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Feminisms and Gender Studies

I. FEMINISMS AND FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM: DEFINITIONS

"I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is," British author and critic Rebecca West remarks; "I only know that other people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or prostitute" (219). Indeed, feminism has often focused upon what is absent rather than what is present, reflecting concern with the silencing and marginalization of women in a *patriarchal culture,* a culture organized in favor of men. Unlike many other critical approaches, but like Marxist approaches, feminism is an overtly *political* approach that criticizes false assumptions about women. As Judith Fetterly has bluntly pointed out, "Literature is political," and its politics "is male." When we read "the canon of what is currently considered classic American literature," we "perforce... identify as male" (in Rivkin and Ryan 561). In recent decades this tendency has changed, in part because of the efforts of feminist critics and also because of social changes such as mass education, the civil rights movement, reactions to ongoing war, increasing urbanization, and the growing liberalization of sexual mores.

Though it once seemed fairly homogeneous, feminism is no longer presumed to have a single set of assumptions, and it is definitely no longer merely the "ism" of white, educated, bourgeois, heterosexual Anglo-American women. As Ross C. Murfin has noted, the "evolution of feminism into feminisms has fostered a more inclusive, global perspective" (301–2). The era of recovering women's texts has been succeeded by a new era in which the goal is to recover entire cultures of women. The historical phases of feminism are called first-, second-, and third-wave feminism.

No other cultural and intellectual movement has been more influential in changing literary criticism and theory than feminism, which paved the way for such later movements as ethnic studies, queer theory, and postcolonial studies,

inaugurating the pursuit of what is called "identity politics" in literary analysis. Some would say that feminism is not a literary method in the sense of formalism, psychoanalytic criticism, or structuralism; they would say that it is a political commitment to the equality of women. Feminist critics employ a variety of methods in their analyses. Their concerns are especially relevant to women's struggles throughout much of the developing world.

II. FIRST-, SECOND-, AND THIRD-WAVE FEMINISMS

Feminism as we know it today began in Britain in the late eighteenth century with the stirrings of reform in women's rights, among the many reform movements that arose at that time—aid to the poor, abolition of slavery in the British Empire, labor reforms such as legislation against child labor, and so on. Indeed, feminism has always been at the forefront of social reform movements in the modern era. The primary gains of first-wave feminists were the right to vote and the right to practice birth control. Thus first-wave feminism was mainly concerned with establishing the legal policy that women are human beings and cannot be treated like property. This step held enormous promise for later generations.

British intellectual Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is the first major written treatise on feminism; her daughter, Mary Shelley, extended feminine and domestic issues into the realm of science and challenged her male-dominated society through her fiction. Later authors such as George Eliot, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Virginia Woolf penned their own feminist works. Though Gilman is better known today for her shocking short story of post-partum depression and patriarchal oppression, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," in her own day she was best known for her breakthrough analysis of gender and economics, *Women and Economics* (1897), which argued that economic prosperity would not be attained in the United States until women were allowed to work. In the United States, with writers such as Gilman, Lydia Maria Child, Margaret Fuller, Sojourner Truth, Fanny Fern, and Kate Chopin, first-wave feminism began around 1848 and lasted roughly until the 1960s, though many felt its greatest moment was the passage of the Twentieth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, which in 1920 gave women the right to vote.

In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the Seneca Convention. Her plan was "to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman." At that convention a Declaration of Sentiments was issued, objecting to the lack of women's vote. This affected law-making, ownership of property, legal rights for married women, divorce laws, employment opportunities including the professions of medicine and the law, admission to colleges and universities, and roles in churches. For the next 40 years, first-wave feminists campaigned for their rights. In addition, the birth control movement was begun by Margaret Sanger, a public health nurse, around 1919, and continues today. It was not until 1965, the year before the first edition of this handbook appeared, that married couples in all states could obtain legal contraceptives.

The second wave of feminism began after World War II; since many women had gone to work during the war, they expected—as did African-American soldiers—to be full citizens back home. As epitomized by the failed Equal Rights Amendment, the goal of second-wave feminists—like that of the first wave—was gender equality in social, political, legal, and economic rights. Second-wave feminism can be said to have lasted until the 1970s. In addition to legal rights, second-wave feminism addressed additional inequalities. As the postwar boom brought economic growth, the baby boom, the expansion of suburbs, and further entrenchment of capitalism, middle-class women found themselves faced with new challenges, especially the seeming national desire to return to prewar patriarchy. In the media of the day it would seem as though the nineteenth century "Cult of True Womanhood," which put women on a pedestal but also in a cage, had returned. Television showed idealized families such as those of *Father Knows Best*, in which the mothers would be in high heels, dresses, and pearls to cook dinner and never had outside employment. Second-wave feminism sought not only to overturn such conventions, but to celebrate the unique contributions of women, their distinctiveness, and alternate views of their world. Some pushed what is called *cultural feminism*, or the idea that a women's culture would be more positive and nurturing than patriarchy; others aligned themselves behind what is called *difference feminism*, or the aim not just of equal rights but of establishing women's difference from men, even their superiority. In general, when feminism is portrayed in the popular press it is second-wave feminism, especially when it is caricatured as a separatist "man-hating" philosophy.

The second-wave movement included the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, and Betty Friedan, who examined a female "self" constructed in literature by male authors to embody various male fears and anxieties. They saw literary texts as models and agents of power. In her book *The Second Sex* (1949), de Beauvoir asked what is woman, and how is she constructed differently from men? Answer: she is constructed differently *by* men. The thesis that men write about women to find out more about men has had long-lasting implications, especially the idea that *man* defines the human, not woman.

In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) Friedan demystified the dominant image of the happy American suburban housewife and mother. Her book appeared amidst new women's organizations, manifestos, protests, and publications that called for enforcement of equal rights and an end to sex discrimination. An author of essays in *Good Housekeeping*, Friedan also analyzed reductive images of women in American magazines.

Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) was the first widely read modern work of feminist literary criticism. Millett's focus was upon the twin poles of gender as biology and culture. In her analyses of D. H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, and Jean Genet she reads literature as a record of male dominance. As a "resisting reader," Millett included critiques of capitalism, male power, crude sexuality, and violence against women. She argued that male writers distort women by associating them with (male) deviance. She aptly concludes that the "interior

colonization" of women by men is "sturdier than any form of segregation" such as class, "more uniform, and certainly more enduring" (24–25).

At the same time as women have been re-read in works by male writers, feminists have promoted the underappreciated work of women authors, and the writings of many women have been rediscovered, reconsidered, and collected in large anthologies such as *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women,* including women who had never been considered seriously or had been elided over time. For example, Harriett E. Wilson, author of the first novel by an African American woman, *Our Nig, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black in a Two-Story White House, North* (1859), was "discovered" one hundred and fifty years later in a rare book store by Yale scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. However, merely unearthing women's literature did not ensure its prominence; in order to assess women's writings, the preconceptions inherent in a literary **canon** dominated by male beliefs and male writers have been reevaluated. Along with Fetterly, other critics such as Elaine Showalter, Annette Kolodny, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar questioned cultural, sexual, intellectual, and/or psychological stereotypes about women and their literatures using both essentialist and constructivist models, which we discuss below. The focus upon the silencing and oppressing of women gave way to deeper interrogations of what a history of women's oppression meant. As Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan ask, "Was 'woman' something to be escaped from or into?" (528). Though much of the early "sisterhood" solidarity of the women's movement was lost as the field diversified, a good deal of philosophical and political depth was attained as these interrogations became more complex.

Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s, challenging the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity as a universal female identity while privileging upper-middle-class white women. Influenced by poststructuralism, third-wave feminists expand the interests of feminists—and, as well, center them—in the concerns of women of color, lower-class women, lesbians, transgendered women, "Third World" women, all previously marginalized. The separation is also an intergenerational issue between feminists who came to adulthood in the 1960s and those who in 2000 were only in their twenties. It is not so much an approach to criticism as a set of claims to identities and a set of arguments involving antiracism and women-of-color consciousness, postcolonial theory, transnationalism, queer and transgender studies, and spatial studies.

Second-wave feminists have criticized third-wave feminists for what they see as promoting casual sex, but third-wave feminists respond that their empowerment of their bodies and their sexuality is part of their politics and was attained for them by second-wave feminism. The criticism has been especially strong as regards their reanalyses of sex workers and pornography as "empowered." At issue too has been "girlie culture": is it permissible to be a feminist and be "girlie?" Third-wavers would not separate sexual self-esteem and equality from a choice to be "girlie." While second-wave feminists worked collectively, third-wave feminism allows women to define feminism individualistically. For example, though many third-wavers are social activists, they are still faulted by second-wavers as not working collectively.

Several second-wave feminists—such as Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Moraga, Eve Ensler, Audre Lorde, Judith Butler, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Rebecca Walker—a young southern bisexual African-American writer who first used the term "third-wave feminist" in a 1992 essay on the Thomas/Hill hearings called "Becoming the Third Wave"—have seen the women's movement as constantly transforming itself. As Rebecca Walker notes, the civil rights movement benefited black men, and the women's movement benefited white women, but black women were left out. Similarly, lesbians felt that the second-wave movement had little interest in them. At the same time, new voices represented working-class women and women in the developing world. As Rebecca Walker states, "To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fiber of my life. It is to search for personal clarity in the midst of systemic destruction, to join in sisterhood with women when often we are divided, to understand the power structures with the intention of challenging them.... Let Thomas's confirmation serve to remind you, as it did me, that the fight is far from over.... Turn that outrage into political power" (41). If in a more "me-oriented" culture, women are not as politically organized, and if "family values" of the right have turned off some women, and the spectacle of career women foregoing motherhood has turned off others, feminists today consider that they have more power because they have more choices. In addition, AIDS, high divorce rates, gay and lesbian rights, and debates over abortion complicate many young women's definitions of feminism. Young women struggle with feminism only partly because they lack historical consciousness. Do all feminists somehow need to be the same, they wonder? Thus, third-wavers tend to work more outside academia and more in the public sphere, and often against a preconceived image of feminism projected by the media. Third-wavers especially ask: Do women always have to be portrayed as victims?

Third-wave feminism challenges the first and second waves' "essentialist" definitions of femininity (more on *essentialism* in a moment). Important to the interests of those women previously marginalized by feminism are poststructuralist and postmodern interrogations of binaries such as male and female, queer and straight, black and white, "first world" and "third." "Third-space" women find themselves triply oppressed by class, gender, and race. (However, not all women of color are third-space women, as they may have privilege, but no white woman is a third-space woman, as they retain what is termed "white privilege." However, there is no unified or essential third-space definition.) Thus third-wave theory usually concerns itself with subjectivities of women of color, transgender politics and a rejection of gender binaries—what Alice Walker and others define as "womanism"—postcolonial theory, transnationalism, and ecofeminism. Third-wave feminists work for battered women's shelters, daycare services, renewed attention to child protective services, attention to the stories of abuse survivors, availability of contraception and reproductive services including the legalization of abortion, upholding sexual harassment policies in the workplace, and women's studies programs designed to create feminist awareness for a greater diversity of women.

Anzaldúa, hooks, Sandoval, Moraga, Lorde, Kingston, and many other feminists of color seek to claim previously unexamined female spaces, whether of class, race, or gender. What, they wonder, does the day laborer in a border sweatshop have in common with an accountant who wants a raise? These feminists also deconstruct their postcolonial selves and strive to imagine new transcolonial selves to reclaim bodies, histories, and identities and to arrive at new voices and new visions (Pérez, Sandoval, Anzaldúa). They use their personal lives to remap identity as in Anzaldúa's "new mestizo" consciousness of class, race, sexuality or Emma Pérez's "decolonial imaginary" that exists between colonialism and postcolonialism. They seek transcolonial agency and a change in subaltern consciousness, what Sandoval calls a "differential oppositional consciousness" that seeks to reimagine "**Otherness**" outside of the **hegemony** of postcolonial discourse, thus reconfiguring the center.

