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Stranger than Truth: Feminist Literary Criticism and Speculations on Women

In opening her lecture on women and fiction, Virginia Woolf considered that “when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold.”¹ These days, among literary critics at least, controversies about literature and theories of representation are perhaps as sharp as debates about women and men. Indeed, questions about the relationship of literature and theory are often marked by attention to sexual difference. So in considering developments in feminist literary criticism and developments in literary theory, as I propose to do, the problem of the truth is particularly acute, for the subject includes women and literature—and theories about both. By surveying, in necessarily general terms, the grounds of feminist criticism, and by asking what constitutes a theoretical vantage point, I hope to suggest just how important the truth of women is to our ways of understanding literature, even if the importance of this truth is its very impossibility.

Feminist literary criticism takes as its object of study women and representation, the relation of which has come to be conceptualized in three major ways: as representations of women, or images of women in literature; as representations by women, or women’s writing; and as women and “the conditions of representability,” or the relation of sexual difference to the very possibility of signification.² While important differences distinguish the work of critics who advance one of these conceptions in favor of another, all agree that sexual difference functions hierarchically in our culture, making woman the second sex, and that literature, as a cultural product, is caught up in the consequences of this asymmetrical difference. The variations in feminist criticism, the theoretical debates, even antagonisms which have developed over the last several years have to do with how the two

terms, "woman" and "representation" are understood, not whether they are related.

In 1969, when Kate Millett wrote *Sexual Politics*, she argued that representations of women in literature served an important function, helping to reproduce the inequities of the social order. Thus literature was a part of "sexual politics," the social control and cultural denigration of women. For Millett, and for many critics influenced by the second wave of feminism, literature was seen as an ideological event, compelling because of its formal complexity and aesthetic pleasures, dangerous in its distortions of the reality of women's lives.³ Such a criticism turned on the criteria of authentic experience and adequate representation; while offering a timely counter to the formalism of New Criticism, it quickly became a repetitive exercise in demonstrating the many instances of trivialized or glorified, sentimentalized or degraded images of women. In the process, however, feminist critics began to wonder what an authentic representation of a woman might be. If the images offered by men in the canonized literature of our tradition are inauthentic, what might one learn from women writers? Could representations by women help to answer the question, "what is a woman?"

Certainly, shifting the focus to women's writing has generated new questions which relate to the old one. Feminist critics have studied characterizations of women in fiction; the conditions under which women write; the position of women writers *vis à vis* the canon; the possibility of a specifically female literary tradition, or of a way of writing unique to women. In a way, these questions aren't new: years ago Virginia Woolf explored in *A Room of One's Own* the material conditions which have hampered women writers, the cultural constraints which have shaped their imaginations, and the remarkable productions of women under the most adverse circumstances. But not until the last decade have these questions been asked insistently and answered in detail.

One of the first full-length studies of women writers as authors with a common history and shared experiences is Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*.⁴ Referring to Woolf in her title, Showalter proposes that women have been able to write in part because there does exist a tradition of women's literature, a tradition largely ignored by standard English studies, but one which enabled women to write of their own concerns and to resist somewhat the pressures of a market-place controlled by men and a canon dominated by male writers. Showalter's revisionary literary history is typical of a major development in feminist criticism, the study of women authors never admitted to "the

tradition," studies which argue that women's writing is trivialized as minor because women themselves and their concerns are dismissed as of secondary importance. Annette Kolodny's "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," for instance, is a demonstration of the ways men misapprehend women's writing.⁵ Kolodny reviews the troubled publishing history of Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, arguing that the power of the story's basic metaphor—the imprisonment of a creative woman—escaped or was actively repressed by the men who read the story. They simply couldn't or wouldn't see it. This kind of blindness and the consequent invisibility of women's lives Kolodny reads again in "A Jury of Her Peers," finding in that story of women's solidarity and men's interpretive failings a paradigm for the lot of women writers and male readers.

