

Stephen Heath

Male Feminism

Men's relation to feminism is an impossible one. This is not said sadly nor angrily (though sadness and anger are both known and common reactions) but politically. Men have a necessary relation to feminism—the point after all is that it should change them too, that it involves learning new ways of being women *and men* against and as an end to the reality of women's oppression—and that relation is also necessarily one of a certain exclusion—the point after all is that this is a matter *for women*, that it is their voices and actions that must determine the change and redefinition. Their voices and actions, not ours: no matter how 'sincere', 'sympathetic' or whatever, we are always in a male position which brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation, everything precisely that is being challenged, that has to be altered. Women are the subjects of feminism, its initiators, its makers, its force; the move and the join from being a woman to being a feminist is the grasp of that subjecthood. Men are the objects, part of the analysis, agents of the structure to be transformed, representatives in, carriers of the patriarchal mode; and my desire to be a subject there too in feminism—to be a feminist—is then only also the last feint in the long history of *their* colonization. Which does not mean, of course not, that I can do nothing in my life, that no actions are open to me, that I cannot respond to and change for feminism (that would be a variant on the usual justification for the status quo, men are men and that's that); it just means that I have to realize nevertheless—and this is an effort not a platitude—that I am not where they are and that I cannot pretend to be (though men do, colonizing, as they always have done), which is the impossibility of my, men's, relation.

Nothing in the above is intended to suggest a kind of criterion of immediacy. Women are not feminists by virtue of the fact alone of being women: feminism is a social-political reality, a struggle, a commitment, women *become* feminists. Simply, the negotiation between lived experience and feminism is for them direct, feminism includes that experience as its material and its energy, producing a knowledge

of it for action, for change. The contradictions that may exist between, say, a woman's experience in her family in the defined roles of wife and housewife and mother which may be felt by her as the authentic terms of her being, where she is really 'herself', and the perspectives feminism will give on that experience, those defined roles, on her position as a woman, are what feminism is about, what it looks at, works from, involves, allowing the move and join from woman to feminist. For a man the negotiation is blocked, doubly contradictory: his experience is her oppression, and at the end of whatever negotiation he might make he can only always also confront the fact that feminism starts from there. To refuse the confrontation, to ignore, repress, forget, slide over, project onto 'other men' that fact, is for a man to refuse feminism, not to listen to what it says to him as a man, imagining to his satisfaction a possible relation instead of the difficult, contradictory, self-critical, painful, impossible one that men must, for now, really live.

'I am tired of men arguing amongst themselves as to who is the most feminist, frustrated by an object feminism becoming the stakes in a displaced rivalry between men because of a refusal by men to examine the structure of the relations between themselves', Claire Pajaczkowska.¹ There we have an expression of anger from a feminist, tiredness and frustration. And I accept that. But how? At a distance? Of course I think that I never have argued about being 'the most feminist', others, not me. Yet I can hardly stay at that distance, self-assured, as if I do then, exactly, feminism *is* an object, something I *can* simply position myself in relation to, like some academic study. But then again, if I take it up into me, into my life, calling into question the assumptions of the position of myself (as opposed to just 'taking it up' like Sanskrit or Deconstruction), how do I develop a reflection on it, how do I think and talk and write about—*with*—feminism without falling back into the male argument, without producing another version of the object feminism up for grabs, 'the stakes'?

Pajaczkowska suggests an answer, by examining the structure of the relations between men, me in those relations. She says this, in fact, in an article on pornography, a response to two pieces by men on that topic; which reminds me of a remark by another feminist, B. Ruby Rich, again in an article on pornography, to the effect that if 'the legions of feminist men' wanted to do something useful, 'a proper subject', they could 'undertake the analysis that can tell us why men like porn (not, piously, why this or that exceptional man does *not*)'.²

Pornography and the relations between men and liking pornography That pornography *is* a relation between men, nothing to do with a relation to women except by a process of phallic conversion

that sets them as the terms of male exchange, is now an established part of radical critical awareness, the analysis has been made many times. Which still leaves theoretical-political *issues*: even if a typical reality of pornography can be recognized, is pornography only that, are there distinctions to be made, different kinds? is all pornography violent and offensive? are there connections between pornography and sexual liberation that are important, progressive? are men's and women's pleasures in sexual imagery bound up with, separate—separable—from pornographic representations and how? are pornographic images for male arousal necessarily the reproduction of domination? what should be done and how about pornography? is it in itself a central target for action or does it deflect from the needed critique of and challenge to the violent sexual objectification of women that runs through the whole range of cultural forms that are socially accepted as non-pornographic? All these and more are issues that have been, are being debated by women, by feminists (for an argued account, from which I have borrowed here, I refer to the relevant chapter of Elizabeth Wilson's *What is to be done about violence against women*?²³).

My immediate concern though is male feminism. I once wrote, quoting a phrase coined by Robin Morgan and used in women-against-pornography movements: ' "Pornography is the theory and rape the practice"—learning to understand the truth of that statement—and to understand it personally, with respect to one's own life—is a political-ethical necessity.'²⁴ I believe that, for men: if men do not grasp that in themselves, then I think that the social structure of sexual oppression is still abstract for them and that feminism is beyond them, out there, just an object again. This is not, obviously, to say that feminism is merely about pornography, only that pornography in our societies, the capitalized circulation of images of sexual-commodity women, is one good crystallization of that social structure, that oppression (there are many others), whether or not those images are ostensibly violent or ostensibly not. 'Pornography is the theory and rape the practice' says it exactly; and if, a reproach that is made, this is a crude position, and reading the feminist debate round the issues mentioned above does make the question complex, difficult, it must still be said that starting from it is necessary for men—do we want to be *subtle* about it, more prevarication, more defensiveness?

One way of grasping the structure of the relations between men is, indeed, with respect to pornography in these terms: what complicity of masculinity does pornography involve me in? Whether or not *I* have any thing to do with it is in this context irrelevant (no need for personal piety); it has to do with me, inescapably, not just because I live in its society but because too, which is what that means, pornography is this society's running commentary on the sexual for me, the final

image I can have (how do I dissociate myself from that image and don't I in the very fact of dissociation recognize its involvement of me, in me?). And it runs into theory as well. For Freud after all, in the last years of his long life's work of the elaboration of psychoanalysis, 'the repudiation of femininity must surely be a biological fact, part of the great riddle of sex'.⁵ Edged through by 'femininity', object and limit, explanation and enigma, psychoanalysis turns round and round again to its difficulties, all its insights and its blindnesses coming down into Freud's ultimate weariness, the gloom of understanding, 'the repudiation of femininity'. Pornography in its typical contemporary reality knows nothing but that: it gives a 'female sexuality' that fits and reassures the repudiation, the representation of her confirmed and confirming—woman as phallic, the same in a masculine sexual economy and woman as passive, feminine, the exact and separate other half, the opposite sex, that that economy requires, allaying the fear of the non-identity of maleness, that men might really be feminine and passive too ('masculine' and 'feminine', those concepts that Freud rejects as 'of no use' in psychology but that he continues to use, filling them with 'active' and 'passive', and that he finds with the psychical 'bedrock' of every male or female individual: men fear passivity, women envy the penis, femininity repudiated). Pornography is developed to be about 'men together', in every sense of the term: all the figures in its systems are male, masculinity from start to finish; its consumption defines a community of men; its aim is my identity as defined maleness, me together, untouched by real relations of sexual difference that include me in the fact of difference, in a sexuality that is heterogeneous, problematic, unstable, the process of my individual history, not just one sex, one's sex, the given heterosexual.

What can then be asked, I think, coming back to theory, coming back to male feminism, is whether that sexual system, that togetherness, is not always in danger of being replayed: contemporary theory as the rebonding of men round 'the feminine' (what exactly is happening when Derrida proclaims his wish to write 'as (a) woman' and all these deconstructing academics excel themselves for the time of a book or an article in woman's non-place, knowing as '*she* knows' that 'there is no truth'?⁶), male feminism as getting hold again—for the last time?—of the question of 'the woman' (are we sure that we are *so* far from the general cultural fascination with woman and 'liberation' and the sexual, from all its modes of recuperation?). Pajaczkowska's tiredness and frustration can go alongside and as a counterbalance to Freud's weariness: the repudiation of femininity and an object feminism, feminism as an expression of women that becomes an object for me, another way of retrieving her, very nicely, as mine, another view of

the old enigma, woman again. Is it possible to wonder whether there is not in male feminism, men's relation to feminism, always potentially a pornographic effect?