A text that particularly lends itself to third-wave feminist analysis is Sapphire's novel PUSH (1996), in which the girl Precious, the protagonist, is an obese, illiterate teenage black mother with an abusive family and AIDS. Her mother *and* father abuse her mentally, physically, and spiritually; thus the subject of motherhood is complicated by her mother and her status as AIDS mother and the mother of a child with Down syndrome. Through education Precious finds her voice, herself, and her hope. The book's discourse changes from virtually illiterate to linguistically powerful by the conclusion, and it ends with several other survivor-girls' personal narratives. (The film *Precious* based an the novel premiered in 2009.)

A corollary to third-wave feminism is the emerging field of maternalist studies. Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* describes motherhood as an institution dictated by patriarchy and thus historically constructed. Rich seeks to redefine motherhood as something that does not maintain the division between men and women based on biological function. She turns to prepatriarchal religions as well as to her own experiences as a mother, as well as antifeminist historical ideas such as the Cult of True Womanhood. Other prominent thinkers on maternal theory include Hazel Carby, Barbara Christian, Sara Ruddick, Hortense Spillers, James Phelan, and Linda Tate. Later theorists such as Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi and Azizah al-Hibri have continued to investigate the mythic sources of the mother's power. Prominent authors Toni Morrison, Anne Tyler, and Alice Walker and emerging authors Kaye Gibbons, Ellen Douglas, Sherley Anne Williams, Tina McElroy Ansa, Terry MacMillan, Gloria Naylor, Sue Monk Kidd, and Alice Randall address black and white mothering. For example, in her novel *Dessa Rose* Williams recovers the silenced voice of the black mother but also voices the white mother Ruth as a complement to the protagonist. Kidd interrogates the Mammy figure from a position of power rather than subservience. Randall rewrites Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* from the perspective of a new character, Cynara, Scarlett's mulatto half-sister by Mammy; Cynara must find strength in her "Otherness" and so only calls Scarlett "Other," a renaming that inspires her recovery process from slave to woman.

III. WOMAN: CREATED OR CONSTRUCTED?

Parallel to the first-, second-, and third-wave feminisms Elaine Showalter identified three phases of modern women's literary development: the *feminine* phase (1840–80), during which women writers imitated the dominant male traditions; the *feminist* phase (1880–1920), when women advocated for their rights; and the *female* phase (1920–present), when dependency upon opposition—that is, on uncovering misogyny in male texts—is replaced by the rediscovery of women's texts and women. Women's literature is "an imaginative continuum [of] certain patterns, themes, problems, and images, from generation to generation" ("Feminist Criticism" 11). Within the present or "female" phase, Showalter describes four current *models of difference* taken up by many feminists around the world: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural.

Showalter's *biological model* is the most problematic: if the text can be said in some way to mirror the body, then does that reduce women writers merely to bodies? Yet Showalter praises the often shocking frankness of women writers who relate the intimacies of the female experience of the female body.

Showalter's *linguistic model* asserts that women are speaking men's language as a foreign tongue; purging language of "sexism" is not going far enough. Still, feminist critics see the very act of speaking—and of having a language—as a victory for women within a silencing patriarchal culture. Tillie Olsen demands to hear women's voices despite impediments to creativity encountered by women; in her 1978 work *Silences* she cites "those mute inglorious Miltons: those whose working hours are all struggle for existence; the barely educated; the illiterate; women. Their silence is the silence of the centuries as to how life was, is, for most of humanity" (327). Silences arise from "circumstances" of being born "into the wrong class, race or sex, being denied education, becoming numbed by economic struggle, muzzled by censorship or distracted or impeded by the demands of nurturing." But women's deployment of silence can also be "resistance to the dominant discourse," Olsen notes, such as Emily Dickinson's "slant truths" or the inner dialogues of such "quiet" characters as Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre or Virginia Woolf's Lily Briscoe (quoted in Fishkin and Hedges 5). A film treatment of this theme is *The Hours* (2002), starring Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, and Julianne Moore. This movie relates with unnerving clarity the inner lives of three women connected through their experiences with Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway,* itself a study of female subjectivity.

Though women writers may have to use "male" language, feminist critics have identified sex-related writing strategies such as the use of associational rather than linear logic, other "feminine" artistic choices such as free play of meaning and a lack of closure, as well as genre preference such as letters, journals, confessional, domestic narratives, and body-centered discourse. As Showalter has observed, "English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses opposition; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses repression; American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression." All three, however, being

woman-centered or *gynocentric*, must search for terminology to rescue themselves from becoming a synonym for inferiority ("Feminist Criticism" 186).

Showalter's *psychoanalytic model* identifies gender difference in the psyche and also in the artistic process. Her *cultural model* places feminist concerns in social contexts, acknowledging class, racial, national, and historical differences and determinants among women. It also offers a collective experience that unites women over time and space—a "binding force" ("Feminist Criticism" 186–88, 193, 196–202). These have been Showalter's most influential models. Showalter issued another important book, a general survey of American women writers called *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx*, in 2009.

Today it seems that two general tendencies, one emphasizing Showalter's biological, linguistic, and psychoanalytic models, and the other emphasizing Showalter's cultural model, account for most feminist theories. On the one hand, certain theories may be said to have an *essentialist* argument for inherent feminine traits—whether from biology, language, or psychology—that have been undervalued, misunderstood, or exploited by a patriarchal culture because the genders are quite different. These theories focus on sexual difference and sexual politics and are often aimed at defining or establishing a feminist literary canon or re-interpreting and re-visioning literature (and culture and history and so forth) from a less patriarchal slant.

Opposed to this notion that gender confers certain essential feminine and masculine traits is *constructivist* feminism, which asks women (and men) to consider what it means to be gendered, to consider how much of what society has often deemed to be inherently male and female traits are in fact culturally and socially constructed. For the constructivist feminists the feminine and gender itself are made by culture in history and are not eternal norms. It is easy to see how constructivist feminism helped give rise to gender studies, the framing of all gender categories as cultural instead of biological. It is also clear that such fluidity of definition has links in poststructuralist and postmodernist thinking in general.

A. Feminism and Psychoanalysis

Many essentialist feminists have been attracted to the psychoanalytic approach, to which they have given their own stamp. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine female images in the works of Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and George Eliot, addressing such topics as mothering, living within enclosures, doubling of characters and of aspects of the self, women's diseases and their treatments, and feminized landscapes. They make the argument that female writers often identify themselves with the literary characters they detest through such types as the monster/madwoman figure counterposed against an angel/heroine figure. Despite this tendency, they describe a feminine utopia for which women authors yearn and where wholeness rather than "otherness" would prevail as a means of identity.

In the 1980s, French feminism developed as one of the most exciting of new feminist practices in the use of psychoanalytic tools for literary analysis. Essentialists found that psychoanalytic theory as espoused by Sigmund Freud, Carl G. Jung, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva, and the French Feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray explained some of their biologically based assumptions about femininity; readers found original and compelling new psychic models for feminine identity, open to flexibility and change by their very "nature" as feminine (see Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together").

Yet Freud has long been on feminism's Enemies List, the charge being that he misunderstood women and was interested only in what they meant for male psychology. Freud practiced upon his devoted daughter Anna and Marie Bonaparte, both of whom carried on his work. These and other women whom he diagnosed as "hysterics" were the cornerstone of psychoanalysis. In Freud's defense, the narratives given by his female patients represented radically new acceptance of their voices in their first-person accounts of fantasies, fears, injuries, and diseases. Before such maladies as Freud addressed could be treated medically, they first had to be voiced subjectively. Today such common (but often terrifying) complaints of women including postpartum depression, major depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, and fibromyalgia are responded to as real health crises with a combination of medical and psychological help; but in Freud's day they were dismissed as ordinary "female trouble." Particularly troublesome women in those days could even face hysterectomies (the uterus was considered the font of *hysteria,* from the same Greek word), or merely isolation and shock treatments. Freud's contribution was not only to identify and "medicalize" women's psychiatric obstacles but also to emphasize the textual nature of his cases; indeed, he seemed to read his patients like texts or languages. Freud also argued that art, whether by men or women, had a pathological origin; following Freud, maneuvers such as bringing a "repressed" subtext to light are similar moves in psychoanalysis and literary criticism, for the goal of both is deeper understanding (see Young-Bruehl, *Freud on Women: A Reader* for selections on women).

As noted in Chapter 6, from the Freudian revisionist Jacques Lacan comes the notion of the *Imaginary,* a pre-Oedipal stage in which the child has not yet differentiated her- or himself from the mother and as a consequence has not learned language, which is the *Symbolic Order* to be taught by the father. The Imaginary is the vital source of language later tamed by the Laws of the Father. The Oedipal crisis marks the entrance of the child into a world of language as Symbolic Order in which everything is separate, conscious and unconscious, self and other, male and female, word and feeling. In the realm of the *Law of the Father* we are confined by "isms" or rules; Lacan calls this the "phallogocentric" universe (phallus + logos) in which men are in control of "the word." French feminists practice what they call *l'écriture feminine* as a psychically freeing form of feminine discourse: the actual sex of the author, for them, is not always important (as it too is an expression of binary Laws of the Father).

The relevance of Freud and Lacan to feminism has mainly to do with the intersections of language and the psyche (combining Showalter's linguistic and psychoanalytic models). Like Freud, Lacan describes the unconscious as structured like a language; like language its power often arises from the sense of openness and play of meaning. When we "read" language, we may identify gaps in what is signified as evidence of the unconscious; for language is a mixture of fixed meaning (conscious) and **metaphor** (in part unconscious). The feminine "language" of the unconscious destabilizes sexual categories in the Symbolic Order of the Father, disrupting the unities of discourse and indicating its silencings. French feminists speak of "exploding" rather than interpreting a sign. Hélène Cixous proposes a utopian place, a primeval female space free of symbolic order, sex roles, otherness, and the Law of the Father. Here the self is still linked to the voice of the mother, source of all feminine expression; to gain access to this place is to find an immeasurable source of creativity.

However, as in the case of Luce Irigaray, no matter how theoretical and abstract French feminists' prose becomes or how complicated their psychoanalytic analyses, French feminists do not stray far from the body. As Rivkin and Ryan explain, "Luce Irigaray distinguishes between blood and shame, between the direct link to material nature in women's bodies and the flight from such contact that is the driving force of male abstraction, its pretense to be above matter and outside of nature (in civilization)." Irigaray etymologically links the word "matter" to "maternity" and "matrix," the latter being the space for male philosophizing and thinking. Matter is irreducible to "male western conceptuality.... [O]utside and making possible, yet impossible to assimilate to male reason, matter is what makes women women, an identity and an experience of their own, forever apart from male power and male concepts" (*Speculum* 529). As Rivkin and Ryan further note, essentialists like Irigaray see women as "innately capable of offering a different ethics from men, one more attuned to preserving the earth from destruction by weapons devised by men." It is because men "abstract themselves" from the material world as they separate from their mothers and enter the patriarchate that they adopt a "violent and aggressive posture toward the world left behind, which is now construed as an 'object.'" For them the mother represents "the tie to nature that must be overcome... to inaugurate civilization as men understand it (a set of abstract rules for assigning identities, appropriate social roles and the like that favor male power over women)." Because women are not required to separate from the mother, "no cut is required, no separation that launches a precarious journey towards a fragile 'identity' predicated on separation that simply denies its links to the physical world." Irigaray would point out by way of example that when confronted with ethical issues, men think in terms of rights, "while women think in terms of responsibilities to others" (Rivkin and Ryan 529–30). A quotation from Jung seems apposite here: "When one has slain the father, one can obtain possession of his wife, and when one has conquered the mother, one can free one's self" (432).

