depends on devaluing femininity . . . and daughters who must accept this devalued position and resign themselves to producing more men who will perpetuate the system that devalues them."¹¹

Chodorow's next essay appeared three years later in the first feminist anthropology anthology, mentioned in the last chapter. Several ideas entered her discussion at this point: the reproduction of sex roles and mothering, the centrality of the mother-daughter relationship, the use of a "largely psychoanalytic" perspective (though anthropology and sociology are still strongly present), and use of the

¹¹"Being and Doing: A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Socialization of Males and Females," in Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1971; reprint ed., N.Y.: New American Library, 1972), p. 287.

writer's own experience in a "women's group that discusses mother-daughter relationships in particular and family relationships in general."¹² That footnote, prominently placed on the first page of the essay, made the statement that the researcher's own experience is to be used, not denied, in working in a feminist mode. Later on Chodorow is criticized for methodology and evidence, but her straightforward approach, checked against and contributed to by reality, may explain why her conclusions strike a chord of recognition in readers. In this piece she is describing both female and male patterns of development, concluding again that female child care creates specific sex roles in offspring. But she begins to pay more attention here to the close bonding between mother and daughter in the child's first few years (the preoedipal phase). While she stresses the fact that the later oedipal crisis is resolved very differently by girls and boys and that the "girl cannot and does not completely reject her mother in favor of men, but continues her relationship of dependence upon and attachment to her,"¹³ she continues to place the entire matter in a social context.

Her next essay¹⁴ was even more explicitly

¹²"Family Structure and Feminine Personality," in Women, Culture & Society, ed. Rosaldo and Lamphere, p. 43.

¹³Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁴"Oedipal Asymmetries and Heterosexual Knots," Social Problems 23 (1976): 454-468.

psychoanalytic and was adapted into a section of The Reproduction of Mothering. Finally, the same year the book was published, she adapted much of its material into an article for Feminist Studies. She summarizes her work as follows:

... in a new interpretation of the feminine oedipus complex, I suggest that because women mother, the oedipus complex is as much a mother-daughter issue as it is one of father and daughter, and that it is as much concerned with the structure and composition of the feminine relational ego as it is with the genesis of sexual object choice. . . . and demonstrate that exclusive commitment to men, in spite of behavioral heterosexuality, is never completely established.¹⁵

She surveys some feminist psychologists' variations on the Freudian idea of penis envy ["she finds out her mother prefers people like her father (and brother), who have penises. She comes to want a penis, then, in order to win her mother's love"] and goes on to add that psychoanalysts assume heterosexuality, but "Rubin rightly reminds us that a mother's heterosexuality is not an inevitable given: it has also been constructed in her own development one generation previously."¹⁶ Finally she summarizes the girl's "turn to her father" during the oedipal phase:

Every step of the way, a girl develops her relationship to her father while looking back at her mother--to see if her mother is envious, to make sure she is in fact separate, to see if she can in this way win her mother,

¹⁵"Mothering, Object-Relations, and the Female Oedipal Configuration," Feminist Studies 4 (February 1978): 137.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 150.

to see if she is really independent.¹⁷

Much of the book The Reproduction of Mothering is explication of various psychoanalytic theories regarding female development. Shakespearean critic Coppelia Kahn, in the previously mentioned essay on feminist psychological theories, advances the thought that "Chodorow reorients psychoanalytic theory with the feminist consciousness that has rejected the notion of woman as castrated man," and has found "in the mother-daughter relationship and in other relations among women, rich, various, and vital sources of feminine selfhood."¹⁸

The main contribution Chodorow makes in her book (and articles) is to focus attention on the previously neglected preoedipal period as critical in the development of the girl's personality, and as functioning in a different way for female and male children. She translates many other people's theories into readable prose which makes the ideas accessible to researchers in a wide range of fields. Like Rubin, she may be most important because of this translation and for maintaining a social perspective along with psychoanalytic insights. The idea that daughters experience a sense of merging with their mothers that in some way persists into later life, and that mothers experience a greater continuity with girl children, is one which can be

¹⁷Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁸Kahn, p. 76.

enormously useful in examining plays which deal with the mother-daughter relationship as well as in examining the difference between the portrayals of mothers by male and female writers. The stories of mothers and daughters, told from women's points of view, are extremely rare in drama. This lack, or absence, needs to be examined as much as do the few plays which do exist.

Chodorow summarizes her description of the early bonding of mother and daughter in this way:

Because they are the same gender as their daughters and have been girls, mothers of daughters tend not to experience these infant daughters as separate from them in the same way as do mothers of infant sons. In both cases, a mother is likely to experience a sense of oneness and continuity with her infant. However, this sense is stronger, and lasts longer, vis-a-vis daughters. Primary identification and symbiosis with daughters tend to be stronger and cathexis of daughters is more likely to retain and emphasize narcissistic elements, that is, to be based on experiencing a daughter as an extension or double of a mother herself.¹⁹

When the girl reaches adolescence she is struggling to separate out from her mother, but at the same time feels the close bonding. Mothers "desire both to keep daughters close and to push them into adulthood," which makes the daughters anxious and "provokes attempts by these daughters to break away." This "leaves mother and daughter convinced that any separation between them will bring disaster to both" (135). The adolescent girl knows that she is not really part of her mother, but may not feel the boundary between them. In

¹⁹Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering, p. 109. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

separating she may criticize her mother, or may "idealize the mother or the family of a friend;" she "may try in every way to be unlike her mother" and may "idealize a woman teacher, another adult woman or older girl, or characters in books and films, and contrast them to her mother" (137). All this behavior is familiar to any woman who has passed through adolescence, and particularly to mothers of adolescent girls, but it is all but missing, in serious form, from drama. Chodorow goes even further and verbalizes a concept that not even Sophocles could have come up with:

However, given the organization of parenting, mother-son and mother-daughter incest⁺ are the major threats to the formation of new families (as well as to the male-dominant family itself) and not, equivalently, mother-son and father-daughter incest. Mother-daughter incest may be the most "socially regressive," in the sense of a basic threat to species survival, since a mother and son can at least produce a child. But the threat of mother-daughter incestuous and exclusive involvement has been met by a girl's entry into the oedipus situation and her change of genital erotic object.

⁺Or, since we are talking about more than actual commission of the sin, "incestuous" relationships--relationships that are not consummated but sufficiently emotionally and libidinally involved to keep son or daughter from forming nonfamilial sexual relationships (132).

Even Chodorow has to qualify and soften this radical idea with a footnote, but sometimes a playwright will not use such self-censorship. This reluctance to deal with the possibility of mother-daughter incest, which merely reflects the power of the bond itself, is the root of the difficulty and fascination of Jane Bowles's only full-length play.

Jane Bowles, born in New York in 1917, published her only novel, Two Serious Ladies, in 1943, the same year she

began writing In the Summer House. She was encouraged by scene designer Oliver Smith, who gave her money toward writing the play from 1943 to 1953 and eventually produced it on Broadway.²⁰ The play had a long gestation period.²¹ It reached Broadway, starring Judith Anderson and Mildred Dunnock, on December 29, 1953, and was subsequently produced in New York City in 1964, 1977, and 1980.

The play is one of ellipses and absences, dream-like and non-linear at times, but with many of the trappings of realism. It concerns three sets of mothers and daughters and is set in Southern California. Molly is eighteen and her mother is Gertrude; Vivian is their fifteen-year-old boarder with her mother Mrs. Constable; the third pair is a Mexican woman, Mrs. Lopez, and her daughter Frederica. The first act has three scenes: One and Three are set in Gertrude's garden, Two is on a beach. Act two has two scenes set in a small restaurant called The Lobster Bowl. The time is "the present" and covers a period of fourteen months. Describing the plot is difficult, but I will quote some of Millicent Dillon's summary:

The play opens with a long soliloquy by Gertrude in which she rails at Molly for lolling in the summer house

²⁰ Millicent Dillon, A Little Original Sin: The Life and Work of Jane Bowles (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart, 1981), p. 95. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

²¹ Bowles worked on the play in New York between 1945-1947 and published the first act in 1947. The play had its first production at the Hedgerow Theater in Pennsylvania in 1951 and was next done at the University of Michigan in 1953 (121, 132, 219, 226).

hour after hour. "You can't even see out because those vines hide the view." She speaks of her dissatisfaction with her own life, having to take in boarders to make ends meet. She says she is thinking of marrying Mr. Solares and going to Mexico with him. . . .

Mr. Solares and his family [including Mrs. Lopez and Frederica] appear with a huge picnic lunch. They joke and sing and eat voraciously. A new boarder arrives, Vivian Constable. . . . She pursues Gertrude avidly and even invades Molly's summer house. Behind Vivian, always hiding in the shadows, is her mother, Mrs. Constable, who is worried about her "poor bird."

In the course of the play Vivian drowns--either by falling from a cliff or being pushed from it by Molly. Gertrude marries Mr. Solares and prepares to go off to Mexico. But before she leaves Molly declares her love for her mother so violently that Gertrude is frightened. However, she goes to Mexico and Molly marries Lionel, a young man who works at a nearby restaurant, the Lobster Bowl. . . . He and Molly stay, in a chaste marriage, in a room above the Lobster Bowl. Mrs. Constable, with Vivian dead, has become an alcoholic and hangs around the restaurant to be close to Molly and Lionel.

In the last act Gertrude, unhappy with her life in Mexico, returns to reclaim Molly from Lionel. In one version of this act Gertrude drags Molly away, after convincing her that she is violent and dangerous to others, and Lionel is left alone. In another version, Molly runs out and kills herself. In the published play Molly rushes off after Lionel, and Gertrude is left alone. (228-229)

This summary gives a general idea of the actions in the play, but not the details which give it its texture. As Dillon points out, Bowles changed the ending several times. The published version still seems to end rather abruptly and unsatisfactorily, but this points to the very lack of closure of the play which is one of the reasons it seems more modern today than so many other examples of 1950s realism. "Like Jane's life, the play was based upon a precarious balance, the absence of finality, even the evasion of ending. All of the endings, even the final one, seem forced." The critical reception in 1953 was mixed, in

part because "the dilemma portrayed on the stage seemed to reviewers to be nothing but the trivial and neurotic arguments of 'female crackpots' " (230). A feminist evaluation of the play finds much more there.

A feminist biographical approach could point out the sources of the play in Bowles's life. The play would also lend itself to examination by Rubin's ideas in the previous chapter: the men in the play are passive in the action. Gertrude and Vivian are the only two active subjects in the plot. Gertrude arranges for the exchange of herself to Mr. Solares as well as the exchange of Molly to Lionel. But it is the fact that these exchanges are not really permanent that causes the action of Act II; Gertrude returns to "take back" the daughter she had gone through the motions of exchanging. In reality both mother and daughter knew that Molly was not exchanged, but rather "lent out" to Lionel, for safekeeping, until Gertrude decided to reclaim her. This series of actions is extremely rare in drama, and deserves further attention. But the play is also a fascinating "acting out" of the mother-daughter scenario discussed by Chodorow, and some of the details of the play make this clear.

Gertrude is a large presence in the play; her larger-than-life aspect was emphasized in the original Broadway production by having her played by Judith Anderson (whose presence brought along with it associations of Medea and other classical roles she had played). She begins the play

up on a balcony overlooking the vine-covered summer house in which Molly sits. Or rather hides. As soon as Gertrude ascertains Molly is in the summer house she says, "If I believed in acts of violence, I would burn the summer house down."²² She suspects Molly of "plotting" in the summer house. Molly has black hair, while Gertrude has red, and Gertrude says: "Whenever I think of a woman going wild, I always picture her with black hair, never blond or red." Molly cannot picture women going wild, but her mother can: "They do all the time. They break the bonds Sometimes I picture little scenes where they turn evil like wolves" (210). She suspects Molly of the violence within herself, it seems. She is a dominant presence, seen from a child's perspective, from down in the summer house. In her opening "monologue" (actually a dialogue with infrequent responses from Molly), Gertrude points out that Molly's father, who is now dead, was Spanish and "Spanish men aren't around the house much, which is a blessing. They're always out . . . sitting around with bunches of other men" (209). Mr. Solares, whom Gertrude marries, is also Spanish, and while he is alive and appears in the play, as a stepfather he, too, is of no help in Molly's separating out from Gertrude. The play charts Molly's struggle to deal with the overwhelming love she feels for her mother and the painful

²²My Sister's Hand in Mine: An Expanded Edition of The Collected Works of Jane Bowles (N.Y.: Ecco Press, 1978), p. 208. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

rejection and seduction she experiences from Gertrude.

This push and pull between the two women is seen in startlingly naked form at several points. The most painful moments occur in the last scene of Act I. Mother and daughter have gotten married in a double ceremony. The scene opens with the visual image of mother and daughter brides. Molly is eating a hot dog and Gertrude has removed her shoes and put on bedroom slippers, but the similarity of their dress and the absence of men until the leave-taking at the very end of the scene give the visual impression that the two brides have married each other. When Gertrude prepares to leave for Mexico, Molly hides again in the summer house and Gertrude addresses her from the balcony in the same words she used at the very beginning of the act:

Gertrude: Molly? Molly, are you in the summer house?

Molly: Yes, I am (250).

This repeated litany is followed by a new ending; Gertrude prepares to leave and Molly begs her to stay. Gertrude descends to the garden and Molly meets her with a bunch of honeysuckle, which Gertrude refuses to accept:

Molly:. . . I picked them for you!

Gertrude: They're for your wedding. They belong to your dress. Here, put them back...[Bowles's ellipses]

Molly: No... No... They're for you... They're flowers for you!. . . I love you. I love you. Don't leave me. I love you. Don't go away! (252)

Molly's pathetic pleading rises to frenzy, but it only makes her mother more anxious to leave:

Gertrude: . . .there's something heavy and dangerous inside you, like some terrible rock that's ready to explode.... I can't bear it any more. I've got to get away, out of this garden. That's why I married. That's why I'm going away. I'm frightened of staying here with you any more. I can't breathe (253).

Mother has married to escape daughter, while daughter has married to please, to imitate mother, to get closer rather than escape. But daughter's efforts have failed and the dreaded separation occurs.

Act II is devoted to showing the malaise in Molly's life without her mother, followed by the mother's return to reclaim her daughter. The ending of the published version of the play has Molly struggle to escape her mother's grasp and run out when her mother momentarily loosens her grip. The suddenness of this final parting seems to reflect the daughter's ambivalence about separating from the mother. She does escape, but not joyously and not, it seems, for good. As Chodorow says, the daughter's oedipal drama is never resolved.

The contrasting pair of Mrs. Constable and her daughter Vivian can be seen as a different way of working out the daughter-mother ambivalence. Mrs. Constable gives unconditional love and cowers at the edges of her daughter's life. Vivian, however, feels the threat of merging with her mother and fights against it by attaching herself to Gertrude. She is sure of her mother's love, so she can afford to be more cavalier than Molly, who suffers the anxiety of not being sure. Vivian uses Gertrude to separate from her own mother, but her choice of object threatens

Molly's less stable sense of self. Molly must kill, or at least feel she has killed, this threat. One of the ironies of the play is that by the time Gertrude tries to use this "secret" to bind Molly to her at the end of the play, Mrs. Constable has become sympathetic toward Molly and does not want to hear the "secret." She has come to realize that Molly is like herself: "You're hanging on just like me. If she brought you her love you wouldn't know her" (273). A few minutes later she identifies with Gertrude as well: "How is Mrs. Lopez? If I were a man, I'd marry Mrs. Lopez. She'd be my type. We should both have been men. Two Spanish men, married to Mrs. Lopez" (277). The lines of identification and merging among the four women are complex and each sheds light on the other three. Expanding the circle of relationships are Mrs. Lopez and her daughter, Frederica. With their warm, simple relationship and ease with each other, they provide almost stereotypic hispanic foils to the more neurotic "WASPs."

In summary, the characters of Molly and Vivian can be seen as the two sides of a daughter locked in ambivalent relationship with her first love object, her mother. As Chodorow summarizes, "A girl alternates between total rejection of a mother who represents infantile dependence [Vivian] and attachment to her [Molly], between identification with anyone other than her mother [Vivian] and feeling herself her mother's double and extension [Molly]." This bonding, of course, goes both ways: "Her

mother often mirrors her preoccupations."²³ In the play, Mrs. Constable has Molly's mode of operating (attachment) and Gertrude has more of Vivian's (rejection). Each daughter seems to have the inappropriate mother for her needs and there is a dramatic tension in wanting each of them to receive what they need from their non-mother.

By applying psychoanalytic theories to the play I do not mean to reduce it to a case study. It is anything but that. But I do feel that it should be appreciated for showing what, in the history of drama, is mainly an absence. At most a father-daughter bond may be presented or a daughter may simply hate or love her mother. But the seriousness, complexity, and centrality of the daughter's struggle against and engagement with her mother in this play are unique. In the Summer House did not enter the canon of major American plays and did not lead to a tradition of woman-written plays about mothers and daughters. Sue-Ellen Case's remarks on medieval woman playwright Hrotsvit's place in the history of drama apply to some degree to Bowles as well: "Contemporary women's plays are more likely to be excluded from the canon because there is not precedent or tradition of development towards them and the position of the pioneer is excluded because there is no tradition of development which springs from her initial model."²⁴

²³Chodorow, p. 138.

²⁴"Re-Viewing Hrotsvit," Theatre Journal 35 (December 1983): 534.

Bowles's play is an important entry in the canon and should take its place there through anthologizing, scholarly work, and production.

One reason the play has not been produced more often is its physical requirements: a dozen main roles, three complete settings, frequent use of music. But a fresh directorial approach to the material could overcome these possible obstacles and broaden its audience, and hence its influence on future playwriting. An approach that stresses its lack of closure, perhaps with Molly not leaving the stage at the end, or using part or all of the three different endings, could lead to an exciting theatrical experience. Bowles is a prime candidate for second stage feminist criticism. The difficulty in placing this play in the canon can be further examined by comparison with two other plays, produced during the eight years before Summer House, which were commercial successes and are often read in schools and produced.