Which is said in difficulty, in recognition of something of the contradictions that there must be in this social reality for men who try to be with feminism. Society, Freud insisted, was rooted in male homosexual love, it was this which was compatible with group ties; women disturbed and were a factor in civilization: society and repressed homosexuality, maintained in its patriarchal forms on the absolute distinction of the sexes, men as men, one and then the other, she as the difference, the projected 'dark continent', man's unknown. Recently, Rosalind Coward has stressed that it is in reality 'men's bodies, men's sexuality which is the true "dark continent" of this society'.⁷ The risk of men's relation to feminism is that it stay a male affair, an argument round women that masks again its male stakes, that refuses again as women are projected back into the safeguard of our identity the real problem, the real point at which change must come, exactly ourselves, the end of 'masculinity'—which, of course, is the end of 'woman' too.

'What do men know about women's martyrdoms?', wrote Thackeray in 1848 in his novel *Vanity Fair*. 'We should go mad had we to endure the hundredth part of those daily pains which are meekly borne by many women. Ceaseless slavery meeting with no reward; constant gentleness and kindness met by cruelty as constant; love, labour, patience, watchfulness, without even so much as the acknowledgement of a good word; all this, how many of them have to bear in quiet, and appear abroad with cheerful faces as if they felt nothing. Tender slaves that they are, they must needs be hypocrites and weak.'⁸

Thackeray is sympathetic *and* patronizing *and* caught up in all the attitudes that help to make the situation of women he describes. Women are exploited but that exploitation is also their nature; they *are* tender slaves, that is what makes them women. All the terms that Thackeray uses—gentleness, kindness, love, labour, patience, watchfulness—are women's qualities, the fact of their true womanhood, and the situation described is the context in which those qualities are brought out; so that what is at stake is not change but recognition—the acknowledgement of a good word, the due reward for the ceaseless slavery. Sincerely, Thackeray is locked into his perception of 'women's martyrdoms': women's lot is cruel and he is alongside them to express the cruelty; martyrdom is the very condition of saints and he is there to celebrate saintliness, reconfirming that lot.

We can see this easily now, looking back at the past, men as well as women. But how much of male feminism today may not also be

analysable as a similar gesture of sympathy-reconfirmation? Can men see that? Suspicion of sympathy: *why, how* am I sympathetic?

Barthes one day in conversation: 'you study what you desire or what you fear'. In any formal sense I haven't studied feminism or feminist issues (is formal study anyway the point?) but I have read and thought about and written in relation to it and them, written on matters that are matters with which feminism is concerned—sexual difference, the contemporary construction of sexuality, the imaging and representation of men and women. Desire? Fear? Both? The questions are difficult to avoid. Writing after all is always an imaging and representation of myself, the passage of a certain desire: it takes a stance and asks for me to be seen in this or that way, even if I cannot control—master—its effects, how you will read me. Of course, there are conventions and genres of the elimination of desire, my writing as the voice of truth, reason, science, which is then the imaging and representation of an institutionalized mastery, my desire for that, that as my 'fitness'. To respond to feminism is to forgo mastery; 'the personal is political' tells me also that I cannot refuse to analyze my desire, that the impersonal safety of authority can no longer be mine. Is that then where the fear enters and connects? Feminism makes things unsafe for men, unsettles assumed positions, undoes given identities. Hence so often the violence of the reactions, that is clear. But hence too perhaps, less clear, elements in the relations men make with feminism, their sympathy. If I can move close to feminism, it may be that I can regain something of a male/female security, get back something of an identity. Do I write from desire/fear, to say simply in the last analysis 'love me', accept me at least as 'modestly, ingloriously marginal'? Which was indeed Barthes's definition of *the lover* today.

Desire and fear at any rate could serve as something of a genealogical probe for male feminism, somewhere from which to think about this or that manifestation and its implications. To think about, which does not mean to reduce to but merely to remember *as well* the sexual strategies of discourse, the subjectivity of the production of knowledge. One could, for example, think about Lacan and his work in this way, giving a different perspective to those of the accounts by followers and propagators. From the initial encounter with the woman, the enigma of her (in the 1930s, curiously coincidental with the beginnings of Freud's 'return' to 'femininity', 'the dark continent', Lacan confronts female paranoia, the Papin sisters and Aimée, the subject of his thesis) through to the *Encore* seminar and beyond (Lacan in the 1970s devoting himself explicitly to 'what Freud expressly left aside, the *Was will das Weib?*, the *What does woman want?*'⁹), we have what? The

question, the woman, her non-existence, her not-allness, a pleasure—*jouissance*—proper to her, supplementary, beyond the phallus, related to God . . . and an address and a self-address in and out of all this which is at once provocative, Lacan putting feminists right, ah the phallus, and identificatory, Lacan a better woman and in love with him and herself, talking about love itself a *jouissance* and psychoanalysis nothing else but that anyway ‘When it comes down to it’, announced Lacan on one occasion to his seminar audience, ‘I am a perfect hysteric, that is to say, without symptoms, except from time to time mistakes in gender’, having given an example of taking ‘miss’—*Mademoiselle*—for masculine.¹⁰ The male analyst understands the woman and speaks in her place, is the perfection of the hysteric, no symptoms, save only the mistakes in gender, the misidentifications indeed, running in and out of her from *his* position, miss-taken but perfect—fear, desire, the love letter as regrounding of authority.

(And where does that leave the woman Lacanian analyst, in his place too? Exactly?).

When the Lacanian analyst sees young people on nude-bathing beaches, what does she know? ‘They [the young people] want to go all the way to the end, but there is no end, other than castration and death.’¹¹ Naively, I understand death as an end, a final reality, but *castration*? The fact of sexual reproduction is also the fact of death, the continuation of the species at the cost of the individual who is transient, mortal. To say which, however, is not to say castration, castration as end, another final reality. There are lots of things one might grasp on nude beaches, and depending on their location: for instance, the beaches in the South of France which this analyst most likely has in mind raise questions to do with the treatment and place of the old (why ‘young people?’), with racial inequality (how many of France’s ‘immigrant’ population are to be seen?), with the whole economic definition of the body, the sexual. But *castration*?

‘It’s extraordinary’, commented Juliet Mitchell in an interview recently, ‘what happens when you get rid of the centrality of the concept of the phallus. I mean, you get rid of the unconscious, get rid of sexuality, get rid of the original psychoanalytic point.’¹² Just as on the beach we confront castration, so we cannot think without the centrality of the concept of the phallus—to do so would be to ‘get rid of’ the unconscious and sexuality. These latter are bound up with difference and division and language in the individual, the excess of the individual over the simple sexual function of species reproduction, the movement of desire that the excess constitutes in our particular histories as speaking beings. For psychoanalysis, which indeed opens up for

understanding this scene of the unconscious and sexuality, the phallus, the penis sublime as symbol, is *the* mark of division and difference, the ur-signifier, the ultimate and initial point of meaning, closing the unconscious and sexuality round it. And from there the scenario is everywhere played out, down to the young people and the beach, no other end, it's extraordinary. . . .

What can I say to that? Apart from, in the crudest psychoanalytic response, *nothing*, since to say anything to it is merely an indication of my resistance, defence, denial, since the phallus and castration give the very structure from where I can speak at all. I can say and try to show that what is being described by psychoanalysis with the phallus and castration and all the other accompanying terms fits a specific social-historical definition and production of men, women, sexuality. I can say and try to show that the fact of division, the unconscious and the sexual is not by definition dependent on the primacy of the phallus, locked immutably in the same old fixed scenario (joining the whole debate on psychoanalysis and historical understanding to which Juliet Mitchell herself has contributed so much). The theoretical work is valuable and perhaps I can help in it. But what can I say from day to day, teaching, talking, just generally around? I find myself in fact continually defending and criticizing Freud and Lacan, psychoanalysis in their terms, rejecting and needing its descriptions, those terms. Which is where it is true that castration is the end, the final reality of this peculiar split, the original point to which it all comes down and from which, getting rid of the centrality of the concept of the phallus, it all has to be rethought, relived.