The feminist practice of revising literary history and the suspicion of traditional judgments of women's writing both challenge canonical norms and, as Mary Jacobus asserts, "[politicize] in a flagrant and polemical fashion the 'difference' which has traditionally been elided by criticism and by the canon formations of literary history."⁶ All worthwhile literature does not represent the Nature of Man. Literature and criticism are both historically specific activities, and feminist critics are eager to identify that specificity. Or, as Kolodny writes, "feminist literary critics are essentially seeking to discover how aesthetic value is assigned in the first place, where it resides (in the text or in the reader), and, most importantly, what validity may really be claimed by our aesthetic 'judgments.' What ends do those judgments serve . . . ?"⁷ As her own work shows, Kolodny believes that paying attention to the realities of women's lives will help one understand and value the productions of women writers.⁸ This concern is shared by Elaine Showalter, perhaps the most emphatic advocate of a feminist literary criticism defined by a focus on women's experience and "related to feminist research in history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology, all of which have developed hypotheses of a female subculture including not only ascribed status, and the internalized constructs of femininity, but also the occupations, interactions, and consciousness of women."⁹ Thus a sociology of knowledge critical of the production and maintenance of the canon is combined with a socio-historical analysis of the specific features of women's lives and literature. For many feminists, the "feminist poetics" articulated by Showalter are convincing in the return to the basic question—what is a woman—because only by knowing about women's "occupations, interactions, and consciousness" can one interpret and evaluate women's writing.

Indeed, the emphasis on the consciousness of women, and the representation of that consciousness in literature unites otherwise varying feminist criticisms. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, don't rely on the social sciences in the way that Showalter does, but certainly do take as their most important object the consciousness of women, a consciousness they find to be divided and in conflict, yet capable of remarkable imaginative productions.¹⁰ Their work is perhaps the best known example of a development in feminist criticism which Myra Jehlen has called "radical comparativism," that is, the study of how women writers repeat and revise the literary tradition which they inherit, but which disinherits women in its very formation.¹¹ Gilbert and Gubar offer a feminist poetics of covert resistance and strategic appropriation, arguing that women must win authority as writers through an oblique relation to a literary tradition and to a marketplace hostile to women. The palimpsest is emblematic of women's writing in their view, offering as it does an overt design which covers over but does not completely obscure another representation. True stories of women's anger and rebellion are hidden under acceptable cover stories, and the feminist critic must be attentive to the subtle revisions which women writers work on the traditions available to them. Part of their culture, their imaginations working on common cultural material, women writers are also alienated as the second sex; to create they must do as Emily Dickinson, "Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant — —." ²

Tracing the "slant" of women's writing, understanding how women writers tell women's truths through mediums traditionally hostile to women is perhaps the most common feminist critical practice right now. In the introduction to a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* devoted to "Writing and Sexual Difference," Elizabeth Abel notes that in many of the collected essays "Female characters and female authors alike emerge as ingenious strategists who succeed in devising some mode of assertion."¹³ And the October, 1984 *PMLA* confirms this development in feminist criticism and its increasingly general acceptance most emphatically: of the six major articles (all by women), four are instances of feminist criticism. One is a study of images ("The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination"); the three others are all devoted in different ways to analyzing the strategies of women writers working from and in a patriarchal culture. For instance, in an article on Eudora Welty, Patricia Yaeger celebrates Welty's "ability to rupture and restructure those patriarchal traditions that operate not only on texts but within history as well."¹⁴ Her essay is representative of the revisionist emphasis common to much feminist criticism; indeed she

not only argues that Welty revises Yeat's poetry, but herself recasts Bakhtin's theory of the novel to include categories of gender.