Both Williams's The Glass Menagerie (1945) and Carson McCuller's The Member of the Wedding (1950) had long, successful runs on Broadway, frequent revivals, and film versions made of them. When Summer House opened it was often compared to them, and always found wanting. Menagerie is a paradigm of the male-written mother-daughter play, but Wedding falls somewhere between that relatively unthreatening portrayal of eccentric mother arranging shy daughter's life and Bowles's uncompromising portrait of raw

love-hate between mother and daughter.

In a biographical comparison between Summer House and Wedding, the similarities between authors would be immediately striking. McCullers was born in the south and Bowles in New York, but within three days of each other in February, 1917. Both had early success as fiction writers, both lived at the famous "February House" run by W.H. Auden in Brooklyn Heights in the 1940s, both were involved with music, both had physical problems from childhood on, both suffered strokes, both were bisexual and were married to bisexual men, and both were friends of Tennessee Williams, who supported their playwriting. He frequently praised both women in print, but sometimes expressed his preference, saying in his Memoirs that Bowles "had a unique sensibility in all her work that I found even more appealing than that of Carson McCullers."²⁵ And in speaking to McCullers's biographer in 1972, Williams said, "Jane Bowles's In the Summer House is perhaps better than anything Carson ever wrote. But, of course, I would never have admitted that to Carson."²⁶

One notable difference between their careers was that McCullers had a larger output of fiction, which was more successful both critically and popularly, perhaps because of her choice and handling of subject matter. For instance,

²⁵Memoirs (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), p. 159.

²⁶Virginia Spencer Carr, The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), p. 434.

both wrote about a variety of sexual behavior in their work, but McCullers's was written (and perceived by critics) as part of a "Southern gothic" tradition, in which "freaks" were portrayed for their symbolic significance. Bowles's characters were often less likeable Northern lesbians, who behaved badly and fit into no known literary genre.

The plays themselves have a superficial similarity: adolescent girl struggles with her identity, comes into some conflict with her "mother," and in the end leaves the stage. Both were written in a style which by the 1970s was being called "lyric realism" and both integrate music into the dramatic mood. Of course, Wedding was adapted by the author from her already successful novel, which had been published in 1946. The book and play were welcomed as touching additions to the literature of female "coming of age" (a small enough literature to be in need of such additions, to be sure), as well as a respectable addition to the "Southern gothic" genre, while Summer House did not really fit in anywhere, but was most often considered second rate McCullers, or Williams. Both were criticized for lack of "plot" or for not really being a "play," but these adverse criticisms did not hamper a continuing life for Wedding, while Summer House languished on the fringe. By looking at the two plays through Chodorow's work, we can see further possible reasons for this selective inclusion in the canon.

In Wedding, Frankie's "real" mother died giving birth to her and, in the play, is replaced in part by the black

servant, Berenice Sadie Brown. By making Frankie, Berenice, and John Henry (a seven-year old boy) her main characters, McCullers makes this a play about "outsiders," about some of the most powerless people in American society: blacks, females, and the young. The bond between Frankie and Berenice is weakened because of race and class divisions. The main action of the play is Frankie's yearning to be part of "the we of me" and her attempt to do so by falling in love with her brother and his new wife and their wedding. When Frankie cannot go away with them, she tries running away, but becomes resigned to home. At the end of the play she leaves the stage with a neighbor "beau" Barney, leaving Berenice alone. But her last line is in reference to her newfound girlfriend: "Mary and I will most likely pass through Luxembourg when we--are going around the world together."²⁷ While paying some attention to the importance of female friendship at the end, the main action of the play shows Frankie moving toward reconciliation with the "we" she craves. This "we" is clearly marriage.

Her separating from childhood is not nearly so painful as Molly's because Frankie's close bond is with a mother-figure who is already "other" to Frankie. McCullers stresses the difficulties of Frankie taking her place in the adult world, of her wanting to "belong" as a member of the

²⁷The Member of the Wedding (N.Y.: New Directions, 1951), p. 118.

club. This is a much more common view of the young person's plight in adolescence than Bowles's view. It is notable, in fact, because it rather closely resembles the young boy's difficulty in adolescence. In 1950 this was a valuable addition to previous images of young females. It did not, however, have the radical potential of Bowles's bald portrait of the tensions unique to mothers and daughters. It merely reinforced the idea that tomboys do, in time, take up with boys, "straighten out," and join the club. This idea does not upset accepted ideas as much as Bowles's portrait of a daughter's bond with her mother that never lessens and makes her a potential "wild woman" for the rest of her life. McCullers stresses where the girl is going (oedipal phase); Bowles stresses where she is coming from (preoedipal phase). Perhaps in Bowles's showing the powerful mother figure, the ring of truth was too strong for ears accustomed to the ting-a-ling of stereotype.

Tennessee Williams has often been pointed to as an influence on both these plays, and in many ways he was. McCullers wrote the dramatic version of Wedding sitting across the table from Williams, who was writing Summer and Smoke, at Williams's Nantucket house in the summer of 1946,²⁸ though Williams insisted he gave McCullers little advice at that time.²⁹ Summer House, begun the same year

²⁸Williams, Memoirs, p. 107.

²⁹Carr, p. 275.

Menagerie was begun (1943), had much of the work done on Act I in New York during 1945-47, when Williams's play was running on Broadway. There are several lines of similarity among the three plays: non-realistic form, use of music (Menagerie's and Summer House's music was written by Bowles's husband Paul), female characters that avoid stereotype, mother-figures preparing their daughters for marriage. But Williams's portrait of the mother-daughter bond differs from that of Bowles.

Menagerie is a view of women seen through the eyes of a man. Tom announces right off that "The play is memory," and that "I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it."³⁰ Tom performs as narrator several other times during the play, to remind the audience of his control of the point of view, and ends the play by confessing that he left his mother and sister. In his last line he tells his sister, "Blow out your candles, Laura--and so goodbye..." and she does as she is told.³¹ Though Amanda and Laura are more memorable characters, Tom performs most of the actions in the plot and his memory filters the events. Despite the fact that Amanda draws much of the audience's attention, frequently because she is played by a female star, this is Tom's play. It describes some of the moments leading up to his leaving home and the reasons for

³⁰Williams, Theatre, Vol. I, p. 145.

³¹Ibid., p. 237.

his haunted memory. The women are merely actresses in his mental drama. He is writer and director. As Anca Vlasopolos says about Streetcar, the "authority of history" is on the side of the winner: the son, not the mother or daughter. Amanda has her stories, stories of past glories recounted in the "present" of the play, but Tom has the story that matters: the play itself. Though she appears to be an acting subject because of her physical presence on stage and some actions within Tom's plot, Amanda is really a pipe-dream. The play is a rationalization for a son-brother's desertion and guilt, in which he identifies to some extent with his passive sister, who has also suffered from the nagging and illusions of an overbearing mother. But in the end he gets out and she remains; he is a travelling subject and both women become important only as objects of his memory.

There are several short scenes in the play between mother and daughter, but the relationship is so one-sided that Laura never seems to have much of a will or be much of a participant. The two are bound together, out of need as well as love and abandonment, but the relationship is conventional. Amanda orders and Laura obeys, or faints, or throws up. Occasionally she can manage a brief deception, but her relationship with Amanda is shallow. This is an outsider's view of it, and more honest than most plays for having stated that fact, but while the play is being performed before an audience the characters are taken at

face value. There is not enough interruption of the narrative to establish that these are Tom's ideas, not flesh and blood people. Here we run into a tricky matter of representation, an issue I shall take up again in Chapter 5. But suffice it to say that there is no hint here of the depth of preoedipal bonding or the complex of feelings between mother and daughter when the time comes for daughter to separate. More plays delineating a daughter's point of view are needed in order to clarify it and expand on its dramatic potential.

Another big difference between Menagerie and the other two plays discussed here is the immense influence Williams's play has had, and continues to have, because of its highly valued place in the canon of postwar American drama. It is very often the first play read by a high school student, and may be the first play seen by that student in a school or community production. Breathes there a drama teacher in America who has not directed this play, if only to give a "good" role of appropriate age to a sensitive, young female student? It, along with Death of a Salesman, has formed the idea of what drama is, and should be, for several generations of students.

Its continued use in the classroom has been stimulated by a large body of critical attention over the decades, almost none of it of a feminist nature. As one widely-available anthology of essays points out, the approaches to the play have ranged from biographical, psychological,

mythological, Southern, religious, and theatricalist, to debate over whether or not slide projections should be used, and a minute investigation into the various drafts and published versions of the script.³² This attention has contributed to the place of the play in the canon and to the fact that it has almost cornered the market on the subject of mothers and daughters. There has been a spate of plays about mothers and daughters, especially in the last decade or so, but none has begun to take the place in our collective mind so long occupied by Menagerie. This one play, regardless of its considerable merits and the fact that its women characters are not stereotypes, does not deserve to have the field to itself. Alternative paradigms, like the not-so-sympathetic, violent and complex mothers and daughters of Summer House need to be exposed to view. The female voice that manages to speak truthfully in dramatic form can now receive help in expanding its sphere of influence from, among other tools, feminist psychology.

³²R. B. Parker, ed., The Glass Menagerie: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp. 7-13.

CHAPTER 4

FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM: MADNESS, CONFINEMENT, AND SECOND STAGE CRITICISM

Literary criticism has frequently been applied to theatre and there is even a small body of feminist literary criticism of plays. But the field's potential has not begun to be tapped and there is an enormous literature from which to draw critical ideas. In this chapter I will give an overview of the field and an account of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's writing about the madwoman figure and images of confinement in nineteenth century fiction as an example of second stage feminist criticism analyzing women as artists and the devices they use. I shall then use their ideas to examine use of the madwoman in John Guare's House of Blue Leaves (1971) and use of confinement in Sam Shepard's Fool for Love (1983) and contrast them with second stage criticism of three plays by Maria Irene Fornes: Fefu and Her Friends (1977), Sarita (1984), and The Conduct of Life (1985).

Feminist literary criticism has a long and complicated

history, but fortunately several individuals have written review essays and overviews which aid in summarizing its activities. First among these are four essays with the title "Review Essay: Literary Criticism," which appeared in Signs between 1975 and 1980.¹ The authors of these four essays have each written many other essays, among them other overviews of feminist literary criticism. Elaine Showalter and Annette Kolodny, authors of the two in 1975 and 1976, have become major figures in the field. Kolodny summarized her essay and that of Showalter, saying both "reveal a kind of critical stasis." She goes on to describe feminist literary criticism as "appearing in various guises, unevenly practiced, more like a set of interchangeable strategies than any coherent school or shared goal orientation. . . ."² By 1979 Sydney Janet Kaplan listed some needs of the field: canon widening to include third world and working class women and works written before the nineteenth century, and "more informed considerations of aesthetics based on feminist principles."³ Cheri Register in 1980 had her own complaints: not enough work on changing the canon or on female aesthetics and too much ahistorical analysis in books

¹Elaine Showalter, Signs 1 (Winter 1975): 435-460; Annette Kolodny, Signs 2 (Winter 1976): 404-421; Sydney Janet Kaplan, Signs 4 (Spring 1979): 514-527; and Cheri Register, Signs 6 (Winter 1980): 268-282.

²Kolodny, p. 420.

³Kaplan, p. 527.

such as The Madwoman in the Attic, with its use of Harold Bloom's idea of "anxiety of influence," which "asserts that a literary work embodies the author's struggle against the intrusion of 'his' predecessors into his own imagination." Adopting Bloom's analysis means that, "Since literary precedent is almost the only determining factor considered, literature becomes its own context, leading to a claustrophobic involution."⁴

Five years earlier Register had formulated three subdivisions of feminist criticism: "image of women," "criticism of female authors," and "prescriptive." About the latter she said, "it may become the crux of feminist criticism in the future. It is a 'prescriptive' criticism that attempts to set standards for literature that is 'good' from a feminist viewpoint." She went on to say that this type of criticism is defined "in terms of the ways in which literature can serve the cause of liberation." It must perform one or more of five functions: "(1) serve as a forum for women; (2) help to achieve cultural androgyny; (3) provide role-models; (4) promote sisterhood; and (5) augment consciousness-raising."⁵ After that essay came out, many feminist critics wrote in passionate detail that feminist criticism must not be prescriptive. Their tone

⁴Register, pp. 274, 281.

⁵Cheri Register, "American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction," in Feminist Literary Criticism, ed. Josephine Donovan (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1975), pp. 2, 19.

nearly equalled Register's in its absoluteness. Though her specific suggestions have for the most part been discredited, she did raise the issue of the need for a political dimension to feminist criticism, linking it to the women's movement from which it arose.

Two other essays are more recent overviews of the field. Elaine Showalter, in trying to write a history of feminist criticism for a special issue of Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature on "Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship," talked about "women's time" and feminist history and described her own personal history in the field. She outlines the main trends of thought very well:

Since 1975, feminist criticism has taken two theoretical directions, that of the Anglo-American focus on the specificity of women's writing I have called gynocritics, and that of the French exploration of the textual consequences and representations of sexual difference that Alice Jardine has named gynesis. . . . they describe tendencies within feminist critical theory rather than absolute categories. . . . Gynocritics is, roughly speaking, historical in orientation; it looks at women's writing as it has actually occurred and tries to define its specific characteristics of language, genre, and literary influence, within a cultural network that includes variables of race, class, and nationality.

Gynesis . . . seeks instead to understand the space granted to the feminine in the symbolic contract. . . . repossess as a field of inquiry all the space of the Other, the gaps, silences, and absences of discourse and representation. . . . very little attention is paid to women writers.⁶

Sydney Janet Kaplan supplies a useful overview of the theories of feminist criticism, including those of

⁶"Women's Time, Women's Space: Writing the History of Feminist Criticism," Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 3 (Spring/Fall 1984): 36.

Showalter, in her essay "Varieties of Feminist Criticism."⁷ After surveying many of the books and anthologies published in the 1970s and early 1980s, she summarizes the work of several critics of that same period, devoting most space to Elaine Showalter, her strengths and weaknesses. Kaplan ends by pointing up the marked difference between Showalter's theory of literature as part of a "female subculture" and Annette Kolodny's call for a multiplicity of theories, or "playful pluralism."

The difference between these two main theorists comes up in many overviews, including that of Toril Moi in her book Sexual/Textual Politics.⁸ Moi divides her book into sections on Anglo-American feminist criticism and French feminist theory. Each part is a brief introduction to the principal theorists, together with Moi's considerable reservations about each, reflecting her materialist feminist point of view. The book is probably the longest overview and summary of various theories available, giving a broad picture of theory coming from both sides of the Atlantic. Once again, Showalter and Kolodny get full treatment, but she devotes almost as much space to Gilbert and Gubar.

While the overviews so far mentioned have represented one woman's voice summarizing what she has seen and read,

⁷In Making a Difference, ed. Greene and Kahn, pp. 37-58.

⁸(N.Y.: Methuen, 1985).

there are many anthologies of critical essays which present a multiplicity of voices. Taken together, they form another type of summary. In the 1970s, five such anthologies spoke about what feminist criticism was and could be.⁹

Images of Women in Fiction actually dealt with first and second stage criticism, from Joanna Russ's observations on the plot options available to a woman writer in "What Can a Heroine Do? or Why Women Can't Write" to Josephine Donovan's analysis of sentence structure of several women novelists in "Feminist Style Criticism." Feminist Literary Criticism included Cheri Register's previously mentioned essay advocating prescriptive criticism, other essays beginning to explore the idea of a feminist aesthetic, a "dialogue" between a text- and a context-oriented feminist critic written by Carolyn Heilbrun and Catharine Stimpson, and a summary piece by editor Josephine Donovan, which pointed to common threads and future trends in feminist criticism. The Authority of Experience contained thirteen essays on specific works or writers of fiction and three of a more theoretical nature, trying to define feminist

⁹Susan Koppelman Cornillon, ed., Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1972); Josephine Donovan, ed., Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1975); Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards, eds., The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism (Boston: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1977); Cheryl L. Brown and Karen Olson, eds., Feminist Criticism: Essays on Theory, Poetry and Prose (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978); Mary Jacobus, ed., Women Writing and Writing About Women (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1979).

criticism. Feminist Criticism included reprinted articles from MLA meetings in 1971 as well as Annette Kolodny's "Some Notes on Defining a 'Feminist Literary Criticism'," which had originally been published in 1975. Women Writing and Writing About Women moved toward third stage criticism, with Mary Jacobus's "The Difference of View," which touched on French psychoanalytic theory and Laura Mulvey's "Feminism, Film and the Avant-garde," which brought film theory and semiotics into the discussion, along with Elaine Showalter's "Towards a Feminist Poetics." By the end of the 1970s a multiplicity of points of view began to emerge.