But then these are pious words and perhaps this is another way of saying the impossibility of men's relation to feminism. It is as though psychoanalysis is there as a kind of necessary impasse today, full of truth about the construction of our subjectivity, about the realization of the sexual identity of men and women, and full of an historical and social censorship, the foregone conclusion of the centrality of the concept of the phallus. The use of the truth against the censorship by women is one thing, but men after all *are* that truth, they can hardly simply use it against the censorship they today define and represent. I think of another analyst, close to and distant from Lacan, saying once: 'Imagine that it were a woman who had invented the unconscious . . . certainly she would not have invented that unconscious. Impossible, absolutely impossible.'¹³ Yes and no? No doubt she would not have, but the unconscious that Freud invented he also found, found these particular structures and the phallus with them. Freud gets Dora right and she him, which is where the protest, the use, the critique, the reinvention begin, as they only can, from *her*.

Feminism is a subject for women who are, precisely, its subjects, the people who make it; it is their affair. Feminism is also a subject for men, what it is about obviously concerns them; they have to learn to make it their affair, to carry it through into our lives. Feminism speaks to me, not principally nor equally but *too*: the definitions and images and stories and laws and institutions oppressive of women that it challenges, ends, involves me since not only will I find myself playing some part in their reproduction but I too am caught up in them, given as 'man' in their reflection, confined in that place which is then presented as 'mine'. I have written about this, written about matters of feminism, for example in the book *The Sexual Fix* mentioned above about the current construction of sexuality for men and women or in an essay entitled 'Difference' about psychoanalysis and sexual difference.¹⁴ But I do not at all think, even less claim, that these are feminist writings, it is just that they depend on learning from feminism. This is, I believe, the most any man can do today: to learn and so to try to write or talk or act in response to feminism, and so to try not in any way to be anti-feminist, supportive of the old oppressive structures. Any more, any notion of writing a feminist book or being a feminist, is a myth, a male imaginary with the reality of appropriation and domination right behind. But who am I to say this? But still, can't I say that this seems to me how we should see it, part of the ethics of sexual difference today?

Then I think of a counter-example, a bit of *evidence*. Isn't John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* evidently a feminist book? No doubt. Here is a book written by a man that was clearly progressive and important for feminism, part of its history, Mill's intervention into the debate over the equality of the sexes widely recognized by women in the late nineteenth-century and subsequently as 'an enormous advantage to the whole women's movement'.¹⁵ No doubt. But *historically*. Today the history has changed, feminism has grown and advanced, there is no place in that way for a Mill.

And anyway Mill did not set out to write a feminist book, 'just' a book about the situation and rights of women. And anyway recognition of his book's very positive and effective contribution need not avoid the possibility of a negative aspect, Mill's work depending on his male authority and perhaps hiding the work of the women around him on whose actions and analyses he depended at the same time that his book would encourage them. Any anyway, the point of this here, the *preoccupation* with acting, speaking, writing 'feminist', as opposed to the *fact* for women of being feminist, is male contemporary, observable now in certain groups of men (intellectuals, radicals): something to do with being right, correct, finding the authority of identity (and vice versa).

It happens often enough in meetings and discussions in which issues concerning feminism are involved and at which women are largely present that one hears a man preface what he wants to say with 'I live with a radical feminist' or 'I have talked about this with a lot of radical women' or some other, similar statement. What follows is then usually some objection, the expression of some effectively reactionary, very male-sexist position. This is a version, of course, of the some-of-my-best-friends-are ploy, as such not specific to debates about women and feminism, found also in, say, those about race, about racism.

What interests me, though, is that some of us have learnt not to say such things, have learnt that we cannot guarantee our position in that way, that just *because* the personal is political it cannot be used to shore up some purity of being—some rightness—for me. The personal as political means that I cannot simply refer to the personal as *my* identity, that I have to think that identity through in the social terms it carries at its centre, as an *identity*: however many feminist women I know, it is not going to remove me from the structures of sexism, absolve me from the facts of male positioning, domination and so on. The oppression of women is not personal, it is social and I am involved in it as a person in this society; there is no personal guarantee against that. Though this is not to say that I am powerless to renegotiate my identity against those structures, that positioning—that after all has been the work of women in feminism, opposing the given terms for them, renegotiating *their* identity.

Where then am I when I hear 'I live with etc.'? Somewhere else. *I* know better. Do I? And really somewhere else? The problem is still one of guarantees: to believe I am somewhere else and know better is still to appeal to a personal distinction and to suggest an authorization. But what could this latter be? It is not, another version of the personal guarantee, that women's discourse is secured as feminist by the fact of their being women (there are reactionary and anti-feminist women) but that the relation between discourse and experience is *politically* negotiable by women in respect of the reality of their position as objects of oppression, inequality, sexism. Unable to make that negotiation, I am caught in the double bind of a position and a discourse that will always also be today a reflection of domination, social maleness. Whenever I know, precisely I don't, and I have to accept a certain insecurity, the end of authority and authorization, to live a difficult and contradictory process of renegotiation in which *I* can never be assured (no matter what reassurance—the guarantees—I might try to claim). I have to beware too of turning this into some kind of existential tragedy (the tough-time men-now-have on which popular maga-

zines are always running stories); it's just a political fact, no more, no less.

One can also add to the 'I live with etc' gesture the frequently observed ambition of men to be more radical, the most radical in feminism. Once again the more, the most, guarantees, proves correctness. Except, of course, that it doesn't; the extreme simply wipes out the experience it purports to represent (as men have always ordinarily done). So that 'radical' in what preceded ought to have been in inverted commas, since this 'radical' is literally reaction, male reaction, against the new reality of women and feminism that exactly it refuses in the very moment it speaks for it, for them.

In a lecture given a few years ago to the—shortlived—Cambridge Alternative English Faculty (the lecture subsequently became part of a chapter of his *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*), Terry Eagleton, after having reviewed some of the issues for a Marxist aesthetics and listed 'the major Marxist Aestheticians of the century to date' from Lukács to himself, turned to 'feminist criticism' as 'a paradigm' for 'a "revolutionary literary criticism"', entering as he did so the following 'reservation': 'Feminist criticism is still notably underdeveloped, and much of it so far has been empiricist, unsubtle and theoretically thin'.¹⁶ I think there was a little *frisson* in the audience, something rather daring had been said, and also some unexpressed rage.

'Reservation' is an interesting word in this context: the stance of the securely judging voice, commending and caveating; the indication of the containing place assigned, feminist criticism sent back to its reservation; and then, coming round to the voice again, the confirmation of the stance, this voice reserving its rights as it enters the reservation, seeing feminist criticism within the limits of its place. And in fact, 'feminist literary theory' as sighted by Eagleton is exactly a theoretical problem from the outside, the onlooker's worry about specificity and autonomy, about whether the people on the reservation have anything very much to say for themselves theoretically, depending as they do on other 'general theories' ('most notably, Marxism, semiotics and psychoanalysis'): 'There is, then, a theoretical problem about the meaning of an autonomous "feminist literary theory" of any developed kind'. Not that there isn't also a political problem, that of the ' "radical-feminist" problematic', the 'jealous defence of feminist "autonomy"—*separatism*, in fact' which is 'a scandal that any revolutionary, man or woman, must surely denounce'. Feminism is found lacking in autonomy in theory, which is its failing (note the doubting quote marks, ' "feminist literary theory" '), but when you get autonomy in practice it

is another kind of failing, a real scandal (and the quote marks shift their position and attack, 'feminist "autonomy"').

Might not all this be completely irrelevant? Suppose we abandoned the judgement of autonomy, specificity and so on, stopped worrying about feminist theory in those terms, recognized it as strongly unreserved, not much bothered about where it might fit in some overall theoretical spectacle. Theory, we know, has its etymological roots in spectacle, the Greek *theoria* with its indications of sight and contemplation, and women have long been the point of its spectacular exclusion, at best a voice-off (as with the 'woman from Mantinea, called Diotima' to whom Socrates appeals in *The Symposium* for his major speech on love¹⁷). Perhaps theory, not the theoretical but *theory* with all its reservations, is today a male move, an argument from men, their self-preserve, the dominant reservation (Irigaray has been saying and showing this in her work, to be greeted again and again with cries of 'irrationalism', another scandal¹⁸). And then what are men doing when they shift their gaze from theory to practice, a less controllable spectacle, and inveigh in their theory-books against "radical feminism" (more quote marks), against that 'feminist "autonomy"' which any revolutionary woman, he says, must surely denounce? Isn't feminism now exactly about women's autonomy and isn't the definition of the terms of that autonomy exactly an issue for women? Is it helpful, appropriate, feminist for men to stand in judgement of feminism and its theoretical work and its political debates, brandishing an assumed standard of autonomy in the one hand and its foregone dismissal in the other?