Women's writing, then, seems to afford some answers to the question, what is a woman, but only if read with attention to the particularity of women's experience as authors, as readers. Many feminist critics share Elizabeth Abel's concerns. "As a feminist I'm still . . . looking for answers about female identity," she says. "I want to figure out what the forms of female experience are."¹⁵ One must be conscious of oneself as a woman, know that women are different from men, and different from what men say they are in order to understand how women's writing is representative of women's lives. For Kolodny, this knowledge is the key to feminist literary criticism, "that locus in literary study where, in unceasing effort, female self-consciousness turns in upon itself, attempting to grasp the deepest conditions of its own unique and multiplicitous realities . . ." ¹⁶ Showalter, too, asserts the primacy of women's experience as the ground of feminist criticism and rejects "the androcentric critical tradition," declaring that "Feminist criticism cannot go around forever in men's ill-fitting hand-me-downs . . . , but must, as John Stuart Mill wrote about women's literature in 1869, 'emancipate itself from the influence of accepted models, and guide itself by its own impulses . . .'" ¹⁷ The strongest impulse of the feminist criticism discussed so far is to discover what is a woman, either through the findings of history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology or through self-reflection. The feminist critic can then evaluate representation with reference to the truth of woman herself.

This belief in women's experience and consciousness has led to a wide-spread suspicion of theory among feminists, for theoretical accounts of women often seem to ignore or actually contradict the evidence of everyday life. The social sciences, however, seem to be natural allies, since those disciplines are devoted to explaining the facts of our lives as we live them. For instance, work of the psychologist Nancy Chodorow is highly regarded by Showalter and many others because Chodorow has undertaken to explain the psychic consequences of mothering in social terms, arguing that the social relations which make mothers the primary care-takers of infants and children produce adults who have problems—specifically, problems with women. For girls, the problem is an identification with the mother that is too close and which thwarts individuation; for boys, the difficulty is to establish an identity in opposition to the early union with the mother. Chodorow's socially specific revisions of psychoanalysis provide the frame of reference for various feminists who analyze the ways in which literature corroborates her findings, recognizing in texts significant elements that would otherwise go unnoticed.¹⁸

Other developments in psychoanalytic theory are often regarded less favorably by feminists. Susan Gubar says that she is suspicious of "Lacanian daughters" whose theorizing repeats the abstractions of Jacques Lacan's own work; Sandra Gilbert finds the "anti-empirical" writing of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, both of whom use a kind of psychoanalytic discourse, "detached from what we have to struggle with."¹⁹ This suspicion of abstraction and detachment is repeated by Jane Marcus when she accuses "male theorists" of "star-gazing" and urges women to keep their feet on the ground.²⁰

However, this ground, the truth of women's lives, is a problem for all feminists. The truth of women is not self-evident, but requires some sort of explanation. Increasingly, feminists are finding that the explanations offered by empirically based theories tend to repeat the problem rather than solve it, especially when the authority of experience is advocated as sufficient evidence. Jacqueline Rose, in "Femininity and its Discontents" argues that psychoanalysis is absolutely important for feminism precisely because it distances one from everyday life and challenges what we think we know about ourselves. She writes,

What distinguishes psychoanalysis from sociological accounts of gender (hence for me the fundamental impasse of Nancy Chodorow's work) is that whereas for the latter, the internalization of norms is assumed roughly to work, the basic premise and indeed starting point for psychoanalysis is that it does not. The unconscious constantly reveals the 'failure' of identity. [T]here is no continuity of psychic life, and there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is ever simply achieved Feminism's affinity with psychoanalysis rests above all, I would agree, with this recognition that there is a resistance to identity which lies at the very heart of psychic life....²¹

For Rose, women's experience is a problem, not an answer, and requires a theory to challenge the adequacy of social classifications. Feminism needs analyses which attend to the dynamic processes through which identity is problematically structured. Feminists, who have long known that women have a particularly vexed relationship to who or to what they "should be," would profit from paying attention to "the basic insight of psychoanalysis—the failure or difficulty of femininity for women, and that fundamental psychic division which in Freud's work was its accompanying and increasingly insistent discovery."²²