Four anthologies and one reader of feminist literary criticism and theory published in the 1980s,¹⁰ each with an informative introduction, make an excellent cross-section of work from the last fifteen years available to a wider audience than would ever have read the pieces when they were originally published in periodicals. The anthologies have already been referred to in Chapter 1 because they form much of the basis of defining feminist theory and criticism, not just of literature. Elizabeth Abel and Elaine Showalter

¹⁰Elizabeth Abel, ed., Writing and Sexual Difference (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982); Elaine Showalter, ed., The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory (N.Y.: Pantheon, 1985); Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, eds., Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism (N.Y.: Methuen, 1985); Nancy K. Miller, ed., The Poetics of Gender, Gender and Culture Series (N.Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986); Mary Eagleton, ed., Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader (Oxford, Eng./N.Y.: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

have edited anthologies which give a good selection of essays from the 1970s up to about 1982. Showalter's includes an excellent bibliography up to 1984. The Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn book contains more recent work and stresses cultural and other contexts rather than individual literary texts. Nancy Miller has edited papers given at one conference in 1984 and the contributors, including Gilbert and Gubar, are those on the cutting edge in their respective specialties. With this book there is a clear movement toward integration of Continental theories with Anglo-American to try to define more closely the effects of gender on a poetics of literature. The reader edited by Mary Eagleton contains by far the largest number of contributions (over sixty), but they are not dated and often cover only one or two pages each. It is difficult to grasp the context from which they come, but many hard-to-locate British sources are included and Eagleton has written a brief introduction to each of the five subdivisions of excerpts: Finding a Female Tradition, Women and Literary Production, Gender and Genre, Towards Definitions of Feminist Writing, and Do Women Write Differently? This is a book which should make some of the vast amount of critical literature accessible to the average student or non-specialist.

Several other anthologies of the 1980s show different directions taken by literary criticism and feminist thought which sometimes intersect in literature. One such direction

is that of "narrative strategies,"¹¹ specifically those used by women writers, which may or may not be addressed through feminist theory. Another trend is that of combining feminism and reader-response criticism,¹² taking into account the construction of the text by the reader reading it. A third trend might be called "critical studies" or "culture criticism,"¹³ in which several fields (such as history, science, literature and film) are studied in an interdisciplinary manner by means of feminist theory.

Two other trends of thought in literary studies, which have been used by both feminists and non-feminists in recent years, are canon-formation and deconstruction. A particularly heated and exemplary exchange about the canon took place in 1983-84 in Critical Inquiry.¹⁴ The issue of what qualifies as "good" literature is a basic one for

¹¹Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick, eds., Contemporary American Women Writers: Narrative Strategies (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1985).

¹²Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, eds., Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986).

¹³Teresa de Lauretis, ed., Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, Theories of Contemporary Culture Series, vol. 8 (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986).

¹⁴Christine Froula, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," Critical Inquiry 10 (December 1983): 321-347; Edward Pechter, "Critical Response I: When Pechter Reads Froula Pretending She's Eve Reading Milton; or, New Feminist Is But Old Priest Writ Large," CI 11 (September 1984): 163-170; Christine Froula, "Critical Response II: Pechter's Specter: Milton's Bogey Writ Small; or, Why Is He Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" CI 11 (September 1984): 171-178.

feminists, but the difficulty of changing attitudes toward what conventionally has been studied is great. As mentioned before, deconstruction is advocated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in a number of essays,¹⁵ and has its other supporters as well who are trying to adapt this man-made tool to feminist uses.¹⁶ These topics--narrativity, reader-response, critical studies, canon formation, and deconstruction--and others might be adapted by feminist critics for the analysis of drama. However, we should also consider the most influential liberal feminist literary critics so far.

After Kate Millett's radical start in 1970 with Sexual Politics, the most constructive liberal feminists included Ellen Moers, whose Literary Women traced a female tradition of novelists, and Elaine Showalter, whose A Literature of Their Own approached women novelists as a subculture which went through Feminine, Feminist, and Female stages of development. Most overviews point to Showalter and Annette Kolodny as the dominant, and contrasting, figures of the turn-of-the-decade period. Each wrote two essays which put

¹⁵Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Translator's Preface to Of Grammatology, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976); "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," in Displacement: Derrida and After, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1983); and "Feminism and Critical Theory," in For Alma Mater: Theory and Practice in Feminist Scholarship, ed. Paula Treichler, et al. (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1985).

¹⁶For example, Elizabeth A. Meese, Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986).

forth their theories.¹⁷ In brief, Showalter called for a "gynocritics," which would center on women's writing and not adapt male modes of criticism. Kolodny stressed "playful pluralism," which would allow a free interplay of ideas from many sources (including male modes). Each has had supporters and detractors. Both were influential, particularly in the 1970s, but the issues have gotten more diverse in the 1980s.

Finding a single, representative theorist/critic in feminist literary criticism to apply to drama was much more difficult than in the other three fields. Literary criticism frequently incorporates insights from other fields, such as Sedgwick's use of Rubin in Chapter 2, and so finding a uniquely "literary" theory is not easy to begin with. In third stage criticism the question of what exactly is literary criticism doing is being raised by feminist and other critics alike. But for second stage work, going back to my criteria for selection of the theory, I looked at how influential the theorist is within her own field and how fruitful her ideas are when applied to drama. Since there was no single essay with the impact of those of Rubin in

¹⁷Elaine Showalter, "Towards A Feminist Poetics" (1979) and "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981), and Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts" (1980) and "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism" (1980); all four in The New Feminist Criticism, ed. Showalter (N.Y.: Pantheon, 1985).

anthropology or Mulvey in film, I looked for someone with a body of work behind them, whose writing was not so narrowly focused as to be difficult to apply to other genres or periods, and who had dealt in some depth with the theory of what they were doing, as well as the specific applications so plentiful in the field.

Even so, the possibilities included Americans such as Showalter, Kolodny, Judith Kegan Gardiner, Nina Baym, and Nina Auerbach, as well as some British socialist feminists and some French feminists. In the end, the names which appeared most often in footnotes and whose work seemed to beg to be applied to drama was that of Gilbert and Gubar. Though they have written many articles, separately and together, the book with the most clearly articulated theory was The Madwoman in the Attic. Even within that book many ideas were developed which could have been focused upon, but I chose the use of imagery and literary conventions surrounding the madwoman and confinement because both have had frequent theatrical use. More than in any other field the choice of theory here is idiosyncratic and mine own, and is offered only as one example of how work using material from the field might proceed.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic¹⁸ is a second stage exploration of female tradition and traits of women's writing, concentrating on

¹⁸(New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1979). Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

nineteenth-century fiction and poetry. The core of their theory is contained in a chapter called "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship." They start by applying to women writers Harold Bloom's theory about the male writer and his "anxiety of influence," that is "his fear that he is not his own creator and that the works of his predecessors, existing before and beyond him, assume essential priority over his own writings" (46). Since most writers have been male, G. and G. find that the woman writer experiences an "anxiety of authorship" or "a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (49). Instead of struggling against her precursor's writing she struggles "against his reading of her," and seeks a female precursor who "proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible" (49). Contemporary women writers may feel less of this anxiety than women of earlier centuries because they have female precursors. For the nineteenth-century woman writer, however, this anxiety left a mark on her writing. One of these marks is the presence of illness, physical and mental, in their work. These illnesses include anorexia, agoraphobia, claustrophobia, blindness, aphasia, and amnesia (58). And while they "did not confess that they thought it might actually be mad of them to want to attempt the pen" (61), the figure of a madwoman did appear very often in their writing.

The way women dealt with their anxiety was by "revising male genres, using them to record their own dreams and their own stories in disguise." G. and G. call these works palimpsestic: "works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (73). Very often the madwoman appeared in these palimpsestic works, "not merely, as she might be in male literature, an antagonist or foil to the heroine," but as "the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage" (78). They see this mad double in so many women's novels that they feel it "links these nineteenth-century writers with such twentieth-century descendants as Virginia Woolf . . . Doris Lessing . . . and Sylvia Plath. . ." (78). The irony, of course, is that by "creating dark doubles for themselves and their heroines, women writers are both identifying with and revising the self-definitions patriarchal culture has imposed on them" (79). One of the best examples of the use of the mad double is that of Bertha Mason Rochester (a literal madwoman in the attic) in Jane Eyre (1847). In their detailed analysis of that novel, G. and G. point out the many ways in which Bertha does what Jane wishes she might do, "is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress" (360), and "not only acts for Jane, she also acts like Jane" (361). They conclude that "the literal and symbolic death of Bertha frees her [Jane] from the furies that torment her and makes possible

. . . wholeness within herself" (362).

Another device used in these palimpsestic works is that of confinement (and sometimes escape). Very often female characters felt space anxiety in houses or rooms of houses, and sometimes it was the madwoman who was so confined (Bertha was not only mad but confined to the attic of her husband's house). A paradigm of such imagery is "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1890) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in which a recent mother is confined to a garret room and forbidden to write as treatment for a nervous disorder. The woman worsens and eventually sees a woman locked behind the wallpaper of the room whom she helps escape by tearing off much of the wallpaper. Madness and confinement meet again in this story and together tell a powerful tale of female experience. This tale, however, is not one confined to the nineteenth century, or to women writers of prose. Of course male writers also used confinement imagery, but "The distinction between male and female images of imprisonment is . . . a distinction between, on the one hand, that which is both metaphysical and metaphorical, and on the other hand, that which is social and actual" (86). Women were actually under the control of fathers and husbands and their confinement imagery, particularly that concerning houses and rooms, was vivid in a way men's was not. This difference recurs more or less in the images of madwomen and confinement in plays written by both men and women in the 1970s and 1980s.

Madness is a rather common theatrical device in drama, particularly that of the twentieth century. However it has not been applied by male dramatists throughout history in the same way to male and to female characters, as G. and G. point out in an example contrasting Lear and Ophelia. One contemporary American play that includes a madwoman is John Guare's House of Blue Leaves (1971).¹⁹ It deals with the same triangle as Jane Eyre: husband, mad wife, and young woman about to become the next wife. The play's angle of vision, however, is as if written by Bertha and Rochester's son. This is the madwoman seen from the outside, stressing how those around her suffer from her madness. There is a similarity here to the way the mother is treated in O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night, a seminal play in modern American drama and one which might well provoke "anxiety of influence" in a playwright writing anytime after its publication. Mother is the object upon which male concern centers, but is not a full, speaking subject. The main story is the husband's or the son's and the mother is characterized as they see her, as she applies to their suffering.

In the case of Blue Leaves, it is a male-mid-life-crisis-triangle story in which zookeeper-songwriter-husband

¹⁹In The House of Blue Leaves and Two Other Plays (N.Y.: NAL Penguin, 1987). Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

Artie (the artist) wants to marry mistress Bunny, but suffers anger and guilt over the irrational behavior of his wife, Bananas. The play is a dark comedy, mixing farcical elements, having to do with the Pope's 1965 visit to New York City, with the Strindbergian love-hate relationship between Artie and Bananas. The day the Pope comes to town is the same day that Bananas finds out that Artie is planning to put her in an asylum and run away with Bunny.

Bananas is a well-observed character: she manifests clinical symptoms of disorder, including agoraphobia, blindness and amnesia. She acts like a crazy woman, but then so does Bunny. The difference is that Bunny is treated, by Artie and later Artie's friend Billy, as a sexually desirable woman. She freely gives her sexual favors, though she will not cook for Artie until they are married. Bunny sees Bananas as a sick wife in a movie, victimizing her husband: "You live in wheel chairs just to hold your husband and the minute your husband's out of the room, you're hopped out of your wheel chair doing the Charleston and making a general spectacle of yourself" (32). This image is clearly at odds with what the audience sees of Bananas, yet Bunny is not considered by the play to be crazy. Bananas complains about the shock treatments she has had that, "At least the concentration camps . . . they put the people in the ovens and never took them out--but the shock treatments--they put you in the oven and then they take you out and then they put you in and then they take you

out..." (34). Bunny then relates a fan magazine article about "Sandra Dee's Night of Hell," in which the star needed hair curlers. To Bananas Bunny says, "Suffering--you don't even know the meaning of suffering. You're a nobody and you suffer like a nobody" (35). This exchange develops the play's theme of celebrity and fame as American values, but also points up that the inappropriate person is being put into the asylum. The two women provide comic incongruity, but Bunny gets to be a much more active subject in the play than Bananas, who is a passive figure of comic pathos.

Bananas performs, at times, the function of the wise fool, a time-honored dramatic tradition. These are her most active moments, but they serve the plot or theme of the play, or point up Artie's predicament, more than they allow Bananas to speak as her own subject. In the second act, Artie is playing songs he has written and wants to sell to his friend Billy, a Hollywood director. Bananas asks Artie to play his song "I Love You So I Keep Dreaming," which he does, and then makes him play "White Christmas," which he does, and then he realizes they are both the same tune. Artie has insisted Bananas is tone deaf, but she is right about this. Artie cannot take the truth, and as Bananas bangs on the piano, Artie "slams the lid shut on her hand. She yells and licks her fingers to get the pain off them" (63). At this point Artie decides Bananas has "had it" and calls the asylum to pick her up. Bananas has told the truth and gotten punished for it, but the play's action and the

most complexly presented suffering belong to Artie.

Near the beginning of the play, both Artie and Bananas talk about their dreams. Artie's major (waking) dream is the one that dominates the action of the play: to go to Hollywood with Bunny and become a famous Hollywood songwriter. When he relates a (sleeping) dream it is that his son Ronnie is the Pope arriving that day, "and I felt like Joseph P. Kennedy, only bigger, because the Pope is a bigger draw than any President." And when Ronnie drove along Queens Boulevard he stopped and let his father into the limo, but not Bananas. "Your own son denied you. Slammed the door in your face and you had open-toe shoes on and the water ran in the heels and out the toes like two Rin Tin Tins taking a leak. . ." (28). In comparison Bananas says, "I dream I'm just waking up and I roam around the house all day crying because of the way my life turned out. And then I do wake up and what do I do? Roam around the house all day crying about the way my life turned out" (29). Just after this Artie "feeds" Bananas, who sits on her haunches and catches the food he throws to her. Artie complains, "Work all day in a zoo. Come home to a zoo," but does it and suffers: "(Artie buries his head against the icebox)" (30). Artie speaks and acts out his dreams, while Bananas dreams only of real life and acts crazy to accommodate Artie's suffering. "Human" truth seems to be portrayed, but the madwoman figure is here more "an antagonist or foil to the heroine" (and hero), as G. and G.

would describe it, than a speaking, acting subject. By the end of the play Billy has taken Bunny from Artie and leaves money for Bananas to be taken care of at home. Left alone together, Bananas promises Artie to be different, but quickly takes once more her dog-like pose. Artie pats her, kisses her. "As his hands go softly on her throat, she looks up at him with a beautiful smile as if she had always been waiting for this." As Bananas smiles, Artie strangles her (86). This is a madwoman whose feelings are spoken for her, in a voiceless stage direction, and whose death seems desired and inevitable, if unjust.

Confinement is another image in many contemporary plays, for example Sam Shepard's Fool for Love (1983).²⁰ The set is a single motel room in which the lead characters, Eddie and May, fight and love, creeping along walls and banging their heads on them. The first half of this long one-act play is devoted to sparring between the two, often keeping to separate sides of the room, slamming out of each of two doors, banging them loudly behind them. The figure of "The Old Man," who halfway through reveals he is the father of both lovers by different mothers, exists on his own platform just outside the confines of the room. When May's "date" Martin enters the room, Eddie threatens him and prevents his escape, once again using the walls to good effect. The climax of the play is a monologue by Eddie,

²⁰In Fool for Love and Other Plays (N.Y.: Bantam, 1984).

performed as he walks around the edges of the room dragging Martin with him, followed by a monologue by May, in which she "finishes the story" of their respective mothers and their love. In the end the lovers kiss, Eddie leaves to check an explosion outside, and May packs, ostensibly to follow Eddie. The play raises interesting issues of narrativity, in the various divisions of the "life story" that is told by the three main characters, as well as the same issue of the "exchange of women" that appears between father and son in Death of a Salesman. However, it is also a good example of male use of the image of confinement.

As Gilbert and Gubar would say, this is a use which is "both metaphysical and metaphorical," rather than "social and actual." There is never any question that confinement can be escaped, especially by the male character. From the beginning of the play Eddie dominates the half of the room which contains the door to the outside. May's side contains the door to the bathroom. Both use those doors and both slam those doors, but Eddie's slam contains within it the constant possibility of escape. The "actual" state of confinement is never really seen or felt on the stage, but rather toyed with and "metaphorically" indicated. It is dramatized by one who has never really had to be in a room to which he did not have the key right in his pocket. Confinement, as well as the madwoman figure, is shown very differently by Maria Irene Fornes. Three of Fornes's plays make extensive use of both the madwoman figure and

confinement: Fefu and Her Friends (1977), Sarita (1984), and The Conduct of Life (1985). Fornes, who began writing in the 1960s and is a pioneering figure in the Off-off-Broadway movement, is a native Cuban who has written plays in both English and Spanish. Her work from Fefu on has developed what Bonnie Marranca calls "a new language of dramatic realism" and an approach to characterization in which "it is the characters themselves who appear to be thinking, not the author having thought." Marranca goes on to describe Fornes's work:

She has freed characters from explaining themselves in a way that attempts to suggest interpretations of their actions, and put them in scenes that create a single emotive moment, as precise in what it does not articulate as in what does get said.

. . . She writes sentences, not paragraphs. Her language is a model of direct address, it has the modesty of a writer for whom English is a learned language. She is unique in the way she writes about sexuality, in a tender way that accents sexual feelings, not sex as an event. . . .

Fornes's work has a warm delicacy and grace that distinguish it from most of what is written today. Apart from her plays there is little loveliness in the theatre.²¹

Fefu and Her Friends²² has a cast of eight women, has very little conventional plot, and takes place in five separate audience/stage spaces. The setting is described as follows:

²¹"The Real Life of Maria Irene Fornes," in Theatre writings (N.Y.: Performing Arts Journal, 1984), pp. 69-72.

²²In Wordplays (N.Y.: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1980). Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

New England, Spring 1935

Part I. Noon. The living room. The entire audience watches from the auditorium.

Part II. Afternoon. The lawn, the study, the bedroom, the kitchen. The audience is divided into four groups. Each group is guided to the spaces. These scenes are performed simultaneously. When the scenes are completed the audience moves to the next space and the scenes are performed again. This is repeated four times until each group has seen all four scenes.

Part III. Evening. The living room. The entire audience watches from the auditorium (6).

