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On the Subject of Literary Feminism: Equality and Difference
in Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf

Phyllis Aronoff

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

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ABSTRACT

On the Subject of Literary Feminism: Equality and Difference
in Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf

Phyllis Aronoff

This thesis examines the construction of female subjectivity in Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman, and Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own and Orlando. These works are viewed as exemplary works in the history of literary feminism, the ongoing struggle of women writers to become the subjects of their own discourse rather than the silent and passive objects of male discourse. Informed by Julia Kristeva's genealogy of feminism, the analysis of these writings focuses on sexual/textual equality and difference.

The readings of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman reveal a submerged but persistent voice of difference that problematizes their explicit endorsement of sexual equality, exposing the ideological conditions under which Wollstonecraft wrote and suggesting the possibility of another feminism, one predicated on difference rather than equality. The readings of A Room of One's

Own and Orlando explore their successful negotiation between the imperative of female difference and the demand for equal participation in language, literature, and history, and show how these works denaturalize representation while at the same time constructing a discursive space in which women are represented as subjects possessing gender and history. The concluding chapter offers a brief examination of Kristeva's "Women's Time," placing Wollstonecraft and Woolf in the context of its theory of the historical development of female subjectivity.

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Introduction: Broaching the Subject

The question of subjectivity is one in which the concerns of current literary theory and critical practice have, if not converged, at least coincided with those of feminism. Taking advantage of this coincidence, I propose to examine the female subject in the work of two prominent literary feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf.

To begin, I would like to briefly introduce the terms of my discussion: subjectivity, literary feminism, and equality and difference.

I am using "the subject" in a number of senses. Two of these senses bear some relation to common usage as defined in Webster's: (1) "one bound in allegiance . . . to a monarch or ruler and governed by his law," and (2) "the thinking agent . . . distinguished from *object*," which, in turn, is defined as that "of which the mind by any of its activities takes cognizance . . . a thing external in space and time." Inasmuch as the defining characteristic of the subject is, in the first meaning, the lack of agency, and in the second meaning, agency itself, these definitions seem to contradict each other. I will return to this question, but first I want to propose a further definition of subjectivity.

More specifically, my "subject" refers to the self as constituted in discourse rather than as an entity that pre-exists discourse.

"Subjectivity" in this sense is defined by Émile Benveniste as follows:

The "subjectivity" we are discussing here is the capacity of the speaker to posit himself [sic] as "subject." It is defined . . . as the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of the consciousness. Now we hold that that "subjectivity" . . . is only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language. "Ego" is he who says "ego." (224; original emphasis)

Returning to the two previously cited definitions of the "subject," I want, despite the apparent contradiction, to retain both meanings, at least provisionally. In Benveniste's terms, this means to see women and men as speaking subjects, subjects *of* discourse, as well as subject *to* the rules that govern the intelligibility of discourse; to see discourse not only as a site of subjection, but also as one of "subjecthood" and potential resistance. To privilege one over the other would be to foreclose on the question of agency; in the works that I am dealing with, female agency is often precisely the issue.

If, as Benveniste suggests, subjectivity is a "property of language," then it cannot be isolated from discourse. To represent the self in

discourse is to constitute the self, and every discourse implies a subject, however fragmented, decentred, shifting, multiple, or anonymous. But one cannot be a subject if one is voiceless. To lack access to full participation in language is to forfeit full subjectivity; it is to be less than fully human. Subjectivity, as Bakhtin has richly demonstrated, is inextricably connected to making one's voice heard in dialogue with other voices, taking part in the ongoing social and historical process by which culture is created and meanings defined--including what it means to be "fully human."

These points are of obvious importance for feminists, in particular, and the issue of subjectivity is central to feminism. This concern, which is generally framed in terms of women's identity, has found privileged expression in women's writing; feminists, as Elaine Showalter once remarked, are people of the book. It is not merely that feminism historically has been as much a literary as a social and political phenomenon. For a feminist, literature, as one of the primary sites in which sexual difference is represented, is always already political, a site of struggle. Feminists have exposed representations of women as integral to the subordination of women, and have energetically criticized them, while struggling to "write themselves." Wollstonecraft and Woolf, standing nearly a century and a half apart, are two founding mothers of this literary feminism.

Because female authorship has meant asserting female subjectivity in the face of dominant discourses that cast women as the objects of male subjectivity, it is implicitly oppositional in nature, regardless of its explicit message. A woman who "attempts the pen," as Anne Finch put it, goes against the prevailing ideology of female silence and submission, so that even in women's writings that do not explicitly concern themselves with the question of women's identity, female subjectivity is an implicit issue. In order to write, as Myra Jehlen points out, women "have to confront the assumptions that render them a kind of fiction in themselves in that they are defined by others, as components of the language and thought of others" (582).

In making these points, I do not mean to imply that all writing by women is by definition feminist, only to claim for it the germ of feminism. In Western culture, women's relationship to discourse has historically been different from that of men, and I want to read women's writing for the textual marks of that difference.

The temptation in such a project is to try to find the pristine "woman" beneath the mis/representations by male writers. I have tried to resist this temptation, to bear in mind that "woman" is unstable, an empty category supplied with different meanings in different historical and discursive contexts. As Joan W. Scott points out, "'man' and 'woman' are at once empty and overflowing categories. Empty because

they have no ultimate transcendent meaning. Overflowing because even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them alternative, denied, or suppressed definitions" ("Gender" 1074). The belief in a fixed, unchanging "woman" conceals such alternative, potentially subversive, definitions. Relinquishing that belief allows us to see femininity--or femininities--as a site of resistance, of contestation of meanings.

This brings us back to the question of agency. Although the discursive construction of subjectivity is commonly seen as antithetical to agency, it is more fruitful, as Judith Butler proposes, to see it as "the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes intelligible" (147). The task of a feminist theory of subjectivity, then, is not to establish a point of view outside of constructed identities--which is by definition an impossibility--but rather to locate within these very constructions the potential for subversion. Like femininities, feminisms are constructed in culture, in specific historical and discursive contexts; this is to say that they are constructed not only in opposition to femininities, but also *out of* femininities.

Feminists (as well as non-feminists) have generally described female identity in terms of sexual equality and difference: women are "equal to men," "different from men," or some articulation of the two, such as "different but equal." There is within feminism a tension between sexual equality and difference that is as old as feminism itself.

On the one hand, feminists have asserted women's right to equal participation with men in an undifferentiated humanity, and on the other hand, they have proclaimed women's irreducible difference from men. Denise Riley's "Am I That Name?" speaks of equality and difference as the "opposition upon which [feminism] is itself precariously erected," and traces how "the history of feminism since the 1790s has zigzagged and curved" between them (112). Currently, as historically, some feminisms see the concept of a specifically female identity as part of the problem and seek women's release from difference, while for others it is the solution, needing only to be redefined, revalorized, and/or empowered. That this is still very much a live issue for feminist theory and practice is shown by the proliferation in recent years of popular and scholarly books and articles dealing with it (a sampling of which are listed in Snitow, n. 30).

"Equality" and "difference" themselves, like "man" and "woman," are empty categories, whose meanings are historically unstable, enmeshed with the histories of other concepts. For all this instability, however, sexual difference itself, whether positively or negatively defined, is consistently marked as female; sexual difference is the difference from man, the difference of woman from man. My use of the term "female difference" refers to this inequitable distribution of the burden of sexual difference. Ostensibly ungendered, "humanity" remains

intractably male. Sexual difference, then, is not the real opposite of equality, but its hidden necessary condition.

The binary construction of equality and difference obscures the interdependence of equality and difference, and the historical process through which sexual equality and difference are produced in discourse. Also obscured are the other categories with which sexual difference is enmeshed and through which it is lived: race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age. The very ability to abstract sexual difference from these other categories, to ignore its compelling connection with the question of survival for women unprotected by class or racial privilege, is a product of such privilege. For what is finally at stake in the dichotomous construction of equality and difference, as Scott points out, is power ("Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference" 142).

My aim in choosing equality-versus-difference as the perspective from which to approach my subject is not to reinforce that binary opposition. Nor, however, do I think that an opposition that has such enduring resonance in feminist history can simply be declared null through the application of deconstructive logic. I hope, rather, by examining how these terms are articulated in specific historical and discursive contexts, to arrive at a less "monolithic" conception of equality and difference, an understanding of them as categories that are permeable and interdependent rather than mutually exclusive. In viewing

these key terms not as achieved facts but as meanings produced and reproduced in discourse, and observing how they function in the very different contexts of the polemical and the fictional writings of Wollstonecraft and of Woolf, my purpose is to illuminate the textual construction of sexual equality and difference.

Explicitly espousing an equality based on Enlightenment rationality, Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman constructs and foregrounds a femininity that is the embodiment of everything this Enlightenment egalitarianism rejects. Female difference is viewed more favourably in Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel Maria: Or, The Wrongs of Woman, but if The Rights shows that equality excludes women, The Wrongs invites the conclusion that difference confines them.

Nearly a century and a half later, Woolf is writing in a context in which the underlying assumptions of Enlightenment rationality are under siege by modernism. Along with other modernist writers, Woolf challenges the conventions of representation, unsettling the boundaries between the work and the world, fiction and fact, illusion and truth. In both A Room of One's Own and Orlando, she extends this questioning to sex roles, refusing to simplistically oppose equality to difference, and constructing a female subjectivity that insists on both.

Writing fifty years after Woolf, Julia Kristeva has provided a provocative contemporary view of sexual equality and difference. I will

conclude with a brief examination of her "Women's Time," placing the feminisms of Wollstonecraft and Woolf in the context of its theory of the development of feminism and the female subject.

Chapter 1: Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Against the prevailing ideology defining sexual difference to women's disadvantage, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman strikes a blow in favour of sexual equality. At a time when the French Revolution held the promise of freedom and human rights for all oppressed humanity, The Rights uses the Enlightenment discourse associated with it to stake a claim for women to share in the general emancipation. As Wollstonecraft makes clear in her dedication, she feels she is simply taking this discourse to its logical conclusion in applying it to women as well as men. But, as we shall see, Enlightenment egalitarianism contains a hidden contradiction, because its unstated premise is the exclusion of femininity. This is reflected in The Rights' view of femininity as the embodiment of everything to which the discourse of equality is opposed.

Wollstonecraft bases her demand for sexual equality on the shared rationality of women and men. Both are seen as rational beings, for whom, "from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow" (12). Women are considered "in the grand light of human creatures, who, in common with men, are placed on this earth to unfold their faculties" (8). Since reason is "the tie that connects the creature with the Creator" (53), divine Reason serves as guarantor of human

reason, ensuring the connections between reason and truth, reason and virtue.

The structure of the argument in The Rights is based on an opposition established in the first few pages between reason, nature, plain language, and truth--identified with masculinity--and feeling, culture, figurative language, and falsity--identified with femininity.

Notwithstanding the innate equality of all human beings, Wollstonecraft observes that there exists "a great difference between man and man," and, more specifically, that women are "not in a healthy state" (7). This she attributes to a distortion of their nature by a system of education that trains them for pleasure rather than reason, making them "alluring objects" for men rather than their companions and equals. She compares women in their current state to "flowers which are planted in too rich a soil," whose beauty is sickly and artificial and whose blooming is ultimately "barren" (7).

She describes the style she proposes to adopt, one that eschews "pretty feminine phrases . . . weak elegancy of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manner." She promises:

. . . I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style;--I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for, wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I

shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings . . . --I shall be employed about things, not words! (9-10)

Aiming "to shew that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex" (9-10), Wollstonecraft proposes to collapse the opposition of masculine "virtue" and feminine "elegance" by reducing the secondary term to the first: subordinating feeling to reason, stripping away the artifice of culture to reveal nature, forsaking the falsity of words for the truth of things, or at least, figurative language for plain language. We may well ask what will become of "woman" in this transaction. With femininity defined as secondary and artificial, the question is, "is there a natural woman in this text?" (A. Wilson 92)

Although my examination of The Rights will naturally touch to some extent on its philosophical aspects, I am mainly concerned with its writerly, textual aspects. For me, this means looking at the "unconscious" of the text as well as its explicit arguments, at what is not said--cannot be said in the terms of discourse available--as well as what is said. I will begin by discussing Wollstonecraft's account of the social construction of femininity. By identifying a constructed femininity with irrationality, and opposing it to a natural, rational masculinity, The Rights raises the question of whom its reasoned arguments are addressed to:

oppressed women incapable of reason, or rational men, women's oppressors. The Rights, I will show, manifests some uncertainty on this score.

I will then focus more closely on the issue of female sexuality, which poses the greatest stumbling block to Wollstonecraft's arguments for equality. I will place these difficulties in context by examining the prevailing sexual ideology of the intellectual and political tradition in which Wollstonecraft was working. Finally, I will examine some of the contradictions in The Rights as textual evidence of the sexual difference repressed by The Rights' egalitarianism.

The Social Construction of Femininity

The most powerful and enduring aspect of The Rights is its demonstration of the social construction of femininity, in which Wollstonecraft examines the range of traits purported to be part of innate female nature, and shows how they are inculcated through education and custom. She begins, rather surprisingly, by denouncing a host of social evils seemingly unrelated to the subjection of women. She attacks kings as the perpetrators of "vile intrigues, unnatural crimes, and every vice that degrades our nature" (16), and assails soldiers as "idle superficial young men whose only occupation is gallantry" and whose "air of

fashion" is "but a badge of slavery" (17). She contrasts "the courtly mien of a bishop" with "the servile dependent gait of a poor curate" required, if he would advance, to "obsequiously respect" his superior (18).

The reason for these apparent digressions becomes clear in Chapter 2 when she begins to deal directly with the situation of women. For the subjection of women, according to Wollstonecraft, is the effect of the same root evils that give rise to these other conditions: "arbitrary power" based on "hereditary distinctions" (15). Having described the pervasive inequalities of her society, Wollstonecraft observes that it is society and its values that shape individuals: "Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in" (21). The subsequent discussion details how this occurs in the case of women in her own society.

At the time of the writing of The Rights, British society was undergoing a reorganization along modern class lines as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The effect of this transformation on the situation of women was not at all positive. The change from domestic to industrial production effected a sharp separation of the home from the workplace and tended to further distance both working-class and middle-class women from economic power. The ideology of the rising bourgeoisie stressed hard work and self-sufficiency for men, but increasingly

prescribed economic dependency for middle-class women, barring them from productive labour in order that they might serve as living testimony to their husbands' success. It is against this middle-class ideology of femininity that The Rights takes aim.

As Wollstonecraft states in her introduction, she takes "a separate view of the different ranks of society, and of the moral character of women, in each," and intends to "pay particular attention to those in the middle class" (9). Although she often speaks as if she is fighting for the rights of all women, the prohibition against useful activity in favour of decorous idleness did not apply to working-class women; their oppression had more to do with too much work, too many children, and bad conditions for both (Kaplan, Sea Changes 48).

Relating how femininity is instilled in women of her class, Wollstonecraft draws explicit parallels with the other social injustices she has discussed. She describes how women are trained to please rather than to cultivate their understanding, and points out, "Soldiers, as well as women, practice the minor virtues with punctilious politeness," asking "Where is then the sexual difference, when the education has been the same?" (23) And similarly:

Men have submitted to superior strength to enjoy with impunity the pleasure of the moment--*women* have only done the same, and therefore till it is proved that the courtier, who

servilely resigns the birthright of a man, is not a moral agent, it cannot be demonstrated that woman is essentially inferior to man because she has always been subjugated. (37; original emphasis)

She sarcastically compares "the *divine right* of husbands" to that of kings, and expresses the hope that "in this enlightened age, [it, too, might] be contested without danger . . ." (41; original emphasis).

Placing the subjection of women in the context of other injustices provides a philosophical, ethical and religious foundation for Wollstonecraft's views. Women's oppression is shown to be one instance of oppression in a society based on oppression, and women's rights one instance of the rights of all. Thus anchoring her plea for women's rights in the Enlightenment discourse on freedom and human rights, Wollstonecraft lends it all the power and moral authority of that discourse. At the same time, she frees herself from any taint of narrow self-interest or special pleading.

By illustrating not only that women's character is socially determined but also that men develop similar character traits under similar conditions, Wollstonecraft's comparison of women's situation to other injustices serves to destabilize gender binarism. But it can only do so partially, because, if Wollstonecraft provides ample demonstration of the social construction of femininity, she fails to do the same for masculinity.

Equating masculinity with nature, she neglects to subject it to scrutiny. While appearing to demand the complete eradication of sexual difference, the "character as a human being" she seeks for women is not gender-neutral, it is masculine. All the qualities valued as human are those associated with men--men of the new middle class. Qualities associated with femininity are attacked (with the interesting exception of modesty, which I will examine below). Little about femininity is seen as valuable; it is, as described in the title of Chapter 4, simply a "State of Degradation to Which Woman is Reduced." If rational man is created in God's and nature's image, woman, the product of culture, can only be a distortion of nature. Furthermore, any faults men may possess are also seen as distortions of nature and ascribed to the feminizing effects of culture. Thus, although Wollstonecraft's examples show that women as well as men can be tyrants, and men as well as women can be servile flatterers, the identification of femininity with the artificiality and corruption of culture is impossible to undo.

The Rights focuses little on women as victims of male supremacy, and its pre-eminent concern seems to be society rather than individuals. The subjection of women is seen as symptomatic of the arbitrary power whose effects are so pervasive that they render the whole of society corrupt:

The preposterous distinctions of rank, which render civilization a curse, by dividing the world between voluptuous tyrants, and cunning envious dependents, corrupt, almost equally, almost every class of people (144)

Society is seen as one body, and in the same way that the rights of each are but an instance of the rights of all, so, too, individual evil is ultimately social evil, of which the real victim is society. This organic view of society is reinforced by a disturbing series of metaphors of disease to characterize arbitrary power: "a pestilential vapour [that] hover[s] over society" (16), a "baneful lurking gangrene" (18), and "the pestiferous purple" (18).

Such a society renders women, too, "either abject slaves or capricious tyrants," who obtain power "by unjust means, by practising or fostering vice" (45). Expressions of compassion for, or solidarity with, the most abject of women are relatively few. In fact, it is the tyrant rather than the slave that is seen as emblematic of women's situation. An "argument that I mean to insist on" (58) is the similarity of women to despots and the idle rich, those who benefit from arbitrary power, not its victims. The "whole female sex" is said to be "in the same condition as the rich: for they are born . . . with certain sexual privileges" (57). Thus women are identified with the gangrene afflicting society.

To Whom is The Rights Addressed?

