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Talking with Antigone

by

m.c. schraefel
University of Winnipeg, 1986
University of Victoria, 1989

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Interdisciplinary

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

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Talking with Antigone

by m.c. schraefel

Supervisor: Dr. W.W. Wadge

Abstract

This project considers the role of conversation in writing by women, specifically, the role of conversational spaces for women's construction of self within the symbolic. It does this through a consideration of narrative structures, modeled by Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. It also points towards how these concerns are situated within the latest textual media, the Internet. It then presents a model of textual reproduction and representation for online texts informed by the preceding discussions.

Women in patriarchy can never presume a listener. Consequently, women's textual productions very often foreground issues of "am I being heard, can I speak?" The lack of consideration in Eurocentric male texts/theories of whether or not a speaker is heard is significant in its absence from any canonical literary theoretical or critical model. By foregrounding conversation both as an issue specific to women's writing, and as a narrative structure particular to women's writing, this work provides a new site for pedagogical and critical consideration of writing by women. The chapters in this dissertation based on *Wuthering Heights* and *To the Lighthouse* read these novels from that site.

Based on the above conversational theory, this thesis provides an historical context and feminist perspective through which to read women's relationship to the Net as another textual medium in which women are foregrounding issues around voice, who can be heard and how. Historically women have been erased from contributions to computing. This erasure continues in patterns of text based identity construction in online interaction, where, again, the silencing of women's voices is of critical moment.

To address this erasure, this dissertation presents the constructions of a new text form, ConTexts (conversational texts), which brings feminist perspectives to engineering practices. *Conversational texts* differ from standard writing practice and current web document delivery in two ways. First, ConTexts are polyolithic rather than monolithic. That is, a document is constructed only as the product of an exchange with a user/reader which results in the combination of appropriate text *chunks* into a new document. Current document models simply present prefabricated, monolithic units written for a single audience. Second, ConTexts incorporate intensional and AI programming, allowing the text delivery system to become involved in the exchange with the user to process user input and to create dynamic content (different versions of the text) which results from that exchange.

Revising the presentation of texts as interactive and polyolithic rather than prefabricated and monolithic is an insight located in this dissertation, derived from feminist study of conversation as narrative strategy.

The versioning of texts according to user requests is situated and described within intensional logic programming and demand driven dataflow models. Intensional logic provides a framework and semantics for describing versions in terms of a version space and possible worlds. In this dissertation, Intensional HTML is used to demonstrate a preliminary form of conversational texts because it allows versions of texts to be delivered through standard web browsers.

That conversation is a formative issue in writing by women is a unique contribution of this thesis to feminist literary practice and is the organizing principle of this dissertation. That real conversation is only an issue in women's writing is the main insight of this work. This dissertation presents the blending of feminist theory with feminist engineering practice. Its observations and implementation designs point to new directions in both text reading and creating practices.

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Every gig I ever played with *monica schraefel and her (very) hungry band* throughout the post-comp zone.

The last tree I planted, the last unit I shaved, five centimeters at a one by one time, for their trains that move slowly through the mountains when they should go fast, and fast when they should go slowly through the prairies, tu sais, b?

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Somer Brodribb, for
her invaluable insights throughout this work,
her unflagging generosity
all the named and unnamed in between the
listening listening
and the
responding responding

Dedication

0000: 54 6F 20 6D 65 0D 0D 0D 66 6F 72 0D 61 6C 6C 20
0010: 74 68 65 20 74 72 65 65 73 20 69 20 65 76 65 72
0020: 20 70 6C 61 6E 74 65 64 2C 20 0D 61 6C 6C 20 74
0030: 68 65 20 73 6F 6E 67 73 20 69 20 65 76 65 72 20
0040: 73 61 6E 67 2C 20 0D 61 6C 6C 20 74 68 65 20 70
0050: 61 70 65 72 73 20 69 20 67 72 61 64 65 64 2C 20
0060: 0D 61 6C 6C 20 74 68 65 20 64 65 6C 61 79 73 20
0070: 77 65 20 62 6F 72 65 2C 20 0D 61 6C 6C 20 74 68
0080: 65 20 74 72 65 6D 65 6E 64 6F 75 73 20 73 74 75
0090: 70 69 64 6E 65 73 73 20 6F 66 20 74 68 69 73 20
00A0: 70 72 6F 63 65 73 73 20 0D 74 68 61 74 20 69 74
00B0: 20 74 6F 6F 6B 20 74 6F 20 67 65 74 20 68 65 72
00C0: 65 0D 74 6F 20 74 68 69 73 20 6D 6F 6D 65 6E 74
00D0: 20 2D 2D 0D 0D 0D 74 68 69 73 20 64 69 73 20 69
00E0: 73 20 66 6F 72 20 6D 65 2E 20 0D 0D 6E 6F 20 61
00F0: 70 70 6F 6C 6F 67 69 65 73 2E 0D 0D 69 74 20 69

0100: 73 20 61 63 63 6F 6D 70 6C 69 73 68 65 64 2E 0D

*in memory of
Patricia Köster
who said "yes"
and meant it.*

Preface

Talking with Antigone

The Noose:

A lot of women end up dead in fiction. Whether in work by men or by women, a significant number of significant women end up dead. In writing by women, however, these characters don't throw themselves, Ana Karenina style, under the wheels of a train for the love of a man or lack thereof. Rather, they die or are killed off for interpreting themselves within their world as something other than what the Law allows. They end up dead because they consciously or unconsciously insist that their alternative interpretation of the Law be heard. When that interpretation is suppressed (which is often), those women die of a frustrated mind.

Sophocle's hero Antigone very visibly embodies the fate of women characters whose reinterpretation of the Law challenges the status quo: condemned to death by asphyxiation, she hangs herself in her tomb. Neither the gods nor the playwright *ex machina* to rescue Antigone before she feels the noose tighten around her neck. They, too, condemn Antigone to death, not because she breaks a king's prescription against burial but because she attempts to become an actant within her world. In her appeal before the king to a higher, older religious law that demands burial, she blasphemes an even greater cultural Law that forbids women to act as interpreters of the Law. Thus, like those other fictive women – Shakespeare's sister, Mary Wollstonecraft's Maria, Brontë's wife of the wild Sargasso Sea, Eliot's women of *Adam Bede* and of course, Cathy of *Wuthering Heights*, Antigone, too, gets holed up and shut up and ends up dead.

Ours is not a culture that listens. In our culture, even though justice is blind, Truth is still discovered in Observation. We *Veni Vidi Vici* in order, thereby, *to Boldly Go*. In the Eurocentric, male epistemological tradition, from Plato to Nietzsche, through Derrida

and Lyotard. to listen is to be seduced by the Siren's song. Stay at a Nietzschean *dis-tanz* out of the voice's way is the patriarchal line. Such a stand is very convenient for dismissing/outlawing the arguments and alternative interpretations/perspectives of the Law that are put forward by those in a less privileged position in the patriarchal hierarchy.

The Suspension:

Antigone's suicide, significantly, takes place off stage. Her death is spoken for. The narrative guides us to observe her corpse hanging rather than to explore her rationale for the act. Indeed, once she is out of the way, the last quarter of the play focuses on Creon with hardly a mention of Antigone.

This dissertation, however, is framed within that offstage moment, within the cave. Rather than attempt to speak for Antigone's suicide, I wish to suspend it. Women's writing, online and off, often initiates such moments of suspension. These moments offer us the potential to imagine an alternative sense of self and desire, through these temporary suspensions of the Law, than those prescribed for us by the Law. Within these moments, and only within them in women's writing, does *real* conversation/understanding between us take place.

Talking with Antigone

For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth.

And it is never without fear - of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. It is very good for establishing perspective.

And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own. For instance, 'I can't possibly teach Black women's writing - their experience is so different from mine.' Yet how many years have you spent teaching Plato and Shakespeare and Proust? Or another, 'She's a white woman and what could she possibly have to say to me?' Or, 'She's a lesbian, what would my husband say, or my chairman?' Or again, 'This woman writes of her sons and I have no children.' And all the other endless ways in which we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other.

We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us. The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

Audrey Lorde,

"Transforming Silence into Action" *Sister Outsider*, 44

Chapter One

Introductions

Our silence will not protect us. That is the lasting message Audrey Lorde delivered to the 1978 Modern Language Association's "Lesbians and Literature" panel in 1978 in "Transforming Silence into Action." Her presentation speaks of the need for women of all backgrounds to speak of our experiences to others and among ourselves.

Based on Lorde's admonition for women to speak our identities from our various positions within patriarchy, this project attempts to construct an understanding of the conversational spaces women do represent in both our fictional and theoretical writing, and how these spaces impact our constructions of identity. Conversation, speaking with another, the desire to be heard, are feminist women's issues. This dissertation identifies how these spaces reflect women's relations to language, the law and the symbolic. We will see how these conversational spaces/conversational moments act as points of resistance to and difference from patriarchal interests which construct the multiplicity of women's voices into silence. From this understanding – that our textual productions demonstrate our desire to be heard – I then present a potentially very new way of representing text, a potentially new genre, that is based on this research and privileges conversational modes of discourse.

This is an interdisciplinary project that starts as a review of current phallogocentric trends in literary theory (a reasonable place to start for a project concerned with women's resistance writing). In reaction against this theory, the dissertation presents two feminist readings of well known novels. It then moves into a discussion of the internet as the latest site for women's textual exchanges, and what the implications for women's construction of space are there. The project finishes with a discussion of the implementation of a conversational interface to intensional texts. This project blends feminist literary theory with

intentional programming. More specifically, this dissertation brings feminist perspectives on the construction of subjectivity to software engineering projects that serve identity construction.

The newest textual medium, the site of the new literacy, is the Internet. The Net is a highly engendered space that needs a feminist critique not only of its current applications but of those in the planning stages. There is a great deal of socialist feminist critique of industry, but there is not nearly as much feminist critique of software systems design, or explicitly feminist-informed application design. This project is a first step towards both, grounded in feminist theory in general, and feminist literary theory in particular.

In Chapter Two, I define the critical part of the project specifically in terms of its resistance to phallogentric constructions of the symbolic. In this chapter I define the key theoretical terms used throughout the dissertation. I point to the main feminist arguments I will use throughout the thesis that challenge phallogentric readings of the symbolic in order to consider specifically how women's writing constructs relations to language and the law, and how what I call *real conversation* becomes a critical space for women's articulation of agency. In the chapters that follow, I develop these feminist positions more fully.

In Chapter Three, Language and the Law: Homonological Difference, I present a reading of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* that develops the relationship of *what can be heard* to the Law's interests as expressed through action on property rights. This reading presents the first example of *conversational moments* that temporarily suspend the Law's ability to restrict women's articulation of difference from being heard.

In Chapter Four, Disparity among Women: Resisting the Semiotic, I present a reading of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* that considers how not only can women *not* articulate difference from terms defined by the Law, we are theoretically constructed as outside language, and so therefore, cannot speak. Woolf's text clearly resists these interpretations of women as silenced before the phallus. Her novel also points to how differences among women keep women from recognizing each other and speaking with each other, and thereby disrupting patriarchy's injunctions against our collaborations.

In Chapter Five, Digital Women, I look at the Net as the next space for women's textual productions. By drawing on women's research of women's experiences online, specifically in relation to online identity construction, I consider how the Net is a very dangerous place if one is a woman, how it is openly hostile to women's voices which articulate a subjectivity different from the circulating stereotypes. I also consider how we may be able to make it more our space so our voices can be heard and flourish there.

In Chapter Six, ConTexts, I propose a new genre for those textual productions: ConTexts, online dynamic documents that are based on consideration of conversational spaces constructed in women's writing. I situate this text concept within a framework of possible conversational texts, and then describe the actual implementation design for one such type of online, ConText.

In the conclusion, I point to where this project contributes to both feminist literary theory, feminist psycho-sociological discussions of women and Net culture, and to the development of intensional programming applications for distributed, networked computing through feminist approaches to systems and human interface design.

Saying that, as Hyman Roth says in *the Godfather, Part Two*, after passing out birthday cake to his associates while telling them what parts of his empire they will inherit, "So. Enjoy"

When the Bookstore was founded in 1975, women expected to find that sexual difference expressed itself in special linguistic forms in the writing of female authors. In 1980, this expectation became a need and a pressing demand. But as far as linguistic forms were concerned, they were no longer thought of in any special way-except that we thought women writers could help us in one way or another. Their production did not interest us as an example of women's contribution to human culture. It interested us, or rather we needed it, if it served to signify what human culture does not know about the difference in being a woman. It was the most difficult measure, for which we had no criteria except our need to find what we needed. What it was exactly, we could not know then, because what was missing was a "language," that is, a symbolic structure of mediation. And that had to be found before we could know, along with the answer, the content of the question itself.

This situation gave rise to a procedure which would have to be called wild had it not already been tested in our politics. Literary texts were treated as we treated our own words, that is, as parts of an enigma to be investigated by taking them apart and putting them back together in different ways along with nonwords: places, facts, feelings. The result of this total experimentalism was to wipe out the boundaries between life and literature. Women novelists, their biographies, their fictional characters, and we ourselves exchanged roles, giving birth to new, strange novels: we kept searching for the right combination, the one which would give us the answer and reveal the meaning of the question. In the end, we found it.

...

We wanted a language to signify the unspeakable of gendered difference, and the first words we found served to name the "Injustice" present in our relations. It did not take long to accept what for years we had never registered, though we had it in front of our eyes. We were not equal, we had never been equal, and we immediately discovered that we had no reason to think we were. The horror of the first moment changed into a general feeling of being a bit freer.

The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, "A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice" *Sexual Difference*, 108-109,110-111)

Chapter Two

Backgrounds, Theoretically Speaking

This dissertation considers the role of conversation in writing by women, specifically, the role of conversational spaces for women's construction of self within the symbolic.¹ It does this through a consideration of narrative structures, modelled by Emily Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (Chapter 3) and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (Chapter 4). It also points toward how these concerns are situated within the latest textual media, the Internet (Chapter 5). It then presents a model of textual reproduction and representation for online texts informed by the preceding discussions (Chapter 6). The project as a whole is situated against the dominant postmodernist bias that reads texts through a Freudian/Lacanian, phallogocentric symbolic in which subjectivity is only performative. This chapter presents an overview of these theoretical assumptions

My work proceeds from the assumption, as stated by the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, that culturally, socially, there does exist "gendered difference" (*Sexual Difference*, 109) and that within this difference of being, there are further differences among women such that, "We were not equal. we had never been equal, and we immediately discovered that we had no reason to think we were" (*Sexual Difference*, 111). The Collective refers to these differences as "disparity" among women. The Collective refers particularly to experiential differences among women of relatively different backgrounds, but it is important to extend the concept to a recognition of disparity in relations among women in terms of race, class, sexual orientation as well. It is significant for women to understand that as women, we are not all equal among ourselves.

¹ The symbolic here refers to the place where we engage with the world in terms of language, the exchange of signs from meaning. Postmodern theory represents the symbolic as the phallic symbolic where meaning flows through a series of presumptions about gendered relations to the symbolic and masculinized or phallic relations are privileged. It is this meaning of the phallic symbolic that this dissertation means to break or reconstruct towards what the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective refers to as a female symbolic.

This acknowledgment forms the first steps toward an exploration of how we communicate with each other, why such communication is important, and how this communication, when identified as a meeting/mediation of disparate voices, may disrupt the hegemonic assumptions of a phallogocentric symbolic, thereby allowing women's voices to be heard.