The house is Fefu's and the other characters are women who gather there to discuss a fundraising program for a vaguely defined cause related to education. The action of the play is the interactions of the women over the course of one afternoon and evening. It demonstrates the synapses between women when they are not with men. As Fefu says early in the play:

Women are restless with each other. They are like live wires ... either chattering to keep themselves from making contact, or else, if they don't chatter, they avert their eyes ... like Orpheus ... as if a god once said "and if they shall recognize each other, the world will be blown apart." They are always eager for the men to arrive. When they do, they can put themselves at rest, tranquilized and in a mild stupor. With the men they feel safe. The danger is gone. That's the closest they can be to feeling wholesome. Men are the muscle that cover the raw nerve. They are the insulators. The danger is gone, but the price is the mind and the spirit ... High price [author's ellipses] (13).

The play itself proceeds to dramatize a bit of that "danger" that occurs when female raw nerves are not insulated by men.

Part of the play's effect has to do with the close proximity of the audience to the performers in the smaller, enclosed spaces of the scenes in Part II. Audience on two

of the four sides of each room seem to "eavesdrop" on the conversations that take place there, more intimate than in the other two parts. The audience is split up, has to move around physically, must become active in order to see the entire performance. This unusual use of space has been remarked upon in criticism of the play, but has not seemed to have an influence on many other plays. It is one of many ideas this play presents which might profitably be explored by other writers, as well as critics. It is a play that must be experienced to be fully comprehended. The special effect of four scenes going on simultaneously, with sound seeping out from one room into others, with characters from each space entering briefly into other spaces, seen as leaving from one scene and then arriving from another. This multiplicity and simultaneity are traits that French feminism associates with women. But the play also demonstrates a woman's use of the madwoman.

The character of Julia enters Part I in a wheelchair and another character describes how Julia fell down at the same moment a hunter shot a deer, and from that moment has not been able to walk. While delirious, Julia said "That she was persecuted.--That they tortured her.... That they had tried her and that the shot was her execution. That she recanted because she wanted to live..." (15). Fefu recalls that years ago Julia "was afraid of nothing," and that "she knew so much." In Part II in the bedroom, as the stage direction says, "Julia hallucinates. However, her behavior

should not be the usual behavior attributed to a mad person" (23). In her monologue, Julia relates persecution such as was described in Part I. She was beaten, but never stopped smiling. She recites: "I'm not smart. I never was. Neither is Fefu smart. They are after her too. Well she's still walking!" She guards herself from a blow. Later she says, "Why do you have to kill Fefu, for she's only a joker? 'Not kill, cure. Cure her.' Will it hurt? (She whimpers.) Oh, dear, dear, my dear, they want your light" (24-5). She then recites a prayer which gives many of the reasons man has considered woman evil. Julia finally says, "They say when I believe the prayer I will forget the judges. And when I forget the judges I will believe the prayer. They say both happen at once. And all women have done it. Why can't I?" (25). In Part III, after a rehearsal of the fundraising "show," Julia has a long speech in which she says, "Something rescues us from death every moment of our lives," and that she has been rescued by "guardians." However, she is afraid one day they will fail and "I will die ... for no apparent reason" (35). Later on, Fefu, alone on stage, sees Julia walk, and seconds later Julia reenters in her wheelchair. Near the end, Fefu and Julia struggle, Fefu telling her to try to walk and to fight. Julia says she is afraid her madness is contagious and tries to keep away from Fefu. Fefu wants to put her mind to rest and loses courage when Julia looks at her. She finally asks Julia to "Forgive me if you can," and Julia says "I forgive

you." (40) Fefu gets a shotgun used earlier in the play, goes out, a shot is heard, Julia's hand goes to her forehead and as it drops, blood is seen, and Julia's head drops. Fefu enters with a dead rabbit and all the women surround the dead Julia.

This series of scenes establishes the "madwoman" Julia as Fefu's double. The play itself, taking place less than ninety years after Jane Eyre, has a certain "feel" of the nineteenth century and there are striking similarities between Fefu/Julia and Jane/Bertha. Julia acts out the repressed, angry side of Fefu by struggling with the "guardians," and perhaps her death frees Fefu at the end of the play. But Fornes is a twentieth-century woman. The play is as if written by Jane and Bertha, with Rochester pushed offstage, his control lessened by his absence. Julia is not in the attic, but more a "madwoman in the spotlight," speaking the truth for herself as subject alternately with speaking the text of male conventional attitudes about women in her "prayer." Fefu and Julia together, overtly bonded and overtly in conflict, make an open statement of women's predicament using the public forum of the theatre.

In the end, Fefu does what Julia cannot--acts. In both Fefu and House of Blue Leaves the madwoman is killed. In Fefu, however, she is killed by her double. She is not "put out of her misery" by the man whose life her madness interferes with, but by the woman whose life she doubles. This action has many possible interpretations. For Helene

Keyssar, "Julia chooses not to fight but to yield. Fefu, however, will not let Julia go. Unable to reinvigorate her friend verbally, Fefu moves to Julia's symbolic terrain and shoots a rabbit." The meaning of this act for Keyssar is that, "Symbolically at least, and on stage where all things are possible, the woman-as-victim must be killed in her own terms in order to ignite the explosion of a community of women."²³ For Beverley Byers Pevitts, "if we recognize ourselves as women, 'the world will be blown apart.' When this does happen, the reflection that was made by others will be destroyed and we will be able to rebuild ourselves in our own image." Julia, then, "is the character who is symbolically killed in the end of the play so that the new image of herself can emerge."²⁴

The use of confinement in the play is also both like and unlike its use in nineteenth-century fiction. On the stage confinement is a visual, visceral reality. In Part II of Fefu the audience is confined, along with the actors, in the separate spaces of a woman's house. In the bedroom there is a particular sense of confinement because it is, "A plain unpainted room. Perhaps a room that was used for storage and was set up as a sleeping place for Julia. There is a mattress on the floor" (23). In its original production, this was the smallest space in the play and with

²³Keyssar, p. 125.

²⁴"Fefu and Her Friends," in Women in American Theatre, ed. Chinoy and Jenkins (N.Y.: Crown, 1981), p. 319.

the same number of audience members in the space as had been in larger spaces, there was a greater sense of confinement associated with Julia than with the other characters. As has been mentioned, there is a contrasting sense of escape or release for Julia at the end of the play, which is underlined by the audience's memory of her in that cramped bedroom. By making the audience experience crowding, the play does indeed show the metaphor to be "social and actual," as Gilbert and Gubar say of women's use of the image. Unlike Fool for Love, the confinement here is not "metaphysical and metaphorical;" Julia does not possess the ability to leave the room. The presence of Julia's wheelchair in the small bedroom crowds the audience closer together and visually reminds them that Julia possesses no "key" out of this confinement.

Two other plays by Fornes, both included in a volume of her plays published in 1986,²⁵ also make good use of the madwoman figure and the image of confinement on stage. Sarita (1984) tells the story of an Hispanic girl of thirteen from the South Bronx, who passionately loves a boy who is habitually unfaithful to her. Over the course of the eight years of the play (1939-1947) Sarita is loved by a young soldier, but is drawn back to her obsessive former love until she is driven to kill him and go mad. The play takes place in twenty short scenes over two acts, with the

²⁵Maria Irene Fornes: Plays (N.Y.: PAJ Publications, 1986). Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

inclusion of many songs with lyrics written by Fornes. While the story itself may seem familiar in outline, it seems fresh because told from the point of view of the young woman involved. Rather than seeing how the madwoman affects the lives of those around her, we see how events and emotions make a lovely young woman go mad. Sarita is her own subject, speaking and acting for herself. The scenes between Sarita and her lover take place in a narrow, box-like kitchen area above and behind the main stage area. The kitchen is the space in which Sarita is confined, waiting for the return of her lover, and suffering the pangs of sexual longing. She does not enter or leave this space, but is simply there when the lights come up. Her "social and actual" confinement is keenly portrayed.

The Conduct of Life (1985) also portrays the confinement of a young Hispanic woman, played in the original production by the same actress, Sheila Dabney, who won an Obie award for her performance as the original Sarita. Conduct features a trio of women who are in subservient positions in the house of a Latin American army officer, Orlando. The most confined of the trio is Nena, a young street girl Orlando picked up and brought first to a warehouse, then to his cellar, to sexually abuse and sometimes feed. The other two women are Olimpia, a servant in the house who sometimes works or plays with Nena, and Leticia, Orlando's wife, who thinks she is a mother figure to Orlando. Over the course of nineteen scenes, with no

intermission, set in the present but visually presented as anytime from the 1940s onward, the audience sees Orlando brutalize Nena in the name of love and sexuality, and drive his wife to shoot him at the end. Again, Nena is confined in a box-like space above and behind the main stage area, and then is brought down into the cellar area. Again, her confinement is actual and cannot be escaped. But in this play the similarities among Nena, Leticia, and Olimpia present a different view of women as subjects under subjugation.

From the beginning of the play, madness is discussed. In her first speech, to Orlando and his male friend, Alejo, Leticia says she would throw herself in front of a deer to prevent its being killed by "mad hunters," and Orlando responds with, "You don't think that is madness? She's mad. Tell her that--she'll think it's you who's mad." When Orlando leaves, Leticia confesses to Alejo:

He told me that he didn't love me, and that his sole relationship to me was simply a marital one. What he means is that I am to keep this house, and he is to provide for it. That's what he said. That explains why he treats me the way he treats me. I never understood why he did, but now it's clear. He doesn't love me (69).

In the next scene Orlando brings Nena into the warehouse room. The scene is brief--a few words and then:

(He grabs her and pushes her against the wall. He pushes his pelvis against her. He moves to the chair dragging her with him. She crawls to the left, pushes the table aside and stands behind it. He walks around the table. She goes under it. He grabs her foot and pulls her out toward the downstage side. He opens his fly and pushes his pelvis against her. Lights fade to

black) (70).

In the next scene Olimpia is introduced through a long monologue in which she tells Leticia, in detail, what she does in order to prepare breakfast for the family in the morning. The accumulation of detail is comical, but the link between the two women is established clearly, as both women must "keep this house," while Orlando is oblivious to what either is doing or thinking. The two women bicker over what is to be served for lunch and dinner, Olimpia asserting her will point for point with Leticia. Though Olimpia is the servant, Leticia is only the "boss" in that she holds the power to hand money to Olimpia to go shopping at the end of the scene. Orlando forces sex on Nena two more times, the second time reaching orgasm and then giving her food and milk. The lines of similarity among the three women become clearer as the scenes progress. When Leticia goes away on a trip, Orlando slips Nena into the house and down to the cellar. Orlando and Alejo talk about a man Orlando interrogated and who is dead. Orlando insists he just stopped him from screaming and then he died. He does not see himself as being the cause. The connection between political torture and subjugation of women is made by the juxtaposed, rapidly intercut scenes.

Leticia senses there is a woman in the house to whom Orlando is making love, and she feels there is nothing she can do. Orlando tells Nena that "What I do to you is out of love. Out of want. It's not what you think. I wish you

didn't have to be hurt" (82). Leticia pleads with Orlando "Don't make her scream," and Orlando responds, "You're crazy" (82). Then he says "She's going to be a servant here," and in the next scene Nena is cleaning beans with Olimpia and speaking, for the first time at length, about her grandfather and how Orlando found her and "did things" to her (83-84). Nena sounds like Julia in Fefu when she says he beats her "Because I'm dirty," and "The dirt won't go away from inside me" (84). Leticia feels he is becoming more violent because of his job. The three women sit together at a table at the end of one scene. In the final scene, Orlando forces Leticia to say she has a lover and to make up details of their meeting. When Orlando physically hurts Leticia, she screams and then, "She goes to the telephone table, opens the drawer, takes a gun and shoots Orlando. Orlando falls dead. . . . Leticia . . . puts the revolver in Nena's hand and steps away from her." Leticia asks "Please ..." and Nena "looks at the gun. Then, up. The lights fade" (88).

The play is over. The doubled madwomen figures have come together, one acting for the other as well as herself, then asking of the confined woman help in ending her own torment. The release here is different from that at the end of Fefu. The killing of the intolerable lover is more complex than that in Sarita. Women are linked by their subjugated roles. The actions of the man makes them mad, but they manage both to act and connect despite their

madness and confinement. And a connection is made between the man's self-deception about what he is doing to the women and the nature of violence in the wider political realm. In this case a woman has written that rare breed of play: one about relationships among women, relations between the sexes, and the connections between these interpersonal issues and broader social issues.

By applying feminist literary criticism to these few plays we find that at least some women use some images and literary conventions differently than some men writing at around the same time. While definitive conclusions are difficult to draw, the tools that feminist theorists and critics in the field have developed are useful for looking at drama as well as prose, particularly at the first and second stages. For the third stage, however, feminist film criticism and its work on representation is even more useful.

CHAPTER 5

FEMINIST FILM CRITICISM: REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND THIRD STAGE CRITICISM

Film theory in general has developed along lines very different from those of theatre and the two have not often intersected. Feminist theory is probably more fully developed in film than elsewhere, partly because of the strong theoretical orientation of the field. But feminist film theory has only begun to be applied to theatre. In this chapter I shall give an overview of the field, and focus on Laura Mulvey's influential essay of 1975, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." I shall then briefly describe some of the work by two feminist theatre critics that approaches the representation of women on the stage through some aspects of feminist film theory. Finally, I shall apply feminist film theory to recent plays by David Mamet and David Rabe and to two recent plays by women, one by a playwright and one by a performance group.

What I would describe as third stage feminist film criticism began in Britain in the early 1970s, around the

same time as the publication of the two American books I have already mentioned as being first stage: Popcorn Venus (1973) and From Reverence to Rape (1974). An early overview essay in 1976 in fact mentions only those two books and one other, before going on to point out their shortcomings and recommending new directions for feminist film criticism. The writers reflect the socialist-feminist view of many British women writing about film:

In summary, then, it is in three areas that we feel feminist criticism must become articulate: a historical-economic analysis of our society, an awareness of the broad range of possibilities in the relationship between art and ideology, and a grasp of the visual as well as narrative language of film.¹

These points are repeated many times by various socialist-feminist writers up to the present.

Two years later, Christine Gledhill wrote a much more detailed overview, summarizing the British socialist-feminist work that had appeared to that point in journals such as Screen, Camera Obscura, Women and Film, and Jump Cut. The main theorist-critics she considers are Claire Johnston, Pam Cook, and Laura Mulvey. The essay is useful in that it summarizes background theory of figures in the three main fields which film theory uses: Barthes (semiotics), Althusser (Marxism), and Lacan (psychoanalysis). She also gives the main trends of thought in a number of essays by the women critics and her own thoughts on directions for the

¹Janey Place and Julianne Burton, "Feminist Film Criticism," Movie, no. 22 (Spring 1976): 62.

field's future. This detailed picture of where feminist film criticism was in 1978 seems light-years ahead of where feminist theatre criticism is a decade later. She virtually negates the possibility of first and second stage criticism:

For our purposes there are two questions: What is the relation of women to language as speaking subject? What is the role of the representation of women in cultural artifacts? Put simply: Can women speak, and can images of women speak for women? The answers seem negative.²

Gledhill shows how feminist film criticism has shifted focus from the content of films (such as the image-of-women analyses) to the form and mechanism of films, and the relation of these forms to ideology. She does see some dangers:

The ultimate problem, it seems to me, lies in the attempt to make language and the signifying process so exclusively central to the production of the social formation. Under the insistence on the semiotic production of meaning, the effectivity of social, economic, and political practice threatens to disappear altogether. . . . to say that language has a determining effect on society is a different matter from saying that society is nothing but its languages and signifying practices.³

Gledhill's disquiet with the over-use of semiotics is echoed in reference to psychoanalysis by Lucie Arbuthnot in her 1982 dissertation, referred to in Chapter 1. She also summarizes the work in semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, but in this case concentrates on the uses of the tools by women film theorists:

²"Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism," Quarterly Review of Film Studies 3 (Fall 1978): 479.

³Ibid., p. 491.

There are three general, and frequently overlapping, categories in which feminist critics have most frequently used semiology. First . . . in the examination of the relationship of the photographic image to reality. . . . Second . . . denotative meaning (its surface representation) and its connotative meaning (its meaning based on cultural assumptions and beliefs of both the image-maker and of the viewer). Third, . . . to amplify their understanding of the role of the viewer in creating the meaning of the image or film.⁴

She finds that Marxism has been used to help "solidify the commitment of American feminists to an awareness of the influence of race and class on artists and their art (191)," but that "European Marxist-feminists have turned progressively to psychoanalysis" (190). This turn is something Arbuthnot views with mixed feelings.

Like Marxism before it, psychoanalysis seemed to offer an alternative to the early absence of a cogent feminist theoretical framework. But in its present form it can only adequately account for the male film-viewing experience. To explore from a psychoanalytic perspective the female film-viewing experience means starting afresh. Already Nancy Chodorow's work gives us some clues to the question of positive identification for women. . . (216).

In describing the field of psychoanalysis in film Arbuthnot starts, as so many others do, with Laura Mulvey, whose 1975 essay she calls "the single most influential point of departure in feminist psychoanalytic criticism and theory in both Britain and the United States" (193). Though she eventually criticizes the approach, she cannot deny Mulvey's influence.

Three years later, Judith Mayne echoed Arbuthnot in

⁴Arbuthnot, pp. 151-152. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

her Review Essay in Signs: "It is only a slight exaggeration to say that most feminist film theory and criticism of the last decade has been a response, implicit or explicit, to the issues raised in Laura Mulvey's article."⁵ Mayne's summary of work in the same three fields previously mentioned is one of the most concise:

Central to each is an issue of representation. According to the semioticians, film was to be understood as a systematic network of binary oppositions, organized metaphorically, if not literally, like language. Marxists, especially those influenced by the work of Louis Althusser, stressed that ideology was a function of representation, and the function of film as an ideological medium would be evaluated in terms of its forms of address to the spectator. And psychoanalytic critics, particularly those following Jacques Lacan, insisted that the look, and therefore the structure of point of view, was central in filmic identification, here understood as an imaginary coherence of the subject (85).