If women are identified with irrationality and are seen as benefiting from the corruption of society, then it would seem pointless to offer them rational arguments in favour of equality. And, in fact, women are rarely addressed in The Rights; when they are, it is usually with condescension. The egalitarian tone of "Let us, my dear contemporaries, arise above such narrow prejudices!" deteriorates quickly into the scolding of "Beware then, my friends, of suffering the heart to be moved by every trivial incident . . ." (92), making it clear that the use of the first person is little more than a rhetorical device. There is an underlying conviction that addressing women in the rational language of philosophy is of no avail, that in their degraded state they are not amenable to reasoned argument. Women are seen as failing to behave as rational beings because their rewards are so great for not doing so: they "avail themselves of the power which they attain with the least exertion, and which is the most indisputable," eschewing "the sober pleasures that arise from equality" (56, 55). Exaggerating the pleasure and power women obtain indirectly, by sexually "enslaving" men, Wollstonecraft makes it impossible to imagine them embracing the satisfactions of reason and virtue.

Perhaps this difficulty explains why, aside from a few notable passages, The Rights appears to be addressed to men. Implicitly

exempting herself from the degradation that she sees as the common condition of women, Wollstonecraft speaks as a rational being to her fellow rational beings--men. Women are usually referred to as "they," even as "the sex." Wollstonecraft is not above reinforcing her appeal to men's reason with one to their self-interest. She emphasizes the effects the subordination of women has on men, arguing that it makes women faithless wives, poor mothers, and a drain on their male providers. She points out that it would be to men's advantage to "generously snap our chains" (150), arguing that greater liberty for women will actually lessen their power by eliminating that which they exercise illegitimately.

For all that Wollstonecraft tailors her arguments to appeal to men, there are signs that she has doubts about her ability to reach a male audience any more than a female one (A. Wilson 96). She begins by addressing an imagined sympathetic audience of fellow rational beings as "we": "What acquirement exalts one being above another? Virtue; we spontaneously reply" (11-12). But it is not long before this confident tone changes and she is anticipating the objections of a hostile audience: "I may be accused of arrogance . . . (22)"; "this apparent digression"; "I foresee an obvious retort" (47); "it may excite a horse-laugh"; "this sounds like a contradiction" (57).

Adopting the voice of Enlightenment reason, it would seem, is not sufficient to ensure Wollstonecraft's confidence of winning men of

reason to her cause. At the same time, by exempting herself from the common condition of women, she has also removed any possibility of making common cause with them. Failing to see anything positive in femininity, she provides no basis for female solidarity or concerted political action by women to change their situation. More concerned with improving women themselves than with bettering their situation, she sees them as passive objects of reform rather than moral agents in their own right. The "revolution in female manners" Wollstonecraft so fervently desires comes down to nothing more than restoring women's "lost dignity" and making them, "as a part of the human species, labour by reforming themselves to reform the world" (45).

Female Sexuality

As might be expected, it is female sexuality that poses the greatest problem for Wollstonecraft's equality feminism. "A king is always a king --and a woman always a woman," she says mockingly, equating "her sex" with "his authority" as impediments to "rational converse" (56). She claims that consciousness of sex is appropriate only "with a lover," and that "[t]his desire of being always women . . . degrades the sex" (99). Aside from the obvious biological differences, she considers men's and women's sexual behaviour to be acculturated rather than natural. In

men, sexuality is (ideally) held in check by the development of their reason. Reason can play no such role in women, however, because they are educated not to exercise reason but to provide pleasure to men. Female sexuality, then, is seen as embodying the triumph of irrational appetite over reason. At the same time, it is seen as reinforcing the existing, corrupt, social structure, since the only way for women to obtain power is through sexual wiles. The result, for Wollstonecraft, is that women themselves come to be governed by the love of pleasure: "They who live to please--must find their enjoyments, their happiness, in pleasure!" (119)

Wollstonecraft emphasizes that men are "certainly more under the influence of their appetites than women" (137) and that "all the causes of female weakness, as well as depravity, . . . branch out of one cause--want of chastity in men" (138). Yet the stigma of sexuality, not only as "weakness" but also as "depravity," remains attached to women, not men, in large part because the imagery identifying women with a monstrous, depraved sexuality is stronger than the assertions to the contrary. Wollstonecraft denounces "unbridled indulgence" and "a degree of gluttony which is . . . beastly," which she attributes to "some women, particularly French women," and compares to "swarms of summer insects that feed on putrefaction" (137). This is closely followed by a condemnation of "the depravity of the appetite which brings the

sexes together," said to have "a still more fatal effect" and associated with women who are "contentedly . . . the slaves of casual lust; . . . who are, literally speaking, standing dishes to which every glutton may have access" (138). Both the glutton and the "dish" are condemned; both are exemplified in woman.

Even when they are not pandering to men's lust, Wollstonecraft finds a disturbingly sexual quality in women. She warns against too much intimacy with sisters, friends or servants, and objects to young girls "being shut up together in nurseries, schools, or convents" where they are likely to acquire "nasty, or immoderate habits" from each other or, worse, learn "very nasty tricks, from ignorant servants." Some "still more nasty customs, which men never fall into" are hinted at, but we are spared details as to what these might be (127-29).

For all Wollstonecraft's arguments to the contrary, the impression we are left with is that of sexual woman, perhaps the inevitable counterpart of idealized (desexualized) rational man. Interestingly, considering her rationalist credo, Wollstonecraft's view of sexuality replicates the sexual ideology of more traditional forms of Christianity. Humanity is seen as fallen, and female sexuality as having everything to do with that fall. And, as in more traditional Christianity, the anti-erotic ethic constructs and foregrounds the sexuality it aims to banish. As Cora Kaplan observes: "Woman's reason may be the psychic heroine of A

Vindication, but its gothic villain, a polymorphous perverse sexuality, creeping out of every paragraph and worming its way into every warm corner of the text, seems to win out" (Sea Changes 45-46).

Wollstonecraft's conception of sexuality in The Rights is closely related to that of Rousseau, whose views on women it was written to refute. Rousseau himself, of course, was one of the main architects of the Enlightenment discourse of rights and freedoms, and Wollstonecraft's task in appropriating that discourse for the cause of women is complicated by the extreme misogyny of his views.

For Rousseau, as for many, the general emancipation of oppressed humanity was embodied in the rise of the new middle class. Thirty years before Wollstonecraft's writing of The Rights, he had, in Émile, prescribed the education of the new man for the new order in the making; at the same time, he had addressed the question of the education of women and their role in the new order. The new bourgeois ideology was based on the identification of individual self-interest with social good. This required that self-interest be freed of any association with sexual desire, a task Rousseau accomplished at the expense of women. Not only were women not to share in the general emancipation brought about by the new order; their suppression is a very condition of the bourgeoisie's rise to ascendancy. Kaplan describes how "the triumph of reason is ensured"

in Rousseau's "construction of the bourgeois [man] as the agent of free will":

Since male desire needs an object, and women are that infinitely provocative object, the social subordination of women to the will of men ensures the containment of passion. In this way Rousseau links the potential and freedom of the new middle class to the simultaneous suppression and exploitation of women's nature. (Sea Changes 40)

In order to disengage the discourse of rights and freedoms in Rousseau from that of feminine submission, Wollstonecraft relocates sexuality from the realm of nature to that of culture. Her insight into the socially constructed nature of sexuality allows her to view it as amenable to social regulation in a way that Rousseau cannot, and enables her to link the education and political empowerment of women, not, as Rousseau does, with the untrammelled exercise of their sexuality, but, on the contrary, with "personal reserve, and sacred respect for delicacy in domestic life" (4).

In a similar manner, Wollstonecraft valorizes motherhood by turning it into a rational, purposive activity. While demanding access for women to a certain number of professions, she insists that a woman's duty as "an active citizen" is "to manage her family, educate her children, and

assist her neighbours" (146). Thus, even while trying to "rationalize" motherhood, she endorses women's relegation to the private sphere. As in Rousseau, it is the containment of sexuality and need in the private, feminine realm that guarantees the rationality of the masculine public sphere. At times, Wollstonecraft comes close to seeing the crippling effect this has on women, as when she speaks of women "immured in their families groping in the dark" (5). But only in The Wrongs will she begin to envision maternal love as a social force active in the public sphere.

In spite of her differences with Rousseau, Wollstonecraft accepts his view of sexuality as a powerful, threatening force, and the strategy of containment she employs is strikingly similar to his. If Rousseau projects a stigmatized sexuality onto women and then ensures its control by putting women firmly under the domination of men, Wollstonecraft goes one step further, removing the taint of sexuality from the rational mothers of the ascendant middle class, allowing it to remain upon women of the upper and lower classes. Thus, although Wollstonecraft recognizes in one reference that it is "[n]ecessity [that] makes prostitution the business of [women's] lives" (72), prostitutes are nevertheless said to "infest the streets" and are condemned for a "sexual quality . . . gratuitously granted" (122).

The Discursive Context: Gender as Genre

Wollstonecraft's difficulties with Rousseau are illustrative of a more general problem she had to confront in writing The Rights. Working within a philosophical tradition that excluded women as writers and as subjects, she was trying to fashion a discourse that valorized the female subject. This is the source of what her critics from her time to ours have considered the lack of unity, the disorganization, of The Rights, but what some more recent commentators instead regard as a "productive tension between . . . two kinds of rhetoric: that of the philosophic authorities she has read, and that of her experiences as a woman" (Finke 162; cf. Moore 167, Carpenter 215, Poovey).

Privileging the Enlightenment values of rational thought, moral intent and social utility above feeling and self-expression, Wollstonecraft aims for the lofty, disinterested, public tone characteristic of discourse in the Enlightenment. This tone, according to Walter Ong, masked the fact that philosophical discourse in the eighteenth century was a kind of martial art, governed by a rhetoric "developed in the past as a major expression on the rational level of the ceremonial combat which is found among males and typically only among males at the physical level throughout the entire animal kingdom" (quoted, Finke 159).

Leaving aside the animal kingdom, it appears that in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the categorization of genre and style was closely tied to the ideology of sexual difference. Locke's Essay concerning Human Understanding (1690) distinguished between language that instructs and language that entertains, associating the former with truth, and condemning wit, fancy and eloquence as frivolous, deceitful--and feminine (Moore 159-60). In a similar vein, Burke's Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1759) divided the sublime and the beautiful between masculine and feminine qualities, associating the former with truth and the latter with the power to subvert reason (Kelly, "Vir Bonus" 287).

More directly influential on Wollstonecraft was the political and intellectual heritage of the Commonwealthmen of the English revolutions of the seventeenth century, whose program of reform she adopted and extended to women (Barker-Benfield 95). The Commonwealth tradition involved a gendered analysis of manners and morals in which vigour of mind, penetration, and wisdom were seen as masculine, and modern man was seen as having deviated from this standard and become effeminate--delicate, refined, absorbed by the private, addicted to ease (99). The "English Jacobins," those writers who were promulgating the ideology of the bourgeoisie and creating a new "intellectual vernacular language" (Smith x) in which to express it, saw the middle class as upholding the

masculine standard of the Commonwealth tradition. These men were Wollstonecraft's political and intellectual comrades, and "[t]heir culture was powerfully, self-consciously male" (Barker-Benfield 113).

This gendered categorization of moral and literary values might be expected to cause textual (and other) difficulties for Wollstonecraft that it would not for male writers. Seeking the appropriate rhetorical weapon to use against masculine authority, she was forced to choose between a figurative language invalidated as a vehicle for serious philosophical writing and a rhetoric that was itself steeped in masculine authority. She opted, as we have seen, for the latter, but The Rights is deeply marked by the necessity of her making such a choice.

The Return of the Repressed

Wollstonecraft is unable to maintain the suppression of feminine figurative language in favour of masculine authority. In fact, no sooner is the distinction made than we begin to witness a proliferation of the former. As Jane Moore observes, The Rights persistently "reproduces what it most fears: metaphoricity, fictionality and, by extension, femininity, whereas reason--the effect of plain words--which is what the text most desires, constantly eludes it" (165).

In rejecting the elegant falsity of "words" for the plain language of "things," Wollstonecraft expresses the belief that, properly used, language is transparent, giving immediate access to reality. Truth is characterized as "simple", "unadorned" (10), "unequivocal" (11), and falsity seen as a covering over or obscuring: deeply rooted prejudices are said to "have clouded reason"; truth becomes "lost in a mist of words" (12); the "quick perception of truth . . . opens the dark cloud" (117); the "misty night of ignorance" will be followed by "a clearer day" (124). As these quotations show, Wollstonecraft, in the very act of declaring her confidence in the self-evidence of truth, resorts to the metaphorical language she deplors.

As we have seen in the case of female sexuality, the qualities associated with the second term of Wollstonecraft's dichotomy refuse to be suppressed. Like the "wild wish" that has "flown from my heart to my head," which Wollstonecraft "will not stifle" (57), emotion erupts in the midst of rational exegesis; flowery language proliferates; disorder disrupts a reasoned disquisition on the need for order. In this disorganization and these ruptures, we may read the repressed femininity of Wollstonecraft's text.

An image that figures prominently through the whole of The Rights is the metaphor comparing women to flowers. The first instance is the following:

The conduct and manners of women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state; for, like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty; and the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity.--One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education (7)

Flowers, and women, here are considered not as belonging to the realm of nature, but as a useless and artificial distortion of nature. A contrast is made between "gathering the flowers of the day and revelling in pleasure" and "the solid fruit of toil and wisdom" (31). Women are associated with the former and sarcastically likened to the biblical lilies of the field: "It is true they are provided with food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin" (56). In "a dream of passion," women "wander through flowery lawns" (126), or they "supinely sleep life away" on a "flowery bed" (121). Wollstonecraft issues a stern warning to women not to "expect to be valued when their beauty fades, for it is the fate of the fairest flowers to be admired and pulled to pieces by the careless hand that plucked them" (149). Women are repeatedly referred to, quoting Milton, as "fair defects" or "fair defects in nature" (34, 40, 45, 55, 67), or "beautiful flaws in nature" (37); the sarcasm of these

references fails to undo the association of women with sickly hothouse flowers, distortions of nature.

Wollstonecraft grants that it is "the language of men" that "classes the brown and fair with the smiling flowers that only adorn the land" (53), just as it is men who use "pretty feminine phrases . . . to soften our slavish dependence" (9). Yet the identification of women's "artificial graces" (37) with this "flowery diction" (10) endures, and, as in the case of sexuality, it is to women that the stigma of this language is attached.

Anna Wilson points out that Wollstonecraft's rejection of figurative language is a refusal not of feminine weakness but of feminine power (92). Like women themselves, like female sexuality, this language is seen as indirect, appealing to pleasure rather than reason, embodying an acculturated artificiality, obscuring truth--and exercising illegitimate power. Eloquence is associated with the reactionary politics of Burke and seen as reinforcing corrupt institutions. Wollstonecraft had already, in her Vindication of the Rights of Men, turned Burke's own gendered categorization of "sublime" and "beautiful" qualities against him, condemning the "unmanly servility" (quoted, Poovey 59) of his style and his views. Here, again, the power of eloquence is seen as feminine, feminizing.

For all her rejection of textual femininity, Wollstonecraft seems powerless to control its proliferation. One of the most flagrant examples

of this is the following passage on modesty, which ruptures the text at the very centre of The Rights:

Modesty! Sacred offspring of sensibility and reason!--true delicacy of mind!--may I unblamed presume to investigate thy nature, and trace to its covert the mild charm, that mellowing each harsh feature of a character, renders what would otherwise only inspire cold admiration--lovely!--Thou that smoothest the wrinkles of wisdom, and softenest the tone of the sublimest virtues till they all melt into humanity;--thou that spreadest the ethereal cloud that, surrounding love, heightens every beauty, it half shades, breathing those coy sweets that steal into the heart, and charm the senses--modulate for me the language of persuasive reason, till I rouse my sex from the flowery bed, on which they supinely sleep life away! (121)

It should, first of all, be noted that Wollstonecraft is not always so unequivocally positive about modesty; elsewhere in The Rights, she sees it as "only the artful veil of wantonness" (193) or "a pharisaical cloak of weakness" (123, n. 4), part of the artificiality and deceit of femininity, and derides women as "the *modest* slaves of opinion" (51; original emphasis). In further contrast, whereas she had originally set out "rather to address the head than the heart" (27), here the appeal is to the "heart"

and "senses." The truth-obscuring cloud here "heightens . . . beauty," and virtues are "softened," even "melted." With its sentimentality, its approving attitude to beauty and charm, and its ornate language, this passage is a concentrated example of everything Wollstonecraft has decried as false and feminine.

The passage has received the attention of several critics, who have described it variously as a "struggle to emerge from the dominant 'order' (Carpenter 225), a "momentary escape" from the "impasse of the absence of female sense" (A. Wilson 98), an attempt to "dematerialize" the threatening subject of female sexuality (Pocvey 78), even "ironic mockery" (Finke 165). All of these readings are pertinent. The rupture in the text exposes Wollstonecraft's inability to remain within the boundaries of her self-prescribed regime of reason, and reveals her groping toward a more expressive language yet threatened by its implications. The passage offers the ironic contrast of her most florid ("sexual") style deployed in praise of what she has called "that purity of mind, which is the effect of chastity" (121). Its bursting of the bonds of masculine reason and its imaginary consummation of a sexual union between sensibility and reason are evidence of a longing for a language that would transcend the constraints of both plain-speaking masculine truth and elegant feminine falsity, a language in which it would be possible to speak truth *as a woman*.

For the question raised by The Rights, and framed in a variety of ways by different critics, is "whether Wollstonecraft [can] use her reason to advance such an argument and remain a woman?" (Vlasopolos 464; cf. A. Wilson 92). Mary Jacobus answers that question with an emphatic no. For Jacobus, Wollstonecraft is, in The Rights, a "plain-speaking utilitarian [who] speaks not so much *for* women, or *as* a woman, but *against* them--over their dead bodies, and over (having attempted to cast it out) the body of the text too" ("Difference" 54-55; original emphasis). In opposition to this kind of writing, Jacobus defines "women's writing" as writing which, while "necessarily working within 'male' discourse, . . . would work ceaselessly to deconstruct it: to write what cannot be written" (52). The task of the feminist reader, for Jacobus, is to focus on those moments in women's writing which represent "gestures past the impasse," gestures that "reveal not only the conditions of possibility within which women's writing exists, but what it would be like to revolutionize them" (56). Jacobus might have arrived at a more sympathetic assessment of The Rights had she read it in the way she prescribes instead of trying to find some changeless, ahistoric woman in this text and ignoring the conditions of possibility of women's writing in 1792 England.

Whereas Jacobus ignores the historical and discursive context of The Rights, Timothy J. Reiss sees it as all-powerful; for him, The Rights

simply reproduces the dominant discourse of its time. While recognizing that the terms of Wollstonecraft's discourse were "the only ones available" (41), he argues that only from a place "outside culture" (14)--a position by definition impossible--would she have been able to genuinely question the dominant discourse and argue "a truly revolutionary case" (21). Denying the very possibility that subjectivity may be spoken from a subordinate and rebellious position within culture, he is blinded to the particular way in which Wollstonecraft articulated the terms she was given, and fails to recognize her *difference* from other thinkers in a similar historical and discursive context. After all, to paraphrase Sartre, Mary Wollstonecraft may have been a bourgeois liberal Enlightenment rationalist, but not every bourgeois liberal Enlightenment rationalist was Mary Wollstonecraft.