The premise for this project revolves around two interrelated concepts. First, I contend that the postmodern embargo of the symbolic, the scene of representation, as exclusively phallogocentric is socially constructed. Such a construction excludes the multiplicity of women's voices from being heard without reference/deference to the phallus. These misaligned readings, when women's writing is considered at all, mangle women's voices, guaranteeing that they will go unheard. As Dale Spender's "Language Studies" concludes, drawing on the earlier work of Cheri Kramarae,

Just as Cheri Kramarae (1977) found there are stereotypes of women's and men's language which mean that people don't actually have to listen to women and men speaking to know that the women are "pathetic" and the men are "masterful," so too (as Philip Goldberg, 1974, pointed out) are stereotypical judgements being made about the written word of women. It is my contention that the population in general and male literary critics in particular entertain a negative image of women and their words, to the extent that it is widely believed that you don't have to read women's writing to know it's no good!

(*The Writing or the Sex*, 23)

My work in this dissertation extends Spender's well researched demonstrations of the erasure of women's voices. Related to the premise that the interests of the phallogocentric symbolic is to silence women's voices is the resulting consequence that *women in patriarchy can never presume a listener*. While Kramarae and Spender have shown the degrees to which women's voices are silenced in conversation and in writing,² my dissertation focusses on how this very silencing becomes integrated into women's writing. Women's textual productions very often foreground issues of to-be-heard-ness: am I being heard; can I speak? In this project, I will consider how these questions of to-be-heard-ness within women's texts offer a new paradigm for (re)assessing and (re)constructing our understanding of subjectivity other than through the Phallus. In other words, if, as I contest, women can never presume a listener, the way in which women construct our texts – vehicles for the communication of ideas and identities – will be quite different from those

² Spender's research demonstrates, "in general a woman is allowed up to about one third of the conversation time in interactions with male peers. Beyond this point, *both women and men* are likely to perceive the contribution of the women to be domineering" ("Language Studies," *The Writing or the Sex*, 10).

texts in which the writer's cultural position as Eurocentric male means that the question of audition does not enter the field of consideration³.

This lack of consideration in male texts of whether or not a speaker is being heard is demonstrated, significantly, by its absence from any canonical literary theoretical or critical model. Need it be added that the dominant forms of literary theory and criticism taught in the academy – semiotics, symbolism, narratology, deconstruction, structuralism, etc. – are based on male thought?⁴

Indeed the theorist best known for specifically considering dialogic exchange in novels, Mikhail Bahktin, nowhere engages the question of whether one character in a novel actually hears what another character says, despite the fact that for Bahktin, the form of the novel itself is founded on dialogue⁵. Bahktin frames the novel as a socialist, democratizing form of narrative because of its dialogic structure. Every voice is given an equal level in the “glossalalia of the text.” A prisoner's voice can be given as much or more status than a king; the butler can cross class hierarchies to be heard with a Lord. Whether the Lord ever listens to the butler or vice versa is simply not an issue. Bahktin refers to this “dialogic” power of the novel as “Carnavalesque”: the ability to cause total inversions of order in the hierarchies of state the novel reflects, rendering all voices equal.

What Bahktin does not consider in his work on the Carnavalesque is the very restricted, overly determined role of the carnival within society. If the novel is a carnival space then it is not revolutionary: carnivals from 12th Night during the Renaissance or Halloween or Monte Carlo now are all socially sanctioned with well known and respected social, legal and temporal limits. The fool may become King during the Carnival, but once the event is over, the fool is still a fool. Nothing has been changed. The law and hierarchies of the patriarchy remain as they were.

Similarly, Bahktin's entire construction of Dialogue has very little to do with anything but the one way effect of dialogue for the Subject's benefit. For Bahktin, dialogue

³ I once had a contest in a seminar and dared the professor and any members of the seminar to bring in a text written by a man that foregrounded any concern about whether or not a character was being heard. I also suggested that they could not produce a text written by a man in which relations within space figured narratively rather than ranging over space, where acquisition was not key. It remains an open challenge. While crass, the challenge foregrounds that women's relations within patriarchy between men and among ourselves are very much other than they are for those phallically privileged within patriarchy. The dominant interpretive frames do not allow for these differences, but to *hear* these texts these different relationships require different reading paradigms (like the ones I propose here) for one, and political action for another.

⁴ Besides feminist theory, what school of interpretive practice sources a woman as its inventor or its reference point? More often than not outside deliberately feminist practice, the acolytes of any theoretical/philosophical position are either male, or trace their lineage back to male textual origins.

⁵The following points about Bahktin are best captured in his text on Dostoyevski, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

primarily serves the role of allowing the (imagined-as-male) subject⁶ to explore his understanding of himself. The listener – whether real or imagined– is merely a construct for the Subject’s spiritual advancement. For Bahktin, the character speaking does not need to have a real listener ever authorize whether or not his speech has been heard or is credible or not. Neither listening nor being heard has a place in the dialogic imagination of Bahktin.

This project is an attempt to construct the framework of an interpretive model that does take into account the very evident concern in women’s writing of being heard, being able to speak. Whether we are literary critics or sociologists or scientists or activists, we need to learn to hear how we each construct ourselves as subjects within and apart from the dominant discourse. Engaging in such *listening* provides a powerful tool for disrupting the patriarchal (white heterosexual male) interests on the symbolic. For women’s voices to be heard, the hegemonic construction of the symbolic as this phallogocentric source code needs such disruption.

The symbolic is not simply a neutral barrier. The symbolic as phallogocentric, as the controlling center of representation (as I describe in detail below), actively and violently protects its territorial stake against any sharing or redistribution of power that recognition of alterity would necessitate. We see this clearly in the recent debates around so called Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech, where the rights of the white heterosexual male to construct the world as he sees fit must be protected against those of a different gender, race or sexual orientation who would construct or represent subjectivity differently. Little wonder that being heard is not a theoretical or critical issue in the dominant critiques of textual production. As the next two chapters readings show, there is too much risk involved in hearing something other than the status quo.⁷

⁶Bahktin bases most of his theory of the dialogic on the novels of Dostoyevski. I have been unable to find any reference in his work to writing by any woman.

⁷ In the 1850-1873 period of the Second Reform Bill in Britain, when women were the most mobilized they had been in that country to achieve the franchise, one of the most oft cited reasons in parliament for *not* giving women the vote (a voice) was that women could, presumably, vote against their husbands. A member could lose his seat because of a disgruntled wife’s vote. It is my observation that in many respects, the fight for the vote parallels women’s struggle for voice, for the right to be heard publicly and domestically. To have a vote means to have a voice. In Britain, to have a voice, one had to have property, clearly demonstrating the Law’s primary role as arbiter of property rights. The vote in Britain was directly tied to property rights. One has a right to speak to the making of Law only if one holds property. Since women did not hold property (all rights transferred to husbands on marriage) and were themselves, as Barbara Bodicon pointed out at the time, little other than ill-educated slaves, there was no reason for women to have a vote, to have a voice, to be heard (See Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, for English Law and the Women Question. See Gillian Beer’s excellent book *George Eliot* for a discussion of the Woman Question and the positions of the main suffragettes of the period, like Barabara Bodicon, who interacted regularly with Eliot).

Several years ago, I did a casual survey of English literature graduate students, between the ages of 22 and 28. Of the twenty students surveyed only one student, a woman, was not white. The question was simple, and the answer completely surprised me. The question was: when you read a book, can you tell if a man or a woman wrote it?

The answers of the women respondents varied from “Yes I can” to “Sometimes I can” to “Sometimes I think I can and I’m wrong” or generally “I can but I’m sometimes fooled.” The answer from the men surveyed (50% of the survey) unerringly responded with “Gee, I never thought about it.” I was flabbergasted by the response. I had expected, naively, all respondents to answer “yes,” or “no,” or “sometimes,” but never, “never thought about it.” I was so surprised because of the group surveyed: all students had spent years concerning themselves with literary criticism and the minutiae of texts. The gender of the author, apparently, was of no consideration for any of the men. I could attempt to rationalize this by suggesting that one consider the education of the survey group: our expertise was defiantly far more entrenched in the canon of male writers. Courses with titles like “Writers of the 18th century”⁸ that contained not one woman author were the norm. However, the women in the group shared the same exposure to the same texts, and yet we all had in common the regular question of “who wrote this? a man or a woman?”

The conclusion to be drawn from this limited survey is obviously that gender in textual production, who is speaking, is of concern for women while, it is not an issue for men, the inheritors of symbolic privilege. In most academic, “malestream”⁹ practice, communications take on a perceived neutrality where only the perceived accuracy or believability of the material is seen to be relevant. Male authorship, authority, is assumed as a given. For women, the story is different: the gender of who is speaking becomes an important ingredient in constructing credibility of the material. As Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* states “African-Americans reject the Eurocentric, masculinist belief that probing into an individual’s personal viewpoint is outside the boundaries of discussion.” She describes this dynamic of questioning a speaker’s identity at work in one of her courses:

During one class discussion I asked the students to evaluate a prominent Black male scholar’s analysis of Black feminism. Instead of severing the scholar from his context in order to dissect the rationality of his thesis, my students demanded facts about the author’s personal biography. They were especially interested in concrete details of his life, such as his relationships

⁸Or, as a friend of mine referred to the course: Misogynists of the 18th C. The male standard as norm is reified by these practices: 18th C writers is the norm versus 18th C *women* writers, which is a non-required, special topics course, for instance.

⁹See Mary O’Brien, *Reproducing the World : Essays in Feminist Theory*.

with Black women, his marital status, and his social class background. By requesting data on dimensions of his personal life routinely excluded in positivist approaches to knowledge validation, they invoked concrete experience as a criterion of meaning. They used this information to assess whether he really cared about his topic and drew on this ethic of caring in advancing their knowledge claims about his work. Furthermore, they refused to evaluate the rationality of his written ideas without some indication of his personal credibility as an ethical human being. The entire exchange could only have occurred as a dialogue among members of a class that had established a solid enough community to employ an alternative epistemology in assessing knowledge claims.
(*Black Feminist Thought* 218)

To ask who is speaking is also a feminist issue because women are simultaneously spoken for and erased by “Eurocentric, masculinist” representations of the world.¹⁰ That assumption costs us every day as we see images of women in the mass media not constructed by ourselves, from the company of women, but from the company of men and their fantasies of women. Is it surprising that the majority of fashion designers for women are men?

To ask who is speaking, to be concerned with whether one is heard by an *other*, while it is an approach for questioning identity and credibility, it is also a way of challenging the hegemony of the phallogocentric symbolic as the only way of representing the world. To ask a question about the subject, the I of discourse, to focus on the who as part of the what, to suggest that that question might represent a need for a different way of interpreting the representation of identity, is also to challenge privileged ways of knowing which erase such alterities. As Hill Collins states:

¹⁰ This is not to say that the gender of the other/woman guarantees a “feminist text,” but as the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective points out about their project of reading their favorite novels for traces of gendered difference, “These were the signs of gendered difference, signs which we had decided to find in women who had often defended themselves from any gendered interpretation of their work” (*Sexual Difference*, 109).

Alternative knowledge claims in and of themselves are rarely threatening to conventional knowledge. Such claims are routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms. Much more threatening is the challenge that alternative epistemologies offer to the basic process used by the powerful to legitimate their knowledge claims. If the epistemology used to validate knowledge comes into question, then all prior knowledge claims validated under the dominant model become suspect. An alternative epistemology challenges all certified knowledge and opens up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth. The existence of a self-defined Black women's standpoint using an Afrocentric feminist epistemology calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth. (*Black Feminist Thought*, 219)

Women's textual productions in themselves directly challenge "certified knowledge" that says, as Charles Tansley in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* states, summing up Western Philosophy: women "can't write; can't paint."

When confronted with the obvious fact of women's writing which should of itself redefine the symbolic to include women's ways of representation excluded by a phallogocentric symbolic, the male establishment has failed to appreciate the revelation. As Dale Spender points out in *The Writing or the Sex?*, the male establishment has traditionally responded with calling all production from that half of the population simply "bad" or nonexistent. Without - as Spender notes - having to read or look for any of it. The reading lists of any core course in any academic discipline, with perhaps the exception of Women's Studies, clearly reflect the unflinching propagation of this belief.¹¹

The other choice offered to women who would engage the academic tradition or the scene of writing (since the Paris '68 student riots) also allows for Women's writing to be ignored. As Derrida has put it throughout his career, writing itself is a "phallic operation." We are, therefore, all men when we write.¹² Why read women's writing if its imitation phallic anyway, when you can go straight to the unabridged source?

This convenient rationalization would forever protect the phallic symbolic from alterity and the power sharing that would imply. It is a violent, hollow position that again can only (and does) violently dismiss the kind of questioning that Hill Collins proposes which challenges the credibility of the speaker. What right, we might ask, under what

¹¹ The only exceptions to this seem to be when a feminist has had curricular control over text choices for a given term. In these cases, the book changes are often temporary and last as long as that instructor before reverting back to canonical form.

¹²Derrida's *Grammatology* takes pains to demonstrate how writing exists before language; in *Spurs* he asserts plainly that writing is of its nature a phallic act. See m.c. schraefel, *Elle-même: the Discourse of Jacques Derrida on Women*, MA Thesis, for a critique of these positions.

authority does Derrida, for instance, have to assert that we are all men when we write? As stated above, there is too much at stake to allow the questions, who is speaking? are they heard?

This is not to say that those most privileged by the status quo do not seek an object or *other* to reflect themselves back to themselves. Both Sally Cline and Dale Spender in *Reflecting Men*, and Kaja Silverman in the *Acoustic Mirror* demonstrate that women's main role within patriarchal relations to men is to act as the mirror of male validation, the acoustic mirror of male desire. As Cline and Spender's research demonstrates, women who fail in this role can suffer serious consequences.¹³

Kaja Silverman, as well, in her critique of Freud's psychoanalytic and Lacan's psycholinguistic reworkings of Freud in their descriptions of women's relationship with the symbolic, exposes how these theories misconstrue women's relationship to the symbolic so that women can only be acoustic mirrors of male desire. By focusing on the Freudian/Lacanian construct of the female oedipal complex, Silverman demonstrates that these theories of female sexuality, the foundation of postmodern thought, construct women's relationship to the Phallus, the primary signifier, as outside language and therefore without possible entry to language. Silverman's arguments demonstrate that on the contrary, these relations do occur very much within the symbolic and therefore women can speak. Silverman's own position on this point is developed through Irigaray who first stated that women *do* speak in the symbolic.¹⁴

It is important to note that, especially within Lacanian psycholinguistics, women cannot speak. As Lacan states directly that women cannot speak, and that, in fact, he must speak for women.¹⁵ Let us recall that the symbolic, within Lacanian psycholinguistics represents the site of Language, of Representation, where the child has learned there are others in a world that formally existed as entirely his (sic) own. In the presymbolic (also known as the semiotic) which is a state without awareness of otherness, there is no need for language or of representation since there is only the field of view and no distinction between objects in the field of view and the viewer. Once there is awareness of Otherness,

¹³See Sally Cline and Dale Spender, *Reflecting Men: The Management of the Male Ego*.

¹⁴ See especially "When Our Lips Speak Together" in *This Sex Which is Not One*. The article is a celebration of women's speaking and a denunciation of Lacan's ordinance that women cannot.