(We anticipate here a comment on the novel *Frankenstein,* which we treat later. Victor Frankenstein certainly springs to mind as a man who must "cut" his

ties with the material domestic world around him by abstracting life itself, then being repelled by its materiality, especially when he sets about making his female Creature. What a price he pays, and how awful the sacrifices of everyone around him, for his obsession with the Law of the Father.)

Julia Kristeva furnishes a more specifically therapeutic sort of psychoanalysis of women in works such as her *Desire in Language*, in which she presents a mother-centered realm of the *semiotic* as opposed to the *symbolic*. Echoing Lacanian theory, she argues that the semiotic realm of the mother is present in symbolic discourse as absence or contradiction, and that great writers are those who offer their readers the greatest amount of disruption of the nameable. (One thinks of Sethe's horrific memories in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.) Like Cixous and Irigaray, Kristeva opposes phallogocentrism with images derived from women's corporeal experiences, connecting, like Marxist theory, the personal with the political and artistic. Kristeva's later work moves away from strictly psychoanalytic theorizing toward a more direct embrace of motherhood as the model for psychic female health. "Stabat Mater," her prose poem meditation on her own experience with maternity accompanied by a hypertext essay on the veneration of the Virgin Mary, understands motherhood as, like language, a separation accompanied by a joining of signification, the loss being the marker of the infant's embrace of identity (178). Many feminists follow Kristeva's privileging of motherhood, arguing that, as Rivkin and Ryan put it, "In the mother-child relationship might be found more of the constituents of identity . . . than are given during the later Oedipal stage" (531).

One other type of psychological approach, **myth** criticism (treated at length in Chapter 7), has its adherents in feminist studies. Feminist myth critics tend to center their discussions on such archetypal figures as the Great Mother and other early female images and goddesses, viewing such women as Medusa, Cassandra, Arachne, Isis, and others as radical "others" who were worshipped by women and men as alternatives to the more often dominant male deities such as Zeus or Apollo. Adrienne Rich and others have defined myth as the key critical approach for women. Criticizing Jung and such later myth critics as Northop Frye for privileging hegemonic Greco-Roman mythologies and consequently downplaying the role of the feminine from the pre-Greek past, as well as in diverse myths from other societies, Rich praises the mythic powers of motherhood even as she critiques the larger culture's ignorance and stereotyping of motherhood.

Because it manages to bring together the personal and the cultural, feminist myth criticism also holds promise for scholars interested in how various ethnic groups, especially minorities, can maintain their own rooted traditions and at the same time interact with other mythologies. Even the most negative images in mythology, such as Medusa from ancient Greece, retain attraction for modern women, for anthropology teaches us that when many formerly matriarchal societies in the "Western" tradition were supplanted by patriarchal societies that venerated male gods instead of the older "Earth Mothers," many goddesses were metamorphosed as witches, seductresses, or fools. Studying these ancient

transformations alerts us to the plasticity of all sexual categories and the ongoing revisions of the power of "the feminine."

B. Feminists of Color

Among the most prominent of feminist minorities are women of color and lesbians. These feminists practice *identity politics,* based upon essential differences from white, heterosexual, "mainstream" society, hence they could be termed essentialists. Although many nonwhite feminists include each other in shared analyses of oppression, and while feminism has largely aligned itself with arguments against racism, xenophobia, and homophobia, third-wave feminists protest being lumped together as though their fundamental concerns are the same. Here we review some of the major concerns specific to these feminists, especially the largest "minority," black feminists, and later in our section on gender studies we note some important lesbian feminists. But feminists of many different groups, including Latina and Chicana feminists, Asian American feminists, and Native American feminists, all have their own particular sets of cultural issues: these are referenced at greater length in Chapter 9, "Cultural Studies." We must point out that "minority" feminisms share in both essentialist and constructivist views; that is, whereas ethnic difference is a fact to be celebrated, feminists of color recognize the ways women and race are both constructs in society.

Like lesbian feminists, feminists of color argue that they face additional layers of the patriarchy that discourage their "coming out"; not only do they reject the traditional Western literary **canon** as lopsided in favor of men and Euro-Americans, but they also specifically target its exclusion of black women. Black feminists in particular have accused their white sisters of wishing merely to become rewarded members of the patriarchy at the expense of nonwhite women. That is, they say that the majority of feminists want to become members of the power structure, counted as men and sharing in the bounties of contemporary capitalist culture, equal wages, child care, or other accepted social "rights." A black or lesbian feminist might see a heterosexual white woman as having more in common with men than with other women of different ethnicities and classes. Maggie Humm has suggested that "the central motifs of black and lesbian criticism need to become pivotal to feminist criticism rather than the other way around" (106). Michael Awkward makes black feminists' concerns clearer when he distinguishes between how they influence each other as opposed to traditional white male models of influence. In *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision, and Afro-American Women's Novels,* he claims that black women writers carry out relationships as mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunts as very different from the patriarchally enforced relationships of fatherhood and sonship, with their traditional Oedipal conflicts. Contemporary novelists who demonstrate this idea include not only Morrison and Walker, but also Sherley Anne Williams, Gloria Naylor, and Tina McElroy Ansa.

Black women writers were previously elided from critical history or included merely as tokens. Since the 1960s interest in black culture, especially

African-American culture, has grown dramatically in American literary criticism. In fact criticism, theory, conferences, and book publishing have barely been able to keep up with the flood of academic and popular interest in black feminism. The term *black feminist,* however, is problematic. Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple* (1982), disputes the term *feminist* as applied to black women; she writes that she has replaced *feminist* with *womanist,* remarking that a womanist does not turn her back upon the men of her community. That charge was made against her by black male critics responding to the portrayal of African-American men in *The Color Purple* especially after the Steven Spielberg film version appeared in 1985 (see *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*). As in "Everyday Use," Walker identifies black female creativity from earlier generations in such folk arts as quilting, music, and gardening. Walker looks to her own literary mothers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Harlem Renaissance figure and folklorist, who insisted upon using authentic black dialect and folklore in her folktale book *Mules and Men* (1935) and her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) without apology or emendation. This tendency to privilege the black language and folkways she grew up with alienated Hurston from some of the male leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes, who preferred a more (mainstream) intellectual approach, which he saw as more activist in nature, like the protest novels of writers like Ralph Ellison and especially Richard Wright.

Seeking out other autobiographical voices, black feminists have often turned to the slave narrative and the captivity narrative, both old American forms of discourse. Challenges to the traditional canon have also included new **bibliographies** of neglected or suppressed works and the recovery and rehabilitation of such figures as the tragic mulatta or Mammy figure by such leading critics as bell hooks and Maya Angelou.

Related to the rise of feminisms among women of color is the area of postcolonial studies, which we treat in Chapter 10. Among its most prominent feminist voices is that of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who examines the effects of political independence upon *subaltern,* or subproletarian women, in Third World countries. In such works as the essays of *In Other Worlds,* Spivak has made clearer both the worldwide nature of the feminist movement, as well as the great differences among feminisms, depending upon class, political structure, and "race."

The issues that black feminist critics raise are far from academic or confined to literary criticism. On September 28, 2005, former U.S. Secretary of Education and Officer of Drug Policy William Bennett, then host of Salem Radio Networks's Bill Bennett's Morning in America Show, allegedly stated that aborting black babies would decrease crime (quoted in Gumbs). Such a violent verbal assault on black families and children spurred black feminist critics to renew their arguments against racism and sexism—not to mention assaults upon their children—as central to debates on democracy and freedom in America.

With roots in the antislavery and women's rights movements of the nineteenth century, through the black and women's rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, black American feminism of the twenty-first century looks

back on three hundred years of liberation struggles. As Sherri L. Barnes points out, "Whether one chooses to use the term black feminism, African American feminism, womanism, or black American feminism, to articulate the complexity of black American women's demand for social, economic and political equality, understood is the desire for a compatible and progressive vision of social justice based on the historical and ongoing struggles against the race and gender (at least) oppression black American women have experienced at home, at work, in their communities and, moreover, within the dominant culture as a whole." Crucial themes in contemporary black feminism include the hope for "an alternative social construct for now and the future based on African-American women's lived experiences; a commitment to fighting against race and gender inequality across differences of class, age, sexual orientation, and ethnicity; recognition of Black women's legacy of struggle; the promotion of black female empowerment through voice, visibility and self definition; and a belief in the interdependence of thought and action." The liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression.

Black feminists were disappointed by the civil rights movement in that black men took over and black women felt excluded as "merely" women. Black women had to face sexism as well as racism, and with their own men. Even today black women are largely unwilling to jeopardize their racial credibility by attacking black men. Yet as Stephen Henderson notes, black women writers increasingly expressed their sense of betrayal by their male contemporaries, whose ideas of the black community were divorced from what emerging women writers knew to be realistic images of black men, marriage, and, particularly, motherhood. He states:

> [T]he contradictions between knowledge and action that surfaced in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements forced sensitive and intelligent women to reexamine their own positions vis-à-vis the men and to conclude that they were the victims not only of racial injustice but of a sexual arrogance tantamount to dual colonialism—one from without, the other from within, the Black community. (xxiii)

As a consequence, black women writers began "free[ing] themselves from the roles assigned to them in the writings of their male counterparts where, depicted as queens and princesses, or as earth mothers and idealized Black Mommas of superhuman wisdom and strength, they were unrecognizable as individuals" (Henderson xxiv). Michele Wallace counterargues that the superwoman stereotype remains a strong tradition from which very few black female authors have strayed; consequently, it continues to mislead adolescent girls:

> From the intricate web of mythology which surrounds the black woman, a fundamental image emerges. It is of a woman of inordinate strength, with an ability for tolerating an unusual amount of misery and heavy, distasteful work. This woman does not have the same fears, weaknesses, and insecurities as other women, but believes herself to be and is, in fact, stronger emotionally than most men. Less of

> a woman in that she is less "feminine" and helpless, she is really *more* of a woman in that she is the embodiment of Mother Earth, the quintessential mother with infinite sexual, life-giving, and nurturing reserves. In other words, she is a superwoman. Through the years this image has remained basically intact, unquestioned even by the occasional black woman writer or politician. (107)

Alice Walker quotes Wallace in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1984), but takes exception to Wallace's final sentence. "It's a lie," Walker maintains. "I've been hacking away at that stereotype for years, and so have many other black women writers" (*Mothers' Gardens* 324). She lists Zora Neale Hurston, one of her literary mentors, as another example.

Patricia Hill Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, observes that black women have been easily compartmentalized by white Western thinkers: "Knowledge is a vitally important part of the social relations of domination and resistance. By objectifying African-American women and recasting our experiences to serve the interests of elite white men, much of the Eurocentric masculinist worldview fosters Black women's subordination." But, she points out, if we place black women's experiences at the center of analysis we attain fresh insights into "the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of this worldview and on its feminist and Afrocentric critiques. Viewing the world through a both/and conceptual lens of the simultaneity of race, class, and gender oppression and of the need for a humanist vision of community creates new possibilities for an empowering Afrocentric feminist knowledge. Many Black feminist intellectuals have long thought about the world in this way because this is the way we experience the world" (222–23). She thus argues that "Afrocentric feminist notions of family reflect [a] reconceptualization process." As an alternative to Western family structures, black women's experiences as "bloodmothers, othermothers, and community othermothers" reveal that the mythical norm of a heterosexual, married couple and nuclear family is far from being natural and universal, "but instead is deeply embedded in specific race and class formations. Placing African-American women in the center of analysis not only reveals much-needed information about Black women's experiences but also questions Eurocentric masculinist perspectives on family" (225). As Walker notes, black women are called, "the *mule* of the world," because they have been handed the burdens that everyone else—*everyone* else—refused to carry (Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 237).