Mayne stresses not trying to reconcile all the contradictions in the field, but trying to examine the tensions and to "rethink dualism itself" (86). Pointing toward the future, she mentions the trend of "understanding film in a more broadly cultural sense" and trying "to get beyond dualistic categories while understanding their power to attract" (99). What Mayne does not consider are the several anthologies of essays, some of which were not yet available to her in 1985.

Though a large amount of the most important work in

⁵"Review Essay: Feminist Film Theory and Criticism," Signs 11 (Autumn 1985): 83. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

feminist film theory has, since the early 1970s, appeared in periodicals, beginning in 1973 a number of anthologies of essays were published.⁶ One of the most interesting of these is Women in Film Noir, edited by E. Ann Kaplan,⁷ a collection of original essays on the noir form of Hollywood's 1940s and 1950s. Most of the contributors and the publisher were British, but the collection got distribution in the United States and, partly because of its subject, found a wide enough audience to support a revised edition two years later and several reprintings. Contributors such as Christine Gledhill, Pam Cook, and Claire Johnston did close psychoanalytic-socialist-feminist readings of individual films and drew some general conclusions about the ambiguity for feminists of a form in which dangerous women are so prominent.

The most recent anthology is Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism, edited by Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams, which contains three essays previously published (by Gledhill, Mayne, and B. Ruby Rich) and four (by editors Doane and Williams, Kaja Silverman and Teresa de Lauretis) which were given at a conference in 1981 and then revised. The introduction by the editors gives a

⁶Claire Johnston, ed., Notes on Women's Cinema (London: Society for Education in Film and Television, 1973); Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary, eds., Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology (N.Y.: Dutton, 1977); and Patricia Erens, ed., Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film (N.Y.: Horizon Press, 1979).

⁷(London: British Film Institute, 1978).

chronology of the feminist film movement and an overview of the split within the critical part of that movement between those who stress sexual difference and those who do not, often called "essentialists" and "anti-essentialists." This split has some of the same elements as that between radical and liberal feminism. As the editors point out:

One can thus trace a marked movement within feminist [film] theory over the past decade from an analysis of difference as oppressive to a delineation and specification of difference as liberating, as offering the only possibility of radical change. However, the dangers of such a valorization of feminity as difference or heterogeneity are clear.⁸

The need for a socialist, or materialist, aspect to feminist film theory is strongly felt here, as it is among the British critics. The dilemma of "the dangers of essentialism" versus what I would call "where do you start if you don't say women are essentially different from men?" is one which is constantly referred to, and worked upon, especially in film. It might even be seen as the most basic "project" of feminist criticism. However, even without the resolution of this dilemma, there are many useful insights gained from film work that are applicable to theatre. For instance, the editors point out as one of the limits of "image" criticism that, "In film even the most blatant stereotype is naturalized by a medium that presents a

⁸American Film Institute monograph series, vol. 3 (Los Angeles: University Publications of America/American Film Institute, 1984), p. 12.

convincing illusion of a flesh and blood woman."⁹ It might be added that in theatre it is naturalized by a flesh and blood woman. This use of live actors as "signs" is part of the work taken up by theatrical semiotics.

In the 1980s three books by single authors (Annette Kuhn, E. Ann Kaplan and Teresa de Lauretis) have had great influence on the field. Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema by Annette Kuhn¹⁰ relates feminism and film through two major tasks: Part III is titled "Rereading dominant cinema: Feminism and film theory" and Part IV is called "Replacing dominant cinema: Feminism and film practice." This book in effect combines a third stage approach with the tasks of first and second stage criticism, summarizing previous work and applying her own amalgamation to some specific films. The emphasis is heavily theoretical, with a glossary of terms and large bibliography at the end. A review of the book in Camera Obscura, like many such reviews in feminist film publications, carries on a dialogue with the book, agreeing and disagreeing, describing and criticizing:

Kuhn eliminates very little from the purview of her topic. She covers the field of film theory, notes remaining problems, calls for additional work to expand the outer limits of feminist theory, and perceives from a "meta-level" the implications of putting together the components of her book: feminism and cinema, theory and practice, feminist and non-feminist contemporary theory. One reads with the impression that she has answered all

⁹Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

possible inconsistencies, stopped up every logical hole. The style of the book is precise, reasoned, and well-orchestrated.

Commendable as these attributes are, they contribute to an overall problem: the clarity of the book is, in some places, deceptive. Genuine difficulties in the literature and politics of Kuhn's subject get glossed over.¹¹

Difficulties may be minimized, but the book is readable, which is more than can be said for others. Kuhn continues to write--both articles and a book of essays have been published since Women's Pictures.¹²

The year after Kuhn's book, E. Ann Kaplan published a book similar in some respects: Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera.¹³ Kaplan, who displays a more American bias than Kuhn's British one, also divides her book into two sections: "The classical and contemporary Hollywood cinema" and "The independent feminist film." Her first chapter asks in its title the key question, "Is the Gaze Male?" and answers in the affirmative for most Hollywood films. She quotes Laura Mulvey to the effect that these films construct male subjects gazing at female objects on three levels: characters within the film, the camera's "eye," and spectators looking at the film. Kaplan, like Kuhn, gives

¹¹Janet Walker, "Review of Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema by Annette Kuhn," Camera Obscura, no. 12 (Summer 1984): 144-156.

¹²For example, "Women's Genres: Melodrama, Soap Opera and Theory," Screen 25 (Jan.-Feb., 1984): 18-28; and the book The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

¹³(London and N.Y.: Methuen, 1983).

definitions and summarizes key theorists, but a much larger proportion of her book, in both sections, is devoted to close, "against the grain" reading of specific films. The book comes out of Kaplan's college teaching and is aimed at course use, with large filmographies and bibliography at the end. Her particular interest is the representation of motherhood and using that subject as a way to approach films in a feminist manner. Kaplan's book has stirred debate, and she has replied to criticisms about it being on the wrong side of the essentialist question, though it is perceived as being both pro and con, depending on the critic read.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is a good introduction to the issues involved in representation and feminism and raises many interesting questions.

The third influential book published in the 1980s is Teresa de Lauretis's Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema.¹⁵ As the subtitle indicates, her subject is semiotics and her approach differs from that of the other two books. In a series of six essays she touches on many theorists in a wide range of fields, but there is little defining or summarizing. This is a book for people who are

¹⁴See especially Diane Waldman and Janet Walker, "Is the Gaze Maternal?: E. Ann Kaplan's Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera," Camera Obscura, no. 13-14 (Spring-Summer 1985): 195-214; Rosemary Betterton, "A Question of Difference: Reviews of Women and Film and 'Re-vision,'" Screen 26 (May-Aug. 1985): 102-109; and E. Ann Kaplan, "The Hidden Agenda: Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism," Camera Obscura, no. 13-14 (Spring-Summer 1985): 235-249.

¹⁵(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

already more than a little familiar with semiotics and psychoanalysis, and for that reason and because of her writing style the book may be inaccessible to many people. For instance, from her introduction:

The second project of this work is to confront those texts and discourses with feminist theory and its articulation of what is at issue in cultural notions of femininity, the working of desire in narrative, the configurations of affective investment in cinematic identification and spectatorship, or the mutual overdetermination of meaning, perception, and experience.¹⁶

I find myself agreeing with one reviewer of the book who found de Lauretis's task of restructuring the field of semiotics for feminist use "in order to make possible the theorisation of an active female subject" a laudable one, but who asks "whether, in fact, we really need all of this weight and complexity of theorisation in order to reach a position similar to that finally reached in Alice Doesn't."¹⁷ De Lauretis continues to publish articles, which are generally more accessible than those in the book.¹⁸ Semiotics may be on the cutting edge of feminist film criticism, but it needs writers who can make its ideas more

¹⁶Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁷Susannah Radstone, " 'Woman' to Women: Review of Alice Doesn't by Teresa de Lauretis," Screen 26 (May-Aug. 1985): 111-112.

¹⁸For example "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema," New German Critique, no. 34 (Winter 1985): 154-175, and "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts," in Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, ed. de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 1-19.

accessible in order to be of optimal use in theatre.

Two more recent books have also contributed. Film Feminisms: Theory and Practice by Mary C. Gentile¹⁹ is a published dissertation divided into the two parts indicated in its subtitle. Part I summarizes feminist and non-feminist film theories and does not fear being "prescriptive" by offering suggestions for future directions for feminist film theory. Part II applies her amalgamated theory to four specific films. The Pornography of Representation by Susanne Kappeler,²⁰ on the other hand, is divided into thirteen "problems" rather than chapters, and addresses itself to both the narrower topic of pornography and the broader topic to which all the other writers have addressed themselves: the representation of women in film. Feminist film theory goes on, but it is time for theatre to enter the fray and use some of these same ideas in relation to live performance. One way to begin is to consider the essay cited more often than any other, that of Laura Mulvey.

Mulvey is both a theoretician and a filmmaker, and her writing style is relatively jargon-free and accessible. That she successfully summarizes a number of rather complex theories in limited space may partly account for the extensive citation by other critics of her article "Visual

¹⁹Contributions in Women's Studies, no. 56. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985).

²⁰(Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."²¹ Like Gayle Rubin's in anthropology, Mulvey's article seems an ur-text in the field of feminist film theory and criticism, especially for those who favor the psychoanalytic approach. Even those who oppose such an approach use Mulvey's article as the thesis with which to disagree. Its appearance rather early on in the chronology of feminist theorizing also helped make it the text with which to reckon.

The article is divided into four parts:

I. Introduction; II. Pleasure in Looking--Fascination with the Human Form; III. Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look; and IV. Summary. She says immediately that she is using psychoanalytic theory "as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form" (361). In her second paragraph she summarizes psychoanalysis as it applies to cinema: "the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is twofold; she first symbolizes the castration threat by her real absence of a penis and second thereby raises her child into the symbolic" (361). After a little more explanation she admits that psychoanalysis is itself a tool of patriarchy, but defends its use for studying the status quo in order to break out of it. She also anticipates many of her critics by listing some of the things she will not be

²¹In Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, ed. Brian Wallis (Boston: David R. Godine, 1984), pp. 361-373; reprinted from Screen 16 (Autumn 1975): 6-18. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

dealing with: "the sexing of the female infant and her relationship to the symbolic, the sexually mature woman as nonmother, maternity outside the signification of the phallus, the vagina..." (362). She is once again clear about her aim: "It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this essay. . . . to make way for a total negation of the ease and plentitude of the narrative fiction film" (363).

In section II Mulvey explains Freud's notion of scopophilia, or "the voyeuristic activities of children, their desire to see and make sure of the private and the forbidden . . . genital and bodily functions, about the presence or absence of the penis" (363). She summarizes some then-current non-feminist film theory which links watching film with this scopophilic pleasure, the magic world which unwinds in the light while the audience is at a distance in the dark, looking at it. She then describes the Lacanian mirror stage and the narcissism that results from the child seeing its own image reflected. In short, the "two contradictory aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation" are the scopophilic, which "arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight," and the narcissistic, which "comes from identification with the image seen" (365).

In section III she goes on to show how, for the male spectator, these lead to the objectification of the female

and identification with the male protagonist on screen. The woman as object works on two levels: "as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium." Because "the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification," the main protagonist is usually male and has the role of "forwarding the story, making things happen" (367). And in order to deal with the male audience's castration anxiety, the female object is either devalued, punished, or saved; or turned into a fetish. Mulvey then uses examples from the work of von Sternberg and Hitchcock to clearly and convincingly demonstrate her points.

In her summary, she admits that the psychoanalytic explanation of the representation of woman she has discussed is not intrinsic to film, but that unlike theatre's objectification of woman,

cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. It is these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged (372-373).

The voyeuristic "gaze" or "look" that she has described can be further broken down into three forms: "that of the camera as it records the profilmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion." Narrative film

tries to "deny the first two and subordinate them to the third," to prevent "a distancing awareness in the audience." Mulvey ends with a call to "free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment" (373). Though this may destroy pleasure it is a necessary destruction for women.

Although Mulvey stresses that these theories are uniquely applicable to film, they are clearly adaptable to theatre as well. Much of her call for "passionate detachment" in the audience sounds exactly like Brecht. But Mulvey deals with women in a way Brecht did not and gives many useful ideas for the feminist criticism of theatre and writing of plays. Scopophilia and narcissism seem just as actively at work in live performance as in film, perhaps more today than in earlier decades because of the audience's conditioning to performance through more exposure to filmic media than to the stage. The objectification of woman and use of predominantly male protagonists in dramatic literature is certainly as true as for film. What theatre lacks is the fine-tuned control of the camera's "look," though certain theatrical devices related to framing, lighting, costume, foregrounding, and interruption can perform some of the same functions Mulvey calls for here. Some feminist theatre critics have already investigated the representation of women on stage using many ideas from film theory. Two women working in this vein are Sue-Ellen Case

and Jill Dolan.

Case has written several articles, as well as the book Feminism and Theatre, mentioned in Chapter 1. In a paper given in 1984 she describes the relationship of feminism and semiotics through some of the ideas developed in film theory. Semiotics is the science of the production of meaning through signs, and "Like everything else on the stage, the representation of woman is as a sign and partakes in cultural encoding."²² She then gives a good summary:

Feminist semiotic theory has sought to describe and deconstruct this woman/sign--to distinguish biology from culture, experience from ideology. Formerly, feminist criticism presumed to know what a woman is, but rejected certain images of women. Through this new concept, the entire notion of knowing what a woman is, comes into question. In fact, gender itself begins to appear as a cultural concept--a fiction produced by a patriarchal ideology. At this point, the entire category called "woman" is under semiotic deconstruction (5).

She relates Ann Kaplan's question, "Is the Gaze Male?" to theatre by saying that "because the majority of playwrights, directors and producers are male," they both own the gaze and "their male gaze controls the production and thereby creates the way the sign for 'woman' is composed" (5). Woman is the "Other" both to men and to herself. Because women "do not have the cultural mechanisms of meaning to construct themselves as a subject of the action," they do not own the gaze and "a wedge is created between the sign 'woman' and

²²"The New Poetics: Feminism and Semiotics," paper presented at American Theatre Association Conference, August 1984. Other page numbers in parentheses.

actual women" (6). Feminist theory and practice in the arts should remove the wedge and "move the sign woman from the status of object within the male gaze to the position of subject and owner of the gaze" (7). Just how this move should take place is hinted at in several of Case's articles.

In speaking of French director Simone Benmussa's production of The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs, a play adapted from a 19th-century story by George Moore about a woman who lived her life dressed as "Albert" in order to gain the wages of a waiter in Dublin, Case points to two theatrical devices which show how the gaze, as well as the "voice," is owned by males. "Only women appear onstage, but male voices are heard in the wings, particularly the voice of the storyteller George Moore, who even appropriates Albert's inner monologues at times." But Albert is not a sexual object and is portrayed in relation to other women. There is also a new use of drag: "The drag role makes all gender roles appear fictitious. More radically, gender itself becomes a role."²³ In an article on the classic Greek theatre she discusses the representation of "woman" on that all-male stage: "The classical plays and theatrical conventions can now be regarded as allies in the project of suppressing actual women and replacing them with the masks

²³"Gender as Play: Simone Benmussa's The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs," Women & Performance 1 (Winter 1984): 23.

of patriarchal production."²⁴ In reference to current "avant-garde" performance-oriented plays and pieces, she and co-author Jeanie Forte conclude in another article that "political impact has been petrified into formalist principles," and suggest that "the rise of feminist theater practice and women playwrights creates a stage with the potential for an alternative representation, one with women in the subject position." This woman, with her own desires, "frustrates the mystifications of morality, challenges the colonization of her body, and denies the use of her sexuality as a commodity in the markets of marriage and pornography."²⁵ The examples they give of such theatre are performance artist Rachel Rosenthal, British playwright Caryl Churchill's Cloud Nine, and French theorist-playwright Helene Cixous's Portrait of Dora. In her book Feminism and Theatre Case brings together many of the ideas from previous articles and in the final section of the book concentrates on the "new poetics," Lacanian psychoanalysis, and film theory applied to plays.

Jill Dolan also deals with representation in an article on gender impersonation and the idea of the stage as mirror. She points out that deconstructionist and postmodern performance "has shifted its concern from looking

²⁴"Classic Drag: The Greek Creation of Female Parts," Theatre Journal 37 (October 1985): 318.

²⁵"From Formalism to Feminism," Theater 16 (Spring 1985): 64-65.

into the mirror for an 'accurate' representation to questioning the nature of the mirror itself," shifted from the image to the "surface and frame."²⁶ She asserts that "the theatrical mirror is really an empty frame. The images reflected in it have been consciously constructed according to political necessity, with a particular, perceiving subject in mind who looks into the mirror for his identity" (7). She discusses female impersonation throughout history and goes on to show how male impersonation has been received quite differently. "While drag is a joke trivialized in the camp context, as a feminist theatrical device meant to point to real-life gender costuming, its effect is quite different" (9). She concludes that the feminist perspective "has to foreground theatre's representational apparatus," and "might have to question the mirror as an apt analogy for theatre." In this case, theatre "might become more of a workplace than a showplace," and "a laboratory in which to reconstruct new, non-genderized identities. And in the process, we can change the nature of theatre itself" (10).