In fact, one of the most significant developments in feminist criticism has been the articulation of a literary criticism informed by psychoanalysis. Those who write such criticism have no innocent relationship to psychoanalytic theory, but do take seriously the analytic procedures which suspend closure, patiently tracing in a text con-

flicts not amenable to resolution and moments of excess which break the bounds of propriety. Often, feminists turn psychoanalysis against itself, not to purify the theory, but to suggest the impossibility of pure theory and the imperative to rethink even the most beautifully conceived analysis. The same goes for literature. What is of interest is not so much thematic development and structural coherence, but rather the textual detail—an unexpected rhetorical figure, an unexplained digression—which is interesting precisely in being *de trop*, too much for the text as it is usually read. Naomi Schor, in “Female Paranoia: The Case for Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism,” suggests that synecdoche, “the detail-figure,” might be the trope of choice for feminist criticism, disrupting as it does the classical structural binary of metonymy and metaphor.²³ A psychoanalytic feminist criticism which pays attention to the processes of a text that exceed sensible explanation does not take as its referent what women experience and know (the moment of female self-consciousness), but takes as problematic the self, consciousness, knowledge, sexual difference, and identity. The best one can do is analyze, in detail, how identity is produced in the subject, how meaning is produced in a text, and be attuned to the dissonances ignored or explained away by traditional literary criticism. The “failure or difficulty of femininity” exemplifies the impossibility of stable psychic positions, an impossibility repeated in the field of literary representation.

Indeed, psychoanalysis links the problems of identity and sexuality with representation, the construction of the subject through culturally inscribed and enforced representations which never provide a permanent fix precisely because representation provides no natural or necessary ground. And here, where subjectivity and representation coincide, feminists have taken up not only psychoanalytic theory, but also the radical questionings of deconstructive philosophy.²⁴

Jacques Derrida’s work for the last twenty years have been an unremitting analysis of “phallogocentrism,” “an enormous and old root” which runs through Western thought and sustains the most basic relations of power in the name of necessity and the law. Phallogocentrism is above all an idealism which guarantees the centrality of man and the evidence of essential truths. The center is secured through an insistence on oppositional categories which are strictly hierarchical. The hierarchy is constituted, as Derrida puts it, through

the enterprise of returning, ‘strategically’ in idealization, to an origin or to a priority seen as single, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order *then* to conceive of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc. All metaphysics have proceeded thus . . . : good before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple

before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. This is not just *one* metaphysical gesture among others; it is the metaphysical exigency, the most constant, profound, and potent procedure.²⁵

No wonder Derrida has been particularly interested in the feminine, or "woman" as that which guarantees the identity and priority of man. For are not women complex, corruptible, derivative, the daughters of Eve? Woman, as the other of man, as that-which-is-not-man, insures the identity of man himself. Or, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, "The discourse of man is in the metaphor of woman."²⁶ The discourses of truth and right, knowledge and morality, spoken by one who knows where he stands, are predicated on the displacement of women in their specificity, a displacement which makes "woman" but the negative of man.

If this strategic idealization is enacted through a displacement of women, if the truths of man are "in the metaphor of woman," why not dispense with metaphor and get at the truth? As we have seen, there's been no lack of effort in this direction, but problems still remain. For such efforts, committed to a positive truth of women beyond the illusions of representation, are still caught up in the logic of phallogocentrism and, in the name of history and materialism, oppose reality to representation without inquiring how each is implicated in the other. One can't simply exchange metaphor for truth without reinforcing the procedures of hierarchical opposition which have done women no good.

So what to do? Some feminist critics have turned their attention to the operations of appropriation and displacement, not to replace "the metaphor of woman" with the "real" truth, but to analyze the processes through which man comes into his own and woman is inscribed as the other. One important development is a better understanding of the double effects of displacement: 1) displacement is a strategic idealization which privileges one thing at the expense of another, and 2) the ideal exists only by virtue of the relation which brings it into being. That is, "ideal" meaning is constituted through difference, and difference is illimitable. The ideal, positive term, supposedly secure in its being, is thus exposed as an effect, an effect of being different; further, the process of differing cannot be brought to a halt by a First Cause, because every cause is first an effect. And yet, while the inexorable logic of difference undoes any essentialism, the potent procedures of metaphysics nonetheless work to impose a final closure or an originary essence from which all subsequent differences derive.