Given the opposition between (male) reason and truth and (female) irrationality and falsity--and, as I have tried to show, she was indeed *given* these terms by the philosophical tradition in which she was writing--how could Wollstonecraft have chosen anything but reason? The structure of the opposition does not allow for any other choice. Choosing Enlightenment rationality, Wollstonecraft accepted its unstated premise, the exclusion of femininity, the banishment of need and sexuality from the public sphere of civic duty and philosophical discourse and their containment in the private sphere defined as female.

The result was the attempt to banish difference from her text. We may read this repressed difference in the disorganization and ruptures of the text of The Rights. Attention to these aspects of The Rights reveals Wollstonecraft's struggle "to write what cannot be written" in the philosophical discourse of her time and exposes the ideological conditions under which she wrote (Jacobus, "Difference" 52). It allows us, by reading The Rights in its own historical and discursive context, to appreciate its genuine radicalism in its own time rather than judge it by the standards of ours.

Chapter 2: Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria: Or, The Wrongs of Woman

Some four years after finishing The Rights, Wollstonecraft began work on the novel Maria: Or, The Wrongs of Woman. This return to the novel form might be seen as an affirmation of sexual difference, since The Rights views novels as the very embodiment of the female difference it overwhelmingly rejects. But The Wrongs does not simply reverse the views of The Rights; as its title implies, its relation to The Rights is one of continuity as well as contrast. Its attitude to sexual difference, and to the novel, is complicated and filled with contradiction.

The Wrongs continues explicitly to favour sexual equality over difference. Whereas The Rights minimized difference by redefining rationality as universal rather than male, The Wrongs attempts to do so by redefining--and revalorizing--feeling as universal rather than female. But if The Rights, in the end, confirms that reason excludes women, The Wrongs succeeds only in demonstrating that feeling confines them. Female difference is not abolished. Significantly, it is given a more positive definition than it received in The Rights, one that sees feminine feeling as a source of strength instead of weakness. But Wollstonecraft's commitment to equality prevents her from exploring the potential of this

difference in The Wrongs, and it remains unrealized, a troubling presence beneath the surface of the text.

Women and the Novel

The condemnation of novels figures prominently in The Rights. They are blamed for introducing into "familiar letters and conversation" the "flowery diction" said to "create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth; and a deluge of false sentiments and over-stretched feelings" (10). Novel-reading is classed with belief in fortunetellers, fondness for dress, the propensity for loving mindlessly, and bad child-rearing practices in a final chapter devoted to "Instances of the Folly Which the Ignorance of Women Generates" (178). More specifically, Wollstonecraft's objection to novels is that they reinforce women's conditioning as subordinate beings and objects of pleasure, exercising their imagination at the expense of their reason and providing substitute gratification that dissuades them from seeking "the unsophisticated charms of virtue, and the grave respectability of sense" (186).

Contrary to what this might lead one to expect, The Wrongs continues to pursue the concerns that are central to The Rights. In an "Advertisement" preceding her introduction to The Rights, Wollstonecraft

had stated her intention to write a second volume of the same work, to be concerned with "the laws relative to women, and the consideration of their peculiar duties"; no such volume was published, nor, according to her editor, has any evidence been found that it was ever begun (7, n. 1). However, Wollstonecraft's preface to The Wrongs states that her "main object" in this work is to show "the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society" (7). It is thus possible to view The Wrongs as constituting a second volume of The Rights, an attempt to say in the novel form what could not be said within the constraints of philosophical discourse.

If, as we have seen, eighteenth-century philosophical writing attempts to banish femininity, the novel of the time seems positively to embrace it. As Ian Watt has described, the development of capitalist society in Britain resulted in the growth of a large female readership. With Richardson's Pamela, there was an "opening up of the new domain of private experience for literary exploration" (Watt 208), leading to a feminization of the field. By the late eighteenth century, when Wollstonecraft was writing, literature had become "a primarily feminine pursuit" (45). Women supplied the majority of both readers and writers (310-11) for a thriving industry in which the novel's unique ability to combine the compensatory attractions of romance with the power of realism was exploited in the mass production of sentimental fiction (207).

For Wollstonecraft once again to adopt the novel form after the championing of masculine sense in The Rights, then, involves an affirmation, albeit qualified and ambivalent, of feminine sensibility. The Wrongs is itself the site of a struggle with feminine sensibility, one that is enacted textually in a self-conscious struggle with the novel form. At the outset of The Wrongs, Wollstonecraft makes clear her intention not only to use the novel form but also, at the same time, to engage critically with it. This means challenging the representation of women in various types of novels that are currently popular. Marilyn Butler observes:

For any author of the 1790s wishing to make use of a female protagonist, Ann Radcliffe was surely inescapable. . . . Yet the great model, dominating the second half of the century, was Richardson's *Clarissa*, challenged only by her French counterpart, Rousseau's *Julie*. ("The Woman" 140)

Thus Wollstonecraft begins by not only foregrounding the issue of the novelistic representation of women but also carefully defining the novel we are about to read in relation to each of these influential models.

The polemical preface, with its declaration of militant purpose, immediately differentiates this work from mere wish-fulfilling romance, and makes it clear that Wollstonecraft's turn to the novel form, whatever else it may mean, in no way constitutes a renunciation of her political views. The author advises us that her story "ought rather to be

considered, as of woman, than of an individual" (7). In an excerpt from a letter, appended by her editor, she further describes her purpose as being "to show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various" (8). Announcing that her political purpose has "restrained [her] fancy" (7), eschewing "stage-effect," she prepares us to read a work in which "the delineation of finer sensations, which . . . constitutes the merit of our best novels" (8) is allied with a radical political agenda for women rather than used to reinforce their subordinate position by providing them with substitute gratification.

Wollstonecraft also complains that, unlike the male heroes of novels, who are "allowed to be mortal, and to become wise and virtuous as well as happy," their heroines are "to be born immaculate, and to act like goddesses of wisdom" (7). This would seem to be a reference to the unshakeable virtue and unhappy end of Richardson's *Clarissa* and the host of fictional imitators inspired by her. According to Watt, the definition of female virtue as "total immunity from sexual feelings" (166) was a central aspect of a "new sexual ideology" (167) that had emerged in Richardson's novels to become "one of the peculiar constants in . . . English fiction" (170). The eighteenth-century novel's "embrace" of femininity thus, paradoxically, involved a set of highly punitive conventions with respect to female sexuality. It is this ideology and

these conventions that Wollstonecraft proposes to attack by creating a desiring heroine who, the preface leads us to hope, may be allowed to become happy as well as wise and virtuous. Wollstonecraft's aim is not only to reclaim the novel, but also, at the same time, to redeem female sexuality, connecting both, not with corruption, as in The Rights, but with women's individual and collective liberation.

The novel itself begins by drawing on, but also distancing itself from, the Radcliffean gothic novel, in which "[a]bodes of horror . . . and castles, filled with spectres and chimeras" are merely "formed of such stuff as dreams are made of," and "groans and shrieks" are "unsubstantial sounds . . . modulated by a romantic fancy" (23). In *this* book, the implication is clear, we may expect such horrors to be real. For Maria, our heroine, reflecting on the question, "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (27), prison is no mere metaphor but the literal description of her situation.

Romantic Expectations

Novels also play a crucial role in Maria's story. Locked up and deprived of activity, Maria finds her only means of "escape from sorrow" (30) in books borrowed from another inmate and brought her by her attendant. Some of the books have been annotated by their owner with

comments expressing radical political views with which Maria is in agreement, and "treacherous fancy [begins] to sketch a character, congenial with her own" (34). In comments such as this, the narrator emphasizes the dangers involved in such fantasizing, dangers of which Maria herself is intermittently aware, as when she reflects on "how difficult it [is] for women to avoid growing romantic, who have no active duties or pursuits" (36). Still, she rejects a book on "the powers of the human mind," with its "cold arguments on the nature of what she felt" (35), in favour of Rousseau's Héloïse, which allows her to escape into "a new world . . . --the only one worth inhabiting" (37).

Significantly, Héloïse features a heroine who is both virtuous and passionate, who flouts paternal dictates and crosses class lines in an affair with her tutor, Saint-Preux. As Janet Todd points out, Maria's romance with her fellow-prisoner takes place literally in the margins of Héloïse, since her attraction is fuelled by more of his marginalia (248). After catching a glimpse of him, she invests him with all the qualities of Saint-Preux, and when they finally meet, she falls in love with him. As the narrator comments with irony: "Pygmalion formed an ivory maid, and longed for an informing soul. She, on the contrary, combined all the qualities of a hero's mind, and fate presented a statue in which she might enshrine them" (49).

As we later discover in reading Maria's account of her life, written for the future edification of the infant daughter that has been taken from her, her seduction by Darnford recapitulates her falling in love with her husband, the cause of her misfortune. In both cases, the original seduction was literary. Maria received her youthful initiation into sentimentalism from her uncle, a "man of a romantic turn of mind" (78) made melancholy by disappointment in love. Having "imbibed his sentiments" and "adopted his opinions," Maria developed a romantic temperament. Together with his conversation, the books he gave Maria--let us presume they were novels--led her to "form an ideal picture of life" (78). Thus primed, Maria fell in love as soon as life provided "a basis [for her fancy] to erect its model of perfection on" (85). Both times, love, for Maria, comes about as the result of "romantic wishes, and, from a natural progress, romantic expectations" (48).

Female Experience

The antithesis of--and the antidote to--romantic expectations, in The Wrongs, is experience, seen as including, but not limited to, sexual experience. Thus it is said to be normal for the young to "sigh after ideal phantoms of love and friendship," but for adult women, "experience ought to have taught them in what human happiness consists" (49). In

her memoir for her daughter, Maria, speaking of women's economic and sexual dependence on their husbands, observes that "[f]reedom of conduct has emancipated many women's minds" (104). She exhorts her daughter, "Gain experience--ah! gain it--while experience is worth having, and acquire sufficient fortitude to pursue your own happiness . . . " (74). She further counsels her not to heed "the frigid caution of coldblooded moralists," for "to fly from pleasure, is not to avoid pain" (77). Yet, for Maria, as for all the women whose stories are recounted in The Wrongs, experience, and sexual experience in particular, is bitter, leading to prison and servitude, figurative when not literal.

The voice of women's experience at its most grim is that of Jemima, tellingly named after the first of Job's daughters, who was promised an equal inheritance with her brothers. Born "a slave, a bastard, a common property" (59), raped and pregnant at sixteen, forced to abort her baby, compelled by need into prostitution and theft, she has known prison, the charity hospital, the work-house. Sex has never been anything other than exploitation for Jemima, and she has "a horror of men." A period as a street prostitute taught her to value her "independence" (60), but even this small freedom was not tolerated by the police, who hounded her until she was forced into a house of prostitution. In five years spent as the housekeeper and mistress of a literary man, Jemima "had the advantage of hearing discussions, from

which, in the common course of life, women are excluded" (61) and "acquired a taste for literature" (63). Upon the man's death, however, she lost her claim to middle-class comforts and was thrown back onto the street by middle-class hypocrisy.

Jemima's experience has given her a clear-eyed, unsentimental understanding of "the wretchedness of situation peculiar to my sex" (65). As she pointedly remarks, her life has precluded romantic illusions: "I have . . . read in novels of the blandishments of seduction, but I had not even the pleasure of being enticed into vice" (59). With her "dear-bought knowledge of the world" (31), Jemima is not just a victim, she is a survivor, in whom, Maria realizes, "humanity [has] rather been benumbed than killed" (71). Significantly, the one thing Jemima feels remorse for is having once caused the death of another unfortunate girl like herself. Still painfully conscious of her own lack of "the grand support of life--a mother's affection" (56), she responds to Maria's plight as a bereaved mother, and in one ending to The Wrongs, the only one Wollstonecraft sketched out beyond a few notes, she restores Maria's child to her, allowing us to envision the possibility of Maria and Jemima raising the child together in a nurturing female community. In contrast to the "despotism of heart and conduct" (Author's Preface, 8) to which women are subjected by men, Jemima represents the possibility of female nurturing and female solidarity across class lines.

The Wrongs also contains brief accounts of the lives of a number of other women. Embedded in Maria's memoir are stories of: Peggy, a poor country woman who loses her husband to war and falls prey to a grasping landlord; Maria's sister, who, unable to find a husband, and barred from employment commensurate with her abilities, takes a position as a governess and dies of loneliness and melancholy; two hardworking landladies kept in thrall by drunk, violent husbands. A revealing vignette is that of "the lovely warbler" (37), an inmate in the madhouse, who, forced into marriage and abused by her husband, went insane at the birth of her first child, and now alternates between exquisite singing and incoherent exclamations. These stories demonstrate the effects of the "partial laws enacted by men" (104) on women in various class situations, and reinforce the unhappy identification of women's experience with sexual and economic exploitation; the only escape, they show, is death or madness.

Experience has an altogether different meaning for the men than it does for the women in The Wrongs. Darnford has travelled widely and lived among people of various cultures and classes, and, by his own account, has had similarly varied and extensive experience with women. For him, his adventures and misadventures represent simply "the experience necessary to guard him against future imposition" (43).

Maria's uncle's unhappy experience in love has left him with nothing worse than a melancholy disposition and a certain cynicism.

Expectations versus Experience

If Maria's story demonstrates the dangers of romantic expectations, the character of Jemima suggests an alternative, offering the possibility of a positive reading of female "experience" as the knowledge of the unjust treatment of women in bourgeois society and the female solidarity such knowledge may engender. Yet The Wrongs fails to establish a consistent attitude with regard to either Maria or Jemima.

One way in which this problem manifests itself is in the inconsistency of the narrative voice in The Wrongs. Maria's account of her early relationship with her husband reinforces the irony I have noted in the description of her growing attraction to Darnford. However, the similarities between the two stories are not emphasized, and the ironic stance with respect to Maria is not consistently maintained. The voice of the omniscient narrator ranges from detached, critical observation, through sympathetic justification, to enthusiastic endorsement of Maria's sentimentality. The result, as the following examples illustrate, is that it is often difficult to determine the degree of irony--or its object.

We are told of Maria that "people of common discernment" might "underrate her talents" and fail to "comprehend the delicacy of her sentiments," but that they are "attached by her unfailing sympathy"; when the narrator goes on to say that Maria is "too much under the influence of an ardent imagination to adhere to common rules" (48-49), it is not easy to decide whether this is irony directed against Maria, or a confirmation of her superiority. In a similar vein, having stated that Maria is twenty-six years old, the narrator speaks of "mistakes of conduct which at five-and-twenty prove the strength of the mind, that, ten or fifteen years after, would demonstrate its weakness." Are we being asked to absolve Maria of responsibility on grounds of age, or, having been told she has already had much unhappy experience, are we being asked to see her as one of those women whom "experience ought to have taught . . . in what human happiness consists" (49)? Such women are further criticized because "their pains and pleasures are so dependent on . . . the objects of their affections"; when, a few sentences later, the narrator says of Maria, "She was beloved, and every emotion was rapturous" (49), should we read this ironically? When the narrator asks of Darnford, "could he ever change, could he be a villain?" (50), this could be an endorsement of Maria's feelings or an ironic comment on them. We are told that the lovers experience "heaven," that "paradise bloom[s] around them," that they have "been transported into Armida's

garden" (51); this may be taken as "poetic" description, or, given that Armida set fire to her palace after her rejection by her lover (Evans 51), it may be read as an oblique reference to the self-destructive nature of Maria's passion. Each of these examples, and more could be cited, may be read as irony directed against Maria, or, alternatively, as evidence of the omniscient narrator's growing identification with Maria.

The narrator's voice is replaced by that of Maria herself in the eight chapters (almost half the length of The Wrongs) devoted to Maria's memoir for her daughter. The irony that was earlier directed against romantic expectations by the narrator is here somewhat neutralized by Maria's characterization of her romantic leanings as "some peculiarities in my character, which *by the world* are indefinitely termed romantic" (78; my emphasis), and by her description of her husband's repeated denunciations of her "romantic notions" (110; cf. 116, 118). The implication is that Maria is less the dupe of romantic illusions than the victim of the world's and her husband's crass failure to appreciate true sensibility.

When the narrator's voice finally returns near the end of The Wrongs, it is only to confirm that her/his point of view has completely merged with that of Maria. After informing us that Maria has received Darnford "[a]s her husband" (138), the narrator provides the following commentary:

We see what we wish, and make a world of our own--and, though reality may sometimes open a door to misery, yet the moments of happiness procured by the imagination, may, without a paradox, be reckoned among the solid comforts of life. Maria now, imagining that she had found a being of celestial mould--was happy,--nor was she deceived. (139)

Here it is evident that, as Mary Poovey observes, the narrator has recapitulated Maria's "fall into the susceptibility to romantic expectations" (98).

There are other suggestions of irony in the characterization of Maria, but again, it is difficult to determine how far the irony extends. Jemima's story itself, as I have read it, constitutes an ironic comment on Maria's romantic expectations. The contrast between Jemima's tough, unsentimental acceptance of the harsh reality of her situation and Maria's escape into romantic fantasy is underscored by Maria's persistent misreading of Jemima's story. For example, when Jemima describes her inability to find even the most menial employment following the death of her literary man, Maria interrupts with a pretty speech on the limited possibilities for "improvement" available to the poor: "The book of knowledge is closely clasped, against those who must fulfil their daily task of severe manual labour or die . . ." (64), an observation that is doubly rich in irony when we consider how little knowledge Maria has

gained from her immersion in books in comparison with Jemima's "dear-bought knowledge of the world" (31). And when Jemima tells how she was heartlessly refused aid by a man who had been part of the intellectual circle of her employer, Maria observes with a sigh, "The culture of the heart ever, I believe, keeps pace with that of the mind" (65).

Maria's memoir shows that she even misreads her own story. She urges her daughter, "Whilst your own heart is sincere, always expect to meet one glowing with the same sentiments . . ." (77). Although there is no indication that Maria's advice is being presented ironically, it becomes ironic in retrospect when we discover that such an expectation is precisely what got Maria herself into trouble.

The difficulty of ascertaining the degree of irony in various passages of The Wrongs raises another problem. For if Maria is being presented ironically, what authority may be attributed to her views? Does the irony extend to her ideas on marriage and her account of her treatment by Venables? The irony in the depiction of Maria undercuts the authority of her very lucid critique of the economic basis of marriage and its reduction of women to the state of idiots or perpetual minors, vitiating the central argument of The Wrongs.

A similar inconsistency is evident with respect to Jemima. Jemima's story, as we have seen, offers a corrective to Maria's

romanticism. However, The Wrongs subordinates Jemima's message of female solidarity to Maria's sentimentalism. Thus, somewhat improbably, it is the lovers' "accents of tenderness" and "air of confidence" (51) that inspire the hard-bitten Jemima to recount her story. And instead of Jemima rescuing Maria from the prison of romantic illusions, it is Jemima who is absorbed into Maria's world, insisting even on remaining in a subordinate role as Maria's servant.