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*.

the use of signs evolves to represent objects that are not present in the field of view, as espoused in Freud's famous Fort Da example.¹⁶

Central to the experience of entering the (highly gendered) symbolic,¹⁷ the site of language, for both Freud and Lacan is the concept of lack. Indeed, for Freud's little boy to recognize otherness –that there are objects distinct from himself– he must (supposedly) perceive the lack of the little girl. That is, the little girl does not have (no longer has!) a penis.

The role of women within this state of phallic primacy is therefore not to speak of ourselves but to present ourselves as lack to the little boy. In a fit of castration anxiety, the shock of this lack will break the boy from his natal bond with the mother and reaffirm the bond with his father where he will take his proper place within the law of phallic primacy. This entry into the symbolic at the site of his perceived mother's lack also means that he must perceive his mother (and by extrapolation all women) as less than himself.

In Lacanian linguistic terms, the penis is transmogrified into the concept of the Phallus, the high Symbol, the Transcendental Signified, as Lacan puts it,¹⁸ of the symbolic. One cannot speak without having the Phallus, the site of Law, the Father and Language. To name otherness, one must be Adam, the still intact. Since women are not of the phallus (even though having a physical penis is supposedly not the same thing as having the Phallus) they are not permitted a location within the symbolic that allows articulation of self into language. The little boy still has his, so therefore can use language (and whatever means necessary) to appropriate more; the little girl obviously does not have "it," can never regain it, and without it cannot appropriate, so what's the use of having language anyway?

In the postmodern symbolic of Freud/Lacan, women's difference-as-lack is therefore the grounds for keeping women from participating in the phallogocentric symbolic, theorized into silence. In these terms, women remain codified within the

¹⁶Freud watches his nephew play with a spool of thread. The boy names it when it is present, then rolls it away from view and names it gone, recaptures it into the field of view and names it present again. This backing and forthing underlines for Freud the boy's awareness of his distinctness from other objects, as well as his awareness that he can represent these objects to himself through language.

¹⁷ In Freud, Lacan, Kristeva and Cixous, entrance to the symbolic always privileges the little boy's progress into language. As Irigaray, throughout *The Speculum of the Other Woman* notes, the little girl is simply not conceived of as part of this inheritance. For a resituating of the little girl into the symbolic, see Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror*.

¹⁸ This discussion represents a synthesis of Freud's and Lacan's positions on women's relation to language, to the penis and thereby to the phallus and the symbolic. See Lacan's *Feminine Sexuality*, Freud's *Female Sexuality* and Derrida's *Spurs* for the full articulation of this position. See Irigaray's *The Speculum of the Other Woman* for an interactive critique of Freud's *Female Sexuality* in particular, and Somer Brodribb's *Nothing Matters* for a fuller critique of Lacan's *Feminine Sexuality*.

Presymbolic, the semiotic. French theorist Julia Kristeva,¹⁹ drawing on Lacan in particular, writes of these spaces as the *chora* and the *enceinte*.²⁰ The *enceinte* is the location of the child within the womb. here the mother completely absorbs the child; the child is entirely one with the mother. No representational communication is necessary. In the post birth *chora*, the *chora* is formed as a result of the mother now, for instance, holding the child in her arms, nursing *him*,²¹ cooing with him the sounds of solace and happiness. These guttural sounds are not representational, not symbolic. They are part of a preverbal space that is maintained until the child reaches a stage of recognizing loss, usually first signified by the recognition of the mother's absence from time to time. At this moment the child moves into the symbolic, since the child begins to use symbols to represent the awareness of loss, of alterity, of other-than-himself-ness. The mother, the woman, is left behind in this, outside the symbolic for the reasons described above. She has served her purpose.

Once the male child enters the symbolic, breaking away from the choric enclosure with the mother to discover himself, Kristeva suggests that he (always he) learns about the world on two levels: the phenotext and the genotext. In the phenotext, the drives and urges are situated. The phenotext is the place of desire. The genotext on the other hand is the more conscious code of social laws and practices. It is an order. It is the Law. Kristeva speaks of the creative crossing of the drives of the phenotext at odds with the genotext. She refers to these "playful" acts as "negative transgressions"²² of the phenotext upon the genotext. She sites the works of modernist writers and poets like Joyce and Mallarmé whose unconventional mappings of meanings to words, their word play itself, as the site of such playful negative transgressions that result in the highest form of intellectual pleasure, "*jouissance*."²³

Kristeva's interpretive practice with respect to demarking *jouissance* focuses exclusively on male projects. Indeed, it could not do otherwise. It is one thing to propose alternative, negatively transgressive moves upon the genotext in jest, in play which do not threaten the status quo. It is quite another to propose alternative meanings and to demand that these alternative, and therefore illegal desires/meanings be taken seriously. As Elizabeth Grosz says of Kristeva's project's regular representation of women as only ever mother and her consideration solely of male writers:

¹⁹The following definitions are taken from Kristeva's main essays, collected in *The Kristeva Reader*.

²⁰ "Revolution in Poetic Language," *The Kristeva Reader*.

²¹ In Kristeva, the child figured in these enclosures is always male.

²² "Word, Dialogue and Novel," *The Kristeva Reader*.

²³ "About Chinese Women," *The Kristeva Reader*.

Kristeva's work, in spite of its many insights, is itself a phallogocentric representation of women and femininity; her dissolution of sexual identity posits a universal or quasi-egalitarian concept of subjectivity; her admiration of a (male) avant-garde over the articulation of women's specific experiences is an oppositional model that is also phallogocentric. Irigaray makes clear that unless these basic models of representing the two sexes are questioned, all discourse, whether feminist in intent or not, will reproduce the prevailing models of phallogocentric knowledge. ("Philosophy and the Body: Kristeva and Irigaray" *Feminist Challenges, Social and Political Theory*, 143).

Indeed, Luce Irigaray speaks to this exclusion of women's specificities as a result of an homoerotic economy of exchange in which women are only commodities in exchanges among men and are therefore set up in competition with each other in order to achieve higher value for the men who will exchange them²⁴.

Similarly, the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective comments on the lack of community among women that results from this commodification of women as women among women as the way in which the value of women is forced to circulate under a neutral sign, therefore not giving credit to women where women together might achieve worth.

Therefore, women are not only excluded from being allowed to articulate ourselves as subjects within the symbolic, we are deliberately figuralized as commodities, outside language, with certain exchange value. Simultaneously, we are excluded from creating and valuing our own company. In all these exclusions from the symbolic – the site where meaning is constructed – women are kept from constructing the symbolic as a place where value can be exchanged by women, expressing women's identities, constructed apart from the phallic signing of the symbolic.

When women's writing insists on our own specificity and agency within our own texts, we do challenge the hegemony of the phallus. We challenge the status quo that would interpret us as simulacrum only rather than other. This is serious, illegal business. Unlike Kristeva's male poets, whom she celebrates for their *play* at negatively transgressing women who write alterity, are not *playing* with allowable meanings. The expression of real alterity regularly breaks the law and is therefore punishable under the law. The Law, of course, refers to patriarchal, cultural imperialist structures that refuse to recognize alterity, and certainly refuse to grant its various forms any legitimacy.²⁵

²⁴ See, for instance, "Women on the Market," "Commodities Among Themselves" and "When Our Lips Speak Together" from Irigaray's *This Sex which is not One*.

²⁵ For an example of the engines of power arranged against the simple articulation of alterity, see Dorothy Smith's article, "Report and Repression: Textual Hazards for Women" in *Dangerous Territories*. The article

In the eyes of this Law of the symbolic as described above, the very statement by a woman asserting her own *Sum*, I am, breaks the Law that excludes women from the subject position which can only be held in the symbolic and which is assumed to be only a phallic position of intent. These deliberate exclusions are keenly present in the history of women's efforts to publish.

In 1977 the study by Gilbert and Gubar, *The Mad Women in the Attic*, set the stage at least in literary circles of women's double bind within a writing economy in which we are fully capable of participating but from which we are regularly excluded from meaningful consideration, from being heard. Gilbert and Gubar made explicit the regular ways in which the few celebrated canonical women writers like Jane Austen had to conceal their writing practices, since their desires to write were also figured as a betrayal to their assigned role as wives and mothers.

As both Gilbert and Gubar above and Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* point out, it is no accident that many women attempted their first publications under a male pseudonym, both for pragmatic and psychological reasons. Today, online, a large number of women use either male or gender ambiguous pseudonyms for many of the same reasons: to be heard in textual exchanges, and not to be ignored or attacked for presenting their expressions.²⁶

The exclusion/erasure of women's alterity from legal audition within the symbolic, is specifically codified within postmodern practice. Within the above symbolic economy of loss and (re)appropriation, the defining moment of postmodern angst is that, after all, There is no Truth. In other words, there is no one knowable, achievable questable Philosopher's Stone. There are only surfaces, palimpsests of knowledge, the proverbial onion peeled to nothing. Despite the realization that there is no Holy Grail, the postmodern impetus is still to acquire like mad, to quest like mad and to enjoy the pursuit, because that is where the action is.

looks at the massive administrative and ongoing legal responses against the student *Report of the Climate Committee to the Department of Political Science*. University of Victoria (B.C.), 1993, which named sexist behaviors in that department and said "we'd like you to stop." See also "The Equity Franchise" by members of the Chilly Climate Committee, which "analyze[s] the performance of those institutional avenues and offices which are considered to be sources of remedy and protection from retaliation...about the system's processes and professional interactions which worked very hard and over a very long period against that support [of other women for the group] and to sustain harassment and keep discrimination organized" (12).

²⁶ In the fourth chapter, I consider more closely the parallels between the reception of women's writing when their gender was explicit in 18th and 19th century writing and the response around women's writings within Cyberia.

That there is no truth, only its pursuit, all works if you are a man, in particular if you are a white, heterosexual man. As such, you have the privilege of inheritance, or at least appropriation: appropriation of goods and identities. Everything may be surface and surface tension in the postmodern cosmos, but that means that every surface is up for grabs. Any subject can inhabit any position. The first move, it seems, in appropriating all alterity is the appropriation of gender. As Jane Gallop puts it, referring to men who do this and the women who seem to need to imitate them:

Postmodernist Thinkers are defending against the downfall of patriarchy by trying to be not male. In drag they are aping the feminine rather than thinking their places as men in an obsolescent patriarchy. The female post-modernist thinker finds herself in the dilemma of trying to be like daddy who is trying to be a woman (*The Daughter's Seduction*, 100).

Gallop refers (perhaps ironically) to the “downfall of patriarchy” though such is/was hardly the case, unless the articulation of the voices of actual others has been at least enough to sound the alarm for alterity to be claimed as assimilable common property. Barbara Christian, an African American literary critic, has well noted that the postmodern appropriation of “other” voices is concurrent with a language of mystification that excludes “others” from participating in the creation of meaning, and whose timing is suspect:

For I feel that the new emphasis on literary critical theory is as hegemonic as the world which it attacks. I see the language it creates as one which mystifies rather than clarifies our position, making it possible for a few people who know that particular language to control the critical scene. That language surfaced, interestingly enough, just when the literatures of the people of color, of Black women, of Latin Americans, of Africans began to move to “the center.”
(*Radically Speaking*, 314).

Christian also points out that words like “center” and “periphery” create language that maintains control of who/what is in and who is out of the zone of credibility (314-315). Unfortunately, the issue of subjectivity and identity politics is a zone of contention among “postmodern feminists.”²⁷ As Christian notes above, just as the literature of “others” started to be heard, suddenly, postmodern theory proclaims that we are all others or not. Subjectivity is no longer the place to be. As Ross Chambers states, in a work filled with melancholia and “suicide tactics”:

If I am the other, “my” territory is not *mine* – there is no *there* there, as Gertrude Stein might say; and my search for myself—for a self that might

²⁷What I take to be an oxymoron.

stand in resistance to the other(s) that constitute(s) me—can only engage me in endless wandering and in an oppositional elusiveness.

...

The implication here is that reading must be an acknowledgment of textual alterity just as writing becomes an appeal for the production of textual identity addressed to the reader: each identity—that of the writing and that of the reading—must define itself as mediated by the other, that is as mutually other-produced, since in order to produce the necessary shift in the position of reading that produces its own identity, the text must itself incorporate in its own discourse an acknowledgment of the position (of power)—that of the alienating other productive of a false self from which the reader is to shift.”

(*Room for maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative*, 113)

According to Chambers, then, we are all, alas, to understand ourselves as the production of ever shifting, multiple alterities. There is no single phallic, intrepid, cyclopic, I. Similarly, if all is a quicksand of alterity, Subjectivity is likewise multivalent, unfixed, since I am a different I to you than I am to him or to her. Gender is similarly simply “performance”.²⁸ As such, it is impossible to claim any sort of position from which to speak since we all are constructed by the circumstances in which we engage. To deny this is to be essentialist: to insist on a general category like women will necessarily exclude the very women one claims to represent; will in fact exclude their voices.

The desire, however, to recognize the specificity of race, gender and the contexts that create cultural or personal identity is to allow difference to be articulated; to articulate difference is to allow these differences to challenge the status quo. To deny this specificity, to erase it as either too fixed or too general is to assume a transcendental neutrality of shifting subjects in which everyone is really equal. That is, fundamentally a white male, for while Judith Butler may assert that gender is performance, she has no problem maintaining the phallus as an essential ingredient of the symbolic. It may not be fixed in the penis; it’s “location may shift” (perhaps to the elbow?), but it is still the site of signification.

Tania Modleski, drawing on Nancy K. Miller, critiques this so called “anti-essentialist” position of “postmodern feminists” as the privileged position of a certain (largely academic) elite:

If Nancy K. Miller is correct to counter proclamations about the death of the subject by insisting that “only those who have it can play at not having it,” could we not also say of anti-essentialist feminists that only those possessing vastly wider options than the majority of women living in the world today can

²⁸ See Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter* for the most comprehensive discussion of these positions.

play at “being it [the subject]” while theorizing themselves into the belief that they are not it?
(Feminism without Women , 22)

In order to read writing by women we need to understand our relation to the symbolic, to the scene of writing as Cixous refers to it. Women constructed within a particularly postmodern symbolic are excluded from the right to sign I within the context of our own claimed subjectivity, specificity, agency since these elements are denied.

We can never presume a listener. And yet, of course our desire, expressed in textual representations, is to be heard within a culture that may say that We are all other, but as long as that otherness is patriarchal in nature, refuses mightily to hear any alterity that would challenge its status within the hierarchy. That of course is what listening does. To demand to be heard means that a subject must temporarily suspend its primacy as subject in order to allow another to be heard, to be subject. It is not in the patriarchy’s interests to allow this. Too much is at stake.

But women do write.

In my theorizing of women’s conversational spaces within these writings, I have found the work of Luce Irigaray, Audrey Lorde, Dale Spender, Dionne Brand, bell hooks and the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective particularly effective because these writers address women’s specificity within patriarchy as a site of Alterity for challenging phallogentrism. Spender’s and the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective have been particularly inspiring in the ways that they both validate the use of textual/ficitonal works as appropriate, representational data for theorizing Women’s relation to the symbolic.

I also acknowledge the limitations of some of these sources. As Teresa de Lauretis points out in her introduction to the English translation of *Sexual Difference*, the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, while it promotes the need for women to mentor women, suppresses the lesbian presence/contribution to their project upon whose development it relies. In other words, a significant contingent of women while participating in a political practice to make *Sexual Difference* a primary ground for political theory and activism simultaneously attempt to make invisible the specificity of the lesbian difference within the contributing group (*Sexual Difference*, 15-17). Similarly, Luce Irigaray’s work, while effectively challenging the sexist fundamentalism in postmodern thought, seems to have become increasingly heterosexist in her own resolutions.²⁹

²⁹In the same introduction, de Lauretis points to Irigaray’s more recent statements that lesbian difference be silenced (*Sexual Difference* 16-17).