Feminist critics have proceeded in two general ways from this position. First, a common project has been to trace the moves a text

makes on women, analyzing the exclusions which are enacted to constitute the "truth" and considering the various failures of such exclusions, noting the marginal elements of a text which disrupt its closure, the excesses which disturb its singular meaning. Second, since women are marginalized by the prevailing order, feminists have been attentive to how representations by women in particular display the limits of a phallogocentric system of representation. Such deconstructive readings almost always overlap in some way with psychoanalytic questions, since both deconstruction and psychoanalysis are concerned with the effects of displacement and the return of the repressed.

In *Fictions of Feminine Desire: Disclosures of Heloise*, Peggy Kamuf studies in five texts "the particular structure which is working to appropriate and disguise the force of woman's passion." The unruly force of desire is consistently disciplined in the novels she reads, but just as surely remains out of bounds: a "disruptive difference . . . which no text can annihilate without leaving traces of such a violence." In attending to the effects of such traces, Kamuf "[attempts] a practice of reading that passes among the various levels of the text, that gives attention to detail, and that, instead of assigning meaning, looks for the terms which meaning excludes." She continues: "Since each text elaborates a means with which to conceal the woman's passionate activity, that is, both to deny it and to assign it a (hidden) place in a structure, a reading that respects the already sanctioned categories of this structure—psychological, stylistic, or thematic, for example—can only continue to disguise the operation of the feminine in the text's language."²⁷ She proceeds, therefore, not by analyzing the hidden identities of women characters, or by developing the themes of seduction and betrayal, but by considering how the feminine is involved in what Mary Jacobus has called "the conditions of representability." As Jacobus notes, "Language itself would at once repress multiplicity and heterogeneity—true difference—by the tyranny of hierarchical oppositions (man/woman) and simultaneously work to overthrow that tyranny by interrogating the limits of meaning . . ."²⁸

The relation of woman and representation is precisely what concerns Jacobus in her article "Is There a Woman in this Text?", an analysis of "the specular appropriation of woman, or even her elimination altogether" as the necessary condition for theorizing. She observes, following Hegel, that "the innovation of theory is to transform an ungraspable reality into something representable." But representation, as we know, is a specular system which in fact can't see women, since "woman" is imagined as absence to man's presence, lack to phallic plentitude, and so on. As Jacobus says, "feminists are caught in the dilemma of theory itself, particularly in their current concern not

simply with sexual difference but with the issue of 'the woman in the text,' or gendered writing. If 'theory' involves . . . a return to the field of representation (like patriarchal discourse, the traditional arena of women's oppression), would we do better to renounce it altogether?"²⁹ As we have seen, some would say yes, but Jacobus answers differently. Theory is not a simple case because, after all, only with the benefit of theories of representation can one see the operations which both displace women and open up radical and destabilizing differences. Sexual difference is not stable binary, determining the essential being of man and woman, but an unstable, asymmetrical relation that gives way at various moments to the possibilities of differences. Indeed, the displacement which is an appropriation of "woman" also insures, affirmatively, that the displaced feminine will return to disrupt the discourse of essentialism.