Thus black feminism and the feminism of women of color in general can provide in place of this position of subservience, Collins observes, "a place where we feel ownership and accountability." There is always choice, and power to act, no matter how bleak the situation may appear to be; "Viewing the world as one in the making raises the issue of individual responsibility for bringing about change. It also shows that while individual empowerment is key, only collective action can effectively generate lasting social transformation of political and economic institutions" (Collins 238). Collins also writes extensively on black versus white motherhood. In order to analyze this dichotomy she argues for a theory that can

differentiate motherhood as experience and institution; dismantle motherhood as an institution; and examine differences in real mothers. In West Africa, for example, childcare is a collective responsibility of an "age-stratified, woman-centered 'mothering' network" to make the daughters strong ("othermothers"). Nineteenth-century accounts often represented black motherhood as one of many roles for slave women.

In comparison, African-American authors Paule Marshall and Jewelle Gomez, science fiction writer Octavia Butler, filmmaker Julie Dash, and poet Lucille Clifton trace the invention and subsequent development of the "magic black daughter." Two key factors define her mother-daughter separation and reunion along with the mother as history. The second is the adoption of magic. In some texts, a daughter's return to the past results in the construction of an essentialist myth of black womanhood, while in others, the possibilities of/in historical return are examined more cautiously (e.g., Morrison's *Beloved*, 81). Other writers and critics who focus on black mothers and daughters include (some we have not previously mentioned) Nella Larsen, June Jordan, Andrea O'Reilly, and Phyllis Perry. Cynthia Dobbs has described in "Mother-Hunger: A Review of *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart* by Andrea O'Reilly," the idea of mothering as essential to survival. As O'Reilly notes, "The challenge for Morrison's mothers... is not how to combine motherhood and work, but rather how, in the face of racism and sexism, to best provide the motherwork—both in and outside the home—necessary for the empowerment of children." Particularly for African-American women, Morrison and O'Reilly argue, motherhood is seamlessly interwoven with public and communal work. As Morrison described it in a 1981 interview in *Essence:*

> Black women [need to] pay... attention to the ancient properties—which for me means the ability to be "the ship" and the "safe harbor." Our history as Black women is the history of women who could build a house and have some children and there was no problem.... What we have known is how to be complete human beings, so that we did not let education keep us from our nurturing abilities... [T]o lose that is to diminish ourselves unnecessarily. It is not a question, it's not a conflict. You don't have to give up anything. You choose your responsibilities. (Morrison)

According to Dobbs, O'Reilly builds her theory of African-American motherhood on the "ancient properties" passed on by African-American women. Morrison's works, despite their representations of an often violent, fraught mother-child experience, demonstrate the crucial importance of African-American mothers as both "ship and safe harbor" to the survival of the African-American community as a whole. As O'Reilly outlines it, motherhood in Morrison is at heart about personal and political empowerment.

In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: A New American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers emphasizes the difference between "motherhood" as the role of white women through the violent exclusion of the bodies of black women from the

definition of the human, and second "the reproduction of 'mothering' which is the labor that black women have still been compelled to perform despite their exclusion from the domain of proper 'motherhood.'" This was an important point for Spillers to make in 1987, when both black nationalist invocations of motherhood as the role for the reproduction of a patriarchal black nation and white feminist views of black women's sexuality and subjectivity unspeakable.

Beginning in the 1970s, the black mother is "queered" with figures such as lesbian and bisexual radicals Audre Lorde and June Jordan. Cherríe Moraga, for example, has called black lesbian feminists such as Lorde, Jordan, and Pat Parker instances of bodies that could not be domesticized by middle-class American aspirations. The invocation of black maternity includes the production of a queer time and space within which black women can operate with a future radically different from their present.

In her book *Feminism on the Border*, Sonia Saldívar-Hull points out that far from being merely a subgroup of feminists, Chicana feminists, who largely feel they have little in common with second-wave white feminists, are in solidarity with other women of color "who share similarities in our histories under racism, class exploitation, and cultural domination in the United States—a kinship that extends beyond sharing a national language." She notes how Chicanas feel kinship with women in Third World countries who search for a feminist critical discourse; Chicana feminism thus "deconstructs the borders erected by Eurocentric feminism as it extends the borders of what is considered legitimately political." Through their shared *testimonios*, Latinas around the world—what Saldívar-Hull calls a "cultural diaspora"—can "contextualize themselves within a global literary history" (46–47). For Saldívar-Hull the two most important figures in Chicana feminism are Moraga and Anzaldúa. In her *Loving in the War Years* Moraga developed a Chicana feminist theory by linking "the genesis of Chicana and Third World feminisms to the Civil Rights movements and to Black feminist theory." She argues that "sexuality, specifically lesbian sexuality,... [is] a legitimate site of political struggle" (51–52). In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestizo* Gloria Anzaldúa articulates her border feminist theory of "Mestiza consciousness," centering her feminism in "the concrete, material locations of working-class identified women whose ethnicity and sexuality further dislocate and displace them." For Anzaldúa, the "New Mestiza," who challenges restrictions placed upon her, can emerge only "after she develops an oppositional consciousness" (59). Combining song, autobiography, historical analysis, literary theory, political theory, prose, and poetry, male and female symbols, Mexican and U.S. cultures, and First and Third Worlds, Indian gods with Catholic ones, Anzaldúa advocates consciousnesses with "tolerance for ambiguity": as Saldívar-Hull sees it, "mestiza consciousness breaks down dualisms that keep fronteristas from praxis. The border consciousness she ultimately develops produces a new, revolutionary theory of politics,... a new culture, a new way of being that will entail a global healing and freedom from violence" (62). Saldívar-Hull describes this foundational book as itself a *mestizaje*: "a postmodernist mixture"

Figure 8.1. Gloria Anzaldúa (2004).
Courtesy Annie Valva.

that "resists genre boundaries as well as geopolitical borders" (70). Saldívar-Hull examines many other important Chicana writers and theorists, including Alma Gómez, Mariana Romo Cardona, Sandra Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes, Rosaura Sánchez, Yvonne Yarbro Bejarano, and Norma Alarcón.

C. Marxist and Materialist Feminisms

Perhaps the most significant source of constructivist feminism is Marxism, especially its focus upon the relations between reading and other social constructions. The establishment of so many women's studies programs, cooperatives, bookstores, libraries, film boards, political caucuses, and community groups attests to the activist orientation of feminism. As Karl Marx argued that all historical and social developments are determined by the forms of economic production (see Chapter 4), Marxist feminists have attacked the "classist" values of the prevailing capitalist society of the patriarchal West as the world also gradually becomes "globalized." Marxist feminists do not separate "personal" identity from class identity, and they direct attention to the often nameless underpinnings of cultural productions, including the conditions of production of texts, such as the economics of the publishing industry.

As we learned in Chapter 4, according to Marxist theory, in capitalist societies the individual is shaped by class relations; that is, interests are determined by the mode of production that characterizes their society. Materialist, and, especially

Marxist feminists see gender inequality as determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production and the major social divisions as class-related. Women's subordination is a form of oppression maintained because it serves the interests of capital and the ruling class. And, as Marx himself wrote, female prostitution "is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the laborer" (Marx, quoted in Pateman, *Sexual Contract* 201).

However, there is debate between materialist and Marxist feminists. Donna Landry and Gerald McLean point out that while "Marxist feminism holds class contradictions and class analysis central, and has tried various ways of working an analysis of gender oppression around this central contradiction," a broader materialist feminism examines "class contradictions and contradictions within gender ideology... we are arguing that *materialist feminism* should recognize as material other contradictions as well.... including ideologies of race, sexuality, imperialism and colonialism and anthropocentrism, with their accompanying radical critiques" (229). Rosemary Hennessy traces the origins of materialist feminism to the work of British and French feminists who preferred the term to Marxist feminism because, in their view, Marxism had to be transformed to be able to explain the sexual division of labor. In the 1970s, Hennessy argues, Marxism was inadequate to the task because of its class bias and focus on production, while feminism was also problematic due to its essentialist and idealist concept of woman; this is why materialist feminism emerged as a positive alternative both to Marxism and mainstream feminism (*Materialist Feminisms,* xii).

Martha E. Gimenez notes that materialist feminism is a "way of reading" that rejects "the dominant pluralist paradigms and logics of contingency and seeks to establish the connections between the discursively constructed differentiated subjectivities that have replaced the generic 'woman' in feminist theorizing, and the hierarchies of inequality that exploit and oppress women." Subjectivities cannot be understood in isolation from systemically organized totalities." Materialist feminism, as a reading practice, is also a way of rewriting the world and, as such, "can influence reality through the knowledge it produces about the subject and her social context." This subject is "traversed by differences grounded in hierarchies of inequality which are not local or contingent but historical and systemic, such as patriarchy and capitalism. Difference, consequently, is not mere plurality but inequality. The problem of the material relationship between language, discourse, and the social or between the discursive (feminist theory) and the non-discursive (women's lives divided by exploitative and oppressive social relations) can be resolved through the conceptualization of discourse as ideology." Gimenez finds the materialist feminists more akin to cultural feminists because they do not set out to change the material realities of women's oppression to class (Gimenez, n.p.)

Yet in her essay, "What Is Socialist Feminism?" Barbara Ehrenreich sets out some of the correspondences and differences Marxist feminism has with classical Marxism. She argues that "Socialist feminists are in a very different camp from what I am calling 'mechanical Marxists.' We (along with many, many Marxists who are

not feminists) see capitalism as a social and cultural totality. We understand that, in its search for markets, capitalism is driven to penetrate every nook and cranny of social existence. Especially in the phase of monopoly capitalism, the realm of consumption is every bit as important, just from an economic point of view, as the realm of production. So we cannot understand class struggle as something confined to issues of wages and hours, or confined only to workplace issues." Class struggle, she notes, occurs everywhere when the interests of classes conflict, in art, education, and health, for example. She points out that because Marxist feminists "see monopoly capitalism as a political/economic/cultural totality, we have room within our Marxist framework for feminist issues which have nothing ostensibly to do with production or 'politics,' issues that have to do with the family, health care, 'private' life." She is concerned with all working women including "housewives" as members of the working class with "a social existence quite apart from the capitalist-dominated realm of production. When we think of class in this way, then we see that in fact the women who seemed most peripheral, the housewives, are at the very heart of their class—raising children, holding together families, maintaining the cultural and social networks of the community." As she observes, in many instances, women's skills (productive skills, healing, midwifery) have been discredited or banned to make way for commodities. As she adds, "women are the culture-bearers of their class" (and culture). Thus there is a fundamental interconnection between women's struggle and the class struggle: "Not all women's struggles have an inherently anti-capitalist thrust (particularly not those which seek only to advance the power and wealth of special groups of women), but all those which build collectivity and collective confidence among women are vitally important to the building of class consciousness" (66–67).

Marxist feminists, like other Marxists, are attacked for misunderstanding the nature of quality in art. For them, literary value is not a transcendent property (just as sex roles are not inherent) but rather something conditioned by social beliefs and needs. What is "good" art for a Marxist critic often seems to be merely what a given group of people decide is good, and it is sometimes hard to differentiate that process from one which Formalists would endorse. Yet Lillian Robinson, a prominent Marxist feminist, has pointed out that even a seemingly innocuous approach such as Formalism is encoded with class interests, connecting it to the systematic exclusion of women, nonwhites, and the working class. Feminist criticism, in contrast, should be "criticism with a cause, engaged criticism.... It must be ideological and moral criticism; it must be revolutionary" (3).