I am also concerned to situate myself as a white radical³⁰ feminist using, among others, black feminist thought to derive theory based largely from texts by white middle class, European women.³¹ Saying that, I believe it is still accurate to say that women can never presume a listener and that this lack forms a critical location for the construction of self of subjectivity within our writings, within our desire to be heard that is culturally, regularly suppressed within patriarchy.

That suppression and our responses to it have a variety of cultural markers. As bell hooks states in “Talking Back” of her own desire to have her voice heard:

Within Feminist circles, silence is often seen as the sexist “right speech of womanhood” – the sign of woman’s submission to patriarchal authority. This emphasis on woman’s silence may be an accurate remembering of what has taken place in the households of women from WASP backgrounds in the United States, but in black communities (and diverse communities), women have not been silent. Their voices can be heard. Certainly for black women, our struggle has not been to emerge from silence into speech but to change the nature and direction of our speech, to make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard.

Indeed, in the following considerations of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and through the consideration of how Net culture as text writes women out of alternative speaking parts, I show how the on and offline presentations of that struggle “to make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard” is at the heart of women’s writing of ourselves into our own representations of ourselves. In this dissertation, I use this understanding, derived from these positions of theorized resistance to inform what might be called a *feminist engineering practise*’s intervention into the means of online textual reproduction (as described in Chapter 6).

In the above chapter, I have presented the theoretical background/positions which the work of this dissertation resists. I have pointed out briefly the feminist theoretical markers that I develop more fully in this project, not only to resist the phallic interpretation of the symbolic, but to theorize *and* to implement a path towards a female symbolic where our alterities may circulate under a non-neutral sign. By so doing, this dissertation

³⁰ For a thorough presentation of radical feminism, see *Radically Speaking*.

³¹ bell hooks, however, critiques white academic postmodernist feminist writing that does not engage non-white work. She is “amazed by the complete absence of reference to work by black women in contemporary critical works claiming to address in an inclusive way issues of gender, race, feminism, postcolonialism, etc.” hooks’s critique goes further to challenge the ‘feminist postmodern’ position that takes any identity claim as essentialist, and therefore untenable as a critical position. States hooks: “[the feminist postmodern] does not aggressively suggest that dominant groups – men, white people, heterosexuals – perpetuate essentialism...it is always a marginal ‘other’ who is essentialist (“Essentialism and Experience,” 175).

engenders moments where alterity can be heard and can be represented, privileged. In moments such as these, our exchanges can be heard. In moments such as these, we change the world.

The opposite of talking isn't listening.
The opposite of talking is waiting.

Fran Leibowitz "People"
The Fran Leibowitz Reader, 193.

Woman has always talked and thought at the same
time as man, just as she has participated in history.
But she has been excluded from discourses, struck
out of the archives.

Plaza, Monique. " 'Phallographic Power'
and the Psychology of 'Women,'" 24.

Chapter Three

Language and the Law: Homonological Difference in *Wuthering Heights*

Wuthering Heights is framed in terms of conversation and conversational spaces. It is both about and related through layers or envelopes of narrative retellings. The story of the novel is told to us through Nelly's overhearing of conversations between the main characters, and Lockwood's reiteration of those narratives to an unspecified audience¹. There is nothing particularly unusual about this kind of double enveloping of narrative. *Frankenstein*, for instance, is related in a similar fashion. Epistolary novels from *Moll Flanders* to *Sidney Bidulf* are often related as stories found by another soul who saw fit to publish the material.

But what is particular about *Wuthering Heights* is that the story itself can be said to be *about* conversation and the spaces that creates (or restricts). It explores issues which result from the question who can speak, and especially how what is said can be received, and by whom. The "action" of the text is largely in terms of who said what when. The text deliberately ignores the standard who did what when of novel action in favour of who can speak and how. Everything in *Wuthering Heights's* world is the consequence of words being overheard, misheard, suppressed, misspoken. The crucial action of the book –

¹ Is *Wuthering Heights* a travel diary? A narrative retold to friends? A book for general consumption? In most narratives that follow the "found story" pattern, like *Moll Flanders*, *Frankenstein* and so on, we are given a narrative excuse for why the story is being shared with the world at large. That does not happen here. In terms of what I argue to be the narrative's investment in who is being heard or not, it seems puzzling that we as readers are never told who we are supposed to be. That is, Lockwood is telling the story to us that was told to him by Nelly but we are never told why he is relating the story. This is unusual for non-omniscient narration.

Heathcliff's departure – is the result of his leaving in the middle of an overheard conversation between Cathy and Nelly². We may note that the story does not follow the "action" of the hero - his flight and process of growing from boy to man. Rather, it stays with the speakers. Heathcliff has to return to the world of *Wuthering Heights* before he can be "heard from" again in the novel. In fact, the only physical action, the traditional stuff of narrative that the text actually follows is Lockwood's less than heroic initial trek through the snow to the grange, and that action itself only serves to set up the conversations to be recalled. Lockwood's action makes him ill, bedridden. He calls for Nelly's story of the people he has just met - and read and dreamt about - to engage him through his recovery. Similarly, when he is well enough to leave, to move about, the story lets him go. The narrative makes it plain that it is not interested in Lockwood's action(s). This is unlike the vivid narratives we get of say Frankenstein's trek through the Arctic in pursuit of his monster, or for that matter the very physical tales of the monster's crimes.

Brontë's text is structured such that what matters most to the narrative is how what is said is received - or not. Cathy's decision to marry Edgar is framed in terms of how her understanding of marriage is in opposition to how the rest of her world defines this term. One may argue that this significant difference in interpretation between Cathy's meaning and the Law's generates the rest of the narrative. The marriage itself constructs the legal terms around which Cathy as wife will be interpreted and consequently silenced. When Heathcliff and Cathy talk after her marriage, Heathcliff does not listen to Cathy, stating that she has nothing to say to him, no right to speak to him because she is not his wife. For Edgar, she may not speak because she is his wife. Nelly, who must, as servant, listen to her mistress, only hears how far Cathy strays from the Law and uses such understanding to subvert actions of hers which may prove subversive to Nelly's employer(s). As I will show in the following discussion, all of Brontë's story is structured around the effects of conversation-as-action. By focusing on conversation-as-action, Brontë foregrounds the relationship of women to language, which is a relationship of enforced silence. This awareness is heightened by the way in which the narrative in particular foregrounds the relationship of patriarchal law, both religious and secular, to language.

From Lockwood's introduction to Cathy by way of her own journal, scribed in the margins of her "holy books" we are presented with religious law and secular law as being used both to silence and to separate Cathy, the narrative I, from her friend and partner, Heathcliff. First her brother as head of the household is empowered, like her father before

² More specifically, it is because Heathcliff does not *listen* to hear what Cathy says during this exchange. He leaves once *he* decides he has heard enough. I will develop this point below.

her, to determine her movements. Her father, we see, let her roam. Her brother, whom the novel has regularly represented to this point as anxiously waiting to take over control of the house, to be the Master, wastes no time in asserting his privilege to enforce his domestic authority. He demonstrates his difference from his father by denying what his father allowed, and uses religious dictum to enforce his rights. Religious law is shown to be only ever a public relations vehicle for tyranny. Lockwood relates Cathy's diary on this point: "On Sunday we used to be permitted to play, if we did not make much noise; now a mere titter is sufficient to send us into corners" (26).³ Joseph tears down the curtain that Cathy puts up to create a space for Heathcliff and herself to be together and then forces them into separate corners to read more religious Law. Joseph strikes Catherine with no better reason than it is Sabbath and they *should be apart* to "think uh yur sowls!" (27).

The Law's power over Cathy, her understanding of it, and the one the text supports is one that demonstrates that the Law's relationship to women always, and to the disempowered for as long as they are disempowered, is to silence them and thereby separate them from themselves⁴. Brontë very much gives us to understand that whoever can speak is empowered by the Law to speak, and whoever especially can be heard holds power – that is, so long as what is spoken is within the Law's allowance of what is speakable. In such a system, listening is unnecessary. Listening, in this context is subversive since it would imply there is something different to be heard than what the Law allows, and of course, that would be against the Law. The narrative of the text, therefore, shows us very forcefully that interpretations of relations that are at odds with the legally sanctioned ones are suppressed immediately either by going unheard or by being denied.

What the text also shows us is that no one in power is under any necessity to listen to anyone, especially anyone who is not in power. Like a woman. Cathy can do as she pleases with Edgar until her words with Heathcliff become construed as challenging Edgar's social order or, for that matter, Heathcliff's world. Then Edgar demands to hear particular words from Cathy to assure him that all is as it should be. Cathy continually frustrates Heathcliff and Edgar by refusing to say what the social script insists Cathy must reply.

³ All parenthetical references to *Wuthering Heights* are from the Norton Critical Edition edited by William M. Sale, Jr.

⁴The critical tradition of the novel regularly presents Cathy's separation from Heathcliff as a separation from a part of herself. But while I agree that a psychological separation is modelled by Heathcliff's leaving Cathy, Brontë's text also presents the Law itself as the force which violently separates a woman from herself when it causes her to be silenced, excludes her from the rights to speak herself.

By placing such emphasis on conversation and especially on how it is heard or not, Brontë foregrounds how the Law perceives conversation, the possibility of real exchanges to be subversive. That is, if someone actually engages with another, actually engages what another says, then, those two may break the law as well as suspend it. If women's voices are to be heard, Brontë's text suggests, it will only be through breaking the Law, since the Law silences women⁵. Men, the novel shows us, can gain a voice in the Law, as I will show below with Heathcliff's rise to power. Women, however, never can speak their experiences without being censored or driven mad by the suppression.

In such an environment, the ability, let alone the opportunity for real conversation to occur would be highly unlikely. Indeed Brontë's story presents only one conversation where such a law breaking exchange takes place. I will consider in detail the exchange that takes place between Hareton and Cathy at the end of the novel. There, for one moment, two characters actually attempt to hear how the other has been interpreting their relationship. The consequence of this momentary exchange of real listening is revolutionary. A new understanding develops that is outside the purview of the Law.

Brontë's exploration of conversation, in particular what keeps it from occurring and why, and the particular consequences therein for women, models how subjectivity is structured within the Law. In presenting such a text, Brontë gives us an unusual narrative form to structure these particular relationships of women, language and the Law. By unusual I mean that rather than presenting a quest romance for instance, where a character encounters various trials through which *he* finds himself, we are presented by the ways in which women are prevented from finding themselves or expressing that self. Catherine's voice cannot be heard. It is marginalized in her writings - literally. Lockwood keeps it out at the window of his dream. What she does endeavor to say can take place only in the kitchens or closets of the story, the marginal spaces. Cathy and Hareton's one conversation takes place in the kitchen, behind the back of the household ruler.

In this chapter, then, I shall consider how Brontë uses conversation to explore subjectivity, how her characters' – and especially her main characters' identities – are

⁵ In a very interesting reading of *Wuthering Heights*, Susan Meyer, in *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction*, makes the very convincing case that Heathcliff is a member of the "darker races." As such, Meyer argues, he, too, is excluded from language and the Law. I suggest quite the contrary. While I agree with Meyer's position that Heathcliff may be seen to be enacting what she calls a "reverse imperialism" upon the members of the Heights and Grange houses, he can only do so through manipulation of the Law. He uses that language as we shall see to rationalize his takeover. Indeed, part of his threat to the novel's world is that as a man (despite his mixed race) he has access to the Law, its language and all the legal means necessary to take over the novel's world.

developed as a privilege of what they can say and what can be heard, where listening is unheard of, rather than our usual sense of what one can have and what one can do.

A consideration of being heard is particularly important in terms of its effect in what I have called *real conversation* - where we are cued to characters actually listening to each other. I am particularly interested in how listening affects the subject/other notion of self, since to be heard is so desired in the text by Cathy and her daughter, but is so unrealized. This lack has a potent effect on the characters' identity construction.

I investigate these questions by considering several aspects of the novel in its three main movements: Cathy's marriage plans; post marriage; post Cathy's death (her daughter's story). In the first movement, from our introduction to Cathy to her conversation with Nelly about marriage, Brontë sets up the development of her characters in terms of their relation to space/speech. In this section, I consider how Cathy develops her illegal interpretation of social conventions and her own position within them and how these concepts affect her language, her interpretation of terms, and hence herself in the Law. I develop in particular what Cathy means by marriage.

In the second movement of the text, from Cathy's marriage to her death, Brontë presents us with many crucial near-conversations between her main characters. I show, however, that the language Heathcliff employs on his return and the language Edgar responds with prohibits Cathy's language from being heard. This not listening to Cathy's difference creates the circumstances of her death.

Finally, in the third movement of the text, the story of Catherine's daughter, I consider how the main conversation between Hareton and Cathy momentarily produces narrative responses that collapse the rule of Law and open the potential for a different kind of story to be told, based on a non-Lawful sense of subject relations where listening is privileged over having. The chief consequence of such temporary privileging is the suspension of the law and its repression in particular of women's voices. The result of this suspension is the creation, finally, of a space within the main narrative for a woman's voice. Rather than Catherine's haunting of the fringes of the novel's locales, her daughter Cathy - the figure some critics insist is Brontë's reincarnation of Catherine - has the opportunity to move effectively, if momentarily within the main area of this new story of hearing and space for exchange rather than never being heard. I stress momentarily, since the forces of the Law to compress that momentary bubble are so great. Brontë therefore leaves the possibility open that the story can revert to the traditional form.

This focus on particular moments of conversation in the book, both those frustrated and achieved, in each of the above phases, allows us to consider how Brontë's

construction of the subject - in particular of a woman's subjectivity - is by the law itself, suppressed, and that consequently only by a suspension of the Law can a woman have the space to be heard, to be(come) herself. Brontë's narrative proposal of the perpetual suspended sentence of the Law is quite at odds with the Quest Myth's theme of hero becoming oneself through learning to uphold the Law. In Brontë's text, a woman cannot survive as herself if she holds up the Law, since it means she must not speak of herself, she must be silent. As Audrey Lorde, states, however, our silence will not protect us.⁶

*

Wuthering Heights is very much an exploration of rights: whose has rights and how those rights can be exploited and used to exploit others. Heathcliff exploits Hareton's legal claim to *Wuthering Heights* to appropriate it; Hareton exploits his legal rights to tyrannize his sister. But Brontë's text demonstrates through these outrages all the more forcefully how women of both servant and landed classes are excluded from all rights of self-determination. The text demonstrates that as women are excluded from rights of self-expression, and are restricted from being heard in that expression, the development of an identity rather than a role is entirely constricted. We see this through Cathy's construction as a character completely unaware of the legal structures that shape her world.

The novel presents us with the effects on identity of privilege. Cathy's father allows her freedom to roam since being a child. But Cathy is unaware of the connexion between her privilege and her father's indulgence. She assumes her state of personal liberty is natural. Because her father indulges her without censure, she assumes that she is naturally again deserving of total attention from anyone else in her society. She associates herself with the open spaces. They are figured as part of her very nature. When we first meet Cathy through Lockwood's reading of her marginalia, we hear how she perceives these natural aspects of her character are suppressed by her brother as she becomes excluded from her element, the Moors and forced into motionless spaces, to sit in corners.