None of this is written to be cleverer than or superior to Terry Eagleton (to whom, as my teacher, I anyway owe so much), even if in the reflection of writing I cannot—do not know how to—avoid that male image, the image of bettering, of asserting superiority. Given theory and reservations, Eagleton's 'theoretically thin' is probably right, he thinks it is. I think the contrary, that if we step outside the bounds of theory and reservations, stop waiting to see 'what a "feminist literary theory" as such might mean' (why are we waiting to see and should women wait too?), we shall find a range of work by feminists (Irigaray and Spivak and Bovenschen and Coward and . . . , though the point is not to produce an imitation of Eagleton's list of 'major Marxist aestheticians') which can only make the judgement of 'theoretically thin' appear as a gesture of reaction and resistance (*who* cares if this work doesn't fit some decided image of what should be 'a "feminist literary theory" as such?'). Eagleton knows all this better than I do, but then he takes his position and I take mine; and in that movement I feel

once again the difficulties, the conflict, the impossibilities of men's relation to feminism.

I experience embarrassment—a kind of critical unease—at writings by men on female sexuality: how can they, how can *he* still presume . . . ? But then I think of the reverse, women writing on male sexuality, Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*, for example, or all the work on pornography by Andrea Dworkin, Angela Carter, Susan Griffin and so many others. That they know, that *she* knows something essential about male sexuality seems to me evident: I learn from them. So, reversing again, men can write on female sexuality and women can learn too.

I hesitate, the embarrassment. All this reversing would be fine were it not that the two sides are neither equal nor symmetrical, are simply *not* the same. And this can be seen in the very idea of female sexuality, its construction as an object, something to write about. Take Freud: an essay entitled 'Female Sexuality' but not one entitled 'Male Sexuality', a chapter on the *New Introductory Lectures* on 'Femininity' but not one on 'Masculinity'. Of course, Freud everywhere writes about men and sexuality, about the male sexual, but that is the norm, the point of departure, and as such at least unproblematic, not in question, not *the* question. When women around Freud write on female sexuality (Andreas-Salomé, Bonaparte, Deutsch, Horney . . .), often challengingly, they too are caught up in that question, his, and so contained nevertheless, as still by Lacan, still waiting contemptuously for women to come out with something of interest: 'since the time we've been begging them, begging them on our knees—I mentioned previously women analysts—to try to tell us, well, not a word! never been able to get anything out of them'.¹⁹ He's right, they can't say anything interesting. How could they when the point is this *question*, which is always beyond whatever they might be able to say as the very fact of their being: they *are* the question. Female sexuality here is male sexuality, the male position and problem: woman as *my* other, she as the defining limit—the *jouissance au-delà*, as Lacanians put it—of my horizon as man.

In the overall system of sexuality that is tightened to perfection in the nineteenth century and that still today determines so powerfully in so many ways the facts of our lives, male sexuality is repetition, female sexuality is query (darkness, riddle, enigma, problem, etc.). Of the former one can say nothing inasmuch as there is nothing to say beyond a few technical descriptions and a couple of moral injunctions or routine celebrations; men are men, there is no metaphysical agitation. Of the latter one can say nothing either inasmuch as women as women are the difference in the system so that there is everything to say; she is

too much, a whole difficulty of knowing, which is where female sexuality becomes the object, the topic, the title of the paper or the chapter or the book. We are in a long history from the nineteenth century through to today in which the self-evidence of sex (man, woman, the sexual act, reproduction) begins to weaken, in which 'sexuality' is the term of the recognition of everything that 'sex', 'one's sex', 'the two sexes' do not say, those notions unable to tell us very much about sexual identity, about masculinity and femininity, about being a man, being a woman. Hence the tightening of the system, the definitions and redefinitions, the worried construction of 'female sexuality', all that writing; hence the constant return of sexuality to sex, to a phallic identity of man and woman, the sexual fix.

In a way, then, female sexuality is a bad question from a rotten history; *and* a necessary one, for women against that history, disturbing its monolithic fiction (I pick up a feminist anthology, *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, not a single piece is called 'Female Sexuality' or 'Femininity', as though here the exploration of sexuality for women has already gone elsewhere to that construction²⁰). While 'male sexuality' is a good question from a rotten history that could not pose it; an inevitable question for women, for Millett, for the writers on pornography, for those on rape, domestic violence, all the other matters of oppression. Instead of begging on our knees for women to go on silently proving their phallic otherness, we can listen to what they are effectively saying about *us*, about male sexuality, about the male operation of the sexual in our societies.

This is not to suggest that men might not have, ought not to have, something significant and real and unoppressive to say about women and sexuality: men's experience after all is part of many women's sexuality and men can know things in different ways, just as women can of men's sexuality. For the present though, in our societies, in our sexual history, I doubt in fact that men, that we, can. There is no equality, no symmetry, and so there can be no reversing: it is for women now to reclaim and redefine the terrain of sexuality, for us to learn from them. Which explains the unease, my opening embarrassment.

At a meeting of the Lacan School a woman analyst says this: 'The nature of femininity is to be cause of man's desire and, as corollary, not to be able to be recognized other than by a man is the nature of femininity. I know that the MLF [Women's Liberation Movement] will be super-angry but I'll carry on. . . .'²¹

Whether or not feminists will be 'super-angry' (my rendering of the here trivializing *furax*, a kid's slang version of *furieux*, 'furious') will

presumably depend on the stress given 'femininity'. If it is a matter of femininity as the constructed image of women, the image in which they are recognized and held as women, then what is being said is a truism: man's desire is set in relation to that construction of femininity which women are made to match and which thus exists precisely by virtue of its recognition by men. In that sense indeed, it really does not take a man to know a woman, since she in this femininity is his knowledge, his image, the height of his imagination—'a real woman'. If it is a matter of something else, of femininity in connection with the reality and experience of women, being a woman, then what is being said might well give rise to anger, to political critique, to feminism.

Perhaps it is almost that 'feminine' and 'femininity' should be scrapped, their use abandoned; they come too loaded with the image, the construction, the monolithic male definition of the 'qualities' of women-woman. But not 'masculine' and 'masculinity', which *can* be used each time to name the elements of a system that assures male domination. The 'feminine' produced within that system is a male malady, fully masculine: *he* is sick from women, hence his endless attempts to confirm *her* as illness (the whole nineteenth-century coupling of women and sickness, 'for her own good'). 'Femininity': the woman you want, the woman you fear; 'masculinity': exactly the same.

Sometimes the sexologists ask us to consider and remember the terms of ownership in sexual exchange: 'Did you know that while it is true that anatomically a penis belongs to the man, his erection belongs to a woman?'²²

Just about everything could be taken apart in that self-assured—Did you know?—sentence, from its hesitant grammatical logic (so that we might read the erection as belonging anatomically to a woman) to its instant heterosexuality (why can't the erection belong to him or to another man or, come to that, to no one at all in particular?). But my interest here is in the notion of belonging. Since I take it that it isn't a question of belonging anatomically for a woman, in what sense *does* his erection 'belong'? The flourished big deal for women in these ownership stakes, his erection belongs to her, is, of course, the reverse, the reality of the same old story, *she* belongs to the erection: if there is an erection, then there must be 'a woman', she is its natural consequence, she's going to have to be around belonging—what, after all, does woman want? Somewhere at the far end of the sexologists' happy sentence is the philosophy of rape: his erection *belongs* to a woman, so she *must* want it and *ought* to get it, etc.

Perhaps there are different ways of thinking about belonging. Thus Michèle Montrelay: 'In the sexual act, the penis plunges into a "femi-

nine" *jouissance* of which one no longer knows to whom it belongs'.²³ I am not sure about the 'one' there used to cover both men and women (is the experience of no longer knowing the same for a woman as for a man?) and 'the sexual act' is again heterosexual (how does the question of belonging carry over—should it?—to relations between men, between women?) but, that said, I can recognize what she describes as true, *possibly* true (this is a *version* of the sexual act). Montrelay also writes of a man as 'son of his mother, and as such participating in her femininity'. And I can recognize again what she is saying, despite the difficulties with 'femininity', can grasp it as experience, her way of talking about the instability, the breakdown of the phallic identities on which the discourse of belonging depends (note how the sexologists make everything turn on penis and erection).