In addition to studying the dynamics of the feminine in texts written by men, feminists study the excessive writing of women. Again the aim is not to claim for women the rights and privileges traditionally the prerogative of men, but to demonstrate how representations by women display the grounds of representation and the fault-lines of radical difference. As Kamuf writes in an essay on *A Room of One's Own*, "for Woolf . . . forced entry into the language will not simply substitute a 'feminine' one for a masculine. Indeed, it cannot for a multiplicity already inhabits the site of this writing."³⁰ Since women writers are, willy-nilly, caught up in the dominant representational system, their writing is not free of the constraints of representation—indeed, even to posit such a freedom is to return to the promises of essentialism—but their oblique relation to the privileges of phallogocentrism makes for writing prone to disruption. My reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, for instance, explores how the contradictions and excesses of that excessively contradictory text are relentless displacements of singular identity, oppositional difference, authentic being, all in a novel which endeavors to tell the story of a woman's coming to consciousness of herself.³¹

Feminist critics who turn to theory are not star-gazers, then, unconcerned with the ground that they stand on. Rather, they are examining the generally unexamined foundationalism which has a place for woman—always the same place, opposite, under man. Only when one moves off those grounds can one see how shaky they are and what subverts their order. If, in studying women and representation, one takes women as the truth and representation as the problem, feminist criticism will do little to alter our thinking about either.

Feminist criticism isn't going to find its "permanent home" in the higher reaches of theory, however.³² Indeed, the best hope for feminist

studies of women and representation is a willingness to be suspended, and not to settle down too soon. For, having analyzed the multiple displacements on which phallogocentrism depends, one must be wary of taking displacement in itself as the truth of women. Spivak has articulated this problem most convincingly in her essay "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," charging that the "woman" celebrated by theorists who find in her an irreducible difference "remains a woman generalized and defined in terms of . . . varieties of denial."³³ Woman here is doubly displaced as "the feminine" becomes the sign of difference, and difference is the truth of representation. How to think about women and representation without reducing either one to the other remains to be done. The suspense may be hard to bear, but feminist critics must continue to wonder, what is a woman?

NOTES

1. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1929), p. 4.
2. Mary Jacobus, "Is There a Woman in this Text?," *New Literary History*, 14 (Autumn, 1982): 138.
3. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1970). Other early feminist criticism includes: Mary Ellman, *Thinking About Women* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, Harvest, 1968); Susan Koppelman Cornillon, ed., *Images of Women in Fiction* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973); Josephine Donovan, ed., *Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975).
4. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). Also in this general category one finds Patricia Spack, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Avon Books, 1975) and Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1976).
5. Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Re-reading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," *New Literary History*, 11 (Spring, 1980): 452-467.
6. Mary Jacobus, "The Question of Language: Men of Maxims and *The Mill on the Floss*," *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (Winter, 1981): 209.
7. Annette Kolodny, "Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," *Feminist Studies*, 6 (Spring, 1980): 15.
8. Further, understanding the realities of women's lives can help to illuminate otherwise puzzling texts by helping to define the specific dynamics of the historical moment in which a text is produced. See Kolodny's "Turning the Lens on 'The Panther Captivity': A Feminist Exercise in Practical Criticism," *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (Winter, 1981): 329-346, for a re-reading of a story, elements of which critics have found inexplicable. Kolodny explicates with reference to "women's increasing advance onto the frontier."
9. Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics," in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), p. 28.
10. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979).
11. Myra Jehlen, "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism," *Signs*, 6 (Summer 1981): 585.
12. Emily Dickinson, *Poems*, J. 512, quoted by Gilbert and Gubar, p. 73.
13. Elizabeth Abel, Editor's Introduction," *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (Winter, 1981): 178.