The marginalia that Lockwood reiterates demonstrates for us that Cathy's view of the world, what is right and what is wrong, what is Justice, clearly is developed through these childhood encounters. In her childhood writings, we see that, as any child would, she takes any good or ill that comes her way personally. In that marginal journal, she portrays herself as the victim of her brother only. She has no sense of a Law that empowers a man to be a tyrant in his home. I would suggest that because her brother more

⁶ See Audrey Lorde. "Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" *Sister Outsider*.

or less abandons her except to abuse her, there are no other forces in her life on the level of equal that mitigate her sense of her rights in the world. Quite simply, there is no other person in her world that she has to listen to. Hindley is plainly a tyrant who becomes a drunken brute; Edgar dotes on her and will give her anything to win her attention; Heathcliff likewise appears indulgent. In her early encounters with Heathcliff and Edgar in particular, Cathy is never shown the boys' own interests. She sees them only wanting to please her. This, too, becomes taken as natural as opposed to being related to any other interest. Nelly, the only other figure on Cathy's horizon, is a servant. In her childhood experience of home, where her sense of Justice is developed, servants serve. Servants exist to take orders, to listen to what one says. They are not there as instructors in the ways of the world. Brontë demonstrates Cathy's interpretation of master/servant relations repeatedly. Cathy tells Nelly everything but listens to nothing Nelly says, since as servant, Nelly has no authority. I will return to this point.

Cathy's perception of the world and its Laws are locked into what she learns of them in childhood. But while Catherine interprets the world, naturalizing it within a simple framework of good versus bad, neither Hindley nor Heathcliff nor Nelly have any such illusions. Hindley knows he will inherit his father's estate because of the Law. It is not a question of good and bad, but an accident of birth, formalized. And it is this Law that gives him the power to get back at those his father "wrongly" assisted at the cost of his young pleasure. Heathcliff, too, knows that it is not good or evil that allows Hindley to tyrannize him, but rights under the Law. But Heathcliff calculates how he can use that Law to make his opportunity to seize power and exact revenge. Even if Cathy knew the Law, she would be unable to use it. There is no place in the Law for women to be heard. We see this in Nelly: she is well aware of the Law that casts her as servant and Hindley as master and never the twain shall meet. The key to her survival is to believe in the Law, that such exclusions are somehow proper. Heathcliff on the other hand being a man can access the Law to know it, to manipulate it to "make his way in the world." This the Law allows.

Years ago, Terry Eagleton portrayed Heathcliff as the text's symbol of the natural man, a sort of Marxist ideal that Cathy foolishly rejects in favor of the fop Edgar. In poetic terms, Eagleton portrays Heathcliff as far more natural and of the wild mores than Catherine.⁷ However, Cathy was born at the Heights, on the moors. Eagleton and others who figure Heathcliff as raw nature may wish to consider that Heathcliff is a street kid. The nine year old boy is picked off the alleys of Liverpool, not the fens of Gimmerton, and he is street smart.

⁷ Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, 112-115.

From our introduction to Heathcliff, we are immediately made aware of just how keen a sense Heathcliff has of structures of power over him and how to manipulate them. He is keenly aware of social stratification at the root of Hindley's loathing of him as an upstart. Heathcliff's social awareness on this score is shown early on when he forces Hindley to surrender to him the horse he desires. He knows Earnshaw has the power to privilege the foundling over the son, even though he is equally aware that once Earnshaw is dead, Hindley will be master.

Thus, in typical patriarchal fashion of male competition, once Hindley is master and exercises his own, legally invested power over Heathcliff, Heathcliff of course promises to avenge himself upon the tyrant Hindley. He expresses his desire in the language of the law, in terms of payment and exchange, a language of debt that we will hear increasingly permeate Heathcliff's discourse. As Nelly reiterates the scene to Lockwood:

"I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only so it, at last. I hope he will not die before I do."

"For shame, Heathcliff!" said I [Nelly]. "It is for God to punish wicked people; we should learn to forgive."

"No, God won't have the satisfaction I shall," he returned. "I only wish I knew the best way! Let me alone, and I'll plan it out: while I'm thinking of that, I don't feel pain."

(57)

In other words, Heathcliff knows the Law, or at least many of its effects, such as what keeps him from advancement in Hindley's household. Though initially cut out of power, as a male he can (and does) gain power. Brontë's narrative makes it very clear, that Cathy, on the other hand, though born into a socially privileged position, is cut off from any real claim to power and that it is the Law, as we shall see below, that keeps her from it.

In the midst of this storm of male power dynamics, Cathy seems only to see that her brother is mean and therefore troublesome to her and that Heathcliff is cut off from her company. She comes to believe that if she can simply get out of her brother's house, she can have the world back to the way it was when her father was alive. She does not ever make the connexion⁸ that she has no legal rights; that any movement over space will only be at the indulgence of any man in charge of her protection.

Her lack of awareness of the Law's overarching affect on her life – that her eventual socialization at the Grange is to mean not an eventual re-introduction to her favorite spaces, but a renunciation of them in favour of her husband's house – develops within her an interpretation of

⁸ "connexion" is still an acceptable spelling as found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

the world that Brontë privileges. Cathy's experience – her relation to space, containment, voice, suppression – creates in her a set of values that revolve around power as exclusion/inclusion. Her interpretation of power, of having power, is not the Law's appropriative *to have* but rather the power to be with. Not to have this power results in the horror of exclusion from. This interpretation of power is based on her experience of the world: her greatest pleasure is in running the moors *with* her friend, and in having access to that space: her greatest pain is in being separated from Heathcliff or in being denied access to the moors.

The entire first movement of the text presents the basis for such an interpretation of the world as relations of inclusion/exclusion rather than appropriation. Cathy has no space of her own, none that is inherently hers. Any she has is ruled by the master and is subject to his whims. She is marginalized in her family house and thus it is appropriate that the physical signs of her life story are inscribed in the margins of the law of the father, and her name inscribed in the pain of a window, the seeming margin between out and in.

Throughout the text, Cathy's language, her vocabulary, expresses her world in terms of this sense of exclusion from and desire for inclusion with. The movement's presentation of inclusion/exclusion as the defining terms of Cathy's ideology is epitomized by Cathy's dream interpretation and response to the world in which she has found herself. Cathy tries to tell Nelly about something she knows will not be welcome because it goes against what she has been taught in her religious upbringing to be the most valued good: to get to Heaven. Just after she tells Nelly about her marriage plans, she hesitantly begins, "If I were in heaven Nelly, I should be extremely miserable... I dreamt once that I was there." Nelly, unwilling to hear what she says could be a portent, protests she won't "hearken" to it, so Catherine minimizes its importance, saying, "This is nothing...I was only going to say that heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of *Wuthering Heights*; where I woke sobbing for joy" (72).

Brontë portrays the dream angels throwing Cathy from Heaven. Earlier in the narrative, the child Heathcliff describes how Cathy and he thought the Grange, where Cathy will be after marriage, was like paradise, heaven (53). By giving Cathy this dream just prior to saying "yes" to Edgar, and by making such an obvious comparison between the Grange and Heaven – which she herself underlines, saying, "I have no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven" (72) – Brontë foregrounds how much Cathy is looking not for typical social advancement in marriage with Edgar, but to get back to the place she feels alive. Further, she wants to be there *with* Heathcliff especially, the one with whom she feels most herself.

Brontë's dream is then the portent that Nelly supposes: Cathy's doomed effort to use marriage will not achieve the reunion with her cherished spaces, nor will the people she wants to be *with* want to be with her the way she desires. We will see that she may thwart the Law's ability to bend her to it, but her ignorance of the Law's power here will not allow her to subvert it towards her own happiness.

The Marriage Proposal

With the above dream narrative, Cathy begins her first major conversation⁹ of the novel. It is the first time we really hear her speak directly rather than through marginalia or brief exchanges, the first time after we have enough experiential narration about her life to see that her values in her world are focused through the experiences of inclusion/exclusion rather than the Law's either/or.

Appropriately if ironically Brontë has Catherine initiate conversation around the only place in patriarchal culture in which a woman is called upon to speak, to say "I do." Cathy enters into a discourse at the cathexis point of the Law, the heart of what Irigaray refers to in the little girl's psychological socialization: to develop into a servant for the little man¹⁰ where the woman's I do, her submission confirms herself as lack and other before the completing male subject. Where the man's "I do" in the law is the articulation of choice and gain, hers is supposed to be the confirmation of submission. Where the man articulates his choice, asks for a woman's hand, the woman is called upon to confirm her submission to that choice – to be his. As the children's song goes, the farmer *takes* a wife. Under the Law, the woman leaves her father's home for her husband's. She is first asked to "accept" that man (Will you marry me?) and then to confirm the fact publicly that she has made that choice (Do you take this man? I do).¹¹

To understand Cathy's rationale motivating her decision to marry Edgar rather than the boy everyone knows she really loves, we need to consider the scene that Brontë places just before Catherine announces her plans to Nelly. It epitomizes her experience of exclusion and suppression, from which she believes marriage with Edgar will provide first an escape and then a better place to be. Brontë's codifies Cathy's experience of fear of exclusion throughout the following exchanges in terms of being heard.

⁹ The exchange between Cathy and Nelly is a conversation since Cathy does listen to what Nelly says, does respond to Nelly's points specifically, as Nelly does to Cathy.

¹⁰ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* 83.

¹¹ See Anne Laurence's *Women in England, 1500-1760, A Social History* for a history of the exchange of house and property signified for women by "I do."

In this scene, we see Cathy seemingly at her worst. She insults Heathcliff into leaving the room, practically calling him a boor. She then, in front of Edgar, slaps Nelly and rattles Hareton “till the poor child waxed livid” (65). Shortly after this, she hits Edgar for his attempted intervention. On the heels of this encounter, Cathy enters the kitchen to which Nelly has been expelled and announces her proposed marriage to Edgar, initiating this revelation by saying “I’m very unhappy.”

Through the conversation with Nelly that follows, we come to re-interpret the scenes we have just witnessed. Listening to Cathy, we hear Brontë present not a spoiled brat acting out, but the deep frustration of an intelligent young woman in a horrible scene. Thus, when Heathcliff confronts Cathy about spending so much time with the Lintons, Cathy becomes impatient to get him out of the way so he does not wreck her arrangements. She is also angered that he does not simply realize that she thinks of him especially in what she is about to arrange. Thus she calls him “no company at all.”

Such a statement reflects the depths of Cathy’s frustration since just a page before, at the Christmas dinner from which Hindley has barred Heathcliff’s attendance, we see Catherine physically breaking into where Heathcliff has been confined just to spend time *talking* with him. As well, her response to Heathcliff’s surprise that she is never before complained about his conversation, we are told is “muttered.” She does not shout or storm, as we have seen her quite capable of doing. She *mutters*, “It is no company at all when people know nothing and say nothing”(64). The *muttering* again suggests a growing frustration with how her company with Heathcliff is being ruined both by her increasing socialization – her mind awakening to new ideas – and that Heathcliff is simultaneously more and more cut off from conversation, communion through words, by Hindley’s disenfranchisement of him. Under Hindley’s tyrannical thumb, as Heathcliff gets more embittered and less articulate, the quality of companionship is being stripped from the rapport. Being with him becomes less of the escape from more of the oppressive same than it has been. Heathcliff’s condition is a constant reminder of how oppressive life at the Heights has become.

Her life at this point is either to be chaperoned by the Lintons only to be returned to Hindley or stay at home with her vicious brother, kept apart from Heathcliff. She has no space for herself and only one option for a change: marry Edgar. Far from abandoning Heathcliff, as the critical tradition of the novel suggests, Cathy sees this as her only option to be with him in the current situation. And she would be right, if the Law were not the Law.

She explains to Nelly that marriage with Edgar becomes her one opportunity to rectify a deteriorating situation. As Cathy responds to Nelly's accusation that she only marries Edgar to satisfy her vanity:

“Nelly, I see now, you think me a selfish wretch, but, did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? whereas if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise and *place him out of my brother's power.*”
(73, my italics)

When Cathy speaks with Nelly, she expresses her understanding of marriage with Edgar as an opportunity for the *three* of them to get something they all want. When Nelly suggests, however, that marrying Edgar to help Heathcliff is the “worst motive” yet for marrying Edgar, Cathy defends her position in terms of her understanding that her version of marriage will provide each participant with something necessary to their all being whole, together, and somewhat happy. As she says to Nelly regarding her initial explanation for marrying Linton because he is rich, handsome, loves her, and she will be the first Lady in the area:

“[Those reasons were for] the satisfaction of my whims; and for Edgar's sake, too, to satisfy him. This is for the sake of one *who comprehends in his person my feelings* to Edgar and myself.”
(73, my italics).

Cathy's woefully idealized belief in her interpretation of her friends and the nature of their own motivations is then capped by Cathy's famous “Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff” speech. Unfortunately, most critics take this statement especially as further evidence of Cathy's own betrayal of both herself and Heathcliff. They suggest that if she is so much a part of Heathcliff, her marriage to another is a betrayal.¹² Cathy, however, believes far from betraying her bond with Heathcliff, she does what she can to protect him. Critics who deny Cathy's attempts here show a sexist disregard for the possibility of a female character's efforts to use power. Cathy fails only because she does not understand the Law as it acts in her world, and, as we are about to see, neither Heathcliff nor Nelly are interested in listening to her version of it.

Along with our becoming aware of Cathy's naiveté of both the Law and the men in her life, we must also recognize that Cathy does not see marriage to Edgar as an entirely win-win situation. She does not marry Edgar because it will be a complete relief and pleasure. It simply seems to present a better situation for all concerned over the present circumstance. Such a reading of Brontë's text challenges the critical tradition of the novel which reads Cathy as betraying Romantic Love in

¹² See Irene Taylor's *Holy Ghosts* for the most comprehensive synthesis of this position.

marrying Edgar. Such readings refuse to read Catherine's position, indeed, they refuse to listen to her rationale for the marriage which is rooted both economically (her desire to get Heathcliff out of his current position) and in relations to power (her belief that marriage with Edgar will give her the tools to achieve her ends). The power and tragedy of Brontë's narrative is that it demonstrates how cruelly wrong Cathy's understanding of power is.

Cathy's understanding of marriage, based on her interpretation of power as the power to be with or keep one from being with, is that she will be able to "satisfy" Edgar's needs. Edgar is understood by her to be something light, transient, easily pleased from the superfluity of her comparatively abundant depth. Edgar to her is "as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire." In return for satisfying his "sake" (interpreted as something fundamentally real, almost soul-like) which only satisfies her "whims" (Edgar's sake is parallel in depth to her whims; what's important to him is only whim to her) she most particularly acts for the "sake" of Heathcliff who is "more myself than I am" and so his sake must run pretty deep.

One might think from the above that Cathy still behaves in a typically patriarchal way: that she marries Edgar to save/serve another man. However, such a perception would fail to consider that she is also looking for a way out for herself. She has no means on her own: Heathcliff, as far as she believes, has none, nor is he capable of any.

So marriage to Edgar for Catherine, far from being either a self-interested betrayal of herself or a self-abnegating sacrifice for another, is a compromise for the *sake of all* involved. Marriage with Edgar is the inhabiting of a space that is tolerable, but despite the perks, it is still not home. Marriage is thus compared to a state, not of appropriation, not of gaining more status, but of *being within* a particular space in order to be in particular company *and* be free to move about within that space. What Cathy's ignorance of the Law allows her to propose as a solution (marry Edgar and thereby also free Heathcliff) disregards the portent Brontë gives Cathy in her dream. Being in heaven is very much being under the eye of the Law, and if the Grange is "heaven" as Heathcliff once described it to Nelly, then Cathy will not find the Heights, what she equates the spaces and companionship she seeks by marrying *into* Edgar's Thrush Cross Grange. Cathy does not hear Nelly's soggy attempts to make that point clear.