D. Feminist Film Studies

Most significant among critical cultural theories in shaping film studies from the 1970s on was feminism. Feminist film critics address a pervasive set of issues such as cinematic representations of women, spectatorship by men, and sexual difference. As Patricia White notes,

> the female image—the female as image—has been a central feature of film and related visual media; in film criticism and theory, making gender the axis of

> analysis has entailed a thoroughgoing reconsideration of films for, by, and about women, and a consequent transformation of the canons of film studies.... A concern with representation, in both a political sense (of giving voice to or speaking on behalf of women) and an aesthetic sense, has also united the activist and theoretical projects of women's film culture. (115)

The first book-length studies of women and film appeared in the United States in the early 1970s, both from those who analyzed women in films in terms of realism and those who saw women as co-opted by the medium. Molly Haskell and Marjorie Rosen proposed "reflection theory," or the idea that film reflects social reality for women but distorts their lives according to the conventions of mainstream media, advertising, pornography, and so on, what White describes as "an array of virgins, vamps, victims, suffering mothers, child women, and sex kittens" (116). Haskell relates the history of women in film as an arc from the "reverence" of the silent era to the "rape" of women by Hollywood in the 1970s. For Haskell the high point of powerful women in film was in the 1940s, with such heroines as Katharine Hepburn. But other critics such as Claire Johnston have felt that such an approach detaches women from their psychic structures and historical circumstances. Johnson sees film as a language and its women as a sign, "not simply a transparent rendering of the real" (White 116). Johnston analyzes the films of Howard Hawks and John Ford as well as those of women directors such as Ida Lupino or Dorothy Arzner. According to White, this analysis in turn set a pattern for subsequent feminist studies of Hollywood genres such as film noir, the musical, and the Western, which show how women as signifier performed precise iconographic and ideological functions, either constituting a genre's structural dimensions (woman = home in the Western) or exposing its ideological contradictions (the femme fatale figure in film noir)" (White 116–17).

Contemporary constructivist positions such as those by such scholars as Teresa de Lauretis and Laura Mulvey are inspired by the Marxist notion of the social construction of individual subjectivity (especially as outlined by Louis Althusser) and by the poststructuralist idea that languages write identities, and do not merely reflect them. "Gender identity is no less a construction of patriarchal culture than the idea that men are somehow superior to women; both are born at the same time and with the same stroke of the pen," as Rivkin and Ryan put it. Constructivists worry that essentialists are interpreting the subordination of women as women's nature: "At its most radical, the constructivist counter-paradigm embraces such categories as performativity, masquerade, and imitation, which are seen as cultural processes that generate gender identities that only appear to possess a pre-existing natural or material substance. Of more importance than physical or biological difference might be psychological identity." Following the thinking of Judith Butler, these theorists see gender as "performative," an imitation of a "code" that refers to no natural substance. Indeed, "Masculine means not feminine as much as it means anything natural" (Rivkin and Ryan 530).

Laura Mulvey's insight that films can compel the female viewer to participate in her own humiliation by watching the film as a man is borne out in her analysis of the technical and psychological organization of the classic Hollywood film, and her analysis has been eagerly embraced by literary critics, who transfer her insights on film to the printed page. The "male gaze" she describes (like the Lacanian Symbolic Order) is based upon voyeurism and fetishism, the only available pleasure (usually) being the male one of looking at women's bodies for sexual cues. Mulvey uses examples from Alfred Hitchcock films to show how male ambivalence toward the overall image of woman causes viewers to choose amongst devaluing, punishing, or saving a guilty female, or turning her into a pedestal figure, a fetish. These extremes leave little place for the female viewer: according to Mulvey, woman is the image, and man the bearer of the look, the voyeur: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance pleasure in looking has been split. . . . [and] the male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (304–9).

White praises Mulvey for "[t]he most thorough-going and explicit introduction of neo-Freudian psychoanalytic theory to feminist film studies." As Mulvey argued for a break with dominant cinema and the rejection of "visual pleasure," she found the"gendered processes of spectatorial desire and identification orchestrated by classical narrative cinema" to mean that "woman" was merely the image or "bearer of the look." Thus for Mulvey and her followers, "the institution of cinema is characterized by a sexual imbalance of power"; Lacan's notion of "pleasure in looking" addresses how films deploy unconscious mechanisms to portray the woman as the signifier of sexual difference and the man as the subject and hence maker of meaning; Mulvey codifies these in cinema through the manipulation of the gaze and narrative itself in terms of time and space, point of view, editing, framing. Cinema thus affords "identificatory pleasure with one's on-screen likeness, or ego ideal (understood in terms of the Lacanian mirror state), and libidinal gratification from the object of the gaze." The male spectator is "doubly supported by these mechanisms of visual gratification as the gaze is relayed from the male surrogate within the diegesis to the male spectator in the audience. The woman, on the other hand, is defined in terms of spectacle, or what Mulvey described as 'to-be looked-at-ness.'" This gaze, however, raises the male spectator's anxieties about castration, and so he masters this by voyeurism (White 117). In her later work, Mulvey speculates on the results of this male detour into voyeurism.

In the end, feminist film studies have taught viewers to "gaze" at women in film differently. At the same time, women directors and film characters have also challenged the "male gaze." Such diverse films as *Rebecca, All About Eve, Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?, Thelma and Louise, The Color Purple, Steel Magnolias, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and The Secret Life of Bees* have all been described as feminist films. How so? That is, how do these films portray women in the various environments they exist within? How do the women protagonists struggle to survive and prevail in their environments?

Students can easily call to mind examples from other current films to corroborate Mulvey's insights: think about how differently women's bodies are portrayed in films like *Monster* (2003) and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2007), or how both male and female gazes are engaged by the whirling assassins and viewpoints of *Kill Bill* (2003, 2004).

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Despite their divergences and different goals, feminisms still seek to integrate competing worlds: Rich describes feminism as "the place where in the most natural, organic way subjectivity and politics have to come together" (in Gelpi and Gelpi 114). Such movement toward integration allows feminisms to do many different sorts of things: protest the exclusion of women from the literary canon, focus upon the personal (such as diary literature), make political arguments, align itself with other movements, and redefine literary theory and even language itself. Maggie Humm reminds us that male critics in the past were generally perceived to be "unaligned" and "a feminist [was] seen as a case for special pleading," but that today it is clear that masculinism rather than feminism tends to be blind to the implications of gender (12–13). Feminist criticism is not, as Toril Moi has observed, "just another interesting critical approach" like "a concern for sea-imagery or metaphors of war in medieval poetry" (204). It represents one of the most important social, economic, and aesthetic revolutions of modern times.

IV. GENDER STUDIES

As a constructivist endeavor, gender studies examines how gender is less determined by *nature* than it is by *culture,* and as we noted with Showalter's cultural model, a cultural analysis is at the center of the most complex and vital critical enterprises. Rivkin and Ryan name their introduction to their essays on gender studies "Contingencies of Gender," which aptly suggests the fluid nature of all gender categories. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s feminists and gender critics, especially those in Gay and Lesbian Studies, have experienced and articulated common ground in oppression and struggle. In the past, descriptions of prose in masculine terms (a "virile" style or "seminal" argument) were taken as the norm; today, a piece of writing might be criticized as limited by its masculine point of view. Myra Jehlen claims that traditional critics wish to reduce the complexities of sexuality to a false common denominator. With authors who seem unconscious of gender as an issue we must make an effort to read *for* it instead: "...literary criticism involves action as much as reflection, and reading for gender makes the deed explicit." As "heterosexual" and "homosexual" men and women escape the masculine norms of society, everyone benefits (263–65, 273). One recalls Huck's escape from gender (with Mrs. Judith Loftus) and race (with Jim) as key components of his ever-evolving identity.

For both feminists and gender critics, society portrays binary oppositions like masculine and feminine or straight and gay as natural categories, but as David

Richter notes, "the rules have little to do with nature and everything to do with culture." The word *homosexual* has only a short history of one hundred years or so (it was new at the time of Oscar Wilde's trial), and *heterosexual* is even newer. In any given culture, many theorists point out that what is "normal" sexually depends upon when and where one lives; for instance, pederasty was practiced by nobles of Periclean Athens, who also had sexual relationships with women, and both sorts of relationships were socially accepted. Homosexuality and heterosexuality today may thus be seen as not two forms of identity but rather a range of overlapping behaviors. Masculinity and femininity are constantly changing, of course. Ross C. Murfin sees gender as a construct, "an effect of language, a culture, and its institutions." Gender, not sex, makes an older man open the door for a young woman, and gender makes her expect it, resent it, or experience mixed feelings. Additionally, "Sexuality is a continuum not a fixed and static set of binary oppositions" (339). Similarly, Teresa de Lauretis has described the "technologies of gender," the forces in modern technological society that create sex roles in response to ideology and marketplace needs, specifically, "the product of various social technologies, such as cinema." Following Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality, she means by "technology" that "sexuality, commonly thought to be a natural as well as a private matter, is in fact completely constructed in culture according to the political aims of the society's dominant class." She concludes: "There is nothing outside or before culture, no nature that is not always and already enculturated" (2, 12).

In the 1970s and 1980s, after the famous Stonewall riots in New York that brought new focus upon gay, lesbian, and transvestite resistance to police harassment, gender critics studied more and more the history of gay and lesbian writing and how gay and lesbian life is distorted in cultural history. For example, Adrienne Rich's work focuses upon liberation from what she calls "compulsory heterosexuality," a "beachhead of male dominance" that "needs to be recognized and studied as a political institution" (143, 145). Sharon O'Brien writes on Willa Cather's problematic attitude toward her own lesbianism, Terry Castle analyzes "things not fit to be mentioned" in eighteenth-century literature, and Lillian Faderman explores love between women in the Renaissance.

Lesbian critics counter their marginalization by considering lesbianism a privileged stance testifying to the primacy of women. Terms such as *alterity, woman-centered,* and *difference* take on new and more sharply defined meanings when used by lesbian critics. Lesbianism has been a stumbling block for other feminists, and lesbian feminists have at times excluded heterosexual feminists. Some lesbians define lesbianism as the "normal" relations of women to women, seeing heterosexuality as "abnormal." This has led some heterosexual feminists to reject lesbian perspectives, but on the whole, lesbian feminists have guided other feminists into new appreciation of certain female traits in writing. They have also brought to the forefront the works of lesbian authors.

Lesbian critics reject the notion of a unified text, finding corroboration in poststructuralist and postmodernist criticism as well as among the French feminists. They investigate such textual features as mirror images, secret codes, dreams, and narratives of identity; they are drawn to neologisms, unconventional grammar, and

other experimental techniques. One has only to think of the poetry and criticism of Gertrude Stein to see the difference such a self-consciously lesbian point of view entails. Like other feminists, they stress **ambiguity** and open-endedness of narratives and seek double meanings. Lesbian critics suggest new **genres** for study such as the female **Gothic** or female utopia. They are often drawn to such experimental women writers as Woolf, Stein, Radclyffe Hall, Colette, and Djuna Barnes, and to such popular genres as science fiction, especially involving created bodies such as cyborgs.

In 1978 the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* was translated. It argued that homosexuality is a social, medical, and ontological category invented in the late nineteenth century and then imposed on sexual practices that prior to that time discouraged and punished nonreproductive sexual alternatives (Rivkin and Ryan 676–77). In the late 1980s after the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic, the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Warner, and others in "Queer Theory" emerged as a way of providing gays and lesbians with a common term around which to unite and a more radical way of critiquing stigmatization, choosing the formerly derogatory name *queer* and transforming it into a slogan with pride (Rivkin and Ryan 677–78). Following Foucault, Queer Theorists view sexuality as disengaged from gender altogether and from the **binary** opposition of male/female.