Looking at two recent, highly-praised plays by American male playwrights, we notice that very little has changed in the representation of women in dominant theatre since the Greeks. The female as desiring subject is not to be found, and in many cases the female is not even to be

²⁶"Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?" Women & Performance 2 (1985): 5. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

seen. David Mamet's Pulitzer-winning Glengarry Glen Ross has a cast of seven men and no women, and yet women (offstage) are vividly represented by the words and actions of the men on stage and two of the males onstage are represented as being "womanlike." In the same year (1984) David Rabe's Hurlyburly had the four males in its cast represent numerous unseen wives, ex-wives, daughters, and other assorted "broad," while the three observable actresses and a bundle in a blanket stood in for all the women in the men's lives.

The 1983-84 season, which saw production of these two plays as well as Sam Shepard's Fool for Love, prompted even the N.Y. Times first-string critic Frank Rich to make a few observations that border on first stage feminist criticism. About these three plays he said, "women and men are so far apart that even the vogue term 'gender gap' seems an inadequate description of the distance between the sexes. The gap is a chasm, bordered on either side by armed camps."²⁷ This article by Rich can be read both for what it says about the plays themselves and what it says about the reception by a representative of the dominant critical establishment of these representations of women by male playwrights:

"Hurlyburly," the latest of these plays, is perhaps the most shocking in its refusal to observe any recent

²⁷"Theater's Gender Gap Is a Chasm," New York Times, 30 September 1984, sec. 2, p. 1. Other quotes from pp. 1 and 4.

cease-fires in the war between men and women. Though set in a with-it contemporary community--that of trendy, cocaine-infested Hollywood--it dramatizes a set of attitudes that might be considered retrogressive in a Marine barracks of 40 years ago. Its principal characters are men who are all either separated or divorced from unseen wives. One of them, an out-of-work actor named Phil . . . has beaten up his wife just before the play begins; his best friend, Eddie . . . rationalizes his pal's behavior on the grounds that Phil's wife must be "a whore" who "hates men."

Eddie, meanwhile, wants to have a "meaningful relationship" with a "dynamite lady" . . . Darlene . . . a bubble-brained photojournalist who moves so frequently from bed to bed that she can't be sure of the paternity of a baby she aborts. . . .

The other two women are . . . out-and-out- "bimbos." Donna . . . is a teen-age drifter whom Artie . . . picks up in an elevator and brings to Eddie and his friends as "a Care package"--an utterly compliant, nearly mute sexual "pet" to be used by one and all "just to stay in practice." Later we meet Bonnie . . . a nude night-club dancer whom Eddie describes as "a good bitch--with a heart of gold." When she goes out with Phil . . . [he] responds to her social niceties by pushing her out of the moving car and leaving her in a bruised heap on the side of the road.

The locker-room atmosphere in "Glengarry Glen Ross" is just as thick There are no women at all on stage in Mr. Mamet's play--which is only appropriate in a work whose characters, a group of cutthroat Chicago real-estate salesmen, regard women as beside the point (if they think about women at all). When one poor schnook of a customer visits the real-estate office to try to get his money back, he explains that he has been sent after the refund by his wife. The salesman Roma . . . tries to browbeat the customer out of his refund by inpugning his masculinity In the play's climax shortly thereafter, Roma blows up at his boss--a manager who is disliked by all the salesmen because he hides behind a desk instead of selling. Searching for the nastiest possible epithet to call the boss, Roma finally finds it--a four-letter word for the female sexual organ. "Glengarry Glen Ross" is laced with scatological insults from beginning to end, but it's the one that means "woman" which its characters regard as the ultimate calumny.

These are fairly accurate descriptions of the plays from my point of view. The point in Rich's article I would differ with is the set of conclusions he draws after describing the

plays. Out of six points he makes, five are various defenses of the playwrights for writing in this way. The only non-defense is phrased as a question: "Is it possible that Mr. Rabe, Mr. Mamet and Mr. Shepard, whatever their personal convictions, have not yet reached the point where they can dramatize men and woman who can talk to one another as equals?" He goes on to point out the general lack of well-drawn major female characters in their works and even observes parenthetically, "(One wonders if Eddie's ex-wife in 'Hurlyburly' phones instead of visits because Mr. Rabe wouldn't know how to portray her on stage.)"

The most significant part of this article is the marshalling of defenses of these writers. His points are:

1. Playwrights may not endorse their characters' behavior ("If anything, the reverse may be true. Perhaps these male playwrights . . . are warning the audience that it shouldn't congratulate itself too heartily on the post-feminist era supposedly at hand.").

2. "These men can take heart in the fact that they are part of a long chain of male American writers, whether playwrights or not, who have been flummoxed by the demands of creating adult male-female bonds." This chain includes Hemingway, Arthur Miller, and Eugene O'Neill.

3. "And it's conceivable, too, that our most resolutely masculine writers can expand their range in plays to come." Look how far Lanford Wilson has come.

4. They "may never change, of course. Given their

better work, one might well not want them to. Certainly none of their plays . . . is lacking for enthusiastic audiences."

5. "There remains the heretical, not to mention distressing, possibility that these gifted writers reflect the real world of men and women in 1984 more accurately than most of us would care to think." This is the "mirror of reality" defense.

The implications of these plays, and Rich's defenses, are many, but I want to stress that what is demonstrated here is that the "male gaze" of playwrights and critics has constructed a representation of woman in these plays which can be received as "realistic" and therefore defensible, rather than as constructs that may, in fact, not correspond to any actual women's reality. It needs to be pointed out that the proscenium is the frame for a constructed picture, not a mirror, and the validity of its picture needs to be judged by all the members of its audience.

Glengarry Glen Ross²⁸ makes metaphorical use of binary sex differences to make many of its points about the operations of business, and by extension, America. The use of sexual metaphor is based on an assumed acceptance of what its terms "mean," and it is that assumption I question. The offstage woman most clearly constructed is Jinny Lingk, the wife who (sensibly) sends her husband back to the real

²⁸(N.Y.: Grove, 1984). Page numbers in parentheses.

estate office to get their money back. Her words are only known through her husband's relaying of them. He interjects, whenever he gets a chance, lines such as: "My wife said I have to cancel the deal" (82), "She called the consumer...the attorney, I don't know. The attorney gen...they said we have three days..." (84), "It's not me, it's my wife" (89), "She wants her money back . . . She told me 'right now' "(90), "She told me not to talk to you.... She told me I had to get back the check or call the State's att..." (93). In this scene Mrs. Lingk is represented as a masculinized woman (though her action is the objectively correct one given the context of the play) and Lingk is represented as a "womanly" man, who cannot negotiate. His representation, along with that of the "cunt" boss Williamson (each of these men is "seduced" by one of the "real men" in Act I), work together to throw audience sympathy and identification away from either management or customer and toward the four salesmen, the poor working stiffs who are the inheritors of the mantle of Willy Loman. But in the process of using stereotypical representations of "woman" in this way, Mamet sweeps the (male) audience along in compliance with the equation woman = weak = useless = interference = victim. Actual women are invisible, which is in fact the most accurate aspect of Mamet's depiction of them. But absence is not enough.

David Rabe's representations of "woman" use the presence of actresses to supplement the descriptions of

offstage women by the men in Hurlyburly,²⁹ but the most striking part of their use is that there is no difference between the women described and the women seen. Again, this is a theatrical device used by Rabe, inviting the complicity of the audience in connecting the dots he supplies, in making closure. An offstage woman is described and defiled, and then an actress enters. She is not the woman described, in most cases, but she "does" just as well because the audience makes the mental connection with what it previously heard. This device demonstrates the interchangeability of women in these men's lives, but it draws the (male) audience into identifying with the major male characters. In making the connection "All women are alike" without thinking about the "truth" of that connection, the audience is lulled. The framing of the play throughout pushes identification toward the men: the setting is the apartment of the two central males, the men are the ones who initiate action and "make things happen." The audience learns about the men by seeing and hearing them in action over the course of most of the play, while the women are to a large degree shown as proving the men's descriptions of them to be correct, in the two or three short scenes each is seen in. The women are seen only in relation to men, there is never more than one woman at a time on stage, and a woman never relates to another woman. This isolation allows the audience to observe one object at

²⁹(N.Y.: Grove, 1985). Page numbers in parentheses.

a time, and how each man on stage relates to her, without the distraction, or context, of any other objects. As film theory points out, the woman is fetishized and/or punished and the audience is manipulated so that it "identifies" with the male characters. No devices interfere with or critique this identification. Male critics may say, "That's just how it is," but the desires of actual women are excluded from the play. For many people that is not how it is.

Two other points of this play are of interest. One is that it is a clear example of the "exchange of women" concept discussed in Chapter 2, as well as exemplifying the use of women to facilitate the homosocial life of men. There are strong bonds among the men, even a triangle of competing bonds among Eddie, Phil, and Eddie's roommate Mickey, but each of the men is or has been married and is also engaged in circulating the "broads" we see on stage. The big issue between Eddie and Mickey is ostensibly their competition over Darlene, but in actuality the stronger competition is between Mickey and Phil for Eddie's attention, perhaps even his soul. Rabe, in his afterword to the play, says that during rehearsals he said that the play is "the story of how 'Eddie, through the death of Phil, was saved from being Mickey' " (168). A close reading of the script does not contradict this summary. Rabe makes another statement I find equally true about the women in the play:

For though they were brought in again and again as coins to be passed among the men, in exchanges in which it was expected of them that they would serve as pacifiers to discharge some male's high state of stress or emotion,

it is certainly true that, more often than not, they confounded this function, tending quite powerfully to arouse in the men the very thing they had been brought in to diminish--a more extreme state of disruptive emotion (167).

This "disruptive emotion" channeled itself into violence against the women who had "confounded" their "function" in almost every scene in which a woman appeared or was discussed. But again, this "exchange" of female objects is a "given" of the play and is not critiqued.

A second point is the use of Phil's infant daughter, kidnapped by him from his estranged wife, and brought to Eddie and Mickey's apartment. The baby is "exchanged," passed around among the men, and makes the other three men think of their own (deserted) children. For all four men she becomes, briefly, a blank slate on which they would like to inscribe their ideas of "woman":

Artie: And this little innocent thing here, this sweet little innocent thing is a broad of the future.

Mickey: Hard to believe, huh?

Eddie: Awesome.

Artie: Depressing.

Eddie: Maybe if we kept her and raised her, she could grow up and be a decent human being.

Mickey: Unless it's just biologically and genetically inevitable that at a certain age they go nasty.

. . .

Artie: She shit herself. . . . Yeah, well, she's a broad already, Phil. Just like every other broad I ever met, she hadda dump on me (124-125).

Once again a woman, brought in to "pacify" has "confounded her function." This time, however, owing to her lack of

sexual threat she can be used for a comic act curtain line. But the exchange of women, or their fetishization, is not funny.

Several American women playwrights have attempted to represent an active woman subject on the stage. The examples I have selected are not conventional Broadway plays, but each manages to resist constructing "woman" for a male gaze, in part by disrupting the conventional devices of the stage, or at least by stretching them. Joan Schenkar's Signs of Life³⁰ (1979) is a highly literate, non-realistic transformation of some "real life" figures such as Alice and Henry James, Alice's "companion" Katherine Loring, P. T. Barnum, and a female version of the "Elephant Man." A Dr. Sloper treats both the "Elephant Woman" Jane Merritt and the spells and cancer of Henry's sister, Alice. Sloper and Henry conduct a tea party between themselves throughout the play. Alice and Jane are prevented from meeting by Sloper, and by the end of the play each of the women has died. Like Glengarry and Hurlyburly, Signs is "about" the gender gap, but in Schenkar's case the story is told from the female side of the chasm.

Some of the theatrical devices Schenkar uses to disrupt the usual operation of the male "gaze" in the representation of women include a multiple subject, framing devices that

³⁰In The Women's Project: Seven New Plays by Women, ed. Julia Miles (N.Y.: Performing Arts Journal, 1980). Page numbers in parentheses.

call attention to the attempts (and success) by men to tell the stories of women, and the contradictions between what male narrators say and female characters are and do. Women as subjects speak, dominate much of the "gaze," compel audience identification, and make things happen, in spite of what is said by the voices of male narrators. The subject here is not single, but multiple. In a note to the actors Schenkar points out:

It might be helpful to imagine the characters in this play as each an aspect of a shared consciousness, rather than each an exponent of a separate consciousness. They do have in common certain prejudices and inclinations which make even the most opposed characters seem to share--however stealthily--a kind of identity. The effect this identity (or these identities) should have on the audience is a constant and nervous recollection of familiarity; a shudder of recognition in the most incongruous places (313).

The play is framed at the beginning by a spiel by Barnum inviting the audience to see his freaks, and at the end by Barnum introducing his new freak, "Rhinoceros Woman," followed by the final toast, of many, between Sloper and Henry, who says, "To the ladies, doctor. Who would have thought their blood...could be...so...red" (362). The frame makes the audience see the play as men exhibiting female freaks, but within the play itself the men exhibitors are seen as freaks, also. Barnum, Sloper, and Henry alternate as narrators of the stories of Alice and Jane. Near the beginning of the play, a scene is acted out in which Jane's mother brings Jane to a workhouse and reluctantly leaves her with the warden. This scene is periodically interrupted by

Sloper and Henry, who are taking tea out on the stage apron. While telling how he came to treat Jane, Sloper says, "The mother was a common whore" (321), and "Jane Merritt was abandoned to a workhouse when she was very young. I presume her mother's lovers couldn't tolerate the sight of their mistress's little monster" (322). This narration is clearly contradicted by the mother's anguish in the scene being played and her more reliable testimony, "I'm a seamstress," and "customers won't come for their fittings as long as that 'monster' is there" (321). The cumulative effect of these devices is a view of women and men onstage which is jarringly unlike the usual "male subject looks at female object." One measure of how unusual it is to not have males in the subject position is that in the original production of the play, the roles of Henry and Sloper were offered to distinguished middle-aged leading and character men, and were turned down by an unusually large number of them. The complaint was that the characters were "unsympathetic," but so were the characters of the (female) warden and Alice James, who had no difficulty finding interpreters. A deeper reason for the difficulty may have been that actors of that age were not used to being in other than the dominant subject position.

Vivian M. Patraka has remarked upon the unusual dramatic techniques of the play: it "constructs a kind of unconscious narrative or communal dream in the first person plural" and "Time collapses, winds down, speeds up and has

multiple overlays, creating a structure parallel to dreams."³¹ She goes on to point out that the play distances the audience through using what she calls "cool" techniques: some of the characters are self-consciously performers of their lives, the "elephant man" story is used much more complexly than by Bernard Pomerance in his widely-produced play, the ritual nature of the tea ceremony and elevated diction throughout the play, humor and narration, playing with time, and "interwoven refrains or motifs that emphasize the group consciousness over the fate of individual characters," such as nightmares, the phrase "signs of life," and images of the elephant and of blood.³² This is a play worthy of much wider production and critical attention than it has thus far received and one which illustrates the possibilities for disruption of the usual representation of women in a play written by a single author to be performed by a group of actors. Many of the examples of women disrupting the theatrical status quo are group-written or written for (often by) an individual woman performer.

One example of a group-written play, performed by its writers, but with an emphasis on language and action as well as performance, is Split Britches (1982),³³ the signature

³¹"Notes on Technique in Feminist Drama: Apple Pie and Signs of Life," Women & Performance 1 (Winter 1984): 59.

³²Ibid., pp. 66-70.

³³Unpublished manuscript, 1982. Page numbers in parentheses.

piece of a group of three actress-writers: Peggy Shaw, Deborah Margolin, and Lois Weaver. The play tells the story of three women (two sisters and their aunt) who lived in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia in the late 1930s. The piece is framed by one of the sisters, Cora, acting as narrator, directly addressing the audience about the performance they are about to see and at the end telling when the three characters died. The story is part of the family history of the actress playing Cora (Lois Weaver). Cora-as-Narrator tells the audience they are going to see some slides and then she moves into the "picture" with the other two actresses. In blackout a slide projector shines light on the three, who hold positions as in a photo, and then the light goes out, actresses shift positions slightly, and a new "picture" is seen. Cora breaks out of her position a few times to describe what the "picture" shows (2-3). When the slide projector goes off, stage lights come up and the actresses perform scenes from the daily lives of these women. Several times during the play they form slide "pictures" again and take turns narrating them. In this way the frame of the play is women-constructed, the women are their own narrators, and the subject of the play is multiple women.

In many ways the play resembles other "feminist theatre" written and performed by women's groups in the 1960s and 1970s. The quality of the writing, structuring, and performing of Split Britches makes it a good example of

how the methods and devices of those earlier groups can be used and refined into compelling theatre today. Long monologues as well as the small repetitions of everyday life blend into a revealing portrait. At one point the dominant sister, Della, tells her elderly aunt, Emma, of a fantasy flight she took in a plane, and before she is done Emma is bothered by a fly. The monologue of flight moves smoothly over to a monologue by Emma about bugs:

Don't bother get that screen door fixed, they come in here anyway. It's like they come a'courtin'. Only the only things they like to court is either hot from the oven, plum filthy or...dead. Dead as a nail. I keep my hair neat I prefer it that way. The only reason they get in my hair so much...is because...you hair is dead! Because every time you think something...and then you forget it, you hairs grows out a little bit. That's why old ladies have such long hair. And it's the same flies every afternoon, I recognize 'em. I wonder how they find their way. So small compared to the wood and them...the sky and them...the stars and them. Well that's durin' the day. Durin' the day. But at night. At night is when the whinin' starts. The mosquitoes! I can feel a dream coming on. I can always feel it! And I lay down and I put out the light and the whinin' begins. And I get up and I put on the light and nothin'. So I smooth out my sheets. I'm too smart for that. And I lay down, and I put out the lights, and the whinin' begins again (5).

This rare combination of characterization, humor, poetry, and thought is repeated in various ways throughout the play and the cumulative effect is an intimate, yet non-realistic portrait of women, making the audience aware of the fact that it is a portrait, not a mirror, and replacing the "male gaze" with one accessible to women.