Belonging is a male problem in our existing system of man and woman, 'masculinity' and 'femininity'; it is the obsession of my identity as a man, getting things straight, knowing where I am and what I have and where she is and what she hasn't. Look at D.H. Lawrence, pioneer-philosopher and preacher-professor of the system: all that mulling over the sexual act, maleness and femaleness, keeping man and woman pure, bringing one into the singularity of one's male self through that act and the necessary passivity of the belonging woman claiming his erection as her object. Of course, we've made progress, look at any book or film, *Rich and Famous* for example, a film that acknowledges Lawrence as 'a sexual test pilot waiting to dive': Chris (Hart Bochner), a young male *Rolling Stone* journalist, 'I don't like girls of my age, they're always looking out for their orgasm'; Liz (Jacqueline Bisset), an older woman novelist, 'So?'; Chris, 'They should be looking out for ours'. Another big deal, belonging again, she *with me*. Of course, some of us have made more progress, look at At what exactly? Have we? What is the relation between men and feminism and the sexual and belonging yet again? To what extent do men use feminism for the assurance of an identity, now asking to belong as a way of at least ensuring their rightness, a position that gets her with me once more?

I can recognize what Montrelay describes, what she is saying, but she starts from the other side to the sexologists who themselves start from my side, the male assumption. She is utopian, about the confusion and disappearance of sides, no more belonging; they are realistic, within the reality of a system they repeat and thus support, a system of belonging. Male feminism is between the two, the impossibility yet again: itself a long way off and itself very near to the reality of today which feminism precisely opposes for change.

thing, what we have and hold in the question; maybe for as long as *we* ask the question, think like that, it's too easy, too easy to *know*, maybe we're missing the point that the question has been taken away from us, maybe if we really listened that's what we'd hear, the end of *our* question, of our *question*.

Here's a better question for us, its particular reference is to 'male critics' and 'feminist criticism' but those terms could be appropriately extended too to 'males' and 'feminism': 'Why is it that male critics in search of a cause find in feminist criticism their last hope?' Because . . . women have been men's problem, the question; and the historical reality of literature and theory over the last hundred and fifty years has been crucially bound up with that, a problematic of sexuality and sexual identity in which the pressure of women's struggles against the given definitions and representations has produced men's concern with that question and provided men today with a terrain which they can progressively and reappropriationally occupy, a cause and a last hope. Because . . . the effects of feminism in academic institutions with the development of women's studies and an awareness generally of the need to consider women and their representation have led to a situation where 'things to do with women' are tolerated (up to a point, and with differences, of course, from particular institution to particular institution and then from department to department), if not accepted, as an area of interest, of possible study, with men thus able to make radical gestures at little cost, quite within the limits that the academy has already extended and reset. In that sense (I stress in that sense), feminism (but feminism has now come down to an 'interest', an 'area') is easy for white males in our Western universities, can readily be part of their profession; issues of class and race are much more difficult and much more absent (absent here meaning simply not recognized within the academic limits, remaining unspeakable and unspoken). As far as male critics are concerned, indeed, the meshing in the academy of some feminist criticism with French theory, deconstruction et al, has greatly helped, especially in the United States: I can do post-structuralism, Derrideanism, Lacanianism, and feminism in a guaranteed 'radical' cocktail, theory till the cows come home, or don't. Not that that flip way of putting it should let *me* out of criticism: after all, I participate in some of this too, am close to it; and however apart from it I may feel and believe myself to be, I cannot afford not also always to recognize the complicities that carry through against the apartness I try to maintain. Because . . . men have a social-sexual stake in feminism, in involving themselves with it. I don't want to imply that their relation to feminism is reducible merely and inevitably to a social-sexual strategy, an 'interest' of that kind, but we might as well admit that in the existing

circumstances that relation cannot be magically free of the given terms of male/female positioning, of the general relations of men to women. Because But all this is just my own paraphrase and realization of the answer suggested already by Gayatri Spivak when she asked the initial question: 'Perhaps because, unlike the race and class situations, where academic people are not likely to get much of a hearing, the women's struggle is one they can support "from the inside". Feminism in its academic inceptions is accessible and subject to correction by authoritative men.'²⁴

Barthes: 'What is difficult is not to liberate sexuality according to some more or less libertarian project, it is to disengage it from meaning, including from the transgression of meaning': Tillie Olsen: let's ask 'the question of the place, proportion, *actual* importance of sexuality in our (now) longer-lived, more various, woman lives' (and I think we could add men into that question too, woman and man lives, even if it is then also asked differently) (and I think we can recognize in both Barthes and Olsen the Western and class elements—*whose* lives are longer-lived and more various, *who* can afford to talk of sexuality in this way?).²⁵

There is a strange spiral of effects and retro-effects round 'sexuality' in relation to which we live (a limited 'we'). The development of a conception and understanding of sexuality, its extension of the sexual away from a mere perception of 'the sexual act' (the perception that is Marx's, for example, even as his daughter Eleanor is translating a major document in the history of the pressure of that extension, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*), *is* liberating, our lives have changed; at the same time that (and here Marx's terms are right) sexuality has become a commodity definition, the fetish of sexual exchange, with a hyper-objectification of women in a circuit of 'pleasure' maintained by everything from sexology to advertising, what was and is liberating closed down into the ideological orders of 'liberation'. Sexuality, we now understand, is bound up with language and representation, the history of an individual's construction of identity in meaning, is a complex matter and movement of desire; and then again, our societies have produced sexuality as *the* meaning, including the meaning of feminism (equivalent to and contained within 'sexual liberation'), as a kind of natural-essence bedrock what it's all about, where we really are, which brings us back to a new version of 'the sexual act', equal opportunities, orgasm rewards, men and women, rich and famous. . . . Sexual politics? Simple. *We know what it means*. Hence Barthes, the need to disengage sexuality from its meaning; hence Olsen, the need to question its place.

It is to psychoanalysis that we largely owe the conception and understanding of sexuality (psychoanalysis that began with Freud at a crucial moment of sexual concern, of challenge to the terms of the existing relations between men and women, women's protest against them; a moment that also saw the beginnings of sexology in the work of such as Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis). 'The great enigma of the biological fact of the duality of the sexes', yes, but Freud hears, finds, learns an articulation of the sexual as sexuality in the process of the construction of the human subject, a difficult and precarious psychical reality. The key point of this articulation is, of course, the unconscious: 'the reality of the unconscious is sexual', says Lacan, but that sexual is not anchored in the body as its simple reflection or expression; the unconscious is 'discordant', it takes over and marks out the body, defines my sexuality which is thus not a pre-given content but, precisely, a process, a history.

Finally, however, it is not quite that easy. If the psychoanalyst's sexuality is not that of sexology and 'the sexual act' ('This is not its terrain', as Lacan insists²⁶), it cannot be simply disconnected from the sexual, the duality of the sexes, Freud's enigma, male and female. Anatomy isn't destiny but neither is it just irrelevant, as Freud kept trying to say and wondering at and stumbling over, as Lacan with his determining phallus and castration somewhere knows, no matter how symbolically sublimated those references are supposed to be. Psychoanalysis indeed, part of its intense value, is exactly bound up with all the problems of the relationships, overlaps and breaks between the sexual as male and female for sexual reproduction and the individual's history as a speaking human being, given a definition as a man or a woman, produced in a particular patterning of 'masculinity', 'femininity', unconscious desire. The *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* are a problematic story about the developing match and mismatch of the sexual and sexuality from infancy to adulthood; the case histories, Dora and the Rat Man, the Wolf Man and Schreber (Little Hans is too programmed to fit the norm, the child was painfully too little to have demonstrated how much more was at stake than the decreed scenario), are stories—novels—of the multiple, complex, heterogeneous mix-up of sexuality, sexual identity.