14. Patricia S. Yaeger, "Eudora Welty and the Dialogic Imagination," *PMLA*, 99 (October, 1984): 969. I should remark here another related development: feminist criticism which analyzes the ways certain genres constrain both women writers and what can be written about women. Mary Poovey, in "Mary Wollstonecraft: The Gender of Genres in Late Eighteenth-Century England," *Novel*, 15 (Winter, 1982): 111-126, discusses the impossibility for Wollstonecraft of working successfully within the genre of the sentimental novel. In "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism," Myra Jehlen argues that the internal logic of the novel "precludes androgynously heroic women," even as it requires that its heroes have both an exterior, public life and "an interior life" that is "metaphorically female."
15. Elizabeth Abel, quoted in an interview in the "Introduction," *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981): 10.
16. Kolodny, "Dancing through the Minefield," p. 16. Elaine Showalter makes a similar point in "Towards a Feminist Poetics" when she writes that she is "committed to a revolution of consciousness" (p. 39). Self-consciousness as a reader is the basis of another aspect of feminist criticism which relates to reader-response criticism. For example, Judith Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978) analyzes how many American novels require the reader to identify with a male protagonist against women—and she tries actively to resist this identification to produce new readings of the texts.
17. Showalter, "Feminist Poetics," p. 37.
18. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). For two examples of literary criticism which take Chodorow's work as a frame of reference, see Marianne Hirsch, "A Mother's Discourse: Incorporation and Repetition in *La Princesse de Clèves*," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981): 67-87, and Coppélia Kahn, "Excavating 'Those Dim Minoan Regions': Maternal Subtexts in Patriarchal Literature," *Diacritics* 12 (Summer, 1982): 32-41.
19. Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert, quoted in an interview in the "Introduction," *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981): 10. For an introduction to the work of Irigary and Cixous, and other French women writers and critics, see Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).
Even the assertion of "what we have to struggle with" has been questioned in terms of the generalized "we," for in recent years Black and Third World women have asserted the differences in women's experiences, paying attention to race and class in contrast to most white feminists who conceive of "woman" as a unified category. A few examples of work that contests that assumption: Jane Bakerman, "Failures of Love: Female Initiation in the Novels of Toni Morrison," *American Literature*, 52 (January, 1981): 541-563; Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith, eds., *Conditions: Five*, "The Black Women's Issue," (1979); Andrea B. Rusing, "An Annotated Bibliography of Images of Black women in Black Literature," *College Language Claudia Tate*, ed., *Black Women Writers at Work* (New York: Continuum, 1983). *Association Journal*, 25 (December 1981): 234-262; The experience of women of color as different from that of white women must be more generally recognized in literary criticism. However, theoretical problems with the category of experience still remain.
20. Jane Marcus, "Storming the Toolshed," *Signs* 7 (Spring, 1982): 624.
21. Jacqueline Rose, "Femininity and its Discontents," *Feminist Review*, 14 (June, 1983): 5.
22. Rose, p. 14.
23. Naomi Schor, "Female Paranoia: The Case for a Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism," *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981): 219.
24. What follows is by no means an exhaustive list, but merely a mention of some of the critics (not cited elsewhere in this essay) working with feminism, psychoanalysis, and/or deconstruction: Jonathan Culler, who in *On Description* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982) includes a section on "Reading as a Woman" which is a thoughtful review of feminist criticism; Shoshana Felman, whose "Rereading Femininity," *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981): 19-44 is a good introduction to her work; Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); Alice Jardine, "Gynesis," *Diacritics* 12 (Summer 1982): 54-65; Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Stephen Heath, "Difference," *Screen* 19 (Autumn, 1978): 51-112 and *The Sexual Fix* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984); Nancy Miller, *The Heroine's Text Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

25. Jacques Derrida, *Limited, Inc.*, quoted by Culler, p. 93.
26. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 169-196.
27. Peggy Kamuf, *Fictions of Feminine Desire: Disclosures of Heloise* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pp. xvi, xvii, xviii.
28. Jacobus, "Is There a Woman in this Text?," p. 138.
29. Jacobus, p. 137.
30. Peggy Kamuf, "Penelope at Work: Interruptions in *A Room of One's Own*," *Novel*, 16 (Fall, 1982): 17.
31. "Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text," forthcoming in *Studies in English Literature*.
32. Elaine Showalter's phrase in "Feminist Poetics", p. 40.
33. Spivak, p. 170. See also the exchange on this question between Peggy Kamuf ("Replacing Feminist Criticism") and Nancy Miller ("The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions") *Diacritics*, 12 (Summer 1982): 42-53.