The Split Britches group is part of a larger group of women who perform in a Manhattan East Village space called the WOW Cafe. Journalist-critic Alisa Solomon described

SB's 1984 piece in this way:

Upwardly Mobile Home takes place in 1986 after Reagan's re-election. Three actors in a theatre company, who are preparing a production of a 1920s hit, Shanghai Gesture, are camping out under the Brooklyn Bridge, homeless. There, one woman peddles her old clothes, another sells instant coffee over the phone, and all three fantasize, argue and rehearse their show. A bizarre sense of humor combines with a barrage of intersecting ideas to create a complex criticism of American myths. Formally inventive, the piece follows a day in the life of these actresses, with overlapping monologs, songs and play-within-a-play sequences.³⁴

Solomon describes some of the other theatre at WOW, along with its history, and sees a few "common themes and esthetics" of the work, such as "Feminism and lesbianism appear in the shows not as issues but as givens;" "What is true literally of the sets and costumes applies equally to the material of the plays--it is drawn from the women's lives;" "The stylistic result is an attention to detail, an approach Weaver calls 'a feminine esthetic because its details are often forgotten or stepped over in male-dominated works;' " and "Their method of working also reflects a feminist intention with its implicit rejection of mainstream hierarchy . . . everyone contributes to creative processes in discussion, and anyone can become part of the Cafe staff simply by choice."³⁵

Several other feminist critics have written about the

³⁴"The WOW Cafe," The Drama Review 29 (Spring 1985): 99.

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

importance of the WOW Cafe.³⁶ Their audience so far has been limited, but some of the methods and devices developed there are worth the attention of critics and theatre practitioners interested in changing the representation of women on the stage. WOW's theatre overlaps, in some cases, the field of performance art, which is beyond the scope of the discussion here. However, many individual performance artists, as well as individual mainstream performers such as Lily Tomlin and Whoopi Goldberg, are also challenging the accepted view of women on the stage. A study of all forms of performance through the lens of feminist film criticism may help to move the writing and reception of written plays further in a feminist direction.

³⁶Jill Dolan, "The Politics of Feminist Performance," Theatre Times 5 (July/August 1986): 1+ and "The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance," Theatre Journal 39 (May 1987): 156-174; Kate Davy, "Constructing the Spectator: Reception, Context, and Address in Lesbian Performance," Performing Arts Journal 10 (Fall 1986): 43-52; and Sue-Ellen Case, "From Split Subject to Split Britches," unpublished manuscript, 1986.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This journey is far from an end, but it has reached some preliminary destinations. My search through feminist theory led into four fields in which the theory is usefully applicable to drama. My brief overviews helped give a context to the major theorist in each field whose work I examined and applied to several plays. I feel I have shown that feminist theories can apply to drama and hope that this study will help encourage further effort in the same directions. My ultimate hope is that women will become more vocal in all aspects of the theatre and enlarge the scope and depth of theatre criticism.

Let me be prescriptive for one moment. I feel that some awareness of feminist theory on the part of critics, directors, designers, actors, and playwrights might encourage the production of more plays written strongly from women's points of view. This is not to say that all plays by or about women need be stimulated by feminist theory or even that it would positively lead to a more vital drama. But the stimulation itself cannot be harmful and might just give

surprising results. Still, this is no "take two and call me in the morning" prescription since there is hardly any agreement on what the "two" taken should be. The wider dissemination of ideas and the opening up of possibilities that include women as active subjects are what I am advocating. One way to start doing this is to combine ideas from different fields and apply them to a particular play.

As an example of how this might work, I will briefly combine Chodorow's ideas of the primacy of mother-daughter bonding with Mulvey's idea of the construction of the pleasure of viewing a narrative and apply them to Wendy Kesselman's play My Sister In This House. It is possible, through form and content, to give a female spectator pleasure in identifying with a female (multiple) protagonist struggling with other female figures. It is possible for the woman to separate out from a mother figure or another aspect of herself, or try to, while still maintaining the spectator's memory of the pleasure of that early primary bonding. In this way the terms of the "exchange of women" would be subverted and the ambivalence toward writing or creating would perhaps be lessened so that women would not have to adapt palimpsestic devices such as the madwoman in the attic, or could use her as they wished.

My Sister In This House (1980) combines many threads of thought, including female-female incest, matricide, and class conflict. Since it is based on the same historical incident as Jean Genet's play The Maids, it has already

served as the focus of some dramatic criticism. Encompassing sixteen scenes and no intermission, the play covers a period of years leading up to 1933. Its four characters are a mother and daughter, "mistresses" of an upper middle class household in Le Mans, France, and the two sisters who serve them as maids. In the course of the play the sisters are drawn closer and closer together, while they grow more restless and confined by their oppressive living conditions. In the next to last scene the mother confronts the elder sister with the incest between the sisters: "That face, that hair. You smell of it, my dear."¹ When the mother threatens that the two sisters will never work together again, both sisters attack their "mistresses." In the final scene a male voiceover describes the mutilated bodies and another male voiceover pronounces sentence on the sisters.

There is much material here for feminist analysis. Helene Keyssar in Feminist Theatre says that a comparison between Genet's play and Kesselman's "makes clear that subject matter is not the essential issue since the 'story' source for Genet and Kesselman is the same."² She makes several points about Kesselman's dramaturgy, such as the combining of class and gender issues, the treatment of

¹Wendy Kesselman, My Sister In This House (N.Y.: Samuel French, 1982), p. 64.

²Keyssar, p. 183. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

history in the play, and the love the sisters have for each other, as opposed to Genet's maids' self-hatred. Though Keyssar does not directly refer to any feminist theory, she indirectly uses it in statements such as:

Her play articulates an important distinction between social realism which reveals the underlying structures and institutions of a culture and conventional realism which describes the individual desires and manners of middle-class characters. In the latter, we are voyeurs, able to escape what we see without notice or effect; in the former we are witnesses, responsible to the history presented. (182)

She touches on the play's socialist feminism and also tries to assail audience voyeurism, associated with the "male gaze" in film theory. But for Keyssar the play mainly raises questions in relation to Genet's play, such as "is Kesselman's play better than Genet's or just more feminist?" and "is this a legitimate question?" (182). These questions she asks but then abandons.

Ann Kilkelly stresses that the play is a re-vision of the events, seen through women's eyes. She quotes Kesselman to the effect that Genet's play could have taken place anywhere, while hers is specific to the place and the actual house, which she had visited. The setting of the play depends on levels and constriction. The photographic tableau that opens and closes the play, and the taking of the photograph in one of the play's scenes, remind us that history is seen through frozen images. There are recurring images of darkness, dreams, and blood in the play. In summary, she says Kesselman "assumes the existence and

importance of the actual" and "requests that we simply look at what we can recover of the actual."³

These critics bring up many important points but I would like to come back to the ideas of Chodorow and Mulvey. The play also explores the pressures of close relationships between women and the consequences of close female bonding. The action presents a pressure cooker atmosphere of an all-female world functioning according to the rules of the unseen men offstage. The patriarchal world is occasionally heard through voiceovers, but the world seen is that of the women. The sisters' mother and the nuns from the convent where they both were raised are frequently discussed by the sisters in the early part of the play. Their relationship is based on the bonding they saw at the convent, with similar closeness leading to an erotic relationship. But there is also a sense that they are searching for the lost mother they never had. The mistress and her daughter are visible representations of the mother-daughter bond, which is repressed and distanced by the women who are dominated by middle class patriarchy. The bond the sisters find to substitute for the one they never had with their mother is threatening to the social order and especially to the mother of the house, the character with the most to lose, who devalues it and calls it dirty. In killing the women who represent the bond repressed, the sisters assert their

³Ann Gavere Kilkelly, "Who's in The House?" Women & Performance 3 (1986): 33.

identities and the absolute primacy of their bond.

From the point of view of representation, the play does not create erotic objects for the male gaze. The women on stage are absorbed with each other, not with behaving in an alluring way for male characters on stage or a male audience. Lesbianism, a staple of so much heterosexual male pornography, is here conveyed in a subtle, unsensational manner. Both scopophilia and narcissism are undercut for the male audience. There is no object at which to stare in the dark and no male protagonist with which to identify. All the emotional investments of the characters, both positive and negative, are in other women. Awareness of the illusion of theatre is brought about by the photographic images at the beginning and end. No cause and effect narrative pulls an audience through the play, but a more casual building up of impressions. The "climax" is performed in the dark and reported on by voiceover. Many of the modes of film that make objects of women are undercut by the form and content of the play. Women are represented as subjects on many levels.

Combining Chodorow and Mulvey is one example of directions future work on feminist theory and drama could take. There is also a need to explore fields other than the four discussed here. Feminist explorations in science, philosophy, and history were merely touched upon in the introduction, but they have much to offer, especially in methodology. Other fields not even mentioned include

sociology, linguistics, semiotics, art, dance, and music, each of which is amassing a growing literature of feminist theory. I concerned myself mainly with American and British theorists, but many other countries are contributing, particularly France and Germany. In many cases material is not yet available in translation, but that is another contribution scholars in this country could make.

The field of plays to which all theories could be applied should be broadened. A little work has been done on Shakespeare and the Greeks, but other periods and countries, from the Middle Ages through the early twentieth century could be approached from a feminist theoretical standpoint. The study of these plays needs to be in all three phases: images of women, women as writers, and a broader theoretical approach that may lead to fourth and fifth phases. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are especially ripe for elucidation of female images and women playwrights, many of whom are almost ignored in both criticism and history of theatre.

Other aspects of the field which need further investigation are clarifying the contributions from radical and socialist feminist theory, indicating how they differ from the liberal contributions which are generally assumed to be "the" feminism, and expanding their applications. Some British theatre criticism has been working with socialist feminism and some French with their brand of radical thought. All fields, countries, and branches of

feminism can be mined for useful nuggets. Finally, all this work needs to be applied to performance aspects of theatre as well as to the texts themselves. As I have indicated, some theorists are going in this direction, especially in third phase work and in relation to performance art. The impact of feminist theory in areas such as the history of acting or the feminist implications of theatre architecture has yet to be felt and could be considerable.

That most of dramatic history has constructed inaccurate and damaging representations of women does not mean that they should continue, unbalanced by representations constructed by women. There is little reason to hope that representations will improve unless women criticize the existing structures and counter them with fresh representations. Women audiences have much at stake in seeing that such images do change. Men barely realize the difference that more equitable representation of women would have on them as well. Through thinking about what theatre does, and how it does it; through using conspective feminist theory to expand and deepen our perception of theatre; and through making women's points of view actively present throughout the theatre, both theatre and society will be enriched.

APPENDIX A

VARIOUS FORMULATIONS OF THE POLITICAL DIVISIONS OF FEMINISM

The feminist movement has always had a political dimension, but the political philosophy underlying it is anything but monolithic. The vast bulk of criticism in this country is liberal or radical in nature. The job of pointing this out and of advocating a more materialist approach has, naturally enough, been taken up by those feminists who consider themselves socialist feminists. I will give three women's descriptions of the political divisions of feminism, two by socialists and one by a cultural feminist, and will again summarize my own view of the three divisions: liberal, radical, and socialist.

In a 1982 article Judith Kegan Gardiner summarized the three divisions of feminism mentioned above and declared she favored socialist feminism. Her descriptions are among the most concise I have found and so I will quote her at length:

Traditionally, liberal feminism traces women's oppression to inequities in an otherwise reasonable democratic system; it focuses on legal and social discrimination and on the inhibiting effects of sex role socialization. Liberal feminist literary critics were among those who pioneered in defining stereotypes and "images of women" in language and literature [first stage]. . . . women have been denied equal literary opportunity. . . . Therefore, the retrieval of forgotten women writers is important [second stage]. . . .

Radical feminism believes that liberal feminism underestimates the globally oppressive nature of patriarchy. One tendency in radical feminism posits a binary division between female and male cultures, although it reverses conventional sexist valuations. Adherents of this viewpoint may see women's special characteristics as arising from female body, from

universal female mothering, or from women's experience of patriarchal social control. . . . [It] does not accept aesthetic standards determined by men, and it does not try to prove that women's literature conforms to them. Instead, it seeks to define women's culture and women's styles in themselves. . . .

Like radical feminism, socialist feminism sees sexism as culturally pervasive, but it defines American women's immediate enemy specifically as capitalist patriarchy, and it is committed to collective action for change. It tries to be comprehensive and precise both about the universal oppression of women and about the unique interactions of race, class, and gender in particular cultures at particular periods of history. . . . [It] is complex, rapidly developing, and by no means entirely coherent. . . . Even at its simplest, a socialist feminist approach adds a sensitivity to questions of race and class to the feminist critic's repertoire. . . .

Where radical feminism encourages the critic to look within the work, socialist feminism tends to look outside it as well, to find contexts and conventions that shape the work through the writer's acceptance or rebellion against them. . . . Its fundamental question is "who profits?"¹

Gardiner's labels and basic ideas are those I shall adopt, but I wish to broaden the discussion by adding a few other points. Josephine Donovan, an American literary critic, outlines three major divisions and several influences, as well as "The New Feminist Moral Vision" in her book, Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism². She deals almost exclusively with American theory published up to 1982, and her survey is chronological as well as topical. While she discusses the influences of Marx, Freud, and Existentialism, her main

¹Judith Kegan Gardiner, "An Interchange on Feminist Criticism: On 'Dancing Through the Minefield'," Feminist Studies 8 (Fall 1982): 630-632.

²(N.Y.: Frederick Ungar, 1985). Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

categories are: Enlightenment Liberal, Cultural, and Radical. The one she favors is a contemporary cultural feminism. The advocacy of Cultural and elimination of Socialist as a category is the hallmark of her book, and reflects a large amount of feminist criticism in this country.

Donovan begins her discussion of cultural feminism with nineteenth-century feminist theories that "go beyond the fundamentally rationalist and legalistic thrust of Enlightenment liberal theory." They "look for a broader cultural transformation," "stress the role of the non-rational, the intuitive, and often the collective side of life," often emphasize the differences between men and women, and they "imagined alternatives to institutions the liberal theorists left more or less intact--religion, marriage, and the home" (31). Cultural feminists today, she says, are "for the most part leery of biological determinism;" they believe "that the traditional realm of women provides the basis of the articulation of a humane world view," and "hold that women's political value system may be derived from traditional women's culture and applied to the public realm" (61-62). In her final chapter she sums up:

A redirection of reverential attention toward what is not in the public, male, rational, and dominant sphere of life will, however, necessarily provide intimations of a way beyond the artificial and destructive divisions of masculine epistemology. This is what contemporary cultural feminism is all about (182).

Hers is a fairly accurate picture of much of cultural feminism, but it does not convince me of its power or strength of argument the way the socialist feminists do. She combines parts of liberal, radical, and socialist, stressing the radical end of nineteenth-century liberal writings, but does not outline the reasons for the parts she elects to combine. Her picture lacks specificity for me, and seems a generalized scheme, based on the writings of the most visible, charismatic women of the nineteenth-century, minimizing many less literary, non-white, and lower than middle-class contributions from the twentieth. While keeping in mind the appeal of her brand of cultural feminism to a wide range of, especially literary, critics, I am more interested in pushing beyond, to aspects of the socialist argument.

Alison Jagger's Feminist Politics and Human Nature is a long, dense book that synthesizes the philosophy behind four political divisions: liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist. The Marxist section gives much of the methodology and theory that led to socialist feminism, as well as the parts that were dropped along the way. On the remaining three divisions, Jagger moves beyond Gardiner's formulation. Liberal feminism stresses individualism and "objectivity":

Because it conceives humans as essentially separate individuals, this epistemological tradition views the attainment of knowledge as a project for each individual on her or his own. . . . the attainment of knowledge is conceived as essentially a solitary occupation that has no necessary social preconditions. . . .

. . . The positivist conception of objectivity has several aspects. First, objectively produced claims are capable, in principle at least, of being verified by anyone. . . . A second aspect . . . is that it excludes any evaluative element. . . .

. . . liberal feminists assume that the validity of their theory will be evident to all who set aside their own special interests. . . . If men rationally think about why they should set aside their own special interests, they should be just as well able as women to see the soundness of liberal feminist arguments. . . .

Other versions of feminism do not claim to be more objective than liberal feminism. . . . they challenge precisely the conception of objectivity. . . . [and] attack the claim that there is any such standpoint as that of the neutral observer.³

Radical feminism stresses the things women know which men do not. Unlike Marxism it is not strongly interested in theory but stresses women's experience, opposes the binary oppositions of patriarchal thought (such as mind/body) and prefers ideas of wholeness and process, circular rather than linear progression. Radical feminist epistemology is "a self-conscious elaboration and justification of a specifically feminist view of reality" and it "starts from the belief that women know much of which men are ignorant and it takes one of its main tasks as being to explain why this should be so" (365). Jagger finds the weakness in this division to be its stress on description. It lacks a theory which would show "that the world as we immediately perceive and describe it is merely the appearance of an underlying reality;" for her the "socialist feminist conception of the standpoint of women is radical feminist in its inspiration,

³(Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), pp. 355-358. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

but it rests on a more complex and self-conscious epistemology" (381).

Socialist feminism analyzes the world from the standpoint of women, stresses the collective process of arriving at knowledge, but like radical feminism opposes binary oppositions and values experience. Socialist feminists "view knowledge as a social and practical construct and they believe that conceptual frameworks are shaped and limited by their social origins." Their insistence on the standpoint of women contrasts with liberal feminism's "standpoint of the neutral, disinterested observer" and the Marxist feminism's "standpoint of the oppressed," which includes women and men (369-370).