The inconsistency in the attitude of The Wrongs toward both Maria and Jemima arises largely from ambivalence with respect to sensibility. The Wrongs attempts to resolve this ambivalence by carving out a positive definition of sensibility, one identifying it with truth, virtue, artistic creativity, and individual and collective liberation. In The Rights, as we have seen, sensibility was viewed as peculiarly feminine, and wholly negative and enslaving; in The Wrongs, this role is reserved for romantic expectations, while "*active* sensibility, and *positive* virtue" (101; original emphasis) are associated with the capacity to love passionately, and opposed to the romantic expectations that may lead a woman to "se[riously] sentimentalize herself to stone, and pine her life away" (102). The Wrongs endorses Maria's view that "generous emotions" are "the foundations of every true principle of virtue" (92). It sees sensibility, at least in theory, as a human capacity, one attainable by both sexes, and the basis of all fellow-feeling.

In practice, however, The Wrongs sees sensibility as the special province of women, and seeks a definition of it as enabling rather than disabling for them. While The Rights looks to reason to change women's situation, The Wrongs looks to found such change on the very qualities that have been used to enslave women. It sees feeling as the gentle force that will free women from the madhouses and prisons to which they have been condemned by the laws of men. Sensibility is said to be the source of Maria's "unfailing sympathy," making her "very generally beloved by characters of very different descriptions" (49), and it is Maria's sensibility, in the end, that is seen as having the power to "reconcile [Jemima] with the human race" (140). As for Jemima, it is when she hears of Maria's loss of her infant daughter that "the woman [awakens] in a bosom long estranged from feminine emotions" (28). Maternal feelings, in The Wrongs, are the essence of womanly sensibility. They exemplify sensibility in its highest form.

The view of sensibility put forward in The Wrongs enables Wollstonecraft to surmount The Rights' devaluation of women and provide an analysis of the female condition that does not hold women themselves responsible for it. Instead of seeing women as tyrants, The Wrongs sees them as victims of a bourgeois patriarchal society whose partial laws and customs give men the power to control and exploit their bodies and their resources. For middle-class women like Maria, this

society forces them to marry, and fosters romantic expectations to reinforce their economic dependence. For working-class women like Jemima, sexual and economic exploitation is more brutal and direct. It is as mothers that women of all classes suffer the worst abuse, forced to bear, abort, or give up children according to the will of the fathers.

If maternity is the site of women's enslavement, maternal feelings also hold the promise for women's liberation. In contrast to women's romantic feelings, maternal love is seen as untainted by patriarchal society; thwarted and exploited, but authentic rather than artificially produced. Women's shared oppression as mothers provides the negative basis of female solidarity; its positive basis is their shared maternal sensibility. This is the radical possibility suggested by Jemima's story, which, as Poovey points out, "has the potential to call into question both the organizational principles of bourgeois society and the sentimentalism that perpetuates romantic idealism" (104). However, The Wrongs fails to follow up on this radical potential, and the maternal voice remains submerged.

Maternal feeling remains a subtext in The Wrongs--a powerful and insistent subtext. Just as the "unutterable pleasure of being a mother," of which Maria was cruelly robbed, makes itself felt in the "full heart [that] overflow[s]" to "interrupt my narrative" (102), The Wrongs itself is unable to contain the disruptive force of this female difference.

Associated with the "disturbed fancy" of Maria's fellow-inmates, it makes itself heard in "the burden of their incessant ravings" (33) and in the exquisite song and incoherent outbursts of "the lovely warbler" (37), the constant background to Maria's struggle.

The Wrongs is finally unable to sustain its vision of sensibility as the potential basis of a new, liberatory social order. Men are seen as capable of neither sensibility nor virtue nor fellow-feeling with women. Heterosexual love is exposed in all the proposed endings as a romantic illusion. Despite Wollstonecraft's brave intention, stated in the preface, to align female sexual desire with women's social and political emancipation, it remains inextricably bound up with sentimentalism, and hence with women's oppression.

Sentimentalism, as Poovey points out, was, for a middle-class Englishwoman of the 1790s, "the only form in which her society allowed her to express either her sexuality or her craving for transcendent meaning" (110). Aware that these desires are deeply entangled with romantic expectations, The Wrongs nevertheless refuses to renounce them. It is impossible to imagine any way in which Wollstonecraft could have resolved this contradiction and produced a coherent novel in accordance with her stated intentions, had she lived to complete this novel.

The Wrongs' division between the female experience of suffering and solidarity, and the escapism of romantic expectations, is replicated among recent critics of The Wrongs, with most situating the meaning of the novel either in the social realm of worldly experience or in the psychic realm of subjectivity. Poovey, for example, as we have seen, reads the repressed meaning of The Wrongs in the character of Jemima, with its suggestion of the possibility of female solidarity in revolt against the institutions of a patriarchal society, while for Mary Jacobus, The Wrongs' repressed meaning is the desire for "a feminist sublime where all foundations are called in question" ("Difference" 56). Laurie Langbauer, like Jacobus, identifies it with "motherhood, difference, and division," all that "threatens . . . patriarchy or representation" (215).

In spite of their differences, these two approaches coincide strikingly in seeing the repressed meaning of The Wrongs in some form of revolutionary assertion of female difference. Their respective emphases on the social and the psychic aspects of this difference, in fact, complement each other. Poovey's exhaustive exploration of The Wrongs' social meanings supplies the necessary context for the psychic meanings emphasized by Jacobus and Langbauer. It compensates for their tendency to see the psychic meanings as the effect of "enduring structures of the unconscious and writing" (Langbauer 209) by showing how the social context impinges upon the inner life. Jacobus and

Langbauer, for their part, by attributing real importance to the psychic meanings of The Wrongs, offer a corrective to Poovey's reductive view of them as wholly negative, part of "that bedrock of bourgeois society--the belief in individual feeling" (108), without any redeeming value.

The desire of The Wrongs to align women's sexual fulfilment with their liberation, and with general social and political liberation, is not merely escapist fantasy; it contains a genuine oppositional impulse, expressed in the only language available. Wollstonecraft's feminist version of "The Lineaments of Gratified Desire," it has the potential to contribute to the formation of a new, non-oppressive female subjectivity, even if The Wrongs is not able to flesh out the vision of such a new subjectivity. To admit this is to recognize that speech may articulate difference as well as the same, and that subjectivity may be spoken from a subordinate position within culture. It is to accord women "the power to resist through fictional language, the language of sociality and self" (Kaplan "Pandora" 173). Most important, it is to claim representation itself as a site of feminist struggle.

Chapter 3: Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own

Nearly a century and a half after Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Virginia Woolf provides, in the humble guise of an informal lecture on women and fiction, another great feminist theory of gender and culture. Whereas Wollstonecraft, writing in the Enlightenment tradition, aimed to align "truth" with "woman," Woolf, a modernist, problematizes representation and interrogates both "truth" and "woman." A Room of One's Own, foregrounding the processes and strategies of representation, shows that truth, both of the world and of the self, is constituted in discourse rather than reflected in discourse. The transparency and self-evidence of reality and of identity are shown to depend on discursive and literary conventions which involve the exclusion and silencing of female difference.

While thus denaturalizing representation, A Room at the same time constructs a discursive space in which women are represented as subjects possessed of both gender specificity and history. Woolf provides a new view of female subjectivity, one in which identity is double or multiple, shifting, even self-contradictory. This is seen as the very condition of women's existence as subjects who are muted or unrepresented in the dominant discourses. A Room itself serves as the

textual model of this female subjectivity in which difference is neither silenced nor reduced to the comforting confirmation of male identity, but is felt as an active force, making and unmaking meanings.

Facts and Fictions

Based on lectures Woolf gave to the women students of Newnham and Girton Colleges of Cambridge University, A Room maintains the form of the lecture. But, instead of establishing her authority and defining her terms as is customary at the beginning of a lecture, Woolf begins by problematizing both. This process is continued through the first two chapters in the form of an extended reflection on the nature of fact and fiction, truth and illusion. These terms are subjected to repeated questioning, and each time a possible relationship is proposed among them, it is destabilized. The reader is also made to experience their instability through the use of a variety of metafictional devices.

With the first line, we are immediately plunged into the fiction that the book *is* the lecture, with Woolf directly addressing an imagined audience. A fictional dialogue is established, in which they are given the first words. This opening radically undercuts the authority of both the lecture form and the lecturer. In the first few lines, a persona is established who self-effacingly disclaims her ability to "fulfil what is, I

understand, the first duty of a lecturer--to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth" (5). The "true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction," remain, we are warned, "unsolved problems" (6). She offers only the opinion that a woman requires money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction, and promises to provide an account of how she arrived at it.

Our fictional lecturer proceeds blithely to unsettle the distinctions between fact and fiction, truth and lies. "Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact," she says, proposing to use "all the liberties and licences of a novelist" in discussing her subject. She adds, "Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them . . ." (6). As she frankly informs us, the identity of the lecturer is itself a fiction: "'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being" (6).

Our lecturer asks her listeners to "call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any other name you please--it is not a matter of any importance" (6-7), emphasizing collective female identity over individual identity. This quotation from the familiar Elizabethan ballad, "Mary Hamilton," resonates on several levels. The omission of the name of the fourth Mary, the speaker in the ballad, emphasizes the lecturer's "non-identity," linking her symbolically with the unnamed Mary Hamilton, and this connection is reinforced by the knowledge that the author of the

ballad is anonymous. The quotation also provides an oblique introduction of the theme of female sexual transgression and punishment by death. And finally, the ballad is itself, as Woolf would have known, a mixture of fact and fiction (Marcus, Languages 179).

"Mary," then, is placed at a men's college in "Oxbridge . . . an invention" (6) to pursue her musings on women and fiction. Here, her access to the lawn is barred and her thought processes interrupted by a Beadle, rude "contact with facts" (8) intruding even in fiction. Then, just as she had strayed onto the forbidden turf of the quadrangle, she is led by "some stray memory" (9) to wonder about the manuscripts of Milton's Lycidas and Thackeray's Henry Esmond, which just happen to be housed in the college library. But Mary is interrupted once again and prevented from entering the library to peruse the manuscripts that would allow her to determine "what is style and what is meaning" (9). As we shall discover, in A Room, style *is* meaning.

Further speculations follow, on truth and illusion, and this time they are explicitly connected with sexual difference. They are sparked by Mary catching sight of a Manx cat, an "abrupt and truncated animal" crossing the grass where she had been prevented from walking. The "something . . . lacking, something . . . different" (13) in the cat symbolizes a change that has come about since the war. The war, it is suggested, transformed relations between the sexes, destroying women's

illusions about men, illusions that were essential to romantic love and romantic poetry, and changing "the value of . . . words themselves" (14). This is only suggested, however, and we are not allowed the satisfaction of certainty, for the question is immediately asked, "which was truth and which was illusion?" (17) Truth and illusion, and sexual difference itself, it is implied, may be a matter of the changing value of words.

As Mary makes her way to Fernham, another "invention" (6), in the October evening, she continues to reflect on truth and illusion, fact and fiction, and how perceptions change with the vantage point of time. She lays down the stern injunction, "Fiction must stick to facts, and the truer the facts the better the fiction," and immediately undermines it by adding "so we are told" (17). Then, with the teasing proviso that it is "nothing of course but a fancy," she describes in lushly evocative detail her arrival in Fernham "in the spring twilight" (18). It is a fantasy of female freedom without male interruptions, presided over by the pioneering woman scholar Jane Harrison, and, as Jane Marcus has shown, containing a possible allusion to a scene in The Well of Loneliness (Languages 180). A sense of longing and anguish at the perishability of youth and beauty pervades the description. A reference to "the flash of some terrible reality leaping" (19) further confounds the distinction between illusion and reality.

The narrative breaks abruptly from this fantasy to return to the primary fiction, if fiction is what we may call such an immersion in the dreary facts of female existence: "Far from being spring it was in fact an evening in October. . . . Dinner was ready," a dinner in which "[t]here was nothing to stir the fancy" (19). Of the two experiences of Fernham, the spring twilight and the October evening, we too may be wondering, "which was the truth, which was the illusion . . . ?" (17) The relations between illusion and truth, fact and fiction, are multiple, complex, surprising--and may, it is implied, be largely a matter of conventions, social and literary. At the same time, it is also suggested, there are some hard facts of existence whose effects are all too real: the wealthy and powerful endow colleges, create culture, from which women are barred by Beadles and professors; men drink wine and women water, although literary conventions forbid mention of this fact.

Literary conventions, particularly those related to narrative, are subverted in a variety of ways. As with the narrator's "non-identity," we are repeatedly reminded of the fictive nature of textual reality, even while the narrative continues to generate it. Plunged by authorial whim from an autumn evening into spring twilight, a fantasy within a fiction, we are made aware that truth is a matter of narrative conventions. The "novelist's convention" that the food eaten at a luncheon and, by implication, the material conditions of life and culture, are "of no

importance whatsoever" (12) is foregrounded, and defied, when detailed descriptions are provided of the meals served at the men's and the women's colleges. The use of coincidence as a fictional device is mocked when Mary's stray thoughts are said to lead her to the very manuscripts that are housed in the college library. The constant interruptions that prevent Mary from reaching any conclusions about her observations constitute an ironic comment on narrative closure and make the reader play an active role in constructing the argument. The fictive nature of the lecture itself is foregrounded in a comment invoking the physical reality of the printed page: "For truth . . . those dots mark the spot where, in search of truth, I missed the turning up to Fernham" (17). All these metafictional devices which proliferate in the first dozen pages of A Room serve to emphasize the constructed nature of textual reality, demonstrating that style is meaning. By exposing the generic conventions which construct the difference between fact and fiction, this opening provides a context for the questioning of gender conventions, those governing the construction of sexual difference.

The opening of Chapter 3 continues the interrogation of the terms of discussion. Mary Beton (we now know her name) has been to the British Museum, one treasure-house of culture to which women are allowed access, but has found only a plethora of contradictory male opinions on women. Still in search of "the truth" about women and

fiction, she is now looking to "the historian, who records not opinions but facts" (43). Her reflections reveal further permutations of fact, fiction, history, poetry, life, truth, woman, in which it is impossible to pin down stable meanings for any of the terms.

Fiction is said to be "attached to life at all four corners," that is, "attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in" (43). This would imply that fact has a logical and temporal priority over fiction. Yet a huge discrepancy is found between woman in fiction and in fact, in poetry and in history. In fiction or poetry, as written by men, woman is "a person of the utmost importance; very various; . . . as great as a man, some think even greater," whereas, in fact, as history tells us, she was barely literate and was the property of her husband to do with as he pleased. Another view is then proposed, one that, for all the contradictions between fact and fiction, neither sees them as mutually exclusive nor accords priority to either one. The truth, woman herself, is "a composite": "What one must do to bring her to life was to think poetically and prosaically at one and the same moment, thus keeping in touch with fact . . . but not losing sight of fiction either." Yet the truth about woman, this composite being that is said to reconcile fact and fiction, itself has "no existence in fact" (45); a product of the imagination, it is itself a fiction that must be created.

Similarly, history is found to contain a "scarcity of facts" about woman, because women are absent from the events that "constitute the historian's view of the past" (46). History is a text that is constructed, and that therefore admits of a different construction: "All these facts lie somewhere, presumably . . . ; the life of the average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere, could one collect it and make a book of it." To find the truth about woman, it is necessary, therefore, to "add a supplement to history" (47); in the absence of facts, to "imagine" (48), to have recourse once again to fiction.

The narrative of Mary's search for the truth about women and fiction demonstrates the impossibility of any such simple, single truth. As we have seen, the search led first to fiction; fiction, apart from a wrong turn leading to a brief, seductive interlude of fantasy, forced a confrontation with unpleasant fact; fact was repeatedly found to require supplementation with fiction; and so on, in a potentially endless process that brings us no closer to the truth, either of woman or of fiction, except to suggest that they are constantly being constructed by our own textual activity.

The painstaking deconstructive questioning of fact and fiction, woman and truth, contrasts with the more expository treatment these themes are given in much of the remainder of A Room. In fact, the major part of A Room consists, as Catharine Stimpson observes, of nothing less

than "a general theory of women, gender, and culture" ("Woolf's Room" 134). Thus Woolf pursues a double strategy in A Room, deconstructing the dominant, patriarchal, discourse on gender and culture, reconstructing this discourse from a female subject position. The initial, deconstructive, "moment," if I may call it that, casts a particular light on the ensuing discussion, destabilizing its terms. In this light, what might, in another context, be clear conclusions or definitive statements, become, instead, strategic positions or suggestions of possibilities. The reconstructive moment involves the examination of a broad range of issues related to women and fiction; these include the material basis of culture, women's relation to male culture and literary tradition, the female writing tradition, feminine and masculine writing, the nature of creativity, and, inextricably linked with all these questions, sexual difference itself. In the following sections, I will examine A Room's discussion of these issues.

The Material Basis of Culture

The question of the material basis of culture figures prominently in A Room from the very title. It comes up for detailed treatment near the beginning, when Mary, finding herself barred from the college's "turf" (8) and "treasure" (9) by their respective custodians, the Beadle and the professor, reflects on the fact that the college is built upon a "foundation

of gold and silver" (12). She vividly imagines the process in which "kings and queens and great nobles," first, and "merchants and manufacturers" (11), later, financed the centuries-long labour of the thousands of anonymous artisans who built the college. The university is emblematic of patriarchal English society, in which wealthy and powerful men dominate every aspect of public life while the women of their class are "the protected sex" (42), barred from money and power, and relegated to the private sphere. Women's responsibility for childrearing, the prohibition against middle-class women holding gainful employment, the laws forbidding women to own property are all cited as having contributed to "the safety and prosperity of the one sex and . . . the poverty and insecurity of the other" (26).

Women and Culture

In such a patriarchal society, a "curious disparity" exists in men's and women's relation to culture. Women do not write books about men, while men, even those "with no apparent qualification save that they are not women" (29), produce volumes on women, volumes which contradict each other in every respect except in that they are all steeped in misogyny. In such a system, women are merely signs circulated among men; yet their role, though passive, is an essential one; they maintain the

illusion of superiority on which man's power to believe in himself depends:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. . . . [If woman] begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. How is he to go on giving judgement, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself . . . at least twice the size he really is? (37-38)

Their silence the hidden necessary condition of patriarchal culture, women are thus in the curious situation of being at once both inside and outside culture.

Mary Beton herself, she informs us, is no longer economically dependent on men; with a legacy of five hundred pounds a year from an aunt, she gained the "freedom to think of things in themselves" (40). That the inheritance has also conferred selfhood on Mary is implied in the fact that the reader is finally, at this point in the narrative, told her name. She is her aunt's namesake, and that arbitrary fact is the reason for the inheritance that has bought her freedom.