One of the most interesting things in Freud is that he recognizes sexual difference, and to start with between men and women. Pre-Freud (I simplify, one can find exceptions, premonitions, bits and pieces of awareness), women were women, different to men, of course, potentially troubling, needing control, but women, woman, you *knew* that. With Freud, recognition, they really aren't the same, they've gone out of the image of their mere identity as difference (she reflects my

identity by the difference I know her to be as woman, my woman, my picture) and the disturbance is substantial, extensive (I too am disturbed, no longer identical with myself, assuredly man). The unconscious ruins everything and the sexuality then understood liberates women from the sexual: they are precisely not just the woman, organs, reproduction, biology. Freud begins again on those ruins the question of difference, the sexual-sexuality, men's and women's histories, noting, for example, that we must give up 'any expectation of a parallelism between male and female sexual development', recording his impression that 'a man's love and a woman's are a phrase apart psychologically'.²⁷ Freud ends complementarity, the one for the other, the Adam and Eve syndrome, she made for him, 'two halves purely'. as John Updike puts it in a novel entitled . . . *Marry Me*.

In Lacan this becomes the continual emphasis that there is no sexual relation, this indeed being the bedrock reality of analysis: 'the real, the only one to motivate the outcome of analytic discourse, the real that there is no sexual relation'.²⁸ Who would relate to who? The individual human subject caught up in meanings, representations, the movement of his or her desire is not to be brought down to one in an act of relation to some other one: the division, the excess, the unconscious runs through and across him or her; that I am one, finished, fixed, here and now simply present, one of a couple, is myth, imaginary. 'The only person with whom one wants to sleep is one's mother'.²⁹ I think the formulation is typically reductive (as so often in psychoanalysis it cannot allow for change, specific differentiations: to want to sleep with anyone is really to want to sleep with one's mother, the only person) but what it gets at is that relation is problematic, that one is never only 'one', belonging shot through by longing, the reality of one's construction from division.

There is no *sexual* relation because there are never two *sexes* but one and the other on both sides of the 'relation' (whether man and woman, woman and woman, man and man). One is always in my or yourself one and the other, or rather, in Lacan's writing, one and the Other, the symbolic as cause of the subject's identity-in-division, the chain of signifiers in which *I* take place. Relation, the idea of relation, depends on an imaginary other who will complement me as one, make up for the fact of division, stop the loss of identity. Women have been powerfully represented and held as 'woman' to be this other and then, the pressure of the reality of women, feared and hated and attacked as the imaginary other of 'woman' fails and his identity is questioned—at which point she finds herself carried over into the realm of the Other, projected as an enigmatic radical alienness, the back of beyond, and

then made up all over again, with talk of her mystery, her ineffable *jouissance*, her closeness to the position of God and so on.

Two things interest me in all this: first, that the division in which everyone, men and women, is inscribed as 'one' and the process of desire thus initiated do not express 'man' or 'woman' (part of what Freud says gropingly and conventionally when he makes libido 'masculine', not sex-expressive, and what the Lacanians follow when they insist that desire cannot be sexualized); second, that the division of everyone is also the difference, the out-of-phasesness, of male and female, man and woman. Psychoanalysis has a classic way of tying these two things together: the phallus, castration, different positions of male and female children in the Oedipus Complex, etc. Which may have its specific historical plausibility, its function as specific historical explanation given a particular social organization of the relations between men and women. But feminists have for long understood that the universalized primacy of the phallus in psychoanalysis, the phallus as aboriginal signifier, can only be maintained by fiat (it just *is*, there is nothing else to say), that, on psychoanalysis's own terms, exactly because the man's fright of castration at the sight of the female genital claimed by Freud is constructed from the paternal threat of castration recognized in the Oedipal moment, posing the problem of having or not-having, then the phallus cannot sustain the whole of sexual difference and sexuality, that the crucial matter of the relation to the maternal body, her sameness and difference and the articulations of that for the boy and the girl, is crucial, outside of any notion of the *pre-Oedipal* which just runs everything back from the phallus and relics off—Freud's buried civilization—the maternal as *before* and can then only see interest in it as regressive, exactly where you would expect women to be and where men shouldn't.

What has all this got to do with male feminism? Perhaps that men need to work out this not-simply-Oedipal complex of division, difference, that they need to think through politically—sexual politics—sameness and difference and otherness (there's something extremely conventional about just assuming that women are defining their differences, that that's the way in which we are going to acknowledge their presence, again), that we should take seriously at last the 'hetero' in heterosexuality, which means the heterogeneity in us, on us, through us, and also take seriously the 'sexuality', which means, I think, giving up, precisely, heterosexuality, that oppression representation of the sexual as act, complementarity, two sexes, coupling.

Difference as social and ideological limitation, the term of patriarchy: her difference gives the identity of the male position, she differ-

ent is his reality, man and woman, 'the opposite sex', everything in place.

Difference as political opportunity, she asserts, gains, realizes her difference, breaks the 'his' and 'her' identity, its imposition, women away from men, out of their place.

Difference as desire: no difference, only differences, no one and other, no his-her, man-woman, nor hetero-homo (another difference definition drawn up from the man-woman norm), a new sociality, deferring places, in that sense a utopia.

But *whose* desire?

There is a lot about psychoanalysis in these notes. I think, as so often, of Barthes: 'The monument of psychoanalysis must be traversed—not bypassed—like the fine thoroughfares of a very large city, across which we can play, dream, etc.; a fiction'. And of Laura Mulvey: 'Psychoanalytic theory is . . . appropriated here as a political weapon'. And of Juliet Mitchell introducing in 1984 a piece written ten years earlier with 'then I was still hoping it would prove possible to use psychoanalysis as an incipient science of the ideology of patriarchy—of how we come to live ourselves as feminine or masculine within patriarchal societies.'³⁰

A fiction to be gone through, a political weapon to be appropriated as such, an analysis of patriarchal positioning in our lives as masculine or feminine (*perhaps*, 'then I was still hoping . . .'). I can use these three gestures to define psychoanalysis here, its use. The critique of the phallogentrism of psychoanalysis (Freudian, Lacanian) is now easy in many ways (which does not mean unnecessary) but the understanding that psychoanalysis produces remains nevertheless; the questions of subjectivity, of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', of sexual difference and identity in the individual's history remain to be worked through all the same: from within patriarchy the terms of patriarchy are analyzed *and* reproduced *and* then more than that, the remaining understanding and questions. Which doesn't make for a simple, cut and dry relation to psychoanalysis (hence, I think, the difficulties and shifts and problems of Mitchell's work, these being a real part of its value, precisely): fiction, political weapon, incipient science of the ideology of patriarchy (the 'incipient' is important) . . . Feminism is the necessary lever on psychoanalysis today, the dialectical pressure that forces it into truth (it always was, in Freud: the Dora case-history is an obvious text for this, strikingly read as such in many recent feminist accounts). Not that this resolves the argument as to 'whether there is a radical potential for feminism in Freudian psychoanalysis'³¹ but it does indicate that the argument is important, that it is, indeed, a radical argument, that

psychoanalysis is already political for feminism, and productivity so ('it came into the arena of discussion in response to the internal need of feminist debate'³²).

How one would say that and follow it through would be different according to context. Mine immediately was British feminism—all my references here were to that, Mulvey and Mitchell and then, in the paragraph above, the Editorial Board of *Feminist Review* and Jacqueline Rose. Things would be different if one's context was French, for example, with the reality of a very influential cultural establishment of psychoanalysis insistently reproducing versions of mastery and discipleship and anti-feminism which have sometimes been played out by women against other women (the 'Psychanalyse et Politique' group and its publishing outlet 'Des Femmes' registering the French phrase for 'Women's Liberation Movement' as its trademark and taking legal action to prevent other women using it). All of which, indeed, should be brought back into and made part of the British argument too so that, say, Lacanian theory *and practice* is examined (has anyone ever even commented on Jeanne Favret-Saada's moving account of her resignation from the Lacan School?³³). It is difficult and contradictory to use psychoanalysis and doubtless that is reflected here, in the movement of these notes.

I started this note from Barthes, Mulvey, Mitchell: two feminists, one male . . . what? Individualist perhaps: 'I believe now that the only effective marginalism is individualism'.³⁴ But one of the things men learn from feminism is that women have had enough of being marginal, marginalized: patriarchal society is about marginalization, keeping women out or on the edges of its economy, its institutions, its decisions. To change things, moreover, involves not individualism but collective action, women together, what feminism is about. Of course, Barthes added that 'individualism' would have to be understood in new ways, 'more radical, more enigmatic' (but then 'enigmatic' is not a happy choice either). This was in the last interview he gave, four days before his death, entitled by the magazine in which it appeared 'The Crisis of Desire'.