Looking back at Harding's three feminist epistemologies (feminist empiricism, standpoint, and postmodernism), I tend to agree with Jagger that feminist standpoint is the most useful, at least at this time. It is also clear that there is a relationship between chronological stages and the political divisions discussed here. Much first stage effort was liberal, much second stage radical, and much third stage is socialist, but the lines here are not clearly drawn and the categories overlap.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, my own interpretations of the three political divisions of feminism are:

Liberal ["there is no difference between men and women"]

1. Minimizes differences between men and women
2. Working within system; reform not revolt
3. Individual more important than the group

Radical ["difference is all"]

1. Stresses superiority of female attributes and difference between male and female modes
2. Favors separate female systems
3. Individual more important than the group

Socialist ["a theory of difference is needed"]

1. Minimizes differences between men and women
2. Stresses changing capitalist system to socialist one will help women, uses theory
3. Group more important than the individual

APPENDIX B

THREE RECURRING TOPICS IN RADICAL FEMINISM: WOMEN'S CULTURE, LESBIAN FEMINISM, AND "NEW FRENCH FEMINISM"

Since liberal feminism is the most familiar to most people, and socialist feminism is at least a little familiar to some, I will briefly describe three topics that are raised by radical feminism (women's culture, lesbian feminism, and "New French feminism") and some of the theorists working in those areas, then indicate a few of the ways theatre has begun to use these ideas. The body of the dissertation deals with liberal and socialist ideas, but the influence of radical feminism needs to be considered as well. It will be impossible to do more than hint at the wide variety of questions and tools this exploration has opened up, but I hope to offer useful suggestions for the future.

Part of the overlap between radical and cultural feminism is formed by "women's culture." This is a term used in a variety of ways, but in general received the most attention on it in the latter half of the 1970s. Gayle Kimball gives an introduction in her essay "Women's Culture: Themes and Images," which appears in a book of essays she edited. She mentions that in the 1970s women created a number of institutions "for publishing, bookselling, teaching women's studies, music production, filmmaking, displaying and teaching art, worship, theatre, counseling,

and farming." They became centers for production of women's culture and some of the emerging themes were: "egalitarian use of power; choices in forms of love, sexuality, and family; respect for women's experiences; reclaiming control of women's bodies; and integrative thought processes that include more than the knowledge of the conscious mind." On this last point she goes on to say that "women think differently in drawing from a source deeper than the conscious mind or the linear sequential thinking of the left brain hemisphere. Wholeness and connectedness characterize women's thinking."¹ This last point may not be provable, but it is one aspect of women's culture that has continued to be explored in the 1980s. Many of the institutions Kimball mentioned have faded, but individual theorists and artists remain active in this area.

Mary Daly is a theorist of spiritual feminism whose four volumes, published between 1968 and 1984, have strongly influenced some radical feminist critics and artists. She started from within the Catholic church and soon moved outside it toward a female-centered spirituality. She coins new words as well as reclaiming old ones, such as "spinster" and "hag," by giving them her own meanings. This stress on neologism recurs in many radical theorists' works.

In her second book, Beyond God the Father: Toward a

¹Women's Culture: The Women's Renaissance of the Seventies (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1981), pp. 2-4.

Philosophy of Women's Liberation, Daly mounted her attack and counterattack:

I have begun by bringing into focus the phenomenon of the death of God the Father in the rising woman-consciousness and the consequent breakthrough to conscious, communal participation in God the Verb. This is followed by an exercise in exorcising evil from Eve, which involves a Fall into freedom. Since this Fall is redemptive and healing, it signals the arrival of New Being. Therefore, the next problem to be confronted is Christolatry, which hinders this arrival. Next comes an effort to look beyond phallocentric morality.²

Five years later, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, spelled out her philosophy in more detail. One concept was that of the spinner of cosmic webs and tapestries: "Spinsters can spin ideas about such interconnected symbols as the maze, the labyrinth, the spiral, the hole as mystic center, and the Soul Journey itself." They also:

. . . possess the inner capacity to spin, spiral, dance, and sing. Not compelled by obsessions with plugging up holes, Amazons can pass through and beyond these cultural fixations, entering the "hole" (gateway) that leads past the obsessions of patriarchal culture.³

In her most recent book she had to spend some time explaining the title:

Primarily, then, Pure Lust Names the high humor, hope, and cosmic accord/harmony of those women who choose to escape, to follow our hearts' deepest desire and bound out of the State of Bondage, Wanderlusting and Wonderlusting with the elements, connecting with auras of animals and plants, moving in planetary communion with the farthest stars. This Lust is in its essence astral. . . . As she lurches/leaps into starlight her tears become tidal, her cackles cosmic, her laughter

²(Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 12.

³(Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 400-403.

Lusty.⁴

In theatre, many individuals as well as feminist groups share Mary Daly's philosophy and follow her call into theatrical expression. Susan Suntree writes for more than just herself when she says:

After passing through vales of anger and negation to be rid of emotional connections to the old culture, women must be willing to enter the strata where the materials for theatre work include elemental experiences and primary concepts. Satires about birth control and mistreatment at work are genuine critiques. But work must continue toward the roots of our perceptions. By sharing the discovery of women's roots women's theatre can reveal a dimension of experience where the origins and spirit of sisterhood reside.⁵

Suntree goes on to discuss the role of ritual in her work, particularly the use of the Goddess, and of the immediate effect on the lives of its audience such work produces.

Several of the previously mentioned books contain sections on theatre as "women's culture." The last section of Karen Malpede's book, Women in Theatre: Compassion & Hope is called "Feminist Plays & Performance: Ending the Violence We Have Known," and contains essays by individuals and groups which, "while all working in very different ways, are each redefining the nature of dramatic conflict," away from the model of war.⁶ A section of essays, "Female Rites,"

⁴Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 3.

⁵"Women's Theatre: Creating the Dream Now," in Women's Culture, ed. Gayle Kimball (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1981), p. 108.

⁶Malpede, p. 233.

opens the Chinoy and Jenkins book Women in American Theatre, "because these performance events, interesting and important in themselves, can also help us understand how women have functioned in our theatre."⁷ Dinah Leavitt's Feminist Theatre Groups also discusses many of these issues.

The possible applications of theorists like Mary Daly to ritualistic theatre have already been noted by some of these writers, but future directions could include closer examination of women's functions in medieval theatre, study of Hrotsvit's plays as women's culture, and extension of metaphors like spinning to describe some dramatic structures devised by women.

In a second area of radical feminist concern, Bonnie Zimmerman's anthologized article, "What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism," serves as an introduction to many of the ideas and possibilities for theatre criticism raised by lesbian critics. She describes heterosexism in feminist criticism, talks about definitions of "lesbian," points out various critical approaches, and mentions some uses of a lesbian perspective. As she says, "Heterosexism is the set of values and structures that assumes heterosexuality to be the only natural form of sexual and emotional expression" and there is a set of assumptions under almost all lesbian criticism:

. . . that a woman's identity is not defined only by her relation to a male world and male literary tradition . . . ,

⁷Chinoy and Jenkins, p. 10.

that powerful bonds between women are a crucial factor in women's lives, and that the sexual and emotional orientation of a woman profoundly affects her consciousness and thus her creativity.⁸

In its critical approach, one revealing statement is that "woman-identified writers, silenced by a homophobic and misogynistic society, have been forced to adopt coded and obscure language and internal censorship."⁹ This applies not only to overtly lesbian writers, such as Gertrude Stein, but also to a wide range of "woman-identified" writers, such as Emily Dickinson, Angelina Weld Grimke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Sarah Orne Jewett. In the field of playwriting there are many such women whose work could benefit from decoding.

One of the most important theorists in lesbian feminist criticism is the poet Adrienne Rich. She has written a number of theoretical essays, but one, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," has been widely read, cited, and debated since its publication in 1980. In it she had two main concerns:

... first, how and why women's choice of women as passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers, tribe, has been crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise; and second, the virtual or total neglect of lesbian existence in a wide range of writings, including feminist scholarship.¹⁰

⁸In Making a Difference, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (N.Y.: Methuen, 1985), pp. 178-179.

⁹Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁰Signs 5 (Summer 1980): 632. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

In exploring those concerns she eloquently raised a host of issues, one of which is that "the assumption that 'most women are innately heterosexual' stands as a theoretical and political stumbling block for many women," and that "the failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness" (648).

One of her concepts is particularly helpful to criticism: that of a lesbian continuum. By this she means "a range--through each woman's life and throughout history--of woman-identified experience." This would include not just genital sexual experience but "the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support." The erotic would be defined in female terms "as that which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself, as an energy not only diffuse but . . . omnipresent." She suggests:

If we consider the possibility that all women--from the infant suckling her mother's breast, to the grown woman experiencing orgasmic sensations while suckling her own child, perhaps recalling her mother's milk-smell in her own . . . to the woman dying at ninety, touched and handled by women--exist on a lesbian continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not (648-651).

Several women responded to Rich's formulations. Ann Ferguson found "her position contains serious flaws from a socialist-feminist perspective" and presented "a different,

historically linked concept of lesbian identity." Her main objection was that Rich's model "does not allow us to understand the collective and social nature of a lesbian identity as opposed to lesbian practices or behaviors."¹¹ Jacquelyn Zita, on the other hand, argued against Ferguson's view, suggesting that "there are several good reasons for adopting the idea of a lesbian continuum as a strategic term," and that "One problem I have always had with socialist-feminist theory is its tendency to obscure and occlude an understanding of how central the institution of heterosexuality is to our womanly existences."¹² As more of a radical feminist, she agreed with Rich's patriarchal, rather than just social, critique. This argument is only one example of the basic differences between types of political feminisms influencing the choice of strategies.

Theatre criticism has suffered from the same silence as other fields, having even less first and second stage criticism with a lesbian feminist perspective than literary criticism has. There have been some small exceptions. Rosemary Curb has applied an openly lesbian perspective to plays written by women in her article in the "Staging Gender" issue of Theatre Journal. She used the term "woman-

¹¹Ann Ferguson, et al., "On 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence': Defining the Issues," in Feminist Theory, ed. Nannerl O. Keohane, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 148-149.

¹²Ibid., pp. 167, 172.

conscious" drama to mean "all drama by and about women that is characterized by multiple interior reflections of women's lives and perceptions. [It]. . . may be called feminist, lesbian, lesbian/feminist, or post-modern, or it may eschew labels."¹³ In her book Feminist Theatre Helene Keyssar discusses lesbianism in relation to the plays of Michelene Wandor and Caryl Churchill in Britain, and Susan Miller, Wendy Kesselman, Maria Irene Fornes, and Lillian Hellman in the U.S. She does not go much beyond plot description, however.

In general, a lesbian feminist perspective might be applied to some female (and male) roles in plays by both men and women, as well as to biographical criticism of plays by some women. It might most fruitfully be applied to the development of third stage theory. Zimmerman asks several questions which might form a beginning:

How, for example, does the lesbian's sense of outlaw status affect her literary vision? Might lesbian writing, because of the lesbian's position on the boundaries, be characterized by a particular sense of freedom and flexibility or, rather, by images of violently imposed barriers, the closet? Or, in fact, is there a dialectic between freedom and imprisonment that is unique to lesbian writing?¹⁴

She also suggests we might ask "how lesbianism functions as a sign within the text," and gives French writer Monique Wittig as one who "locates the lesbian subject outside the

¹³Curb, p. 302.

¹⁴Zimmerman, p. 202.

male linguistic universe."¹⁵ Wittig is also a theorist, has developed a recent interest in theatre, and belongs to a group of women called "New French feminists."

Though the majority of theorists I am using are American, there are several French writers whose work is having such an impact on feminist critical writing that I feel they must be mentioned. At the same time, their work is among the most dense being written and is the most difficult to describe. Part of their intention is to embody their ideas, such as connections between women and non-linear thinking, in their writing itself. Several American writers and journals have attempted to translate the language and ideas of the "New French Feminisms" into Anglo-American terms.

One of the most concise of these "translations" is a recent article by Ann Rosalind Jones. First comes context:

French theories of femininity, using Derridian deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, centre on language as a means through which men have shored up their claim to a unified identity and relegated women to the negative pole of binary oppositions that justify masculine supremacy. . . . Phallogentrism--this structuring of man as the central reference point of thought, and of the phallus as the symbol of sociocultural authority--is the target of Franco-feminist criticism.¹⁶

Next comes the work of its four most prominent writers:

¹⁵Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁶"Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine," in Making a Difference, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, p. 80. Subsequent page numbers in parentheses.

Julia Kristeva posits the concept of the semiotic, a rhythmic free play she relates to mother-infant communication, and looks for in modernist writers. Luce Irigaray emphasizes difference, a totality of women's characteristics defined positively against masculine norms, and imagines a specifically feminine language, a parler femme. Helene Cixous celebrates women's sexual capacities, including motherhood, and calls for an écriture feminine through which women will bring their bodily energies and previously unimagined unconscious into view. Finally, Monique Wittig rejects this emphasis on difference, arguing that women must be understood not in contrast to man but in historical terms as subjected to oppression (80).

In the matter of these writers' styles, Irigaray, for instance, in her first book in this area published in 1974, did things such as "suppressed verbs, posed questions rather than writing assertions, used telegraphic and exclamatory phrases," used puns, and later added "double or multiple voices, broken syntax, repetitive or cumulative rather than linear structure, open endings" (87-88). Their work rarely falls into any one conventional genre, often combining them, "feminizing" them, or forming new categories. "Fiction" and "non-fiction," "art" and "criticism" are labels not readily applicable. But Jones does outline four main methods used in "Franco-feminist criticism since the 1970s": deconstruction, attention to silences, "decoding of feminine/semiotic modes of writing and close reading of the politics of style" (96), all of which may be applied to work by men or women.

Among the many objections to these theories, most tend to disagree with the emphasis on the uniqueness of women's bodies as "essentialist" or to find a basic contradiction between any kind of rational discourse, such as criticism,

and the non-rational philosophies expressed. The first type of critique comes from liberal or socialist feminists most often, who wish to minimize "difference" and/or go beyond such individualized issues as the body. The second type can come from anyone, including Jones:

Is there any point in applying feminist versions of more recent critical methods to such texts? What is to be gained from psychoanalysing a text whose express purpose is to reveal its writer's unconscious, from aiming the X-ray techniques of structuralism at a text written to overthrow the 'ready-made grids' of binary opposition, or from turning the historicist ideology-critique of Marxism upon futuristic texts written against ideology? Franco-feminist criticism resists any easy pluralist assimilation (93).

There are many differences among these four women. Irigaray and Cixous are perhaps the closest in values, but Kristeva often deals with criticism of male writers who do "semiotic" work, and Wittig is definitely Marxist-influenced. Wittig is also outspoken, in her theory and novels, as a lesbian. Even critics who admire her writing often draw the line at her politics, which seem to be extremely lesbian-separatist. Wittig has denied this, but the body of her work seems to demonstrate that view. Susan Suleiman's reaction is not atypical:

On one level this may be merely a heterosexual bias on my part, or even a kind of fear (the heterosexual woman's fear of being 'contaminated' by lesbianism?). But on another level, there are good theoretical reasons for my demurral. Is one going to do away with the confines of sexual categorization, whether in language or in life, by eliminating one of the terms altogether? Does not the eliminated term become reinscribed by its

very absence?¹⁷

The reactions to these writers, just hinted at above, are stronger versions of the reactions to many radical feminist writers. This reaction is due to the fact that their ideas are just that: radical. They are the farthest out from center; they sometimes overstate their cases to make points and influence people. Most often they are the cutting edge. But they usually cannot be ignored. And in the case of the French, their language, their forms of expression (even in translation), broaden the number of ideas a reader's mind can hold. The ideas can be rejected, or, more likely, modified in some way, but the radical impulse has performed its purpose. Liberals and socialists acknowledge their debt.

The years 1980 and 1981 saw an outpouring of articles on the "New French Feminisms," beginning with a book of that title which presented a number of pieces, translated and in one place for the first time. This was followed by four journals, two feminist and two not, with entire issues devoted to either French feminism or "difference."¹⁸ Many

¹⁷"(Re)writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism," in The Female Body in Western Culture, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), p. 22.

¹⁸Elaine Marks and Isabelle deCourtivron, eds., New French Feminisms (Amherst, Mass.: Univ. of Mass. Press, 1980; reprint ed., N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1981). See also Feminist Studies 7 (Summer 1981), Yale French Studies 62 (1981), Signs 7 (Fall 1981), and Critical Inquiry 8 (Winter 1981).

of the primary texts by the "big four" have been translated and published,¹⁹ and a recent volume, The Poetics of Gender devoted four essays to the French.²⁰

The French influence on feminist theatre criticism can be seen in the pages of the "Staging Gender" issue of Theatre Journal (October 1985). Three essays use their theories and one analyzes one of Cixous's several plays, Portrait de Dora. That play has been successfully produced in France and England, and has been published in French and English (twice),²¹ but has yet to receive a major U.S. production. It combines much of her theory with a text "about" one of Freud's most-discussed cases in a highly theatrical manner. Cixous continues to write for theatre, and Wittig has done so as well. The connections between these theories and aspects of performance are just beginning to be tapped. Marianne DeKoven, for instance, has applied French theories to Gertrude Stein.²² But much remains to be done.

¹⁹For example, Speculum of the Other Woman and This Sex Which Is Not One by Irigaray (1985), The Newly Born Woman by Cixous and Catherine Clement (1986), Desire in Language (1980) and Revolution in Poetic Language (1984) by Kristeva, and several books as well as essays in Feminist Issues by Wittig.

²⁰Nancy K. Miller, ed., Gender and Culture Series (N.Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986), has essays by Wittig, Alice Jardine, Jane Gallop and Domna C. Stanton.

²¹In Benmussa Directs (London: John Calder, 1979) and in Diacritics 13 (Spring 1983): 2-32.

²²A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing (Madison, Wisc.: Univ. of Wisc. Press, 1983).

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