While a legacy may free an individual woman from the need to flatter or fawn on men, women collectively remain disinherited from

culture. Silenced in patriarchal culture, they need to draw sustenance from a tradition of their own. A large part of A Room is devoted to constructing such a tradition, writing the needed supplement to history by thinking back through our mothers. Since, as we have seen, history is marked by the absence of women, the supplement must focus as much on women's silence as on their speech, as much on what they could not say as on what they did say. By foregrounding women's silences, their absence from certain periods in literary history as well as the repressions that mark what they did write, Woolf uncovers the conditions of possibility within which writing exists, the conditions underlying women's silence and men's speech.

The Supplement to History: The Female Writing Tradition

Woolf's supplement to history is an account of the historical and discursive production of female subjectivity, detailing women's gradual emergence from silence, passivity, and powerlessness as objects of male discourse, into agency as subjects of their own discourse. It is the history of women's becoming--and women's writing is seen as both instrument and record of that process. Woolf traces women's writing through stages in which women defined themselves in terms of male standards, declaring their equality with men or asserting, and sometimes

pleading, their difference. But what is important about women's writing, for her, is that it has the potential to bring to writing something entirely new, which can be defined in terms neither of equality nor of difference *between* women and men. The supplement to history both deconstructs male-centred history and constructs a new, woman-centred, history, one that projects a genuinely different future for women and for all humankind.

In the Elizabethan period, women's silence is complete, covered over by the authoritative view that it is "impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare" (48). Therefore Woolf must entirely imagine the life of Shakespeare's "wonderfully gifted sister" Judith (48). The only life that can be imagined for her is one in which she was denied any possibility of developing her talent, was exploited sexually, became pregnant, and finally killed herself. Judith's story demonstrates that Elizabethan women were not merely silent, they were silenced by the limits imposed on them, the "work [that] began . . . almost before they were out of the nursery" (50), the narrow lives dictated by the "religious importance" placed on chastity, the emotional burden of their own "contrary instincts" warring within them. If a woman survived to write under such conditions, whatever she wrote would have been "twisted and deformed" and "her work would have gone unsigned" (51). Woolf points out that the old anonymous

Elizabethan ballads are said to have been written by women, recalling "Mary Hamilton," whose story of seduction and punishment by death is paralleled by that given to Judith (Fox 156). In this way, Woolf symbolically restores Judith Shakespeare's voice as the anonymous author of that Elizabethan ballad.

Women writers after the Elizabethan period do not have to be entirely imagined as was the case with Judith Shakespeare. Instead, these women, who have generally been visible only in the "background" of "the lives of the great" (47), are brought to the foreground. Two such writers examined are the seventeenth century's Lady Winchilsea and Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. Both "might have been" poets, but their work is "disfigured and deformed" (62) by rage at the limits imposed on them because of their sex. Another woman of the seventeenth century, Dorothy Osborne, whose letters were published in the nineteenth century as an appendix to a biography of her husband, "had the makings of a writer in her" (64), but bowed to the prevailing view that a woman writing a book was ridiculous. Here again, the foregrounding of women's silences, of what they did not write, brings out the conditions under which they wrote.

The eighteenth century was marked by an event that in the supplement to history is "of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write" (66).

Writing for public consumption allows women to take part in the social and historical process by which meanings are defined rather than remain passive objects of exchange and magnifying mirrors for men. Women's beginning to write was a first step in breaking the silence that is a necessary condition of patriarchal culture; hence, for Woolf, the importance of this event for *human* history.

The possibility of making a living by their pens bestowed dignity on women writing, and the freedom to write as they liked. Most important, it opened writing up to "women generally" (66) and not only the leisured few, establishing a tradition of women's writing that eventually produced Jane Austen, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot, of whom it is finally possible to say, "they wrote good novels." Yet Woolf sees both Emily Brontë and George Eliot as "not by nature novelists" (68), the former better suited for poetic plays and the latter for history or biography.

A variety of reasons are offered as to why middle-class women writers "naturally" (68) took to the novel form while remaining silent in other genres for which, in some cases, they were better suited. First of all, the novel could be accommodated to the conditions of women's lives. It allowed them to focus on the observation of character and personal relations in the small realm to which they had for centuries been confined, the common sitting-room, and turn the very narrowness of their

lives into an advantage. It supposedly suffered less than other forms of writing from the constant interruptions to which women were subject. And, whereas other genres had already been formed by men to meet their own needs, the novel was still "young enough to be soft in [women's] hands" (77). This allowed early nineteenth-century women writers with "no tradition behind them, or one so short and partial that it was of little help" (76), to begin to shape a tradition of their own.

Narrow lives and constant interruptions were not the only impediments to women's writing in the early nineteenth century. There was also the prevailing misogyny, to which most women writers responded either by asserting female equality or pleading female difference, trying to prove they were "as good as a man" or apologizing for being "only a woman." In either case, for Woolf, the integrity of their work is damaged. The writing of Charlotte Brontë, for example, is seen as marred by anger, ignorance, fear, rancour, pain, the effect of oppression. Jane Austen and Emily Brontë alone among the early women novelists are said to have responded to misogyny with neither aggression nor conciliation, pursuing their own visions and expressing their own values with integrity, writing "as women write, not as men write" (75).

The supplement to history reaches Woolf's own period in the form of a hypothetical novel written by "Mary Carmichael," a contemporary writer. The examination of this work allows Woolf to speculate as to the

directions in which women's writing is developing. New areas of experience that open to women are expected to offer new possibilities for subject matter and, even in the case of the "less interesting" (87) naturalistic novel with its overabundance of banal fact, new subject matter will demand new forms. One subject dear to Woolf's heart is the obscure lives of ordinary women, which thus far have remained unrecorded either in biographies, history, or novels; however, she warns that prudery, "the legacy of our sexual barbarity," and the "fetters of class" remain impediments (8). She speculates that future women novelists might also provide a picture of "that dark place at the back of the head" (90) that men are unable to see even in magnifying mirrors, and that this would not only change our picture of men but also transform relations between the sexes.

Vast new areas open up for literature when the view of women is no longer restricted to their relationships with men. Opening literature to women's relationships with women, including sexual relationships will not only broaden and deepen the literary portrayal of women, it will "light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping" (84). Rachel Bowlby asks whether this buried region of unrepresented femininity is mysterious only because it has thus far remained

unrepresented, or whether there is something qualitatively different about it that by nature resists representation (31). The only answer A Room provides to this question is to say that a writer would have to express this female reality obliquely, "[talking] of something else," barely suggesting it "in the shortest of shorthand" (84)--a sufficiently oblique answer. To do so would require "words that are hardly syllabled yet" (84), bringing about a change in language itself. With women's increasing freedom to disregard male-imposed standards, Woolf foresees their writing evolving more and more toward poetry, the least literal, most suggestive, kind of language. In Mary Carmichael, representative contemporary woman novelist, there are still "too many facts" (80), but it is speculated that in another hundred years, "[s]he will be a poet" (93).

Stretching from the past to the future, from women's silence to their poetry, Woolf's supplement to history both recasts and supplants the dominant version of history. In this, it anticipates current understandings of the logic of the supplement.¹ To say, as Woolf does, that women's beginning to write is an event of fundamental importance to *human* history completely transforms our view of history. It becomes, as Alice Jardine, in another context, has suggested, the "*history of women's discursivity*," a history that "take[s] as its starting point the rather startling observation that feminism is the only -ism of all the -isms invented throughout Western history which allows for the fact that

women not only speak but have something *to say*" (97; original emphasis).

Men's and Women's Sentences, Androgynous Minds

The question of gender and genre is pervasively present throughout A Room, and a variety of views are offered of their mutual inflections. As we have seen, A Room insists on the importance of women writing "as women write, not as men write" (75). At the same time, it holds up the ideal of the androgynous mind, transcending gender. I will not try, at this point, to resolve this apparent contradiction; I will merely examine A Room's discussion of these issues.

Within the supplement to history, there is an important discussion of men's and women's sentences. Austen is praised for reinventing the sentence, because the sentence current in her time was a "man's sentence," one "unsuited for a woman's use." This suggests the view that discourse reflects, rather than constructs, a gendered subjectivity. At the same time, however, in saying that Austen "devised" the "perfectly natural" woman's sentence, Woolf exposes the status of the natural as constructed rather than given. The fact that women can write "men's" sentences, as Woolf's example of three such sentences demonstrates, makes it clear that the sexual division of sentences is far

from absolute. The "man's sentence" is the legacy of centuries when men alone wielded the pen, and formed the literary tradition. As part of this process, sentences as well as larger literary forms were "made by men out of their own needs for their own uses" (77). The idea that Austen created the sentence she needed in spite of the relative lack of a female literary tradition to draw on also recognizes a degree of female agency much greater than that implied in the view of women, expressed earlier, as the silent objects of male discourse. This suggests that women's emergence from silence effected a qualitative change in their relation to language and to patriarchal society.

Furthermore, if women can write "men's" or "women's" sentences, and if men, too, can be said to write in more or less "manly" or "womanly" ways (102), then masculinity and femininity are themselves not only historically produced, but also textually constructed. For what does it mean to write "as women write, not as men write"?--as *which* women write? Not the majority of women, because we are told that women who wrote in this way number only two out of "all the thousand women who wrote novels" (75). Not those women who write self-consciously as women, because, as we have seen, there is, for Woolf, nothing more typically masculine than consciousness of self.

"To write as women write" is to write as those-women-who-write-as-women write, and so on in a potentially endless series in which the

meaning of woman is continually deferred (cf. Kamuf, "Writing" 298). The notion of the woman writer who writes as a woman is, in this perspective, a reading strategy, a hypothesis that enables Woolf to read women's writing *differently*, to read for sexual/textual difference rather than for an identity that is given. As Kamuf states, "Reading a text as written by a woman will be reading it *as if* it had no (determined) father *as if*, in other words, it were illegitimate, recognized by its mother who can only give it a borrowed name" (298; original emphasis). This strategy allows Woolf to resist the homogenizing discourse of universality, and focus on the historical, political, and metaphorical body of the woman writer.

Woolf's emphasis on the female body is matched by an equal emphasis on the androgynous mind, a concept that underlies many of A Room's arguments. The androgynous mind is "resonant and porous, . . . transmits emotion without impediment; . . . is naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided" (97). In Woolf's "plan of the soul" (96), each mind has both male and female powers; thus the mind's ability to "think back through its fathers or through its mothers" (96). It is only when there is a fusion between the two sexes in the mind that "the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties" (97). Furthermore, this fusion must occur unself-consciously, because "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex" (102).

Shakespeare's mind is said to be the very "type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly mind" (97), and his complete lack of self-consciousness "certainly the state of mind most favourable to poetry that there has ever existed" (52). His writing contains nothing of autobiography or self-expression, which are seen as inimical to art. His greatness is specifically attributed to the absence in his writing of any "desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship or grievance" (58), impediments to integrity that are seen to mar the work of certain early women writers as well as more recent male writers, both, for historical reasons, afflicted with too much consciousness of their sex.

Looking at A Room itself in the light of these considerations, it is immediately apparent that it does not manifest the seamless unity and perfect absence of self-consciousness said to characterize the product of the "woman-manly" or "man-womanly" mind (102). Nor is Woolf writing "as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman" (92). A Room clearly was written to voice women's grievance, to plead their cause. On its own terms, then, it would stand condemned as a failure, "doomed to death" (103). This leads Catharine Stimpson to conclude that "Woolf's commitments are inconsistent with Woolf's style, with that blurring of fact and fiction" ("Woolf's Room" 138). In contrast to this view, I

propose to show that Woolf's style and her commitments in A Room are quite consistent, that A Room's style *is* its meaning.

What is at stake here is the construction of female subjectivity in discourse, and the choice of a textual model of the female subject. The question is, how appropriate is the model of the serenely seamless androgynous mind in which all contradictions are dissolved? And how can this model be reconciled with Woolf's emphasis on the female body? Stimpson recognizes the importance for Woolf of female heterogeneity for which she coins the term "heterogeneity" (143), but she sees it as characteristic only of women as a collectivity, not as individuals. Thus she sees A Room's "self-division" (138) as a flaw, whereas I want to see it as a strategy, or as the textual model of a *different* female subjectivity. In order to do so, I will focus, in the following section, on various textual features of A Room as they relate to its views on women's writing. Then, in the final section of the chapter, I will propose a more complex view of the concept of the androgynous mind, one in which androgyny is seen as mediating between A Room's aesthetic and its feminist convictions, its style and its commitments.

Style as Meaning

A Room exhaustively describes the limitations imposed on women by patriarchal culture, and shows how these limitations and the struggle to overcome them have marked women's writing, making it impossible for women writers to approach the Shakespearean ideal. Yet, at the same time, Woolf takes what patriarchal tradition has constructed and stigmatized as feminine disabilities and turns them into enabling strategies, forging A Room's style out of anonymity, indirection, interruption, estrangement from tradition, lack of respect for conventions, and even anger. In this section, I will examine each of these elements of A Room as both theme and device, uniting style and meaning.

Anonymity is not only a key concept of A Room, it is also a main writing strategy. A "relic of the sense of chastity" (51), anonymity is, for Woolf, emblematic of women's position in relation to male tradition. Anonymity is both women's curse and their peculiar virtue, embracing everything from the brutal silencing of Judith Shakespeare, to the use of male pseudonyms by the Brontës and George Eliot, to the lack of self-preoccupation that characterizes Jane Austen's writing. Anonymity is the release from identity, and identity, for women, is a burden, a continual reminder of socially imposed limits. Anonymity is equated with

impersonality and with the rich inner diversity and fluidity of the self when the dark bar of the ego is lifted.

The anonymity of women is contrasted with the obsessive preoccupation with self that, for Woolf, marks male endeavours in general and, more specifically, characterizes a certain tradition of men's writing. She speculates that "Rousseau perhaps began it" (53), setting the trend for the confessional and self-analytical writing that became dominant in the nineteenth century. With Galsworthy and Kipling, Woolf's immediate precursors, men's writing developed a self-conscious virility, resulting in works that "celebrate male virtues, enforce male values, and describe the world of men" (100), and, most tellingly, lack "power of suggestion" (101) — this tradition, which Woolf sees as having become increasingly prominent in response to women's demands for equality, culminates in "Mr A," Mary Carmichael's critically esteemed male counterpart.

In sharp contrast to Mr A, whose writing is marked by "the dominance of the letter 'I' and the aridity, which, like the giant beech tree, it casts within its shade" (99), the narrator of A Room is anonymous in every meaning in which Woolf uses the word. She is anonymous in the most literal sense in that she remains nameless for a large portion of A Room, and in the sense that her personal identity matters less than her identity as a woman and a victim of male injustice. She is also

anonymous in the elusiveness and fluidity of her voice, and her use of irony and metaphor to destabilize meanings; these are the textual marks of the decentred, heterogeneous subjectivity that constitutes anonymity in its most typically Woolfian sense.

Interruption is also both theme and strategy in A Room. As we have seen, constant interruptions are an impediment to women's movement and thought, reminding them of their sex and the social limitations it entails. Since "interruptions there will always be" (78), A Room puts them to positive use. The interruptions that prevent the narrator from drawing conclusions about anything she observes induce in the reader the same feeling of frustrated expectation she is said to experience, and make dramatically evident the silencing of women by patriarchy. They also provide an opportunity for the reader to actively draw her own conclusions, completing the narrator's unfinished thoughts on the control of culture by the rich, powerful, and male--for it is often just such conclusions that the narrator seems to be on the verge of delivering when she is interrupted.

Women's indirection in writing and thinking is contrasted with men's directness throughout A Room. As typified by the student at the British Museum, educated men have acquired "some method of shepherding [their] question past all distractions till it runs into its answer as a sheep runs into its pen" (30). Similarly, the writing of Mr A is "so

direct, so straightforward after the writing of women," evidence of a mind "which had never been thwarted or opposed, but had had full liberty from birth to stretch itself in whatever way it liked" (98). For all the narrator's professed admiration of this masculine directness, male methods are seen as yielding a very narrow version of the truth, the reflection of the narrow male self. In contrast, the narrator of A Room sees her "simple and single question" (30) proliferate until a simple and single answer is impossible. Her thoughts repeatedly wander or stray, trespassing onto male turf or taking a turning into female fantasy, and leading to unexpected insights. A Room is the product of this female indirection, which realizes that "truth is only to be had by laying together many varieties of error" (104).

For all Woolf's rejection of anger as an impediment to integrity in writing, anger makes itself felt throughout A Room, both Woolf's own anger, in the form of ridicule of the patriarchs and patriarchal institutions that have diminished women's lives and work, and that of many of her literary mothers. As Mary Jacobus points out, when Woolf reads anger in an "awkward break" ("Difference" 70) in Jane Eyre that disturbs the continuity and reveals what Brontë cannot say outright, she, in effect, edits into her text the angry outburst edited out of Charlotte Brontë's, thus carrying out an "oblique recuperation of feminist energy" (57).¹ This authorizes us to effect a similar recuperation by reading Woolf's

foregrounding of Brontë's anger (and that of Lady Winchilsea and Margaret Cavendish) as inscribing into her text the anger she is not able to acknowledge directly.

This is not to say that A Room can be reduced to an exercise in feminist anger. The "fact of anger" (34) was also revealed in the narrator's idle drawing of "Professor von X," author of "The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex" (32). Peggy Kamuf points out the dangers involved in reading A Room simply as a series of "nasty caricatures of angry Professor von X, the . . . author and authority of masculine privilege and feminine subjection" ("Penelope" 10). For if the privileged masculine subject is recognized in A Room as the product of a historical process of sexual differentiation, then sexual difference "cannot also be seen to originate in the subject it only produces" (10). We cannot simply dismiss Woolf's rejection of anger, but neither can we ignore all the angry women's voices that so insistently make themselves heard in A Room in spite of it.

The theme of women's exclusion from male tradition is also made evident through A Room's style. In the first chapter, at the men's college at Oxbridge, Mary's initial reflections are concerned with her literary fathers. She first thinks about Charles Lamb, "one of the most congenial" (8) of writers, and of Lamb's shock at the idea that "any word in Milton's Lycidas could have been different from what it is" (8). Then,

in a similar vein, she wonders whether Henry Esmond's "eighteenth-century style was natural to Thackeray" (9). These specific concerns may seem puzzling, until, nearing the end of A Room, we are told that "the unconscious bearing of long descent which makes the least turn of the pen of a Thackeray or a Lamb delightful to the ear" (92) is exactly what women writers have been deprived of. This deprivation has been enacted in the most concrete way in the barring of Mary's access to the manuscripts of her literary fathers.

Not all of the allusions to male writers are as respectful as those quoted above. Milton's male supremacy, for example, is reduced to a "bogy" [sic] blocking women's view of the sky (40. 112). A reference to "some mute and inglorious Jane Austen" (50) suppressed by patriarchal culture again decrowns Milton by comparing him to the unassuming Austen, while Mary Beton's mention of her own "one gift which it was death to hide" (39) even dares to compare herself to him (although she adds the very feminine qualification that her gift is just "a small one but dear to the possessor" [39]). Similarly, Samuel Johnson's infamous remark comparing women preachers to dancing dogs is robbed of its authority and its sting by being attributed to Nick Greene two centuries earlier, effectively making Johnson the literary offspring of the sleazy seducer of Judith Shakespeare. A parody of the Lord's Prayer mocks patriarchal power and phallic religion in a single deft stroke: "His was the

power and the money and the influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor. He was the Foreign Secretary and the Judge" (35), and so on--but not "forever and ever, amen."