Is the position of men to feminism marginal, an individualism? I think it is, and *at best*, despite the difficulties of the terms; not meaning by that to exclude shared actions and relations, simply saying that feminism has decentered men, something else they must learn, and that that means that there is no simple position, only a shifting marginalism, a new individualism in the sense that collective identity of men is no longer available (no longer available once you listen and respond to feminism). This, again, is not tragic (not to be lived as loss, along the 'if-only-I-were-a-woman-I-would-have-an-authentic-identity' lines),

just a fact of life (of life politically, listening and responding to feminism). And perhaps we can come back to psychoanalysis here. I can think of any number of feminist women in Britain who are directly involved in psychoanalysis but no men. Obviously I don't mean that there are no men in psychoanalysis, only that the political-personal commitment to analysis, here where I live and work, seems common for women, rare for men. A reflection on male feminism should probably recognize that, this not to conclude that feminism should lead men into psychoanalysis but to move to consideration of whether and how the radical potential of psychoanalysis for feminism, the argument about that at least, actually involves men. Perhaps psychoanalysis with its exploration of subjectivity, its problematization of identity, can offer an individualism, away from the certainties of our representations of man and masculinity, that men too readily resist, refuse. The fiction to be gone through can tell a different story of ourselves, politically appropriate if we want to analyze and change the patriarchal positioning central to our lives.

In a graduate class at Yale concerned with Richardson's *Clarissa* a male student remarks affirmatively that of course he cannot conceive of anyone other than as 'a full human subject'—'what else could one be?'. The female teacher answers simply, 'well, you can be a victim'. It is like a little scenario of the centre and the margin. What is difficult for men aware of feminism is not to imagine equality for women but to realize the inequality of their own position: the first is abstract and does not take me out of my position (naturally women should be equal with me); the second is concrete and comes down to the fact that my equality is the masking term for their oppression (women are not equal with me and the struggle is not for *that* equality).

Do I write male? What does that mean? We have learnt—from semiotics, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, the whole modern textual theory—not to confuse the sex of the author with the sexuality and sexual positioning inscribed in a text. There is no simple relation of direct expression between myself as male or myself as female and the discourse, writing, text I produce, this production involving me in the whole mesh of discursive orders of language, all the available forms and constructions with their particular positions, their particular terms of representation, all the defined senses of 'masculine' and 'feminine' (and in which I am anyway caught up from the start, given as 'man' or 'woman').

But this cannot be allowed to end those initial questions, however much I might want to push responsibility away into a world of conven-

tions and forms, inscriptions of position, into all that world of textuality of which we are invited to be the playfully deconstructing prisoners. I must recognize the facts of those forms and conventions and their implications in my position as a man in this society, a position which my writing risks reinscribing, confirming, prolonging. Just as women are not bound by the dominant discursive orders which nevertheless socially define them and against which, from which, beyond which their new reality has to be made, articulated, brought into being. Hence no doubt the strong emphasis from women on women's writing, female discourse, writing the body and so on, theoretically dubious (from the perspective of male theory?) with its potential essentialism (a kind of immediate expressive unity of woman, the female) and politically strong (elaborating a reality of women speaking and writing out as women). For men, though, exactly because of the fundamental asymmetry that holds between them and women (their domination), there can be no equivalent: men's writing, male discourse, will simply be the same again; there is no politically progressive project that can work through that idea (unless perhaps in and from areas of gay men's experience, in a literature for that). 'Telling the truth about one's body: a necessary freeing subject for the woman writer', says Tillie Olsen.³⁵ What seems unlikely is that that sentence could also be written for the male writer. The truth about men and their bodies *for the moment* is merely repetitive (this has to be put without any suggestion of some inverse romanticization of women and their bodies): the régime of the same, the eternal problem of the phallus, etc. (with its celebrants from Lawrence on, through Miller and Mailer on into the present day). Taking men's bodies away from the existing representation and its oppressive effects will have to follow women's writing anew of themselves: for today, telling the truth about the male body as freeing subject is utopia, about the female body *actuality*.

So there I am between a male writing as oppression and a male writing as utopia, and still I am, here and now as you read this page, a male writing. All I can do is pose each time the question of the sexual positioning of my discourse, of my relations to and in it, my definition as man, and then through it to the practice and reality of men and women, their relations in the world. To do this, not to elide the question, to give up the image of neutrality, is not not to write male, not to run continually into terms of oppression, but it is, at least, to grasp writing as an involvement in an ethics of sexual difference, which is a start today towards another male writing.

A woman reading is not the same as reading as a woman. In a long history women have been trained not to read as women, to repeat and

conform to male readings, male tradition, a particular recognition of the canon of literature ('canon' with its strange appropriateness, ecclesiastical law and phallic weapon). Which is not to say that they have simply repeated, simply conformed, that there has not been misreading, other reading, in revolt, refusal; domination, after all, implies an edge of resistance, the elsewhere of what it seeks to hold down. And, of course, the dominant order has also in that long history decreed and tolerated set areas for reading as a woman, women's reading - the novel in late eighteenth-century England, the Hollywood 'woman's film' of the 1940s, there are many examples. Such areas are safe and unsafe: clearly defined and 'trivial' and at the same time a little uncertain just because women are there with their readings (hence the period attacks on novel-reading and its dangers, hence, differently, from the other side, the reoccupation of the 'woman's film' by feminist film theorists today).

Reading as a woman is a place given, the available positions, 'women's' genres, styles, and so on, or an alternative project, a struggle to be won, all the pressures of women re-reading, of feminist criticism. 'A woman writing as a woman', Peggy Kamuf pointed out, involves a split: the repetition of the seemingly identical 'woman' in fact breaks the assumption of identity, 'making room for a slight shift, spacing out the differential meaning which has always been at work in the single term'.³⁶ The same goes for 'a woman reading as a woman'. To read *as* is to make the move of the construction of an identity in which the diverse, heterogeneous relations of experience are gathered up in a certain way, a certain form. A woman reading is different from reading as a woman which, in turn, is not necessarily the same as reading as a feminist. Except that one can see the necessity in reverse: reading as a feminist involves reading as a woman (it involves a knowledge of what it is to be a woman both negatively, the assigned place of oppression, and positively, the force of the struggle against oppression) which includes a woman reading (reading as a woman takes up a woman's experience). Putting this necessary reversibility in these terms is then doubtless open to theoretical debate. Since sex is not immediate identity, since reading as a woman is construction, where is the necessary link between reading as a woman and being a woman? Since feminism is a social-political awareness of the oppression of women and a movement to end it, where is the necessary link between identity as a woman and being a feminist? Or, to put it another way, this circuit cuts out men.

A man reading is never now not the same as reading as a man. In a long history men have been trained simply to read, they have the acquired neutrality of domination, theirs is the security of indifference

- it is women who are different, the special case. Reading as a man is not a project, it is the point of departure; which is why, say, for male modernist writers seeking an avant-garde dislocation of forms, a recasting of given identity into multiplicity, writing differently has seemed to be naturally definable as writing feminine, as moving across into a woman's place (Joyce provides an obvious instance, his two great novels ending in 'female' monologue or polylogue, Molly Bloom, Anna Livia). It is a point of departure which cannot be merely thrown off, forgotten. We can learn to read as women and we can learn to read as feminists; that is, we can learn women's readings, feminist readings, we can make connections that we never made before, come back critically on our point of departure. Yet we must recognize too that we are that point of departure, not in the sense that that is our identity, that we are just that (we are a history, a process that is unfinished), but in the sense that that is nevertheless where we are at, in this society that is our position. It would be nice to forget one is a man (and I am more prone to this fantasy than most) but we can't, we have to assume what being a man means. So the circuit of reading, the reversibility described above, cannot include us as it includes women, though we can go along with it, perhaps.

I think one has politically to accept the contradictions (not be put off by charges of theoretical impurity, incorrectness). The relation of sex to identity is not immediate, we are constructed as gendered individuals in a complex psycho-social history; 'male' and 'female', 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are positions, places, terms of identification; we are unfinished, sexually heterogeneous, however much the orders of heterosexual law constrain and define; woman and man do not exist, only men and women with all the shared experience that race and class can cut across much more decisively at many points, in many situations. *And* the relation of sex to identity is direct and powerful; men and women exist in radical separation, in difference that is produced as the ground of oppression; the shared experience is cut across by sexual difference, which sexual difference also cuts across race and class; the women's movement, in other words, is a reality.