Nelly, interacting with Cathy's reasoning, remains firmly the representative of the Law, having no truck with what she sees as Catherine's misappropriation of it. To each of Catherine's rationalizations, she offers a firm Thou Shalt Not. Interestingly, Nelly the

servant is the only character who even partially listens to Catherine, even if it is to reject Catherine's apostate view of World Order:

“If I can make any sense of your nonsense, Miss,” I said, “it only goes to convince me that you are *ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying; or else that you are a wicked, unprincipled girl.*”
(74, my italics)

Though Nelly almost hits the nail on the head in her interpretation of Cathy's position, she fails to engage with Cathy. She does not ask “Is this your nonsense? Are you unaware of what marriage means?” Rather, she reasons against Catherine's interpretation of marriage through a defense of the Law-as-natural and Catherine as perverse. She asserts it is natural that Heathcliff should be possessive; natural that Edgar should be against supporting a perceived rival. It is natural that marriage establishes terms of conquest, not mutual sharing; exclusion, choice, loss and submission, never equalization (71-74).

Nelly, as servant of the Law, understands that the Law demands choice:¹³ either-or; to have or not; never both-and. Thus, Nelly finally appeals to Cathy on the one ground she feels confident must reach her: that marriage means abandoning Heathcliff: “As soon as you become Mrs. Linton he loses friend, and love, and all! Have you considered how you'll bear the separation, and how he'll bear to be quite deserted in this world. Because, Miss Catherine—” (73). Indeed, Cathy seizes on the only place that her world crosses with Nelly's: the point of separation and desertion. These concepts, as we have seen, are central to Cathy's experience and are entirely at odds with her purpose:

“He quite deserted! we separated!” she exclaimed, with an accent of indignation. “Who is to separate us, pray? They'll meet the fate of Milo! Not as long as I live, Ellen – for no mortal creature. Every Linton on the face of the earth might melt into nothing, before I could consent to forsake Heathcliff. *Oh that's not what I intend – that's not what I mean!* I shouldn't be Mrs. Linton were such a price demanded! He'll be as much to me as he has been all his lifetime. Edgar must shake off his antipathy, and tolerate him, at least. *He will when he learns my true feelings towards him .*”
(73, my italics)

Given Catherine's understanding of her world, she perceives no opportunity for Heathcliff to elevate himself. Leaving, going away from each other (for instance, Heathcliff actually leaving to go on quest) is not even imagined as a possibility in Catherine's world where the imperative is to be with. In marrying Edgar, she simply walks a few miles down

¹³Bette London draws on Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* reading of *Wuthering Heights* to suggest Nelly so firmly clings to the Law because it has cost her any chance of a relationship with Hindley (Bette London, “*Wuthering Heights* and the Text Between the Lines,” 43). If this is the case, then Nelly has a vested interest in keeping others from challenging a Law that has kept her from speaking her self, her desire. She helps to silence another woman for the Law's interests.

the road. She does not leave. However, even if Cathy feels that to be so, Nelly does have a point when she states that Edgar will be “not so pliable as you calculate upon, “ And nor, for that matter, will Heathcliff.

Cathy, however, has only ever seen Heathcliff and Edgar be as pliable as she calculates upon. Edgar heretofore has only ever coddled her whims and protested love to her despite her temper. She assumes he will likewise tolerate Heathcliff once he knows how she really feels about him. Similarly, Heathcliff, whom she believes knows her so well, will understand that she only acts for their mutual benefit. Her interpretations of her friends are without any reference to the larger social order. They are based entirely on personal experience, and nothing has happened in her experience to make the larger structure manifest. Catherine does not hear the unspoken Law. Consequently, she does not accept Nelly’s well informed socio-legal version of the world since she has had no experiences to support that interpretation. Even marriage itself does not immediately challenge Cathy’s original interpretation of that estate.

In the early months of their marriage, Cathy’s desires do not threaten Edgar’s supremacy as master of the Grange. He can easily give his wife anything from his domain. Cathy’s interpretation of Edgar’s relation to her remains unchallenged. Similarly, before marriage, right at the moment of this conversation, since Heathcliff leaves in the middle of it, Cathy never hears him say that he does not want her to fix things for him; that he has his own agenda. Thus, when the men of her world protest their love for her, that is what she hears: that she is simply loved, and that out of love for her, and her love for them, they will continue to support her. Cathy never imagines that there may be a pre-appropriation (before marriage) behavior and a post-appropriation (post-marriage) behavior.

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Just as Nelly does not really hear Catherine, but only interprets her relative to the degree to which she adheres to the Law, Heathcliff does not hear Catherine either. In leaving, he hears the Law when, in the middle of Catherine’s crucial explanation to Nelly, “He had listened till he heard that it would degrade her to marry him, *and then he stayed to hear no further*” (73, my italics). Brontë’s dark irony has Heathcliff leave before he can hear that Cathy thinks he is more herself than she is; he does not hear that she wants to help him so that she can *be with* him in a way that would free both of them from life with Hindley. He merely hears that Cathy will not marry someone not in her league; that that blocks her love. Brontë further problematizes Heathcliff’s departure. Despite the differences between Catherine’s and the Law’s view of life and marriage, Cathy’s words,

to the point where Heathcliff leaves, could *sound* like she values position more than person. Catherine has just complained of the quality of Heathcliff's conversation and has just delivered a catalogue of possessive values that Edgar affords her, all attributes of power in the social hierarchy. Heathcliff relies upon the Law of appropriation to interpret his beloved's words.

The significance of the final conversational moment of this section of the novel, the moment of Heathcliff's departure, the crucial misunderstanding between Heathcliff and Cathy in particular is that only Nelly ever asks "do you mean this?" (regarding Cathy's interpretation of marriage) and she will not hear Catherine's rationale for that meaning. For the rest, Edgar never asks, "this means Heathcliff is out, right?" The Law allows him to assume that of course that is what marriage means; he does not have to listen. Similarly Heathcliff decides to leave practically mid-sentence. He *chooses* when to leave. He does nothing to interrupt Cathy, to question her, to assert his intentions directly. He only goes off in a funk as he has done before when Cathy first came home from the Linton's, thinking that she now liked them more than him when all she wanted was for him to take a bath. Why does he not interrupt Cathy? Perhaps he does not want to see Cathy as independent from his aid, and therefore not in need of his rescue. And as we see later, Heathcliff desperately wants to play the part of avenging knight who gets the girl. So he leaves before someone can stop him, challenge his interpretation. It is as if he has read too many romantic novels and does not want to be cheated of his chance to act out his role as Oedipus on quest.

Intriguingly, Brontë does not probe why her Heathcliff does what he does anymore than she looks at Edgar's motivation. But because she spends so much time on Catherine's explanations – situated in the kitchen, with a servant, outside the main circle of what can be heard – we can fairly safely assume that both male characters move with the Law, the what's known, while Cathy does not. It is Cathy's difference from the Law that Brontë's text finds worth exploring. That, and how that difference gets suffocated.

To this end, Brontë underlines just how much Cathy is not heard and how deeply she misinterprets the law of the world. Just after Heathcliff leaves, she delivers her famous "I am Heathcliff." Not quite. If she were, she would not do what she does next when she hears that something she has said may have provoked him. If she were Heathcliff she would know why he leaves. Instead, as soon as she hears from Nelly that Heathcliff has left upon hearing how she "complained of her brother's conduct regarding him" (74)

She jumped up in a fine fright, flung Hareton to the settle, and ran to seek for her friend herself, not taking leisure to consider why she was so flurried, or how her talk would have affected him. (74)

When she cannot find Heathcliff, she orders Joseph up from his supper to find him and bring him back, crying, "I want to speak to him, and I *must*, before I go upstairs...I wonder where he is—I wonder where he *can* be! What did I say, Nelly? I've forgotten. Was he vexed at my bad humour this afternoon? Dear! tell me what I've said to grieve him. I do wish he'd come. I do wish he would!" (74-75)

This passage shows two very crucial things about Cathy that further differentiate her from Heathcliff: that she really does not know what or how he could have construed anything in what she has said as ill (something Nelly makes clear anyone could see), demonstrating her very alternate perception of the world, and her assumptions that hers is therefore the normal logical perspective, and further, that as soon as she hears she has disgruntled him, that he may have misinterpreted her, she goes to clear with him. Something Heathcliff never does. This is the most significant lost moment for real conversation in the novel. Significantly, she is the only character in the novel who has any faith that words can effect any kind of change.

Brontë chooses not to have either Heathcliff interrupt Cathy or Cathy catch up with Heathcliff. They could have spoken and still disagreed; Heathcliff still could have left. But Brontë chooses to have Heathcliff leave, unfollowed by either Cathy or the narrative. Of course, there are a myriad of reasons why Brontë may have chosen this non-meeting as the crucial moment of her story. In terms of conversation, however, and its potential for subversion of the Law, Brontë demonstrates the tragic degree to which words are *not* used to communicate difference but only state the Law. Cathy is the only character so far in the narrative to express possible, different interpretations of words like marriage. Nelly refuses to allow such differences; Heathcliff walks out on them.¹⁴ This lost opportunity for conversation, then, underlines the degree to which the Law's interpretive control keeps people apart.

The first movement of Brontë's novel closes very dramatically on the image of Cathy going into a fevered state following Heathcliff's departure. The doctor warns to "take care she did not throw herself downstairs, or out of the window" (78) and that "she would not bear crossing much" (79). Nelly focuses her listeners on how Catherine's illness provides her the excuse to get her way

¹⁴This non-exchange between Cathy, and Heathcliff, mediated by Nelly (since she knows when Heathcliff leaves and says nothing) challenges Kristeva's notion of play as presented in Chapter Two above. Kristeva's negative transgression between the geno and pheno texts here definitely does not result either in new meanings being heard or in jouissance for the practitioner. On the contrary, Brontë's text demonstrates here that meanings are fixed within the terms of the Law: that other meanings - meaningful differences - far from creating jouissance are entirely censored.

in everything. Brontë's text however affords another focus. Let us consider the grounds for Cathy's delirium.

The last words we hear Cathy say before she "burst into uncontrollable grief, and the remainder of her words were inarticulate" (78) are about Heathcliff's departure: that if Hindley's kicked him out for good, she will go with him. "But," Cathy laments, "perhaps you'll never have the opportunity – perhaps he's gone" (78). Her sobs at this thought "proved to be the commencement of a delirium" (78).

Cathy's delirium commences because her whole world has just been tilted. The last thing in that world that she could imagine happening – that Heathcliff would ever leave her – has just happened. Her main reason for marrying Edgar evaporates. Without Heathcliff to share her married privilege, married life to Edgar would hardly create the new space she hoped for. They do not share enough in common. The remaining company of her world, however, has little to offer by way of consolation. Hindly is an avaricious brother who would use her to get at the Linton lands (79); Joseph and Nelly tend her roughly (78); Edgar's parents objectify her as the pet of her son (79); Edgar is simply infatuated (79), and by Cathy's standards, shallow. No wonder the doctor is concerned that she might throw herself out a window (73).

Little wonder, then, too, that she waits three years before actually marrying Edgar(79), a fact grievously overlooked in the criticism¹⁵. Three years to hope for the possibility of Heathcliff's return. Three years is long enough to realize that the scene she finds herself in now will not change and that the best she can hope for in these new circumstances is to marry Edgar after all. Cathy's decision is reminiscent of Chaucer's Criseide in *Troilus and Creseide*. Once Creseide has been convinced that Troilus will never return for her, she finally consents to marry Achilles. She, too, is condemned by much critical literature for making the best life she can for herself under the circumstances, rather than choosing to waste away for a never-returning beloved. In *Wuthering Heights*, neither the characters nor many of the text's critics forgive Cathy for attempting to get on with her life.

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So far we have seen how Brontë's text presents us a character developed with a unique perception of the Law. That perception results in the character's establishment of an ideology of

¹⁵ In all the criticism I have read on the text, and in all the published surveys of the critical tradition (see for instance, Allott's 1990 casebook, Vogler's Twentieth Century perspectives collection, Everitt's compilation of modern critical trends and Linda Peterson's 1992 authoritative edition of *Wuthering Heights* and its companion essays) of *Wuthering Heights*, no one else to my knowledge has noted that Cathy waits three years before marrying Edgar. This is particularly significant considering that the critical tradition roundly condemns Cathy's marriage to Edgar as a betrayal.

exclusion/inclusion rather than one of appropriation, the real Law of that character's world. Coming from this perspective of the law, the character speaks in a way that is incongruous with normal discourse. Brontë also shows us in the novel the Law's amazing ability to nullify the manifestations of difference wrought by Cathy's interpretation of the Law. When Cathy acts on her beliefs as a child, she is sent to a corner. On Heathcliff's departure, Cathy's calling for Heathcliff is put down to delirium as a fever induced by standing in the rain rather than by the Law's oppression. When Cathy speaks, those who hear her, whether Nelly or Edgar, rationalize her demands as the ramblings of an ill child that must be indulged for fear of making her more ill. The content of her words thereby becomes nullified. Any threat to the Law's standards is thereby eliminated. But the silent treatment does not last.

Significantly, Brontë constructs the first movement of the novel to avoid any conversation that would threaten the Law's various rationalizations for Cathy's difference. The one crucial conversation of the novel that should have taken place, the one between Cathy and Heathcliff, does not. It is not until Heathcliff's return in the second movement, when the scene shifts to the highly socialized space of the Grange, post Cathy's appropriation to Edgar via marriage that real confrontation with the Law takes place.

Brontë's text, then, is not interested in rescuing Cathy. Only by having Cathy marry Edgar will the values of all three participants have any reason to be articulated. It is only in that context that we would see what the text takes pains to demonstrate: that those speaking from the perspective of the Law, in this case Edgar and Heathcliff in particular, will not hear what anyone says from outside the Law. They will not hear Cathy since their self-proclaimed love is limited by the Law, and what Cathy says, as we will see, does not fit that frame of reference. Cathy speaks *a different relation to the Law*. But Cathy, we are to discover, cannot make herself heard especially since her interpretation of power is constructed in ignorance of its power over her, limiting her ability, ultimately *to respond to it*.

And it is this clash of terms that Brontë's text explores in the second movement: how do people who care about each other communicate with each other when their ideologies speak from such different places? Is it possible? What is the cost if such communication is not possible? The novel cannot raise these questions without the Law being evoked. Thus, once Brontë has her readers actually hear through Nelly how Cathy interprets her world, via her marriage plan, the novel no longer puts off the confrontation between the Law and Cathy. Cathy's marriage re-defines the relationships among the three: Cathy as wife; Edgar as husband and Heathcliff as Rival. In this frame, old rationalizations can no longer apply once Heathcliff returns, since in total contradiction to Cathy's ideology of an inclusive all, and in total contradiction of her understanding of him, he demands a choice (159).

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As we have seen, after Heathcliff's departure, Cathy remains unmarried for three years. It is an additional six months after that marriage before Heathcliff returns. In that time, Nelly tells Lockwood that "the gunpowder lay as harmless as sand because no fire came near to explode it"(81). Cathy, we are told, behaves well, "infinitely better than I dared to expect" (81) despite her

... seasons of gloom and silence now and then: they were respected with sympathizing silence by her husband, who ascribed them to an alteration in her constitution, produced by her perilous illness, as she was never subject to depression of spirits before.