As Alice Fox points out, allusion is "a major rhetorical strategy" (146) in A Room, and one that is used almost exclusively with male writers. In Woolf's hands, this strategy becomes a way of taking playful revenge against the circulation of women as objects in male discourse. It involves taking meanings from men's texts and robbing them of their power against women by decontextualizing them and putting them into circulation in new contexts of her own construction. This strategy allows Woolf not merely to criticize patriarchal discourse but to reclaim speech and reinvent meaning for women.

Woolf creates a highly original style for A Room out of the very traits that she shows patriarchal culture to have constructed and devalued as "feminine." It is a style that carries the textual marks of female difference, displacing the simple, single truth in favour of a multiplicity of meanings. Stimpson and others who criticize A Room for this would have Woolf deny female heterogeneity in the very process of speaking about it.

The Androgynous Mind: The Difference Within

As we saw above, the valorization of the androgynous mind would seem to entail the loss of the unique female perspective A Room celebrates. This, in essence, is Elaine Showalter's criticism of Woolf's "flight into androgyny" (263). But the "heterogeneity" of the textual body of A Room suggests a more complex and dynamic view of the androgynous mind. I propose to show that, far from dissolving female difference, it is a means for "the putting into discourse of 'woman,'" that process Alice Jardine has called "gynesis" (25). The concept of the androgynous mind fulfills a variety of functions in A Room. It allows Woolf to redefine English literary tradition and her relation to it. It frames a theory of creativity, one based on the metaphor of maternal generativity rather than that of the pen-penis. It mediates between Woolf's aesthetic and her political convictions. It serves both to revalorize and to contain--or attempt to contain--female difference.

Probably few writers, male or female, have been as steeped in tradition as Woolf, and she sees the individual writer as "an inheritor as well as an originator" (107), dependent on those who have gone before: "For masterpieces are . . . the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (66). Yet, for women, as we have

seen, the relation to tradition is problematic. Women occupy a double position with respect to patriarchal culture, both "the natural inheritor[s] of that civilization" and "outside of it, alien and critical" (96). This duality is not merely a theoretical concept but an experiential phenomenon, a recurrent "sudden splitting of consciousness" (96), a painful ambivalence with respect to English literary tradition. It is felt in Woolf's awareness that the flowering of William Shakespeare's genius meant the thwarting of Judith's, that the demand for women's equality which she values is tied to the consciousness of sex which she abhors, that Shakespeare himself might have been "impeded and inhibited and self-conscious" (99) if women in the sixteenth century had demanded equality with men.

The "marriage of opposites" (103) in the androgynous mind allows Woolf to imaginatively heal the split in consciousness, authorizing her both to trespass freely on masculine turf and to enjoy the special viewpoint of the outsider. It provides her with access to literary fathers and mothers both. By redeeming selected male writers from membership in patriarchal tradition and reinscribing them in an androgynous tradition of her own construction, Woolf is able to lay claim as rightful heir to a long literary patrimony which includes Keats, Sterne, Cowper, Lamb, Coleridge, and, of course, Shakespeare (102). These men are her literary fathers. Her literary mothers are those women writers brought to the

foreground in the supplement to history. In this family tree, it will be noted, the fathers are androgynous, the mothers female.

As critics such as Frances Restuccia and Elizabeth Abel have pointed out, Woolf's androgyny is very much weighted toward the feminine. In practice, androgyny serves as a corrective to excessive masculinity; as for excessive femininity, the only example cited is Proust, who is immediately excused on the basis that too much is better than not enough, by far the more common failing. When women writers are criticized, as are George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, it is not for excessively feminine writing; and when they are praised, as are Jane Austen and Emily Brontë, it is for the feminine, not the androgynous, quality of their writing. No woman writer is criticized for erring on the side of too much femininity in writing.

It is said that "masterpieces are not single and solitary births" (66), and throughout A Room, the metaphor of giving birth is used for authoring a text (although literary motherhood is seen as precluding the biological variety). As Abel points out, Woolf's androgyny "entails the assimilation of maternal generativity" (87). For male writers, the intercourse of masculine and feminine that takes place in the androgynous mind is the prerequisite for successfully giving birth to a text. The wholly masculine mind is described as barren, a place where nothing will grow except possibly "a horrid little abortion" (101). Texts

by women writers, however, do not seem to have been fathered, only mothered, because only women writers are listed in their ancestry (66).

Peggy Kamuf provides a contrasting interpretation of the use of the maternal metaphor in a passage in which Woolf imagines what would happen when Johnson, Goethe, Carlyle, or some other great man entered a woman's room to have his "dried ideas . . . fertilized anew," creative power restored to "his sterile mind" (86). Citing an earlier passage in which Woolf recalls that Jane Austen is said to have hidden her writing when anyone came upon her at work, Kamuf ("Penelope" 16) cleverly points out that, in this scene, the embroidery the great man sees on "her" knee may be hiding a manuscript; "the sight of her creating in a different medium from his own," a cover for her creating in the same medium; and "the different order and system of life" he perceives there (A Room 86), part of the same order and system of life he knows. This view emphasizes the constructed nature of female difference as the magnified mirror-image, the comforting confirmation of male identity.

Woolf's notion of androgyny mediates between her aesthetic and her feminist convictions. The androgynous mind is a metaphor for the ability "to think poetically and prosaically at one and the same moment, thus keeping in touch with fact . . . but not losing sight of fiction either" (45), poetry being marked as female for Woolf, and prosaic fact as male. It should be remembered that the product of this operation is not neuter

or androgynous; it is "the truth about woman," itself a fiction. The seemingly contradictory imperatives of androgyny and femininity are held together, as Makiko Minow-Pinkney points out (8), by the principle of difference as opposed to the logic of identity. Woolf's androgyny does not mean the erasure of sexual difference, but rather the release of difference from the fixed opposition of male/female. Thus she asks, "if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? . . . For we have too much likeness as it is . . ." (87).

Once female difference is released from the fixity of the binary opposition--"the difference between" that serves as comforting confirmation and magnifying mirror for male identity--then the ways in which women differ from each other and themselves--"the difference within" (Johnson x)--become evident. Thus, when a woman enters a room, she experiences it "very differently from these great men" (Johnson, Goethe, Carlyle, et al.); she discovers a multitude of "rooms [that] differ so completely" from one another, each one permeated with "that extremely complex force of femininity" (86). Similarly, "hav[ing] no single state of being" (96) is shown to be a rich source of creative power for individual women, in contrast to the unitary masculine "I" that obliterates everything else within and without.

Androgyny is also, paradoxically, a way to contain this unsettling difference, an attempt to "absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the whole" (84). In this sense, as Jacobus points out, androgyny, "like all dreams of another language or mode of being," is "an essentially Utopian vision of undivided consciousness" ("Difference" 61). Female difference as Woolf perceives it cannot be absorbed into the symbolic order without disturbing the balance of the whole, since its very nature is to disturb that balance. As we have seen in the supplement to history, the expression of this difference involves women's breaking their silence, tampering with the sentence and the expected sequence, writing against the conventions, upsetting the reader's complacency. Its full expression would require "whole flights of words . . . to wing their way illegitimately into existence" (87), in simultaneous defiance of paternity, paternal language, and paternal law.

The final endorsement of androgyny in A Room, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out ("Unmaking and Making" 323), is in the voice of Mary Beton, not that of Woolf. And perhaps Ms. Beton is bowing to "the pressure of convention [which] decrees that every speech must end with a peroration" (109) when she provides the obligatory nugget of truth couched in exalted language:

. . . it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman. (102-3)

I may be forgiven, I think, for finding this statement too respectful of convention, too categorical, too "masculine" in tone, too much like one of "those exhortations [that] can safely . . . be left to the other sex" (109), to be taken as Woolf's definitive word on this question.

At the end of A Room, when "Mary Beton ceases to speak" (102-3), the authorial persona returns, and confounds convention by "briefly and prosaically" delivering an alternative conclusion: "it is much more important to be oneself than anything else." A further admission, again contrary to convention: "The truth is, I often like women. I like their unconventionality. I like their completeness. I like their anonymity" (109). Although the forces of repression, as personified in Sir Archibald Bodkin, necessitate the adoption of a sterner tone, Woolf is loyal in her commitment to women.

Woolf is all too aware that "that happy age . . . when the writer used both sides of his mind equally" (102) did not permit the existence of a writer who would use both sides of *her* mind equally. Her commitment

is to women as well as to "woman," to their "written *bodies*" as well as their "*written bodies*," as Jardine neatly characterizes the distinction (37). This explains A Room's emphasis on the physical, historical, and political bodies of women. A Room associates women's sexuality with women's speech, and their silencing with their imposed chastity. In this light, the sexual transgressions of Mary Hamilton and Judith Shakespeare constitute the mute protests of bodies denied speech. When, sometime in the future, Judith Shakespeare is (re)born, she will have to be resurrected "in the flesh," she "will put on the body which she has so often laid down" (112).

The female body also represents women's solidarity, a solidarity forged out of differences among women: "the common life which is the real life and not . . . the little separate lives which we live as individuals" (112). The resurrection of Judith Shakespeare, it is suggested, will come about only through concerted effort by "the body of the people" (66). Therefore A Room ends by acknowledging a bond with the silent and obscure women, not only of the past but of the present, those not attending the lecture because they are at home "washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed" (111-12). Foregrounding the labouring bodies of these women not of the privileged minority, Woolf allows us to envision a time when their difference, the difference of class, will be heard in literature.

Challenging the conventions that constitute masculine and feminine identities, A Room emphasizes women's difference while refusing to provide a definition of this difference. For to define it would be to limit it, to allow the difference between the sexes to obscure the differences among women and within each woman, differences that, paradoxically, only emerge when women, *as women*, are allowed to participate on an equal basis in language and literature.

Chapter 4: Virginia Woolf, Orlando

Written during the same period, Orlando shares A Room's concern with literature, sexual difference, and the relation between them. A Room at one point sets up a "scene in a battlefield" and a "scene in a shop" as examples of male values and female values as they are "transferred from life to fiction" (74). Orlando opens with an evocation of a battlefield and ends with a scene in a shop, and, like A Room--if anything, even more radically--calls into question both the sexual difference in values and the transfer from life to fiction. Through this process, we are made to discover that "life" and sexual difference are themselves fictions, meanings constructed in narrative rather than given.

Foregrounding the processes of narrative representation, Orlando demonstrates that narrative does not derive its authority from any "real life" it represents but from the cultural conventions that define both narrative and reality, fiction and truth. The novel explores the conjunctions of language, culture, and subjectivity over three and a half centuries of English history, showing how changing linguistic and literary codes govern representation and construct gendered subjectivity in different periods.

The issue of narrative representation is given prominence in a variety of ways. Orlando, the protagonist, is a writer preoccupied through the different periods by the problem of how to recreate "the thing itself" (11) in literature. Orlando's concerns are mirrored throughout by those of the equally long-lived biographer, who is intent on rendering the truth of Orlando's life and sexual identity--if only he can determine what it is. The biographer's wrestling with the difficulties of transferring Orlando's life to fiction provides another viewpoint on the relation of life and literature. A further perspective, one that radically denaturalizes Western subjectivity and representational conventions, is that of an imaginary band of Turkish gypsies with whom Orlando lives in the seventeenth century.

Representation: The Biographer's Dilemma

The biographer is a busy, fussy presence through most of Orlando. His singleminded pursuit of the facts of his subject's life is reminiscent of the Oxbridge-trained scholar of A Room. He claims not to require "the help of novelist or poet" (10) to record his subject's life, but, as we shall see, he must resort to the same devices to create a coherent narrative. He employs every conceivable narrative device, but he undoes their effects by the ham-handed way in which he uses them, and by

repeatedly intervening in the narrative to point to them. All the biographer's efforts to capture his elusive subject prove ludicrously inadequate.

Disdaining "those who like symbols, and have a turn for the deciphering of them" (19), the literal-minded biographer continually points to Orlando's use of imagery, underlining his metaphors or providing unnecessary parenthetical reminders that what is presented is "in Orlando's fancy" (37). This creates a heightened awareness of figurative language on the part of the reader. The biographer himself, however, is comically oblivious to the extent to which his own work is pervaded by metaphor and interpretation.

Chief among the biographer's metaphors is that of "the spirit of the age," a convention so common in historical writing that it is easy to forget that it is one. History is divided into neat, discrete periods, each with a distinct identity of its own; for example: "The age was the Elizabethan; their morals were not ours; nor their climate; nor their vegetables even . . ." (18). The matter-of-fact biographer, incapable of distinguishing between things and ideas, confuses the literal and the metaphorical: "danger and insecurity, lust and violence, poetry and filth swarmed over the tortuous Elizabethan highways and buzzed and stank" (158). The effect of this conflation of registers is to bring out the constructed, metaphorical nature of all such descriptions.

The unity and coherence of each age, and the sharpness of the differences between successive ages, can only be achieved by ignoring the differences within each age. This gives rise to the problem of explaining how historical change occurs: how, if each age is so different from the preceding one, one age gives way to another. The dilemma is brought out in the biographer's descriptions of such changes, absurdly literal applications of metaphors; the nineteenth century, for example, begins with the arrival, promptly at the stroke of midnight, of a dark cloud over the entire British Isles. Again, the conventional, constructed nature of the narrative is emphasized.

The convention of the spirit of the age raises a further question, one which is a major concern throughout Orlando: whether individuals shape the times in which they live, or are shaped by them. Living, as s/he does, through several centuries, Orlando is the ideal subject for such an interrogation. The question is, does Orlando have a fixed core of identity that remains constant through the different periods in which s/he lives, or is s/he formed successively by one age after another? Is Orlando's unity and coherence produced by the narrative devices through which her life is made intelligible?

The biographer, whose task spans the centuries of Orlando's life, draws on narrative conventions from many periods. Writing of Orlando in the seventeenth century, he uses an elaborately figurative style full of

personifications such as: "Memory . . . the seamstress, and a capricious one at that" (55), or "the hussy, Memory" (56), and "Ambition, the harridan, and Poetry, the witch, and Desire of Fame, the strumpet" (57). The gendered nature of these conceits is not insisted upon here, nor in the scene in which this stylistic vein culminates, in which "Our Lady of Purity," "Our Lady of Chastity," and "Our Lady of Modesty" battle "Truth, Candour, and Honesty, the austere Gods" (94-5) over the representation of Orlando's sexual transformation.

More factual approaches turn out to be no more satisfactory. Documentary evidence, consisting of the diary of one Lieutenant Brigge and a letter of a Miss Penelope Hartopp, is, literally, full of holes; the manuscripts are damaged in every place where information of value about Orlando would be revealed, and only the most inane and irrelevant portions have been preserved intact. This seemingly most direct source of information does not relieve the biographer of the necessity to interpret, and "even to use the imagination" (84), to construct rather than discover the truth of his subject. On the other hand, a strictly factual approach, involving huge lists of furnishings purchased by Orlando for the great house, not only proves tedious but reveals nothing about Orlando him/herself, "for one cupboard is much like another" (77). Facts alone, without interpretation, are meaningless. Like the pompous introduction and the index which is both incomplete and larded with irrelevancies,

these devices, the biographer's stock in trade, exposed as conventions which lend authority to the narrative without getting us any closer to the truth.

The biographer's activity not only exposes specific narrative conventions and devices but, increasingly, as the biography approaches the present, it also demonstrates that "a life" is a textual and narrative construction. Having Orlando "skip" certain events which are "without any importance in [her] life" in order to "get on with the text" (180), the biographer comically reverses the relation of life and biography. A blank space is declared to be "filled to repletion" (178), because "the most poetic is that which cannot be written down" (178). The narrative production of linear time is mocked as the biographer simply recites the months of the calendar, admitting that this method of writing biography is perhaps "a little bare" (188), and then, going to the other extreme, attempts to render the truth of Orlando's life through close observation in real time. Because Orlando refuses either to kill or to love, obeying the conventions neither for masculine nor for feminine behaviour, the biographer is unable to report anything. A life is not only narratively produced, but the narrative conventions that govern its production differ according to gender.

Representation: Orlando's Quest

The object of Orlando's literary quest is the same as that of his/her biographer. "Life? Literature? One to be made into the other? But how monstrously difficult!" (201) she exclaims after three centuries of trying, three centuries in which s/he adopts the styles, succumbs to the excesses, and learns the lessons of successive periods. This allows for a parodic review of a variety of literary conventions from Elizabethan to modern times, accompanied by Orlando's reflections on the problem of representation. Like A Room's supplement to history, Orlando's odyssey provides a revisionary reading of history, but whereas the former involved a reconstructive thinking back through literary mothers, Orlando concentrates on literary fathers, and its thrust is deconstructive.

Orlando's youth is spent in the Elizabethan period, an age in which, we are told, there is no opposition between literature or "book learning," and "'life' and 'reality'" (21). He lives an active, adventurous life, mixing in all levels of society. A novice in writing, he struggles to turn "green in nature" into "green in literature" (11). A novice in love, seeking words to describe the beautiful Sasha, he uses "metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant" (26), but feels that language finally fails to capture her mystery. As a boy, he once glimpsed "a rather fat, shabby man" with "the most amazing eyes" (56), staring into space and writing, and this

memory of Shakespeare becomes a continuing presence in his life, an emblem of the possibilities of literature. Orlando thinks "the volley of tumultuous syllable from the lips the finest of all poetry" (123). He writes "twenty tragedies and a dozen histories and a score of sonnets" (16) by the time he is eighteen, as well as beginning his poem "The Oak Tree."

Disappointment in love leads Orlando to retire to his house in the country, exchanging enjoyment of the pleasures of life for "delight in thoughts of death and decay" (49) and a renewed interest in literature. It is now the seventeenth century, and literature and life are opposing values. The love of literature is a "disease" whose "fatal nature . . . [is] to substitute a phantom for reality" (52). Thanks to Nick Greene, "a very famous writer at that time" (59), Orlando experiences the duplicity of the arbiters of literary taste. Disillusioned, he destroys all of his fifty-eight works except "The Oak Tree," the "only monosyllabic title among the lot" and perhaps the only one not involving "some mythological personage at a crisis of his career" (54). Reflecting that Shakespeare wrote in obscurity, he determines in future to write to please himself rather than in pursuit of literary immortality, Greene's "Glawr."

Orlando continues to struggle with the problem of representation, "the problem of what poetry is and what truth is" (72). He repeatedly finds himself resorting to metaphors which he feels are "utterly false."