Queer Theory relies on such postmodern concepts as gender ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity of identities, which have replaced the more clearly defined sexual values of earlier generations. The controversy over the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe in the early 1990s illustrates the intensity of conflicts that once arose when a gay male aesthetic is deployed.

In *Epistemology of the Closet,* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick deconstructs the pathology of the homosexual and argues that sexuality is "an array of acts, expectations, narratives, pleasures, identity-formations, and knowledges..." (22–27). Using Sedgwick as a starting point, Queer Theorists have sought to create publics that "can afford sex and intimacy in sustained, unchastening ways," as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner write in a special issue of *PMLA* devoted to Queer Theory. A "queer public" includes self-identified gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered. At the same time, this public has "different understandings of membership at different times." The word *queer* was chosen both because of its shock value and because of its playfulness, its "wrenching sense of recontextualization" (343–45).

With a commitment only to pleasure, "queer" rejects the conventions of Western sexual mores. This rejection resembles the late nineteenth-century aesthete's embrace of the notion of "art for art's sake." (Indeed late nineteenth-century figures such as Oscar Wilde are important sources for Queer Theory.) Instead, the queer celebrates desire, what Donald Morton calls "the unruly and uncontainable excess that accompanies the production of meaning.... The excess produced at the moment of the human subject's entry into the codes and conventions of culture." Desire is an autonomous entity outside history, "uncapturable" and "inexpressible" (such formulations recall Freudian theory—see Chapter 6.) Morton identifies Queer Theory's roots in the anarchic skepticism of Friedrich Nietzsche (370–71). Queer commentary has produced analyses of such narra-

knowledge; voicing strategies; gossip; elision and euphemism; jokes; identification and other readerly reactions to texts and discourse" (Berlant and Warner 345–49). They read the normless Internet as "queer" because it is unpredictable and endlessly transformative. Critics such as Alan Sinfield have offered startling new readings of Shakespeare, while others have returned to such homosexual writers as Walt Whitman with better clues as to embedded sexual meanings and the role of desire in reading the text. Increasingly in the last few years, gay characters, themes, and programs now appear on all mainstream major television channels and are the subjects of Hollywood films. Gay marriage remains in the headlines as a controversial issue, but the queer or gay aesthetic has fully entered American culture. Widespread critical praise for such films as *Milk* (2008) attest to this.

V. FEMINISMS AND GENDER STUDIES IN PRACTICE

A. The Marble Vault: The Mistress in "To His Coy Mistress"

Addressing himself to a coy or putatively unwilling woman, the speaker in Andrew Marvell's poem pleads for sex using the logical argument that since they have not "world enough, and time" to delay pleasure, the couple should proceed with haste. But the poem's supposed logic and its borrowing from traditional love poetry only thinly veil darker psychosexual matters. What is most arresting about the address is its shocking attack upon the female body.

The woman in "To His Coy Mistress" not only is unwilling to accept the speaker but also is obviously quite intelligent; otherwise, he would not bother with such high-flown metaphysics. Yet the speaker seeks to frighten her into sexual compliance when his fancy philosophy does not seem persuasive enough. His use of such force is clearest in his violent and **grotesque** descriptions of her body.

Her body is indeed the focus, not his nor theirs together. Following a series of exotic settings and references to times past and present, the speaker offers the traditional adoration of the female body derived from the **Petrarchan sonnet**, but he effectively dismembers her identity into discrete sexual objects, including her eyes, her forehead, her breasts, "the rest" and "every part," culminating in a wish for her to "show" her heart. (Such maneuvers remind us of Freud's and Lacan's discussions of the Oedipal male's objectification of the mother.) This last image, showing the heart, moves in the direction of more invasive probings of her body and soul.

In the center of the poem the lady's body is next compared to a "marble vault." The speaker's problem is that despite the woman's charms, her vault is closed to him. He deftly uses this refusal as a means to advance his assault, however, since the word vault (a tomb) points toward her death (not his, however). He clinches the attack with the next image, the most horrifying one in the poem. If she refuses him, "then worms shall try/That long preserved virginity."

Returning to more traditional overtures, the speaker praises her "youthful hue" and dewy skin, from which, through "every pore," he urges her "willing soul" to catch fire. These pores though minute are more openings into her body; the

connection with penetrating worms from the lines before is in the wish to penetrate and ignite her very soul. Attack upon the woman as fortress and the use of fire to suggest arousal were common **tropes** in sixteenth-century love **sonnets**, but Marvell's adaptation of them has a grotesque, literal feel more aligned with seventeenth-century Metaphysical poems, with their strange juxtapositions. The speaker's violence at the woman is, however, expanded to include himself, when he envisions the two of them as "amorous birds of prey" who may "devour" time, not "languish in his slow-chapped power" ("to chap" meaning "to chew"). It is significant that he does not foresee his own body moldering in the tomb, like hers, invaded by worms; he does admit that one day his lust will be turned to ashes, but that is a very different image from worms. He does not seem to see himself paying the same penalties that she will. The closing vision of how they will "tear our pleasures with rough strife/Thorough the iron gates of life" returns to the language of assault on her body. All in all, the lady of the poem is subject to being torn, opened up, or devoured by her admirer. A deep irony resides in the fact that he is absolutely right in suggesting she will pay more penalties for sex than he will.

It would be a mistake to see "To His Coy Mistress" as belittling women, however. If there were no power in the feminine, especially the mother, there would be no male identity crisis; the woman's silencing in such a text as this emphasizes not her helplessness but her power. The woman addressed is goddess-like: capricious and possibly cruel, she is one who must be complained to and served. Both the speaker's flattery and his verbal attacks mask his fear of her. To him the feminine is enclosed and unattainable—tomblike as well as womblike. The speaker's gracefulness of proposition, through the **courtly love** tradition, gives way to his crude **imagery** as his exasperation builds; her power lies in her continued refusal (it is evident that she has *already* said no to him). The feminine is portrayed here as a *negative* state: that is, she does not assent; she is not in the poem; and the final decision is not stated. It is a poem about power, and the power lies with the silent female, with the vault or womb—the negative space of the feminine. However, as the speaker's logic makes clear, her reserve has a price: she will not live as fully as she might, especially as a sexual being.

As distinct from his speaker, Marvell offers a portrayal of male and female roles of his day that celebrates their various positions while sharply indicating their limitations. It is a positive and negative evaluation. On the one hand, it is a poem about youth and passion for life, both intellectual and physical. It gives us a picture of the lives of sophisticated men and women during the time, people who enjoy sex for pleasure and who are not above making witty jokes and having fun arguing. No mention is made of procreation in the poem, nor marriage, nor even love. It is about sex. The poem is so sophisticated that instead of merely restating the courtly love tradition, it parodies it. Yet on the other hand as the male speaker satirizes his lady's coyness, he is also satirizing himself in his outrageous imagistic attempts to scare her into sex with him. The repellent quality of his images of women, like a bad dream, haunts us long after his artful invention and his own coy sense of humor fade.

B. Frailty, Thy Name Is Hamlet: Hamlet and Women

The hero of *Hamlet* is afflicted, as we pointed out in Chapter 6, with the world's most famous Oedipus complex, next to that of its namesake. The death of his father and the "o'erhasty marriage" of his mother to his uncle so threaten Hamlet's ego that he finds himself splintered, driven to action even as he resists action with doubts and delays. Unfortunately, he is a son who must act against both his "parents," Gertrude and Claudius, in order to avenge his real father and alleviate his own psychic injury, a symbolic castration. But because his conflict is driven by two irreconcilable father-images, Hamlet directs his fury toward his mother—and, to a lesser degree, toward his beloved Ophelia—even as he fails in his attempts to engage the father(s). A Freudian critic would point out that the two fathers in the play represent the two images of the father any boy has: one powerful and good and one powerful and bad, that is, sleeping with the adored mother. Hamlet's irresolvable polarity of father images creates a male-female tension that is likewise unannealed. The question of how to account for Hamlet's delay in avenging his father has occupied generations of critics. A feminist reading indicates a solution: for Hamlet, delaying and attacking the feminine is a handy substitute for avoiding Claudius. Several times Hamlet's speech signals his unconscious thought that everything is his mother's fault for being an object of competing male desires, whether she actually had a hand in the elder Hamlet's murder or not. The feminist reading that follows is based upon Hamlet's loathing of his mother and of all feminine subjects as well, including at times his own (feminized) self. His fear and hatred of woman turn inwardly and destroy him; Claudius's death at the end is accompanied by the deaths of Hamlet, Gertrude, Laertes—all of whom join Ophelia, who has died earlier.

Hamlet contends with a woman's body, his mother's, and he finds its sexual proclivities disgusting, as he rails at her in her chamber. He loathes himself for being born out of the female body; his own sexual conflicts and confused desires threaten him from the unconscious. He condemns his mother's incestuous union with Claudius but mirrors the incest in his own Oedipal desire for her. The world of *Hamlet* is riven by such struggles, and the play's psychological themes are made more powerful by their contact with the other major thematic pattern in the play, politics. As Shakespeare was writing his play, perhaps the advancing age of Queen Elizabeth I and the precariousness of the succession—always with the accompanying danger of war at home and abroad—were elements in the dramatist's conjoining a man's relations with women to his relations with political power. The play gives us a picture of the role of women in Elizabethan society, from the way Ophelia must obey her father without question, to the dangers maidens face from young male courtiers, to the inappropriateness of Queen Gertrude's sexual desires. But although cultural roles of such women of the court are not applicable to women of all classes in Elizabethan times or our own, what women stand for psychologically and sexually in *Hamlet* is more universal than not.

The emphasis upon family relationships and specifically the politics of sex from the beginning of the play is accompanied by an emphasis upon political matters of the realm at large. In this sense, it is about the politics of masculinity and femininity

in addition to the politics of Elsinore Castle, Denmark, and the larger world. The night from which the Ghost initially emerges is described in female terms, compounding the fear of unrest in general with fear of the feminine: the Ghost lies in the "womb of earth" and walks in an unwholesome night in which a "witch has power to charm," banished only by a male figure, the crowing "cock" (I.i).

Claudius has taken as his wife "our sometime sister, now our queen... With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage" (I.ii). The father-son images in Claudius's description of matters between Denmark and Norway are followed by Claudius's fatherly behavior to young Laertes and then by the first appearance of Hamlet, whose first words are directed to his mother in response to Claudius's greeting; when Claudius goes so far as to call Hamlet "my son," Hamlet mutters, "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (I.ii). Gertrude pleads with Hamlet to stop mourning his father, and Claudius asks him to think of him as a new father.

What follows is the first of his many soul-searching monologues. When Hamlet thinks of himself, he thinks first of "this too too solid flesh" (for which alternate readings have suggested "sullied" and "sallied" for "solid"), which he would destroy had "the Everlasting not fix'd/His canon 'gainst self-slaughter." If his flesh is sullied, his mother's is polluted: in the monologue he blames his mother's "frailty" for exchanging "Hyperion" for a "satyr." She is "unrighteous" in her lust (I.ii).