Nelly offers no challenge to this interpretation, wanting peace herself from the feud she knows would erupt were the real reason for Cathy's initial illness, never mind consequent depression, to come out (81). And she does know of it, for as she tells Edgar on Heathcliff's return, when Edgar starts calling Heathcliff names, "She'd be sadly grieved to hear you. She was nearly heart-broken when he ran off; I guess his return will make a jubilee to her" (83). Meanwhile, however, Edgar can believe that, three years after Heathcliff's departure when he does finally marry Cathy that he does in fact have a wife in the way the Law defines wife and marriage; that she is his alone. Everyone seems just fine.

In this six-month period of calm, summed up in approximately three paragraphs, any phrase of conversation is entirely absent. Brontë's summary of the period demonstrates how the characters scrupulously avoid any meaningful conversation. Edgar never asks Cathy directly why she becomes depressed. Cathy never tells him though she says herself on Heathcliff's return that she suffered in silence through his absence.

As we later hear, Cathy throughout this period unquestioningly presumes that she gets her way in the household because people want her to have it; because they *love* her. For Cathy, love is giving; love is appeasement. She never sees that, far from being the powerful first lady, treated well out of another's love for her, she is Edgar's wife. She is treated well for his sake, because of his word. Once again, anything she has is a result of his indulgence.

In the second movement, however, as the heretofore unspoken becomes articulated, Cathy does begin to hear more and more what she could never have believed: that Edgar and Heathcliff are neither who she thought they were, nor whom they say they are. They do not *love* Cathy, despite their protests to the contrary. As stated above, Cathy never grasps that Heathcliff's and Edgar's responses are systemic, not personal. Consequently,

her ability to understand them, to communicate with them from their frame of reference is made impossible. But the responsibility is not all Catherine's. In this movement of the novel, no other characters seem able to pass through the Law to the personal to hear Cathy's frame of reference. Hence, neither side ever meets; characters die in grief. Brontë uses this part of the novel to underline how confrontation is not communication; dialogue is not conversation. Even, or especially, among characters who do care for each other, if they only hear either the Law or themselves, listening, and hence meeting, togetherness, is impossible. The Law silences difference, the voice of a woman.

As soon as Heathcliff returns, then, Brontë's narrative verges on becoming the traditional story of husband and rival fighting for possession of their chosen mistress.¹⁶ Edgar is ready to fight as Lord of the manor because Cathy is his and he recognizes Heathcliff as the rival for his favorite possession; Heathcliff, once Cathy lets him in, is ready to fight Edgar partly because he stands in the way of his having the woman he loves, but also because Edgar has been a contributing part of a scene that has excluded him and that he will be revenged upon. Both Edgar and Heathcliff know their parts in the patriarchal romantic narrative of rivalry. That story is not about conversation. Gauntlets are thrown, pistols engaged and the damsel stands mute at the sidelines. Cathy, however, puts a spoke in those narrative wheels by insisting on a speaking part. Her verbal response to both men actively destabilizes her legally assigned role of to-be-defended/to be rescued damsel.

In the scene of Heathcliff's return, for instance, instead of waving to Heathcliff from a high trellised window, not daring to communicate with him for fear that she should cross her husband's exclusive rights to her, Cathy actively brings Heathcliff into Edgar's house, practically leaping into Heathcliff's arms. She vocally insists that Heathcliff now has the appropriate trappings to be welcome in any gentleman's home. By bringing the two into contact; but especially by choosing to maintain both's company simultaneously, Cathy effectively stymies the Law's actions. Heathcliff, ever attempting to cast himself as the romantic hero, professes that he was only going to catch a glimpse of Cathy before going off to revenge himself on Hindley and then kill himself (85). Her welcome, as he admits,

¹⁶ In 1965 Rene Girard, in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, defined the triangle of rivalry as a common narrative structure. He explains that in the triangle of two men battling for one woman, the woman is simply the object of male competition – something between themselves that excludes the heroine. Irigaray's work on women as commodity of homoerotic exchange between men, in "Women on the Market" in *This Sex which is not One* resituates this triangle as part of larger social structures, not simply narrative exchanges. Brontë's text takes this standard narrative focus between the rivals and jams it. Cathy refuses to be ignored. She insists on her own agency, which disrupts either competitor's would-be claim upon her.

quite changes his romantic plans. Similarly, Edgar has no reason to evict Heathcliff when his wife calls him on his own social and class biases, and has tea with his perceived rival right in front of him. Edgar, like Nelly, is mute witness to everything that Cathy and Heathcliff say. Cathy is ecstatic. The tableau she has dreamed of has finally occurred. Everyone is together. There's no betrayal of marital trust; there's no damsel to be rescued. And by this communal moment, where Cathy verbally orchestrates the scene, Cathy and Brontë deny both men the usual narrative opportunities to get at each other's throats. Consequently, Edgar and Heathcliff are left to extemporize to get the narrative back on the appropriate rails of rivalry and revenge,¹⁷ and, away from such familiar ground, they are rather awkward at it. Heathcliff would have the too happy Catherine think on him "the hard and bitter life" he "fought through...only for you" (85) while Edgar tries to turn Catherine back to social duties: "Catherine, unless we are to have cold tea, please come back to the table" (85).

Indeed, Brontë makes very clear that the only way Edgar and Heathcliff succeed in regaining any control over the following scenes is to ignore Cathy, the woman they supposedly love. And they would rather ignore Cathy and what she says under the romantic guise of pretending to do everything for her than listen to her. It would cost more than they're willing to pay. Edgar's whole life has been to be privileged by the Law; Heathcliff's pain has been caused by his disenfranchisement from that privilege. He has now struggled too hard to gain its approval, by its means, to give it up. The following analysis of the conversations Brontë presents in the following scenes demonstrates how the text presents the Law, and what lengths it will go to, to silence Cathy's alternative interpretation/interruptions of the Law, once the excuse of illness or age can no longer be used to ignore them.

"I wanna Be a Cowboy" meets

"This is Not my Beautiful House"

When difference¹⁸ is silenced – and it is in the Law's interest to silence difference – change cannot occur. Only accumulation of power is in the Law's interest. Not change.

¹⁷Within the rivalry, Brontë's text also challenges the moralizing British folktale where a dark lover comes to court the married lady. In the tale, the wife goes with the lover out to sea and realizes too late, alas, that she has run off with the devil and she is not happy about it. The moral of the story: bad things happen to bad wives. Significantly, Brontë's story does not follow this thread. In fact, quite the opposite. Cathy only threatens to go off with Heathcliff should Edgar persuade her he does not love her.

¹⁸I refer to difference that is outside the rule of Law. As we shall see in this section, Heathcliff and Edgar speak different languages, use different vocabularies from each other, but nothing they say presumes

Both Edgar and Heathcliff speak languages informed by the Law's principles of more is more. One can only take more and more if one does not listen. The cost of this willed deafness to subjectivity, the cost of hearing only through predetermined terms, only playing by the rules, is subjectivity. One cannot become oneself if one only becomes the vehicle of the Law. And Edgar and Heathcliff and Nelly all speak the Law in the language of the Law. Edgar speaks the more moral/religious language of the Owner, while Heathcliff speaks the Language of Debt while Nelly throughout speaks the language of propriety: a place for everything (one) and everything (one) in its place.

Though each characters' approaches to the law express different interests –Edgar moralizes property interests, while Heathcliff blusters forth vehemently about rights and wrongs and Nelly, when she is not listening at keyholes simply repeats the Law's position on any question – each approach in itself silences and objectifies the woman they claim to care for. In the case of Edgar and Heathcliff in particular, as soon as these two engage about their interests in Cathy, they exclude her. Their machinations have nothing to do with her. It is a game played simply between the main patriarchal players that has no need to hear from the territory they seek to control.¹⁹ Thus, the Law exerts power over the chosen territory not by what is said but by what it refuses to hear.

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Prior to Heathcliff's arrival on the post-marriage scene, Edgar is silent. His way of being is portrayed as saying as little as possible. He has what he wants; there is nothing to discuss. He relies on his usual mode to achieve the effect he wants: let Cathy have what she wants as long as she maintains the illusion of being Edgar's and does not ask for anything or anyone that will threaten his position.

Heathcliff as the rival, however, must talk up a storm. The onus on him, if he is to stay within the Law, is to prove that what he wants ought to be his, and that indeed, he is owed it. Brontë gives Heathcliff the language of debt.

In his three and a half year absence, as C.P. Sanger pointed out fifty years ago, Heathcliff learns the Law and the language of grievance, appropriation and property. He frames his talk of getting back at one and all in terms of real estate and debt. According to that law he knows he has been done wrong, and can find the means of challenging these

fundamentally different values. Their voices are both aligned along the continuum of having, appropriation.

¹⁹See Girard on narrative competition among men for the woman as prize. See Irigaray "Women on the Market" with regard to women as commodity of exchange among men.

offenses – despite the fact that those, too, were leveled under the law (Hindley, for instance, as master of the house, has the right to do as he pleases with the education or not of his servants).

In discovering the Law, in becoming well versed with it, Heathcliff gains something Cathy previously pointed out that he was growing to lose: his voice. The Law offers him certain discursive frames through which he can iterate his grievance: the terms of exchange. To go back to that first self-pitying exchange with Catherine, for instance, Cathy calls Heathcliff cruel for being “absent and silent for three years, and never to think of me.” Cathy, of course, frames her experience according to the terms that reflect her ideology. Heathcliff was apart from her. He gave her no signs of his love during that absence, nor anything to demonstrate he was still connected with her. In Cathy’s language, he was apart from rather than with. Heathcliff immediately responds in terms of his new voice: the language of debt :

“A little more than you have thought of me!” he murmured. “I heard of your marriage, Cathy, not long since; and, while waiting in the yard below, I meditated this plan: just to have one glimpse of your face, a stare of surprise perhaps, and pretended pleasure; afterwards settle my score with Hindley; and then prevent the law by doing execution on myself. Your welcome has put these ideas out of my mind; but beware of meeting me with another aspect next time! Nay, you’ll not drive me off again. You were really sorry for me, were you? Well, there was cause. I’ve fought through a bitter life since I last heard your voice, and you must forgive me, for I struggled only for you.” (85)

In the above exchange, we see that Heathcliff does not at all address the points Cathy raises about his sudden departure and extended silence. Rather, he refocuses his comments on what Cathy owes him: she must forgive him.²⁰ His desire that Cathy forgive him is expressed not in terms of a request but as a demand, a right that he claims. To forgive one in terms of exchange, to forgive a debt means that she must either erase his debt by paying it herself²¹, since “I struggled only for you” (85).

In Heathcliff’s language, the word “for” plays a key part in establishing an emotional/proprietary demand *for* payment. That is, while Heathcliff demands that Cathy must forgive him/pay his debt, he simultaneously demands that any debt he incurred on

²⁰ Although he first accuses Cathy of driving him off, he is the one who ran away leaving no space for negotiation in the first place.

²¹ One recalls Derrida’s detailed discussion in *Obtography* of forgiving a debt, that an *other’s* debt must still be covered in full by the forgiver. The responsibility for the debt changes hands; it is not erased; it must be paid on demand.

account of Cathy, she must consider paid in full by Heathcliff's own struggle, since that struggle was *for* Cathy.

Cathy's understanding of *for* differs greatly from Heathcliff's. When Cathy initially proposes to marry Edgar "for" both Heathcliff, herself and Edgar, "for" means "in your service." As we've seen, she rationalizes her decision as for the good of all; that she, in her marriage can do this *for* all of them. "For" in Heathcliff's parlance expresses far more the sense of "in order to have" "[F]or I struggle only **for** [read: in order to have] you. Such a sense of *for* as a term of appropriation excludes the subjectivity of the supposedly beloved one from the exchange. Already his language fixes Cathy in the position of his guarantor, debtor and desired property: even though he offers his *for* as an excuse for conduct, the "I struggled only for you" is still put forward as an unsolicited service which not only can Cathy not refuse, but must take in exchange for her own experience of their separation. Add that to the sense that *for* also asserts "in order to have," and Cathy is being denied her emotional reality, objectified and purchased all in the same breath.

Such language of debt is informed by an ideology that maintains the value of appropriation. Everything has a price, although that price need not be agreed upon in advance if the participant is a desired woman, but the exchange must be paid out/forgiven by that woman on demand. The only participants in such exchanges who must agree on terms, who have any say on terms are the men involved. Edgar enters into a contractual relation to have power over Catherine when he marries her. Similarly, Heathcliff wants barriers to Catherine, his desired possession "forgiven," that is, paid or absorbed by someone else. Unfortunately, the Law Heathcliff now speaks works against what he supposedly most wants: to be with Catherine. The ideology informing Heathcliff's language that he believes will finally give him access to Catherine would transmogrify her into an object to be had. Being with has nothing to do with having, and Catherine will not be had.

Catherine's refusal to deal with Heathcliff on his terms becomes explicit in their last meeting before Edgar attempts to throw Heathcliff out of the house. Cathy discovers that Heathcliff has lied to her about his relations with Edgar's sister, and she wants to know why. In an earlier exchange, Cathy begs Heathcliff not to play with Isabella, unless he is "serious" about having her. Heathcliff agrees. In this last conference between the two, Cathy immediately demands Heathcliff explain why he broke his word, and why he said he was not interested in her if he is. Cathy wants Heathcliff to speak plainly, to answer her

question. If he did, he would engage in the first step of a conversational exchange, but that does not happen.

With Jesuitical finesse, Heathcliff again produces a non-response. In his empowered sense of self-righteousness, he does not have to listen; he does not have to answer. Any call upon him to say something is simply an opportunity for him to express again the debt he is owed: the vengeance he will therefore take. Thus, he turns Cathy's question from whether or not he has broken his word into a question of power over: "What is it to you?" he growled. "I have a right to kiss her, if she chooses, and you have no right to object. I'm not *your* husband: *you* needn't be jealous of me!"

In his new voice of the Law, he turns away from previous values, values that Cathy counted on and that had nothing to do with rights and privileges under the law: if he said he would do something, he would. Now, what he can get away with under the Law, despite any previous agreements, becomes his only guide. He is empowered by the Law to make love to whomever he wants, to make what alliances he can, to use a woman as an object for that end, and he means to do it. He asserts that Cathy has no rights over him because he is not her husband. But if he were her husband, Cathy would still be without rights to challenge a husband. Brontë makes this point as we see later: when Heathcliff does marry Isabella, Isabella has no power to check Heathcliff on any grounds of rights. When young Cathy marries Linton, she has no authority to challenge his petty tyranny or Heathcliff's domination as Father in Law. Heathcliff justifies all his actions in some form of legal context. Through the Law, earthly and heavenly, he has gained a voice and he plans to use it. As he says to Catherine, with a piece that sounds like he has just been waiting for the opportunity to deliver himself of it:

"And as to you, Catherine, I have a mind to speak a few words now, while we are at it. I want you to be aware that I *know* you have treated me infernally – infernally! Do you hear? And if you flatter yourself that I don't perceive it, you are a fool; and if you fancy I'll suffer unrevenged, I'll convince you of the contrary, in a very little while! Meantime, thank you for telling me your sister-in-law's secret. I swear I'll make the most of it. And stand you aside!" (97)

Heathcliff's insistence on his rights and wrongs in these two passages has nothing to do with the question Cathy asks him. She sought to engage with him on the grounds that they had previously agreed upon between themselves: that he was not interested in Isabella and that he would leave her alone. Without a word to dissolve that previous understanding/contract, Heathcliff throws it to the wind *because he can*. No law binds him to that past understanding. No Law binds him to renegotiate those terms with Cathy.