But when he attempts to "simply say what [he] means and leave it" (71), he only produces more metaphors. Yet when he resumes work on "The Oak Tree," he has "changed his style amazingly" (79), unwriting instead of writing the poem, chastening the floridity of his style. This change in Orlando corresponds to a change in the times, for it is now "the age of prose" (79).

Orlando spends the latter part of the seventeenth century in Turkey, as a woman, travelling with a nomadic tribe of gypsies. This allows the basic assumptions of Orlando's society to be shown in an entirely new light, exposing them as cultural conventions rather than natural phenomena. In comparison with the gypsies' ancient lineage, for example, Orlando's ancestry of four or five hundred years is "the meanest possible," and from their point of view her forebears are profiteers or robbers. Similarly, the idea that the gypsies speak a purely referential language, a language "degree zero" as Barthes calls it (218), exposes the inherently metaphoric nature of language--or at least the English language--and the cultural basis of representation.

Despite their ancient lineage, the gypsies have no literary tradition, and no literature. They relate to reality in a fundamentally different way from Orlando. Their senses are "much in advance of their vocabulary"; their relation to the world is direct, unmediated by language, which is, for them, purely instrumental. The gypsies see nature only in terms of its

direct effects on them; to them, nature is cruel. In sharp contrast, Orlando, imbued with the "English disease, a love of Nature" (100), relates to the world through the medium of language, and always thinks in metaphor. "Everything . . . [is] something else" (101) for her. Struck by the difference in perceptions between her and the gypsies, Orlando continues to meditate on the nature of reality, and to entertain the possibility that the beauty of nature is a product of representation, mediated through language rather than "in things themselves" (102).

Orlando's change of sex means that, on her return to England, she is relegated to the sidelines of the literary world, pouring tea and observing the eighteenth-century wits. Although their wit is profoundly marked by misogyny, she learns from them that "the most important part of style . . . is the natural run of the voice in speaking" (149), a quality that cannot be recaptured by means of imitation but must be invented anew in each age.

In the nineteenth century, for the first time, Orlando finds herself profoundly out of tune with the spirit of the age. In keeping with the rampant fecundity of the time, the dominant literary style is one in which "sentences swelled, adjectives multiplied, lyrics became epics, and little trifles that had been essays a column long were now encyclopedias in ten or twenty volumes" (162). Literature, no longer "something errant, incalculable," has become "an elderly gentleman in a grey suit talking

about duchesses" (198)--none other than Nick Greene, significantly as long-lived as Orlando, and now "the most influential critic of the Victorian age" (195). Greene is as critical of his own contemporaries as he was in Elizabethan times, only now the golden age he holds in reverence is that of the Elizabethans he then denigrated.

The rigid separation of the sexes thwarts Orlando's androgynous spirit, obstructing her creativity. When she tries to work on "The Oak Tree," she finds herself writing "the most insipid verse she had ever read in her life" (168) and, finally, broken by the spirit of the age, unable to write at all. She is healed only by finding a husband. Paradoxically, marriage to Shel releases her from the rampant linguistic fecundity of the time into a new economy of style--at least in her communication with him, in which a word or two is sufficient to convey "a whole spiritual state of the utmost complexity" (199). Marriage enables Orlando finally to complete "The Oak Tree," the culmination of several centuries of literary labours.

Orlando's experience of the twentieth century is one of fragmentation, of "metaphorization," of the world: "Nothing is any longer one thing" (215). Because of the pace of modern life, "[n]othing [can] be seen whole or read from start to finish" (217), and modern technology makes it possible to "rise through the air . . . listen to voices in America . . . see men flying" (212) without knowing how these things are done.

Reality is no longer readily intelligible as it was in the other times through which Orlando has passed. Where once representational conventions lent coherence to experience, now, in the twentieth century, the semblance--or disguise--of a coherent world is no longer available.

Orlando's demonstration of the cultural and historical nature of representation undermines every possible foundation on which the coherence and unity of reality and of the self might be grounded. All are shown to be illusions. And not only is the need for illusions mocked, the destruction of illusion is itself parodied:

Illusions are to the soul what atmosphere is to the earth. Roll up that tender air and the plant dies, the colour fades. . . .
By the truth we are undone. Life is a dream. 'Tis waking that kills us. He who robs us of our dreams robs us of our life--(and so on for six pages if you will, but the style is tedious and may well be dropped). (143)

Subjecting even parody to parody, Orlando, as Rachel Bowlby points out, denies us even "the ultimate illusion of 'all is illusion'" (128).

Yet--with Woolf, there is always a "yet"--for all its mockery and its deconstructive impact, Orlando's parodic romp through English literature is also loving. Its parody involves not the outright rejection of the parodied object, but rather its exposure to ambivalent carnival laughter "in which mockery and triumph, praise and abuse are inseparably fused"

and "creative renewing changeability" is celebrated without being allowed "to congeal in one-sided seriousness" (Bakhtin 164). With his/her literary endeavours and involvement in the literary world extending over more than three centuries, Orlando embodies English literary history --embodies it, in the end, in a woman's body. Her transformation from poet as Elizabethan lover-adventurer to poet as twentieth-century matron shopping for boots and sardines constitutes an imaginative reappropriation for women of English literary history, a merging of "women's time" with the linear time of history. If Orlando is seen as another hypothetical "Shakespeare's sister," this represents her reconciliation with "the body of the people" (Room 66), a happier ending than that reserved for Judith.

Sex and Representation: Trappings and Tropings³ of Sexual Difference

Orlando's odyssey through literary history is also a sexual odyssey. Just as Orlando the writer "vacillate[s] between this style and that" (58), s/he vacillates between this sex and that. Two signifying systems, that of language and literature, and that of clothes, are being interrogated, and in both cases, similar questions are being asked about the relation of reality and appearance, identity and disguise. If Orlando's literary transformations show that the coherence of reality depends on cultural

and narrative conventions, her sexual transformations suggest that the coherence of the self depends on similar conventions, and that binary sexual identities, the ordering principle of human sexual arrangements, is just such a convention. Sex, it is suggested *is* style.

Orlando begins by introducing uncertainty with respect to that most fundamental of distinctions, the first fact that is registered when one person meets another and when an author presents a fictional character: sexual identity. The issue of sexual difference is raised in the opening line. Dismissing any "doubt about his sex," it introduces doubt where none existed; it further qualifies certainty about Orlando's sex with the statement that "the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (9). More radical doubt is introduced with respect to Sasha, who is presented as "a figure, which, whether boy's or woman's, for the loose tunic and trousers of the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex, filled [Orlando] with the highest curiosity" (25-26). In her case, certainty is deferred until we, with Orlando, have registered the impact of "the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person" (26).

Orlando and Sasha share this seductiveness that is not merely independent of (an established) sexual identity, but is enhanced by their epicene quality and the ambiguity of their garb. Orlando combines eyes like drenched violets and a tendency to blush the shade of a damask rose, with an abundance of "manly charm" (16) and an earthy streak

accounted for by the fact that a grandmother of his was a milkmaid. He beds many young girls and is loved by the aged Queen Elizabeth. Sasha, as she first appears to Orlando, has the legs, hands, carriage, the speed and vigour, of a boy, and the beauty and grace of a woman. Orlando senses in her "something hidden . . . something concealed" (33), and later, when she betrays him, he sees her as "mutable, fickle, . . . a deceiver" (45), the same elusiveness seen in a less favourable light.

Orlando's transformation into a woman takes place in a social context so unlike England that the change of sex has little impact on her life. Sexual difference is simply not an issue in gypsy society because, in contrast to the English, "the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men" (108). As for their dress, the same clothes are "worn indifferently by either sex" (98). This fanciful glimpse of a radically other system of sexual organization denaturalizes sexual difference and provides a telling comment on English society.

It is only when she returns to her own society and is made aware of "the penalties and privileges of her position" (108) that sexual difference begins to take on importance for Orlando. As a woman, she identifies fully with neither sex, but "seem[s] to vacillate" (112) from one to the other. She is "in a highly ambiguous condition" (118), awaiting the court decision that will eventually pronounce her female--and thus

unable to hold property in her own right but able only to pass it on to her male heirs. Gender, in a patriarchal society, is a legal fiction that serves to ensure the transmission of property among males.

Although she was not born a woman, Orlando becomes one: putting on the trappings of femininity and being treated as a woman, she finds herself conforming to the conventions of feminine behaviour, becoming modest, timorous, and vain. She is still sexually attracted to women rather than men; this is attributed to the fact that she has yet "to adapt [her]self to convention" (113). Eventually she adapts rather well to the conventions for both sexes, "chang[ing] frequently from one set of clothes to another" and "enjoy[ing] the love of both sexes equally" (155), thereby doubling her enjoyment of life. This, in effect, is Orlando's answer to the unnamed eighteenth-century gentleman who says, "Women have no desires, only affectations" (154).

A number of possible explanations are proposed of the "dilemma" of Orlando's sexual identity. The first suggestion is that "it is clothes that wear us and not we them" (132). However, a second, contrasting, view of the relation between clothes and sexual identity is immediately presented: "Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath" (133). The final explanation is much more complex: "Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the

male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above (133)." Although this explanation satisfies the biographer, it does little to stabilize definitions of sexual identity. At any given moment, "a woman's dress" may cover either a female or a male reality underneath; an unreliable indicator of sex, it is therefore a disguise. So much was already suggested in the presentation of both Orlando and Sasha; but this passage goes further, to suggest that "a woman's sex" (133) may similarly be a disguise. In other words, sex, far from being the immutable bedrock on which gender is constructed, is itself socially constructed. As Judith Butler has argued, the "production of sex as the prediscursive" is itself "the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*," and sex is "always already gender" (7; original emphasis).

Sexual difference, then, cannot be defined in biological terms. The "something hid deep beneath" (133) sexual identity is the ceaseless vacillation, the intermixing, of the sexes, in which the binary opposition of sexual identities gives way to the difference within every individual, the vast variety of potential selves, "of which there may be more than two thousand" (222). In this sense, there is no "something" beneath sexual identity, only the play of difference. Clothes "keep the male or female likeness" (133) only by suppressing this difference within, imposing a false unity. Archduke Harry cunningly manipulates the

relation of clothing and sexual identity whereas Orlando, we are told with fine irony, wears her disguises "rather more openly than . . . most people" (133).

Like clothing, language suppresses the difference within in favour of the difference between the sexes; thus language cannot adequately represent androgyny. This gives rise to difficulties for Orlando's biographer when he tries to describe Orlando's change of sex. We are told that "in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been" (97). The change did not alter "their identity," only "their future" (97)--and the pronouns we must use to refer to "them." This play with personal pronouns, beginning with the masculine "he," switching to the neutral "they," and ending, "for convention's sake" (97), with the feminine "she," neatly demonstrates how linguistic conventions determine sexual representation, and underlines the impossibility of representing the both/and of bisexuality in a linguistic system based on the either/or of sexual difference. The statement that "he was a woman" (97) may represent the triumph of Truth, but it is not intelligible. The biographer, unable to explain Orlando's transformation, provides only "the simple fact" that "Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since" (98). But Orlando's sexual identity is anything but a simple fact.

Narrative is equally dependent on fixed sexual identities. Seeking to penetrate the mystery of Orlando's sexual transformation, the biographer finds a hole in the manuscript. Unrepresentable in narrative, Orlando's sex-change creates a rupture in the text. Linguistic and narrative conventions allow and legitimate certain sexual subject-positions and exclude others from intelligibility. As the biographer, who claims to enjoy "immunity . . . from any sex whatever" complains, it is impossible "to give an exact and particular account of Orlando's life" because "her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive" (155).

Attempts to represent androgyny must of necessity use the language of sexual difference: a "mixture . . . of man and woman" or "a vacillation from one sex to the other" (133). The concept of androgyny makes evident a quality inherent in all representation, a quality described by C. S. Peirce in terms that resonate with those of this discussion:

The meaning of a representation can be nothing but a representation. In fact, it is nothing but the representation itself conceived as stripped of irrelevant clothing. But this clothing never can be completely stripped off; it is only changed for something more diaphanous. So there is an infinite regression here. (Quoted, Silverman 15)

Representation is rooted in the absence of the object, and the androgyne is the absent object *par excellence*. Just as *androgyny* must refer back to *male* and *female*, other representations, the "clothing" never can be completely stripped off sexual identity, because sexual identity itself *is* "clothing," a representation that covers another representation, or, in Woolf's terms, a disguise that conceals nothing but another disguise. All of us share Orlando's androgynous condition; sex is the mystery at the heart of identity.

In Orlando, sexual difference is always represented metonymically, in terms of stereotypes, emphasizing sexual identity *as* representation, constructed rather than essential. Orlando's womanly qualities are said to include tenderheartedness toward animals, a tendency to cry easily, a distaste for mathematics and an ignorance of geography, and a habit of hiding her manuscripts when interrupted, while her manly ones include boldness and vigour, a vast knowledge of farming, a large capacity for drink, and a taste for games of hazard. Sexual difference can *only* be spoken of in terms of conventions. Thus, in Turkey, "the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men" (108), but in eighteenth-century England, "[t]he difference between the sexes is . . . one of great profundity" (133).

The sexual spirit of the nineteenth century is as antipathetic to Orlando as its literary spirit. Love, birth, and death are "swaddled in a

variety of fine phrases" (161), and evasion and concealment are sedulously practised by both men and women. The sexes draw further and further apart and, at the same time, they are required to be indissolubly linked in marriage. The rampant fertility of the time makes the average woman's life "a succession of childbirths. . . . Thus the British Empire came into existence . . ." (161-62).

Orlando's union with Shel represents the realization of the androgynous ideal in the only way possible in the nineteenth century. Each immediately recognizes the androgynous nature of the other: "'You're a woman, Shel!' she cried. 'You're a man, Orlando!' he cried" (177). One page later, in further mockery of the arbitrariness of fixed sexual identities, Orlando is reflecting that she has become "a real woman, at last" (178), a conclusion confirmed shortly after by legal judgment. Marriage to Shel allows Orlando to satisfy the spirit of the age without actually submitting to it; like the traveller carrying contraband, the androgyne wearing woman's dress smuggles in the forbidden in the disguise of the ordinary.

Having followed Orlando's sexual journey through several periods, I would like now to digress briefly to address the view of certain critics (e.g. Marder, Rigney, Fleishman) who see her androgyny as a symbolic resolution in the individual psyche of an eternal opposition between masculine and feminine principles, the expression of a universal order

within which binary sexual identities are not abolished but preserved. Such a view nicely demonstrates the function of myth in naturalizing ideology, imputing to representations a fixed, eternal character. While correctly stressing the centrality of the myth of the androgyne in Orlando, it completely ignores Orlando's strong demythologizing impulse. My reading of Orlando emphasizes the latter.

The world of myth, as Northrop Frye informs us, is "a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body" (136). But Orlando's foregrounding of metaphor denaturalizes myth, and Orlando has no "single body," only an unending succession of disguises. Orlando's androgyny is not resolution but vacillation, a "whirligig state" (112) in which she is never identical to herself. Rather than a mythic fusion of genders, Orlando's androgyny is "a metonymic confusion of genders" (Minow-Pinkney 122), resisting any definition of sexual identity other than the purely contextual and contingent.

The metaphoric nature of language gives it an inexhaustible propensity for the production of myth. For this reason, according to Barthes, the only effective way to challenge a myth is from the inside, by creating an artificial myth, or counter-myth, that demystifies it through parody or mimicry, and robs it of its power (222-24). I would suggest that Orlando's recreation of the myth of the androgyne is just such a

counter-myth, one that, with its parodic "sidelong glance . . . full of subtlety, even of suspicion" (Woolf, Orlando 132), robs the mythology of fixed sexual identity of its power.

Orlando's marriage, for example, may be seen as a mocking rewriting of the Grail legend. Before meeting Shel, Orlando is "broken," barren as a creative artist, lame in the left foot; and her first words to him are "I'm dead, sir" (176). Their marriage is a parodic reunification of male and female principles, resulting in a renewal of life for Orlando, and the restoration of her fertility as an artist and as a woman. Aside from the tone, what weights all this toward parody is in large measure the caricatural description of Shel: "this boy . . . sucking peppermints" (178), "making models out of snail shells in the grass" (183), repetitively engaged in "the most desperate and splendid of adventures--which is to voyage round Cape Horn in the teeth of a gale" (177-78), and finally, "grown a fine sea captain, hale, fresh-coloured, and alert" (232). One could hardly imagine a more deflating image of "the male principle." This is reinforced by his association, at the end, with the wild goose which replaces "Love, the Bird of Paradise" and "Lust the Vulture," the two aspects of "double-faced . . . Love" (82), to become the parodic object of Orlando's erotic quest.

Orlando's sexual odyssey culminates in the birth of her son. This event is introduced by a two-page salute to "natural desire! . . .

happiness! divine happiness! and pleasure of all sorts" (207), in which fertility is no longer associated with the rampant undistinguished fecundity that has given rise to evasion and concealment, and to the British Empire itself, but rather with the disruptive force of desire that "interrupts and confounds the tapping of typewriters and filing of letters and forging of links and chains binding the Empire together" (208). The passage is a joyous jumble of images of fertile nature, snatches of singsong rhythm and rhyme, parodic allusions, and self-mockery, an unsettling mix of poetry, burlesque, and nonsense. It constitutes a semiotic interlude in which desire briefly surfaces. In contrast to the static image of androgyny as mythic resolution, here Orlando's androgynous difference ruptures language, shatters meaning, and loosens the bonds of the symbolic.

Near the end of the passage, however, there is a suggestion of a darker vision in "those dreams . . . which splinter the whole and tear us asunder and wound us and split us apart in the night when we would sleep." But this vision is explicitly rejected, and "floods back refluent like a tide, the red, thick stream of life again; bubbling, dripping" That this is nothing less than a "transition from death to life" (208) is emphasized in a parenthetical remark. Whereas, until now, we have seen mainly the laughing face of Orlando's androgyny, this vision reveals its other face, the self in vacillation as splintered, torn, wounded, in danger

of annihilation. This face is increasingly prominent in the final section of Orlando.

The twentieth century's fragmentation of the external world is accompanied by a "chopping up small of identity" which is likened to death (217). The vacillation of the selves that live within Orlando threatens to turn into disintegration. She is able to become "what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self" (222) only when she returns to her ancestral home, re-establishing her link with her origins and restoring her sense of continuity. Only "because the past shelters us on one side and the future on another," we are told, are we able to "survive the shock" (211) of the present moment. Without the discursively produced continuum of past-present-future and the continuous "I" it entails, the experience of the present moment is nothing but a barrage of sensory impressions and associations, frightening and unintelligible. But as Bowlby points out, the present is also, as the point from which we construct the past, necessarily a moment of division, separation (143); the intelligibility of reality comes at the cost of self-division.

The only alternative to this self-division is disintegration, even psychosis. Orlando has one such experience when she gets a sight of the gardener's thumb, which lacks a fingernail, and feels revulsion so extreme that it threatens to swamp the boundary between subject and object, engulfing her. This "terror" of the present is explained by the fact

that there is, paradoxically, "something . . . always absent from the present" (227). It is this absence, I would suggest, that we attempt to fill through language.