Hamlet's meditation upon his mother's faults and his later assault upon her are keys to understanding his torment, but while many critics have been content to move through the play seeing Gertrude only through her son's angry eyes, Carolyn Heilbrun has provided an important feminist revision of Gertrude. Instead of a "well-meaning but shallow" Gertrude, Heilbrun finds her queen-like in her pointed speech "and a little courageous." Gertrude expresses herself well throughout the play. She is solicitous of Hamlet, asking him to sit near her to give him a sense of belonging to the new court, and her speech to Laertes upon Ophelia's death is a model of decorum and sensitivity, one instance in which her usual directness would not be appropriate. If there is one quality that characterizes her speeches, it is her "ability to see reality clearly, and to express it," even when turned upon herself. As Hamlet rails against his mother and even violently seizes her in Act III (she cries out in fear, "Thou wilt not murder me?"), she betrays no knowledge of the murder. "What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue/In noise so rude against me?" she asks. Hamlet denounces her sexual passion, and she responds: "O Hamlet, speak no more!/Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,/And there I see such black and grained spots/As will not leave their tinct" (III.iv). She admits her lust and sees it as sinful, but this is different from being an accomplice to murder. She thinks Hamlet mad and promises she will not betray him, and she does not. In the end, Heilbrun sums up Gertrude: "...if she is lustful, [she] is also intelligent, penetrating, and gifted" (1–17). We do not know her motives for marrying Claudius—perhaps she feared for her life and really did not have a choice—but she is honest enough to admit that sex had something to do with it. Hamlet is not able to face such a thing honestly. It is interesting that he assumes she had a choice in marrying Claudius; perhaps he sees her as much more powerful than she really is in the situation.

Let us contrast the distorted image of the mother Hamlet projects upon Gertrude with these evident dimensions of her character. Their relationship is most significant for a feminist reading, since Gertrude's body is the literal and symbolic ground of all the conflicts in the play; her body and soul are contested by her son, husbands, and courtiers.

When the Ghost of Hamlet's father addresses Gertrude's sin—"O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there"—he falls short of condemning her, but condemns her choice (I.v). He identifies his own body with the temple and the city ("And in the porches of my ears did pour/The leprous distilment"), while connecting Claudius with leprosy and filth and Gertrude with thorny vegetation. Though the Ghost's narrative of what happened to him leaves ambiguous the exact order of events (did Claudius seduce her before or after the murder?), he warns Hamlet against taking revenge upon his mother: "Leave her to Heaven" (I.v). The elder Hamlet's willingness to do that and not to cry for his son to take revenge for the perceived unfaithfulness of his spouse is a sign of his true nobility and perhaps Gertrude's innocence. But it is also a marker of how women were to be managed by men from the cradle and beyond—that she is his (Hamlet the Elder's) responsibility.

The Ghost's desire for leniency with his wife is not matched by similar sentiments of other male characters in the play. For example, there are the crude sex jokes of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who characterize first the earth and then fortune as whores. And when Laertes warns Ophelia about Hamlet's intentions, she jibes him about his own sexual escapades with women, and Polonius pays Reynaldo to spy on Laertes and see whether he is whoring. Ophelia is a more sympathetic—and more reliable—character compared to her hypocritical brother and scheming father. She also seems to be a better judge of Hamlet's strange behavior. Polonius puts it down merely to lovesickness.

When a troupe of players comes to the castle, Hamlet asks one of them to repeat Aeneas's speech to Dido on the death of King Priam, a doubly appropriate scenario in that Aeneas abandons Dido in order to pursue political greatness. Hamlet and the players speak of the "strumpet" Fortune, but Hamlet also mentions Hecuba, the wife of Priam, who mourns for her lost children (the opposite of Hamlet's mother, whose child mourns for her). Hamlet thinks of his own genuine grief in contrast to the players' pretended grief, and he calls himself "whore" and "drab" who must only "unpack" his heart with words instead of actions (II.ii), interestingly, continuing to relate making believe to "whoring." Claudius too uses the whore image, as he calls himself in an aside, a "harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art" (III.i). ("Plast'ring" refers to the practice of covering syphilitic facial scars with paint, alluding again to the disease metaphor used for Claudius). The Queen's half-hearted questions to Hamlet evince her growing despair at his behavior, and *she* appears not whorish in the least, but merely sad and resigned. We must contrast her behavior with that of her husband, as he drinks and carouses loudly into the night.

Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" speech (III.i) follows these shifting scenes of falsehood and betrayal. Ophelia interrupts him and is greeted as "nymph"; Hamlet asks her to pray for him, but then begins to berate her savagely,

the first time he has really let his emotions go in front of someone else. He demands to know whether she is "honest" as well as "fair," and his demands escalate into his shouting, "Get thee to a nunnery" (*nunnery* being Elizabethan slang for *brothel*). His words recall the advice about young men she has heard from her father and brother. Hamlet ends by accusing her and all women of making monsters of men. In a case of repression and projection, he takes out his anger on her instead of its real object, Claudius. "Heavenly powers, restore him!" Ophelia prays after he leaves, adding: "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown," echoing Gertrude's fears for his sanity. Hamlet was the model for young manhood, "Th' expectation and rose of the fair state,/The glass of fashion and the mould of form" (III.i). Calling Hamlet a "rose" feminizes him to some degree (and recalls the Ghost's mention of "those thorns" that lie in Gertrude's "bosomy lodge to prick and sting her" [I.v]). The metaphor perhaps points toward his denial of unconscious drives and aspects, and her speech emphasizes his "feminine" traits of gentleness, a forgiving heart, stability, caught as he is in the throes of his male-gendered ego struggle. She pities and loves him but is herself much "o'erthrown" by his poisonous words.

Later, in the play-within-the-play, the poison used to kill the king is described as "Hecat's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected" (III.ii). The witch Hecate is a dark feminine image from early Greek mythology; the words "blasted" and "infected" invoke venereal disease again. The disease metaphors attached to the murderous Claudius and to "whores" point both toward his incestuous sin and to his own "whoredom": he marries to gain the kingdom. Everything points to the "sins" of sexuality, but also toward Gertrude and Ophelia, who inhabit a space outside the politics. Arguably, the destruction of their worlds leads to the wholesale royal and national defeat of Denmark.

We sense that the scene between Hamlet and his mother has been put off as long as it can when he bursts into her chamber and attacks her verbally and physically. But typical of the misdirected passions of Hamlet, he accidentally kills Polonius, who is hiding behind the curtains. (We must pause to note a certain voyeuristic quality to Polonius that would make an interesting analysis in the context of sexuality in *Hamlet*.) Again another person has stood in for Hamlet's real opponent, himself. Fittingly, when Laertes hears of his father's murder, he expresses himself in images derived from adultery: "That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,/Cries cuckold to my father, brands the harlot/Even here between the chaste unsmirched brow/Of my true mother" (IV.v), lines which seem to mean that if Laertes does not avenge his father, he is the son of a whore. (Compare this to Hamlet's dilemma.) Ophelia, now mad with grief at her father's death, sings a mock dirge for all women and perhaps for their sons too: "Good night, ladies, good night. Sweet ladies, good night, good night" (IV.v).

The final act begins with Hamlet and Laertes fighting in Ophelia's newly dug grave (a sexualized metaphor), after which Hamlet confesses his love for her, a question that has been left hanging until now. Perhaps her death has awakened in him his true nature as a lover of women instead of a victim of them, but we

must remember it was his habit of misdirected anger that led to her despair and suicide. Laertes—as a **foil** or double of Hamlet and now the gentleman's model instead of Hamlet--has also taken Hamlet's aggressive, provoking, revenge-seeking place. When they fight in the last act, each is wounded with the poisoned sword. Laertes had provided the poison (IV.vii), but it was the father-king, Claudius, who had suggested the fencing match with one sword "unbated," a fittingly diseased **phallic** weapon to use against two sons. The queen drinks a poisoned cup, saying she "carouses" to Hamlet's "fortune." She calls, "Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, and rub thy brows," just as any proud and loving mother would (V.ii). Dying, Hamlet forces Claudius to drink from the cup he poisoned for Hamlet, but it is all too late, too late, even for revenge, and it is left for Horatio to tell Hamlet's tale. Hamlet and the two women he loved join his two fathers and Laertes in death. Political stability is restored by Fortinbras of Norway with a manly flourish, but at the price of Denmark's independence. The crisis of fathers and sons and sons and mothers is over, and the world of male political power is restored. Thus revenge destroys family.

C. "The Workshop of Filthy Creation": Men and Women in *Frankenstein*

As they sift through the artifacts of the early twenty-first century, surely archaeologists in the distant future will speculate on what sorts of gods were most widely worshipped around the world in our times, and they may very well conclude that one god had the face of Boris Karloff as the Creature in the Hammer Studios films of the 1930s, later portrayed in every conceivable medium from coffee mugs to billboards to T-shirts, consigning Batman and Elvis and Jacko to the footnotes. Considering the deterrents nineteenth-century women authors faced, it is a surprising fact that the world's most widely recognized fictional character, *Frankenstein*'s Creature, was created by a teenaged girl nearly two hundred years ago. But as many critics have noted, despite its huge popular success and mass commercialization, Mary Shelley's 1818 novel presents a startling array of interpretive questions, including especially questions concerning the women of Shelley's generation.

Understanding *Frankenstein* means understanding the gendered psychology of its creator. In *Frankenstein* femininity embraces life and regeneration, whereas masculinity murders and turns suicidally upon itself. Victor is alienated from the domestic sphere in his masculine quest for scientific glory, and as Mary Poovey observes, "the monster he creates completes his alienation by virtually wiping out his family" (16). Kate Ellis finds that *Frankenstein* critiques "a bifurcated social order" that separates "the masculine sphere of discovery and the feminine sphere of domesticity" (124). Victor's sin of expropriating the function of the female by giving "birth" to a child would seem to be a bridging of the two spheres. But though he sees himself as promoting social good in his supposedly unselfish desire to right the wrongs of material life (including its usual means of reproduction), the unnaturalness of his ambition to attain immortality is related to his forswearing normal relations with women, with his family and friends, and with his own "child." How fitting that people have confused Frankenstein with his creature, calling both

"Frankenstein": Victor, the creator who erases others' identities, has been partially erased by his Creature. Again, revenge destroys the family.

1. Mary and Percy, Author and Editor

Death and birth were "hideously mixed" in the life of Mary Shelley, notes Ellen Moers, just as they were in Victor's "workshop of filthy creation" (221). Mary experienced not only the untimely deaths of three children, two as infants, but also other violent deaths in her family. Her journal describes the loss of her first baby at age seventeen and the dreams she had in which she was able to bring it back to life. Mary's bereavements help one understand the otherwise puzzling compulsion that drives Victor to restore life.

Mary Shelley's experience, Moers points out, was highly unusual: "The harum-scarum circumstances surrounding her maternity have no parallel until our own time.... Mary Godwin sailed into teenage motherhood without any of the financial or social or family supports that made bearing and rearing children a relaxed experience for the normal middle-class woman of her day (as Jane Austen, for example, described her)." Mary was an unwed mother, partly responsible for breaking up the marriage of another young mother. Her adored father, philosopher William Godwin (1756–1836), cut her off (for a time) when she eloped, and of course her own mother, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), whose memory she cherished and whose books she reread throughout her youth, died after giving birth to Mary herself. Thus it is not difficult to explain her "fantasy of the newborn as at once monstrous agent of destruction and piteous victim of parental abandonment." In having her Creature cry, "'I, the miserable and the abandoned, I am an abortion to be spurned and kicked, and trampled on.... I have murdered the lovely and the helpless.... I have devoted my creator to misery; I have pursued him even to that irremediable ruin,'" she transformed the "standard Romantic matter of incest, infanticide, and patricide" into a "phantasmagoria of the nursery" (221–24). Of course many of these facts would also be noted by the historical-biographical approach (see Chapter 2) or the new historicist (Chapter 4).

At the time she began writing *Frankenstein,* Mary had been living with Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) for two years; they married halfway through the year that she spent writing the novel (from June 1816 to May 1817), just weeks after his first wife Harriett Shelley's suicide and two months after the suicide of Mary's half-sister, Fanny Imlay. As J. Paul Hunter observes, "Her mind was full of powerful (and conflicting) hopes and anxieties; and she often saw in traditional opposites—birth and death, pleasure and pain, masculinity and femininity, power and fear, writing and silence, innovation and tradition, competitiveness and compliance, ambition and suppression—things that overlapped and resisted easy borders and definitions" (viii).