Thus when Elaine Showalter warns against overstating 'the essentialist dilemma of defining the *woman* reader, when in most cases what is implied and intended is a *feminist* reader. Reading as a feminist, I hasten to add, is not unproblematic; but it has the important aspect of offering male readers a way to produce feminist criticism that avoids female impersonation. The way into feminist criticism, for the male theorist, must involve a confrontation with what might be implied by reading as a man, and with a questioning of surrender of paternal privileges'³⁷, I feel this is right; and I also feel that, hastening to add, she

our sisters, over and over?"). Maybe the task of male critics is just to read (forget the 'as') and learn silence: 'Silence can be a plan/rigorously executed/the blueprint to a life/It is a presence/it has a history a form/Do not confuse it/with any kind of absence' (CL, 17). But a silence broken by these poems, theirs not ours, 'these words, these whispers, conversations/from which time after time the truth breaks moist and green' (CL, 20).

Perhaps (the mode of these notes is 'perhaps'), perhaps male feminism should involve a fundamental *admiration*. The word, yes, is old-fashioned, is tangled up with ideas of love and courtship (the heroine's 'admirers' in this or that classic novel), is eminently deconstructible as the original senses are teased out and we find the notion of considering with astonishment and stupefaction moving into that of contemplating with reverence and esteem and gratified pleasure (one can feel psychoanalysis, the uncanny, just round the corner). But still, *admiration*, in the sense in which Irigaray has recently brought it back, thinking precisely of an ethics of sexual difference. She gets at it by rereading Descartes who in *Les Passions de l'Ame* makes admiration the first of all the passions, the 'sudden surprise' of the new and the different that precedes objectification of the other as this or that quality, this or that characteristic. Or as Irigaray explains it: 'What has never existed between the sexes. Admiration keeping the two sexes unsubstitutable in the fact of their difference. Maintaining a free and engaging space between them, a possibility of separation and alliance.'³⁹

Admiration as utopia, what has never existed between the sexes: so how to open this space of a radical sexual difference that is not the old difference (psychoanalytic theory too readily turns admiration to the immobility of castration, a supposed male astonishment, the fright that Freud thinks no man is spared 'at the sight of a female genital', a male fixation, what Descartes describes as the body 'motionless as a statue', stopped rigid in single perception: 'astonishment is an excess of admiration that can never be other than bad'⁴⁰)? The question brings us back to the impossible relation of men to feminism, that relation only as a possible future, and to the recognition of male feminism as today a contradiction in terms, but then necessary as that, necessary for men to live as such. Perhaps in the end all one can say, indicating the core reality of male feminism, is what Irigaray says as so many others have said, part of the political consciousness of feminism: 'I will never be in a man's place, a man will never be in mine. Whatever the possible identifications, one will never exactly occupy the place of the other - they are irreducible the one to the other'.⁴¹ Perhaps men could

learn to realize that, no sadness, no anger, just an acceptance of the irreducible, something like Irigaray's admiration.

More pious words? Of course. I take Irigaray and use her writing to end mine, and with a word, 'admiration', as though that could do anything, could resolve any of the difficulties, any of the doubts I feel as I read over what I have written. But perhaps 'admiration' can say that too, that there is no ending, that I cannot resolve. And then I think that I wrote most of this in a hospital ward for women, the majority of them elderly, watching my mother for hours and days. There is every conventional reason not to mention that here and no real reason why I shouldn't. It had something to do with admiration and is at least a possibly real ending.

NOTES

1. Claire Pajaczkowska, 'The Heterosexual Presumption: A Contribution to the Debate on Pornography', *Screen*, vol. 22 no. 1 (1981) p. 92.
2. B. Ruby Rich, 'Anti-Porn: Soft Issue, Hard World', *Feminist Review* no. 13 (Spring 1983) p. 66.
3. Elizabeth Wilson, *What is to be done about violence against women?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) pp. 135-68.
4. Stephen Heath, *The Sexual Fix* (London: Macmillan, 1982) p. 163.
5. Sigmund Freud, 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth, 1953-74) vol. XXIII, p. 252.
6. Jacques Derrida, 'La Question du style', *Nietzsche aujourd'hui?* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973) vol. 1, pp. 299, 244.
7. Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (London: Paladin, 1984) p. 227.
8. William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1848) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) p. 639.
9. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XX Encore* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) p. 75. Freud's question occurs in a letter to Marie Bonaparte, cit. Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work* vol. 2 (London: Hogarth, 1955) p. 468. Lacan's 1932 thesis containing the Aimée case and the 1933 essay on the Papin sisters published in the Surrealist review *Le Minotaure* can be found in Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).
10. Lacan, seminar 16 November 1976, *Ornicar?* no. 12/13 (1977) p. 12.
11. Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni, *La Robe* (Paris: Seuil, 1983) p. 25.
12. Juliet Mitchell, 'Feminine Sexuality: Interview with Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose', *m/f* no. 8 (1983) p. 15.
13. Michèle Montrelay, intervention, Journées de l'École Freudienne de Paris, Lille 1977, *Lettres de l'École Freudienne* no. 22 (March 1978) p. 144.
14. Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *Screen* vol. 19 no. 3 (Autumn 1978) pp. 51-112.
15. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement* (London: Jack, 1912) p. 16.
16. Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1981), all quotations from pp. 99-100.
17. The translator of the Penguin Classics *Symposium* notes that 'It is almost universally and no doubt rightly held that Diotima is a fictitious personage, in spite of the apparently historical statements made about her by Socrates', Plato, *The Symposium* trans. William Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975) p. 19. No doubt rightly since the voice-off is always anyway theory's fiction for itself.

18. See particularly Luce Irigaray, *Speculum, de l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit, 1974).
19. Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XX Encore*, p. 69.
20. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson eds., *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (London: Virago, 1984).
21. Irène Roublef, intervention, Journées des Cartels de l'École Freudienne de Paris, Paris 1975, *Lettres de l'École Freudienne* no. 18 (April 1976) p. 211.
22. Paul Brown and Carolyn Faulder, *Treat Yourself to Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 81.
23. Montrelay, *L'Ombre et son nom* (Paris: Minuit, 1977) p. 151; subsequent quotation, p. 142.
24. Gayatri Spivak, cit. Elaine Showalter, 'Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and The Woman of the Year', *Raritan* vol. III no. 2 (1983/4) p. 133.
25. Barthes, 'Digressions', *Promesse* no. 29 (1971), p. 27; Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (London: Virago, 1980) p. 255.
26. Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XI Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1973) p. 240; trans. Alan Sheridan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) p. 266.
27. Freud, 'Female Sexuality', *Standard Edition* vol. XXI, p. 226; *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Standard Edition* vol. XXII, p. 134.
28. Lacan, 'L'Étourdit', *Scilicet* no. 4 (1973) p. 47.
29. Lacan, seminar 15 March 1977, *Ornicar?* no. 17/18 (1979) p. 9.
30. Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973) pp. 92-3; trans. Richard Miller, *A Barthes Reader* ed. Susan Sontag (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982) p. 412; Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* vol. 16 no. 3 (Autumn 1975) p. 6; Juliet Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution* (London: Virago, 1984) p. 221.
31. Editorial, *Feminist Review* no. 14 (summer 1983) p. 1.
32. Jacqueline Rose, 'Femininity and its Discontents', *Feminist Review* no. 14 (Summer 1983) p. 5.
33. Jeanne Favret-Saada 'Excusez-moi, je ne faisais que passer', *Les Temps modernes* no. 371 (June 1977) pp. 2089-103.
34. Barthes, 'La Crise du désir', *Le Nouvel Observateur* 20 April 1980, p. 87.
35. Olsen, *Silences*, p. 255.
36. Peggy Kamuf, 'Writing like a Woman', *Women and Language in Literature and Society* ed. Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker & Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980) p. 298.
37. Showalter, 'Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and The Woman of the Year', p. 143; subsequent quotations, pp. 133, 147. Showalter's article has been very much part of the writing of the present essay.
38. Quotations here are from: Adrienne Rich, *Diving into the Wreck* (New York: Norton, 1973) - *DW*; *The Dream of a Common Language* (New York: Norton, 1978) - *CL*; *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (New York: Norton, 1981) - *WP*.
39. Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1984) p. 20.
40. Descartes, *Les Passions de l'Âme* (1649), *Oeuvres et lettres* (Paris: Gallimard 'Pléiade', 1953) p. 729.
41. Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, pp. 19-20.