Language offers that "something which . . . is as a shadow without substance or quality of its own, yet has the power to change whatever it adds itself to," giving it beauty, making it "tolerable, comprehensible" (227). Yet, along with its capacity to confer meaning, language also has a disturbing power to disperse meaning, freeing the difference within things, making "everything . . . partly something else" (228). The absence at the heart of presence is the reason why Orlando's quest for "the thing itself" in literature and in love can only be a wild-goose chase.

Desire

The pursuit of love, as of literature, "substitute[s] a phantom for reality" (52), yielding disguises, metaphors, never the thing itself. Sasha is Orlando's first experience of desire, of difference, of frustration both in writing and in love. Comparing her to "the green flame . . . hidden in the emerald," he vows to "chase the flame, dive for the gem" (33), but words always fail to capture her essence. Orlando's literary and erotic quest, and the biographer's--and the reader's--quest for the truth of Orlando's sexual identity, are driven by desire. This desire is

characterized by the absence of its object: ". . . Heaven has mercifully decreed that the secrets of all hearts are hidden so that we are lured on forever to suspect something, perhaps, that does not exist; still . . . we see blaze up and salute the splendid fulfillment of natural desires . . ." (207).

Nowhere is language less able to tell the truth than about love and sex. Like Apollo, the god of poetry, in eternal pursuit of the unattainable Daphne in the arras in Orlando's house, literature is in constant pursuit of the truth of sexuality. This eternal round of poetry and desire is the "frail indomitable heart" of Orlando's house (224), and of the English literary tradition of which the house is the emblem. However, as Barbara Johnson points out:

. . . it is not simply a question of literature's ability to say or not to say the truth of sexuality. For from the moment literature begins to try to set things straight on that score, literature itself becomes inextricable from the sexuality it seeks to comprehend. It is not the life of sexuality that literature cannot capture; it is literature that inhabits the very heart of what makes sexuality problematic for us speaking animals. (13)

This makes for what Jane Gallop, in a gloss on this passage, calls "the inescapable metaphoricity of the body" ("Writing" 289).

"What is Love?" is, for Orlando, "the first question," ready to "hustle Books or Metaphors or What one lives for into the margin, there to wait till they saw their chance to rush into the field again" (70). Love and literature continually displace one another at the centre and margins, their vacillation fuelled by the energy of desire. For Woolf, as for Jane Gallop, "Not only is literature at the heart of sexual difference, but sexual difference is at the heart of literature . . ." ("Writing" 289).

This is why the woman's body is never *mere* metaphor for Woolf, why her concern for "woman" does not eclipse her concern for the physical bodies of real women. Refusing to define female "natural desire" (208), Woolf mocks the limiting definitions put forward by "male novelists . . . --and who, after all, speak with greater authority?" (190), calling instead for "more forms and stranger" (208). Finally, "it's ecstasy that matters," regardless of "what nonsense it might make, or what dislocation it might inflict on the narrative" (203).

In Orlando, as in A Room, Woolf's androgyny is weighted toward the female; this is why sexual difference is emphasized even while any definition of it beyond the conventional is rejected. In describing Orlando's androgyny as a "whirligig state" (112), Woolf invokes this word's long history of feminine associations. The OED defines "whirligig" as a "fickle, inconstant, giddy, or flighty person," and lest we miss the gender coding, cites as one illustration the following: "Woman is

the Whirly-Gig [sic] of Nature; she changes so often and swiftly."

Orlando rescues this stereotype of feminine fickleness from disrepute and revalorizes it as the disruptive, life-giving difference within, the source of the human capacity for infinite variation.

I began with the question of the sexual difference in values and the transfer from life to fiction. Orlando's play with reality and appearance, life and literature, identity and difference demonstrates that "life" and sexual difference are themselves fictions, meanings constructed in narrative rather than given. At the same time, by envisioning a new female subjectivity in which sexual difference is no longer a burden imposed on women but a measure of human freedom and creativity, Orlando constructs a *different* relation of women to language, literature and history, one in which they are no longer the victims but share in the creation of these necessary fictions.

Conclusion: Changing the Subject:

Reading Wollstonecraft and Woolf with Julia Kristeva

Julia Kristeva's contemporary theory of gender and culture focuses on the female speaking and writing subject and accords a privileged place to women's writing. The concepts of sexual equality and difference are central to Kristeva's analysis. She provides a logical and chronological framework that places equality and difference in dynamic relation, both in the individual subject and in the history of feminism. In this conclusion, I will first examine Kristeva's account of the development of feminism in her essay "Women's Time," and then look at the writing of Wollstonecraft and Woolf in the context of this theory.

Kristeva divides the history of feminism into three "generations," "phases" (33), or "attitudes" (51), each of which corresponds to a specific relationship of the female subject to language and time. She sees the demand for sexual equality as the founding moment of feminism, and equality feminism as the first generation. Arising concurrently with industrial capitalism, this phase is one in which women's demands are related to "the *production* of material goods (i.e., the domain of the economy and of the human relationships it implies, politics, etc.)" (32; original emphasis). With its goal of women's insertion

into politics and history, it relies on a linear temporality. It affirms the referential function of language and the subject's ability to know the world and to interact with it.

Although she is often seen as an opponent of equality feminism, Kristeva acknowledges that later feminisms "can only be conceived of . . . as a succession, as a progression in the accomplishment of the initial program mapped out by its founders." She recognizes the benefits equality feminism has achieved "and continue[s] to achieve" for women in terms of economic and political equality with men, and considers its effects "even more important than those of the Industrial Revolution" (37).

At the same time, Kristeva sees the cost of equality feminism as the rejection of "the attributes traditionally considered feminine or maternal insofar as they are deemed incompatible" (37) with equality, and she refuses simply to dismiss these attributes as ideological and reactionary. Although first-generation feminism proves capable, according to Kristeva, of meeting three of women's four main egalitarian demands, those for economic, political, and occupational equality with men, it is unable to meet the demand for sexual equality, in the specific sense of equal rights to the full and free exercise of sexuality.

It is in part in response to the limitations of equality feminism that the second generation of feminism has arisen. Kristeva places it in post-

1968 western Europe, but her description applies equally well to North American cultural feminism. Whereas equality feminism focuses on women's role in production, this second generation is concerned with "their role in the mode of reproduction and its representations" (33). In this phase, then, feminism is concerned with sexual difference, "which is at once biological, physiological, and relative to reproduction [and] is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which *is* the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language, and meaning" (39; original emphasis). The sociosymbolic contract, "far from being that of equal men, is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship" (41) of women to men. Women are left out of this contract which establishes language as the fundamental social bond, and subjected to it against their will.

Faced with this inseparable conjunction of the sexual and the symbolic, feminists of the second generation aim to withdraw their energies from the perpetuation of the sociosymbolic contract. They demand the recognition of "an irreducible identity without equal in the opposite sex" and seek to "give a language to the intra-subjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past" (37). This feminism situates itself outside the linear time of history, in the cyclical time of women's bodily rhythms or the monumental time of "the eternal feminine," more oriented to spatiality than to temporality.

For Kristeva, this emphasis on female difference or specificity offers both dangers and possibilities. One danger is that it may lead to a complete retreat from the symbolic order, history, and language. On the individual psychic level, this results in mutism, hysteria, psychosis. On the collective level, it may take the form of a quest for transcendence through a kind of secular religion, turning its back on social problems and ready to support all status quos. Another danger Kristeva warns of is that, since nothing in this feminism is "fundamentally incompatible with 'masculine' values" (35), it risks becoming an inverted sexism, and thus producing "a simulacrum of the combated society" (46).

The promise of specificity feminism, for Kristeva, is that it opens the possibility of a third phase of feminism in which entry into the symbolic order is combined with the emphasis on sexual difference, something she "strongly advocate[s]" (51). Feminism in this third phase affirms the female consciousness that results from women's status as objects or outsiders, while demanding the right to give expression to this "irreducible difference" (38) through participation *as subjects* in language and history.

At the present time, the third phase of feminism exists primarily as a literary phenomenon. For Kristeva, literature is the privileged manifestation of women's desire for affirmation, their "desire [for] a more flexible and free discourse, one able to name what has thus far never

been an object of circulation in the community: the enigmas of the body, the dreams, secret joys, shames, hatreds of the second sex" (50).

Writing allows women to make of language "a game, a space of fantasy and pleasure" rather than remain its sacrificial victims (49).

Kristeva makes the point that women's "identification [through writing] with the potency of the imaginary is not only an identification, an imaginary potency" (49); women's writing has real transformative power. Women's entry into the symbolic order as speaking and writing subjects has the potential to change the nature of the sociosymbolic contract, to lead to a more equitable sharing of its burden. While careful not to conflate aesthetic practice and political resistance, Kristeva sees women's writing as capable of bringing a critical negativity to bear on the subject of language and ideology, releasing repressed or unrealized possibilities that may contribute to the transformation of present social conditions. Women's writing is for her, as described by Thomas Foster, "a prefigurative practice that both exists in the 'Now' and belongs to a different future" (223), partaking of both monumental time and the linearity of history.

In the third phase of feminism, difference is internalized, so that the limiting "belief in Woman, Her power, Her writing" is replaced by a recognition of "the singularity of each woman, and beyond this, her multiplicities, her plural languages" (51). This internalization or

"demassification" (52) of difference is the basis of a new female subjectivity, one in which the subject is always in process, oscillating between identity and negativity, power and the refusal of power, equality and difference. The sway of identity is never secure; it is constantly under siege.

Kristeva associates the difference within, the power of negativity, with the semiotic, the psychic trace of the relationship with the mother before the accession to language and subjectivity. The semiotic makes itself felt in those aspects of language that point beyond the constraints of symbolic norms, unsettling and renewing meanings. Since the semiotic can only find articulation through the symbolic, there is for Kristeva, as Jacqueline Rose points out (21), no question of the semiotic "overthrowing" the symbolic, only of the destabilization and shifting of boundaries between the two. Furthermore, the semiotic cannot be made the basis for a new female or feminist identity; to do so would be to turn the concept upside-down, since the very nature of the semiotic is its negativity, its power to disrupt identity (Rose 29).

Kristeva's description of the dynamics of the "subject-in-process" of the third phase of feminism also applies to the male subject. But the woman is the exemplary Kristevan subject, because women are "more vulnerable within the symbolic order" (47) due to their greater difficulty in separating from their mothers. Furthermore, as we have seen, historical!

factors today contribute to strengthening the appeal of female specificity, further weakening the hold of the symbolic on women. Ultimately, however, "the very dichotomy man/woman . . . may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*" (51; original emphasis).

Kristeva makes it clear that, as well as being chronological, the generations of feminism each represent "a *signifying space*, a both corporeal and desiring mental space" that goes beyond a specific time, and she allows for the possibility of "the *parallel* existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other" (51; original emphasis). Kristeva's feminism, then, is an ongoing dialogue between equality and difference, in which identification with the symbolic order, language, and history continually faces the disturbing, and renewing, challenge of the irreducible difference. In this we may recognize her female subject writ large.

As Foster points out, Kristeva's model follows both a dialectical trajectory and a deconstructive one, combining the linearity of dialectic with the repetitive, cyclic character of deconstruction (231). The third phase represents both a synthesis and a deconstruction of the two previous phases in a process that modifies both dialectic and deconstruction. Instead of affirming a final unity, this model is one in which all identity is seen ultimately to "disintegrate in its very nucleus" (52), yet, at the same time, subjectivity does not simply dissolve in the

play of difference but emerges as capable of resistance, creativity, and ethical thought and action.

Looking at Mary Wollstonecraft in the light of Kristeva's theory, we can immediately place her in feminism's first generation. One of the founding mothers, she was instrumental in shaping the terms of equality feminism. We may also read in both A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman the difficulties of equality feminism, difficulties that, as we have seen, centre on sexual difference.

For all Wollstonecraft's egalitarianism, it is the submerged voice of sexual difference in her work that speaks to many feminists today as the truly radical voice of her feminism. This has more to do with our own vantage point two centuries after she articulated her equality feminism than with any failure on Wollstonecraft's part. Since she wrote, bourgeois individualism has become the dominant discourse of our society, and equality, while still leaving something to be desired in the application, has become the reigning ideology. Women enjoy formal equality with men, and many of the goals envisioned by Wollstonecraft have been attained. It is precisely this situation that allows us to evaluate the costs and conditions of equality. Thus we are able today to read the suppressed voice of female difference in Wollstonecraft's work as exposing the material and symbolic conditions of the sexual equality she endorsed.

In this light, The Rights and The Wrongs provide evidence of how maintaining the rationality of the public sphere of political responsibility and philosophical discourse necessitates the banishment of need and desire, their construction as female, and their containment in the private sphere. In The Rights, as we have seen, this results in the exclusion of femininity from public life, and its suppression in the text. The Wrongs further exposes the material and symbolic boundaries that divide the world into a male public space and a female domestic space, defining and confining women as bearers and rearers of children while denying them control over their own sexuality and the lives of their children. The Wrongs' failure to reconcile women's sexual and maternal fulfillment with their political liberation demonstrates equality feminism's inability to challenge these boundaries and provide a vision of women's sexual liberation. But by foregrounding women's sexual and maternal feelings, and their oppression and exploitation in love, marriage, and motherhood, The Wrongs also suggests the possibility of another feminism, one predicated on difference rather than equality.

The inability of Wollstonecraft's egalitarianism to expel sexual difference, its persistence as an unsettling presence in her writing, reveals a hidden contradiction in equality theory. The placing of equality and difference in antithetical relation obscures the way sexual difference functions within equality theory as the internal condition of equality itself.

In other words, egalitarianism requires difference, defined as female, as the repository of all it rejects. To recognize this is to see sexual equality and difference no longer as a fixed opposition but as forces in constant interaction in both history and theory.

My readings of A Room of One's Own and Orlando bring Woolf into focus as a third-generation feminist *avant la lettre*. Writing a century and a half after Wollstonecraft, she is sharply aware of the failings of equality. Yet, for all her insistence on female specificity, she avoids the temptation of retreat from the symbolic order as well as the construction of a female identity that simply reproduces the unitary rigidity of male identity. The question of women's relation to the symbolic order is precisely what she is grappling with in these works, challenging notions of sexual identity and striving to redefine women's connection to language, literature, and history. Both A Room and Orlando offer a vision of a new female subjectivity in which the weight of sexual difference is no longer carried by women alone but equitably shared, a source of freedom and creative potential.

Kristeva herself in "Women's Time" is implicitly speaking as a feminist of the third generation, of course, and Woolf's views to a remarkable extent anticipate her theoretical formulations. Like Kristeva, Woolf valorizes women's status as outsiders, and privileges the expression of this female difference through the serious play of writing.

As we have seen in A Room, she shares the view that women's writing is central not only to women's continuing development but also to the evolution of *human* culture. She sees the expression of women's irreducible difference as having the power to burst the "links and chains binding the Empire together" (Orlando 208), to threaten, and to revitalize, the very basis of our civilization.

Woolf is an exemplary third-generation feminist in her refusal of simplistic equality as well as simplistic specificity. In the idea of a room of women's own, a signifying space removed from the temporality of history, we recognize the pull of "the eternal feminine," but this pull is countered by the demand for women's entry into language, literature, and history. Woolf insists both on binary sexual difference and on the ultimately fictive (Kristeva would say "metaphysical") nature of such difference. As we have seen in both A Room and Orlando, Woolf, like Kristeva, favours the release of difference from the fixed opposition of male/female, the flowering of the difference within that is obscured by the sole emphasis on the difference between the sexes. She refuses to define this difference, for to do so would be to misconstrue what is essentially a negative, disruptive force as something positive; instead she emphasizes the multiplicity of female selves in the world and within each woman. For her, finally, as for Kristeva, "two sexes are quite inadequate" (A Room 87). Orlando's journey even follows a similar

trajectory to that of Kristeva's subject of feminism, beginning in complete identification with the male agent of literature and history, seeing the emergence of the difference within, and culminating in the "fluid and free subjectivity" of a self in perpetual vacillation and renewal (Kristeva, "Women's Time" 51).

Woolf also shares with Kristeva a sharp awareness of the tenuousness of individual identity and of the dangers attendant on the loss of identity. As we have seen in Orlando, the "chopping up small of identity" involves the threat of death (217); language is the fragile but necessary protection against psychotic disintegration, and linear time, the "narrow plank of the present" is the only way over the "raging torrent" of pure difference within (211).

Woolf's perception, in A Room, that women are at once within and outside patriarchal culture anticipates Kristeva's view of women as participating in both the psychic economy of equality and that of difference. Woolf is acutely aware of the necessity, and the difficulty, of balancing the contradictory demands of these two positions. Equally applicable to Woolf's views is Spivak's observation that the Kristevan model contains "an implicit double program for women . . . : *against* sexism, . . . and *for* feminism," the former involving action against women's oppression and the latter involving the transformation of consciousness ("French Feminism" 170; original emphasis). I would say

that Woolf is more successful in adhering to the difficult demands of this double program than Kristeva herself is. For all Woolf's commitment to the (metaphoric) feminine, she never loses sight of the physical, historical, political--and, yes, written--bodies of women.

This is not the place for exhaustive analysis or criticism of Kristeva's views; I would, however, like to conclude with a few comments on the value of her theory as a context in which to look at literary feminism, my project in this thesis. The historical account of feminism in "Women's Time" makes it possible to relate women's writing to the development of female subjectivity and to women's collective progress. It destabilizes the opposition between equality and difference, and lets us see them as psychic and historical forces in dynamic interdependent relation. The pull of difference is balanced by a recognition of the necessity for participation as equals in the symbolic order--a symbolic order transformed by this very participation. Allowing for the coexistence of different temporalities in the world and in the self, Kristeva's model recognizes that the tension between affirmative positivity and critical negativity in feminist theory and politics is the enabling condition of feminism. It lets us valorize *both* equality and difference, and acknowledge the enduring relevance of *both* Wollstonecraft and Woolf. It lets us see the evolution of feminism and of the female subject as an ongoing process in which their meanings are not

given in advance but are constantly being created by our own theoretical and political activity.

Notes

¹ In the Translator's Introduction to Jacques Derrida's

Dissemination, Barbara Johnson provides the following explanation:

The logic of the supplement wrenches apart the neatness of the metaphysical binary oppositions. Instead of "A is opposed to B" we have "B is both added to A and replaces A." A and B are no longer opposed, nor are they equivalent. Indeed, they are no longer even equivalent to themselves. They are their own difference from themselves. (Quoted, Meese 80)

² My analysis here differs slightly from that of Jacobus in that she emphasizes the destabilizing effect of feminist energy on the text whereas my emphasis is on the fact of feminist anger. Nor do I mean to suggest that feminist anger is the only form of feminist energy.

³ This wonderful expression comes from Jane Moore (162).

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