Feminists argue that *Frankenstein* was written as an act of political and artistic resistance by a woman burdened by her parents' failures toward her, her husband's Promethean self-absorption, and the patriarchal oppressions of society at large. Percy Shelley plays the largest role in their analyses. Among other

and sister were named Elizabeth. Like Victor, Christopher Small points out, Percy Shelley was an "ardent and high-spirited youth, of early promise and 'vehement passions'" (206–7). At the birth of ideas Victor is a poetic genius; at the living of life he is a hopeless failure.

Mary Shelley's name did not appear on the title page of the first publication of *Frankenstein* in 1818; rumors were that it had been authored by Percy Shelley, who did sign the preface. It was not unusual in that time for female writers to use male pseudonyms for publication or to omit their names. But in the 1831 revision of *Frankenstein,* Mary not only signed her name but wrote an introduction that provides commentary on the genesis and evolution of the book. For a time, family cares and her sense of being too "common-place" to live up to Percy's "far more cultivated mind" held her back, she recalls. But, as Betty T. Bennett notes, Mary also had a clear sense that "Percy had helped her to fulfill the promise of her literary heritage: Wollstonecraft's 'greatness of soul' and Godwin's 'high talents,' Mary told a friend in 1827, 'perpetually reminded me that I ought to degenerate as little as I could' from them, and Percy had 'fostered this ambition'" (Vol. 2, Ch. 4). Yet as she notes her husband's encouragement, she also remarks that "I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely yet of one train of feeling, to my husband" (in Smith, "Introduction" 21–25).

According to feminist critics, Percy Shelley's role in the preparation of *Frankenstein* for publication has been overstated in the past. "Mary undoubtedly received more than she gave," according to a patronizing entry in the *Dictionary of*

Figure 8.2. Mary Shelley (ca. 1820).
Getty Images/Hulton Archive.

National Biography (1897): "Nothing but an absolute magnetising of her brain by [Percy] Shelley's can account for her having risen so far above her usual self as in 'Frankenstein'" (52:29). Feminist critics have sought to reclaim the genius of the novel for its author.

Just how much did Percy edit and revise, and what effect have his emendations had upon subsequent versions? In her important essay "Choosing a Text of *Frankenstein* to Teach," Anne Mellor reports her close examination of fragments of Mary's manuscript, noting an "eerie appropriateness" in the fact that the story has been so overtaken by adaptations that "Mary Shelley has seldom gotten full credit for her originality and creativity. . . . [S]he has remained in the shadow of what she created." Percy's contributions were in the end fairly minor, though they do reveal that he misunderstood Mary's intentions, especially as he made the Creature more horrific and less human and Victor less to blame for his transgressions. He also changed Mary's simpler Anglo-Saxon vocabulary into a "stilted, ornate, putatively Ciceronian prose style about which so many students complain," says Mellor, with its learned, polysyllabic terms instead of her more sentimental descriptions: "I want to claim not that Mary Shelley is a great prose stylist but only that her language, despite its tendency toward the abstract, sentimental, and even banal, is more direct and forceful than her husband's" (in Hunter 162–64). This is an example of how textual scholarship and feminist approaches find themselves aligned.

Among feminist critics, Mellor finds the earlier version truer to the author's feelings and ideas when she wrote it because it has a "greater philosophical coherence" clearly related to its historical context in the years just after the French Revolution. It portrays how male egotism can destroy families. It is also closer to the biographical facts of the death of Mary's first baby and her knowledge of scientific breakthroughs such as galvanism (in Hunter 160, 164–65).

2. *Masculinity and Femininity in the Frankenstein Family*

All three **narrators** are male, Walton, Victor, and the Creature, and all are **autobiographical**. Barbara Johnson describes them as attempts at "masculine persuasion": "The teller in each case is speaking into a mirror of his own transgression" (2–3). Indeed within the Frankenstein family, gender and parental roles are ambiguous and transgressive. Alphonse Frankenstein is a rather feminine patriarch. His wife Caroline, who is of a noble family, dies early on, a great loss, however, right away a substitute mother is conveniently available in Elizabeth, a cousin raised in the family. Henry Clerval furnishes further gender blending as "a model of internalized complementarity, of conjoined masculine and feminine traits," as Jeanne Rosier Smith describes him. With all of these androgynous domestic forces around him, Victor strays at his first opportunity. Victor's straying is a man's prerogative. As we see in Elizabeth's substituting for Caroline, and later in Justine's imitations of Caroline and in her death as Elizabeth's precursor, the Frankenstein family tends to reproduce itself incestuously, Smith observes, in an "insistent replication of the domestic icon," causing a destructive pattern of indebtedness that characterizes "the Frankenstein definition of femininity" ("'Cooped Up'" 317–18, 321). George Levine stresses the claustrophobic nature of the Frankenstein family: "Within the

novel, almost all relations have the texture of blood kin," in contrast to the Creature, who has no kin. As the story and its characters are doubled and redoubled, Levine notes the appearance of the incest theme, one of Percy Shelley's favorites (212–13).

Walton's first letter to his sister begins: "You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings," a passage that might be read as an attempt to acknowledge feminine concerns about his safety, but is in fact a denial, setting the tone for the kinds of denials Victor will utter. Just before he discovers Victor on the Arctic ice, Walton's second letter confides his deep desire for a friend. When his "friend" appears, he seems to understand what Walton is about: "You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did: and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been." Nevertheless, Victor casts the blame for his own miseducation upon Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus (all favorites with Percy Shelley), but even more upon his father, who only "looked carelessly at the title-page" of Agrippa, and said, "'Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash.' If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me, that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed much greater powers than the ancient, because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while those of the former were real and practical; under such circumstances, I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside and turned to modern chemistry." Not Agrippa but his father's cursoriness was the "fatal impulse." Victor's blaming behavior parallels Walton's excuses to his sister, and the two men bond.

In his attempt to circumvent his Oedipal drama, Victor says he wanted to create a "new species [that] would bless me as its creator and source.... No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their's." Reflecting his aspiration to be the ideal parent, he describes his labors in terms of giving birth:

> My cheek had grown *pale* with study, and my person had become emaciated with *confinement.* Sometimes, *on the very brink of certainty, I failed;* yet still I clung to the hope which the next day or the next hour might realise. One secret which I alone possessed was the hope to which I had dedicated myself; and the moon gazed on *my midnight labours,* while, with *unrelaxed and breathless eagerness,* I pursued nature to her hiding-places.... My limbs now tremble and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then *a resistless, and almost frantic, impulse urged me forward;* I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit.... *[M]y eye-balls were starting from their sockets* in attending to the details of my employment.... whilst, still urged on by *an eagerness which perpetually increased,* I brought my work near to a conclusion. [emphases ours]

But though he next compares himself with the world's great conquerors, the reality of what he has produced panics him:

> Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly

> whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips.... [N]ow that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room....

The Creature is conveniently nowhere to be found upon his return. In a panic Victor regresses to his bed and dreams of embracing Elizabeth, but embraces instead the worm-ridden corpse of his mother. As he awakens, he sees the terrible image of his own self: "...by the dim and yellow light of the moon,...I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created," a monstrous baby who mutters "some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks."

3. "I Am Thy Creature..."

Feminist readers lay more blame upon Victor for his abandonment of his creation than for his **hubris** in having first created him: the Creature demands, "How dare you sport thus with life? Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed." Victor's response is an angry shout: "Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies."

But the Creature's story is *the* story, the story of a community, and the novel's longest single section is narrated by the Creature, who tells of his education hiding in the De Laceys' cottage storeroom, observing them as "a vision of a social group based on justice, equality, and mutual affection," as Mellor notes in "Possessing Nature" (in Hunter 277). The De Laceys and Safie challenge the Frankenstein family's artificial reproduction of domesticity as well as Victor's refusal to parent. The Creature learns eagerly from Safie: "Safie was always gay and happy; she and I improved rapidly in the knowledge of language, so that in two months I began to comprehend most of the words uttered by my protectors." Safie's Christian-Arab mother had been enslaved by the Turks but escaped: "She instructed her daughter in the tenets of her religion, and taught her to aspire to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit, forbidden to the female followers of Mahomet." Safie is an "incarnation of Mary Wollstonecraft," Mellor notes (in Hunter 286).

Typically, Victor procrastinates over making a bride for the Creature. What if she has desires and opinions that he cannot control, what if she procreates, what if she is so ugly the Creature rejects her, what if she rejects the Creature and seeks a human mate? The most fearful risks to him are her possible reproductive powers. He passionately tears her to pieces. One wonders whether Victor fears his own bride's sexuality, since he sends her into their wedding chamber alone. Victor's carelessness towards friends, family, and bride is repeatedly shown.

When Victor finds the murdered Elizabeth in their wedding chamber, only he could be shocked, and only he could respond, "no creature had ever been so

miserable as I was," forgetting Elizabeth, just as he had forgotten the Creature's threat to her. As Johanna Smith observes, "Like Elizabeth's, the monsterette's creation and destruction dramatize how women function not in their own right but rather as signs of and conduits for men's relations with other men, simply 'counters' in the struggle between Victor and the monster in himself" ("Introduction" 100–102).

Yet there must also have been a great deal of Mary Shelley in Victor Frankenstein: she endows him with a fine mind, an inquiring spirit, and the urge to create. She gives him voice to explain himself, and he is in certain ways honest with himself. Why does Victor turn upon all that he loves? Perhaps articulating her conflicting ideas of her own identity, Mary Shelley speaks both through Victor's struggles and the words of his Creature, an articulate if abandoned child.

The last words of the text, in which the Creature is "lost in darkness and distance," are not necessarily the ending: we do not know what becomes of the Creature, and there is someone whose response has not yet been heard. The ending takes us into a realm that may be read as a feminine use of ambiguity, what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls "an existential temporality." Margaret Saville, Walton's sister and the recipient of his letters, is, Spivak says, "the occasion, if not the protagonist of the novel. She is the feminine *subject,*" an imagined female reader who must "intercept" the text and read its letters so that it may exist. The reader is thus encouraged to read the text *as* the skeptical Margaret: "Within the allegory of our reading, the place of both the English lady and the unnamable monster are left open"... ("Three Women's Texts" 267–68).

D. Men, Women, and the Loss of Faith in "Young Goodman Brown"

Nathaniel Hawthorne's portraits of women go against the literary conventions of his day. Despite his remark that he was tired of competing with the "mob of scribbling women" novelists, he generally portrayed women not just as symbols of goodness (but more deeply than the "Cult of True Womanhood" tradition), as possessing knowledge that surpasses that of the male characters and approaches that of the author and narrator. Hawthorne treated women with more **realism** and depth than did most other writers, especially male writers, paving the way for the development of realism and **naturalism** at the close of the century in the works of Henry James, William Dean Howells, Edith Wharton, and Theodore Dreiser; all of these writers portray women as powerful moral *agents* rather than one-dimensional moral *objects.*

Hawthorne's most interesting women characters include Hester of *The Scarlet Letter,* Zenobia of *The Blithedale Romance,* Hepzibah of *The House of the Seven Gables,* Miriam of *The Marble Faun,* and such short story characters as Beatrice in "Rappaccini's Daughter" and Georgiana of "The Birthmark." All of these women engage in conflict with the men in their lives, and all of them have the sympathy of the author. Hester is Hawthorne's greatest character, male or female, and from the lips of the magnificent Zenobia, modeled in part on the feminist and author

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