Understandably, Cathy amazedly replies “What new phase of his character is this?” Prior to this conversation, Cathy makes what she believes to be a new discovery of Heathcliff’s character: “Avarice is growing with him a besetting sin.” While Catherine discovers what seems to be new phases and vices in Heathcliff, Brontë’s readers know Heathcliff has only found a language to describe the way he has always experienced the world. However, the only vocabulary the law offers is one of exchange, of property.

Heathcliff may not really believe what he says, but he has been longing for a voice for so long to redress how he has been disenfranchised, that he takes the voice most available to him that will seemingly give him what he wants. But the words one uses frames one’s reality and the effect on him of his new *legal(ized)* voice vilifies him. Heathcliff was never previously disrespectful of Catherine. Now, everything he says to her further objectifies her. And one never asks an object questions. His new voice has no language to ask “what did you mean when you said it would degrade you to marry me? Why did you spend so much time with Edgar if you wanted to be with me?” Rather, his new voice, to get what he wants, must first pronounce wrongs inflicted, debts to be repaid so that he can collect what’s owed. And so, he now describes Cathy as having treated him infernally, though he gives no particulars.

To this new accusation, however, Cathy asks for just such clarification: “I’ve treated you infernally – and you’ll take revenge! How will you take it, ungrateful brute? How have I treated you infernally?” Heathcliff again does not engage with Cathy’s question. On the contrary, he uses it merely as a stepping stone to vent more of his own spleen, once again he does so by grounding his response in terms of the Law, and once again, very much in terms of the values of the Law: property and the language of debt:

“I seek no revenge on you,” replied Heathcliff less vehemently. “That’s not the plan. The tyrant grinds down the slaves and they don’t turn against him, they crush those beneath them. You are welcome to torture me to death for your own amusement only allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style, and refrain from insult, as much as you are able. Having leveled my palace, don’t erect a hovel and complacently admire your own charity in giving me that for a home. If I imagined you really wished me to marry Isabella, I’d cut my throat!” (97)

In his first speech Heathcliff asserts both that Cathy has driven him off and that she must forgive him. As we have seen, positioning Cathy such that she must forgive him actually removes the power of that choice from her, objectifying her. Even though here, Heathcliff’s “You are welcome to torture me to death for your own amusement only allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style,” seemingly sets Cathy in a position of power

over him, there's obviously no power here. Though she is supposed ruler and creator over his misery, it is a kingdom of his own imagining. Further, by defining Cathy in this hierarchy where Heathcliff is number two, and she is number one, Cathy can act only in terms of Heathcliff. And as for those below Heathcliff, cut off from Cathy by Heathcliff's positioning of himself between her and the rest, only he has rights to those he positions below himself. Again, he has the right to act on all positions, but she can only act upon him since, as he demonstrates, she has no *legal* right to interfere with him. Very conveniently, Heathcliff situates Cathy in terms where she is totally isolated and totally Heathcliff-centered – at least as far as he is concerned. In terms of the laws he has structured both imaginatively and practically, he boxes Cathy in to be his exclusively. It is a role/prison Cathy utterly rejects inhabiting. However, by not answering Cathy's question of how she has supposedly mistreated him, Heathcliff avoids any challenge of the terms of exchange he establishes between them.

Indeed Heathcliff does not respond to nor engage with any of Cathy's concerns. He turns all questions to center on his own needs and perceptions, breaching no questioning of them. Resisting Heathcliff's language's corruption of their rapport, she charges back upon his statement that really the only reason he would marry Isabella is to get back at her for not marrying him. To this she "cries":

"Oh the evil is that I am *not* jealous, is it?... Well, I won't repeat my offer of a wife: it is as bad as offering Satan a lost soul. Your bliss lies, like his, in inflicting misery. You prove it. Edgar is restored from the ill-temper he gave way to at your coming; I begin to be secure and tranquil; and you, restless to know us at peace, appear resolved on exciting a quarrel. Quarrel with Edgar, if you please, Heathcliff, and deceive his sister; you'll hit on exactly the most efficient method of revenging yourself on me."

The conversation ceased. (97-98)

Though Catherine at least partially engages with the things Heathcliff says, he refuses to respond to her. Heathcliff talks about himself and how he can therefore maintain control of her and keep her focused on him. Cathy on the other hand, responds to Heathcliff's promise to avenge himself on her, to hurt her. She does this not *for* herself, that is, not just because she wants to bring the conversation back to herself, but because despite what she has just heard him say to the contrary, she still believes he will act out of love for her, *for* her sake. As she said to Isabella prior to the above exchange, warning Isabella away from Heathcliff, "I never say to him, 'Let this or that enemy alone, because it would be ungenerous or cruel to harm them'; I say, 'Let them alone because *I* should hate them to be wronged'" (90). But as we have heard, that sentiment no longer

applies. After all, that path did not win him Cathy's hand. Vengeance, the language of debt, promises better.

Heathcliff does want to be with Cathy. In this last exchange, after Cathy first yells at him "How have I treated you infernally, ungrateful brute" Nelly narrates his response of "I seek no revenge on you," as being spoken "less vehemently." As soon as Heathcliff senses that he may be pushing too far, that this may lead to Cathy's real rejection of him, he backs off. But just a bit. By the time he tells her not to erect a hovel over his crushed hopes, he is back fully into the language of his grievance and its righteousness. It is almost as if he gets carried away with himself. The words certainly take him out of himself and away from Cathy. And she is losing Heathcliff. She cannot interpret his words and he will not hear hers. They are ideologically isolated. Even when they use the same words, the definitions of the terms and their relative importance significantly differ. Tragically, their inability to reach each other utterly frustrates both parties because they can't hear the ideological interpretations going on behind the framing of these words.

In their frustration, Nelly tells Lockwood, "The conversation ceased. Mrs. Linton sat down by the fire flushed and gloomy. The spirit which served her was growing intractable: she could neither lay nor control it. He stood on the hearth, with folded arms, brooding on his evil thoughts."(98) Conversation comes to an abrupt halt. They walk to separate corners. Cathy does not dismiss Heathcliff and Heathcliff does not leave, despite the argument. After all, they still want the other to hear their own pain, their own needs, and above anything else, they do not want to be separated again. They both want to be with each other, but they cannot get through their different ideological relations to the Law to be heard. The narrative focusses on their mutual frustration, but it is a frustration borne of the Law's interests against women's voices. Heathcliff's insistence on the Law and his resistance to Cathy's direct questions demonstrates his refusal to put down the Law and his interpretation of it for long enough to hear the woman he loves. Cathy's position with him is therefore untenable.

Nelly, the interloper of this conversation, interprets Heathcliff's words as against the Law, while she hears Cathy return to her previous blasphemy about what marriage implies. Cathy speaks too lightly for Nelly of Isabella's fate and Heathcliff threatens the household, and thus Nelly's job by his plans upon the young Linton. Nelly, whose interests are with the landed gentry rather than the upstart self-made bourgeois like Heathcliff, runs off to get Edgar, the true authority.

Tea?

When Nelly returns with Edgar in pursuit, she describes a scene changed between Cathy and Heathcliff. Heathcliff has his head hung down while Catherine is described as going on at a great clip. In her absence, then, they have found a way to start talking again. However, as soon as Heathcliff sees Edgar coming, he signals Cathy to be quiet, *which she immediately does*. Just in this gesture we can see that despite what does not happen on a verbal level between them, there is a definite, non-verbal understanding between them, a level of meaningful communication. It occurs in the one space they still have in common: their awareness that they are still, somehow, despite marital or gentlemanly remaking, outside the pale of the Law. Here, for one moment at least, where no words are spoken, they understand each other, as if they are children again, waiting for Hindley to put them each in their corner. They will not give Edgar the right to interpret their words as a lever to separate them. But Edgar does not enter to listen or referee. As soon as he comes into the room, he ignores Cathy and addresses himself to Heathcliff.

While we have heard Heathcliff's language of debt, Brontë now lets Edgar hold forth. Edgar as landowning aristocrat avoids speech as something that may unnecessarily put his possessions at risk. For Edgar, language itself is an object, like clothing or estate, and the type of language employed reveals especially the moral, and therefore, superior nature of the user. His communications then is not so much a language that articulates his relation to the Law, rather, it is a style. His style of speech reflects his wearing of the Law as chief administrator and judge. How appropriate that he is a magistrate. With Edgar, it is not what one says, but what diction and style one uses that establishes hierarchical position, and therefore rights to be seen, or especially, heard.²² For Edgar, this style is something one is born into or not; it cannot be earned, especially not by a servant with delusions of gentrification. On Heathcliff's return, for instance, Edgar cautions Cathy not to be absurd in greeting "a run away servant" (85). Despite being told that Heathcliff appears to be a gentleman, Edgar only reluctantly allows him into the main room for tea. He does so only to please another whim of Catherine's, not because he accords Heathcliff equal status. Edgar will not acknowledge Heathcliff's newly achieved status. Edgar's aristocratic class consciousness rejects Heathcliff's achievement as a pretense. He will tolerate tea with him only to please Cathy but more importantly to hear what this rival would say to her that may challenge his interests and to oppose that chance at every turn.

²²Hearing is more offensive than seeing: servants can be seen, but they cannot speak to their "betters".

From the tea table, then, Edgar begins his assault on Heathcliff from the moral high ground. He accuses Heathcliff of using foul language to Catherine, “which has been held to you” thus implicating Heathcliff’s position within the Law as “that blackguard.” The kind of language, we discover, becomes in itself, grounds for Heathcliff’s fair dismissal from his house. As Edgar says to Catherine, “I suppose because it is his ordinary talk, you think nothing of it—you are habituated to his baseness, and, perhaps, imagine I can get used to it too!” But, of course, Edgar insists he won’t get used to it. Continuing with his treatise on genetics, Edgar insists that Heathcliff is a “miserable, degraded character” as exemplified in his language. His language is, like its owner, a “moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous” (99). In other words, it could seduce Isabella, a good girl, into running away with him. The moral Edgar, though, sees right through Heathcliff’s wordplay, but Isabella would not.

Edgar does not say right away that he will not see let Heathcliff see Isabella because of what that might mean for his property management. He covers his own landholder interests in morality. The core of Edgar’s concern, of course, has nothing to do with Cathy or, specifically, Isabella. It is the potential for Heathcliff to gain his property that disturbs him. As Nelly says about Edgar’s speculations on Heathcliff’s presence:

Leaving aside the degradation of an alliance with a nameless man, and the possible fact that his property, in default of heirs male, might pass into such a one’s power, he had sense to comprehend Heathcliff’s disposition – to know that, though his exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable, and unchanged. And he dreaded that mind; it revolted him; he shrank forbodingly from the idea of committing Isabella to its keeping. (88)

But Nelly is kidding herself. It is impossible when thinking about Isabella as someone to be *kept* to “leave aside” the consequence of where his property, of which he and Heathcliff both see Isabella as a part, will go. Edgar is concerned for his property, and in his language that translates Isabella into an object, an object Heathcliff is entirely unworthy to possess because he is *not* a blueblood. And so he calls Heathcliff morally corrupt for speaking as he does to Cathy. But when Edgar comes upon the pair, Heathcliff has not been the one speaking. Catherine is speaking as Edgar comes up, while Heathcliff motions her to silence.

As Edgar and Heathcliff begin their name calling, Cathy does not hear the male game of ownership and oneupsmanship going on around her which has nothing to do with her. Cathy, unlike Edgar or Heathcliff actually responds to what she hears said. Thus, she responds to the direct implication of Edgar accusations. She is outraged that Edgar’s

behavior questions her sense of herself as capable of handling the interests of her husband in his absence.

Edgar continues without hastening to his wife. He reductively objectifies Heathcliff to an effect of language, a thing to be dismissed, disallowed. Heathcliff then does to Edgar exactly what he has done to Cathy: he ignores Edgar, speaking about him as he were any object in the room. He dehumanizes Edgar to that effect: "Cathy, this lamb of yours threatens like a bull...By God, Mr. Linton, I'm mortally sorry that you are not worth knocking down" (99). This is the only line in which Heathcliff talks directly to Linton; the rest of his words in this scene are delivered to Cathy, stressing the Law's idea of choice once again: "...that is the slaving, shivering thing you preferred to me!" (100).

Not only does this language of talking to Cathy about Edgar perpetuate objectification, it also creates a sense of exclusion, a space from which Edgar is excluded. But while Heathcliff can use his lingual style to imply how much more special he is to Catherine than Edgar is, this is not at all Cathy's perspective, and she attempts to make that clear.

In Cathy's terms, she has tried for all of them to be happy together, but she finds it increasingly difficult to comprehend why they no longer respond to her the way they once did. As she tells Edgar and Heathcliff, "I'm delightfully rewarded for my kindness to each! After constant indulgence of the one's weak nature, and the other's bad one, I earn for thanks, two samples of blind ingratitude, stupid to absurdity!" To Edgar, she says, "Edgar, I was defending you and yours: and I wish Heathcliff may flog you sick for daring to think an evil thought of me!" (99) Once Edgar is out of the room, ostensibly to get reinforcements to eject Heathcliff, Cathy turns on him with equal displeasure that Heathcliff has done enough to ensure their separation, the worst thing Heathcliff could do to her for the second time: "If he did overhear us, of course, he'd never forgive you. You've played me an ill turn, Heathcliff!" (100)

Neither Edgar nor Heathcliff escape Catherine's censure, but neither one of them understands what Cathy's language foregrounds: that she does not want to go through another separation, especially one for no reason since they are now all together. What she fails to understand is how either party, brought up to believe in the Law of Either/Or could feel uncertain of where they stand with her. But neither man clarifies these concerns. Both stand on rights of property, Edgar through aristocratic inheritance and Heathcliff through middle class development. While these men stake out their territory and their claims, Cathy, utterly frustrated at hearing the two men she cares for behave in such a mean spirited way towards her, goes to her room. She seeks as always, a safe space, a neutral corner. She

tells Nelly that Edgar must be told she is on the verge of being “seriously ill.” Though the following speech to Nelly, we hear her frustration, as well as her understanding of the world:

[Edgar] has startled and distressed me shockingly! I want to frighten him. Besides, he might come and begin a string of abuse or complainings; I'm certain I should recriminate, *and God knows where we should end!* Will you do so my good Nelly? You are aware that I am in no way blamable in this matter. What possessed him to turn listener? *Heathcliff's talk* was outrageous, after you left us; but I could have soon diverted him from Isabella, and the rest *meant nothing*. Now, all is dashed wrong by that fool's *craving to hear evil* of self that haunts some people like a demon! *Had Edgar never gathered our conversation*, he would never have been the worse for it. Really, when he opened on me with that unreasonable tone of displeasure, after I had scolded Heathcliff till I was hoarse for *him*, I did not care hardly what they did to each other, *especially as I felt that, however the scene closed, we should all be driven asunder for nobody knows how long!* Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend, if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own. That will be a prompt way of finishing all, when I'm pushed to extremity! *But it is a deed reserved for a forlorn hope*" (101, emphasis mine)

Cathy's construction of the scene is couched in her own language, in terms of “talk” and listeners. Heathcliff's “talk” is extreme, but is nothing that she could not dissuade him from with more talk in order to protect Edgar's interests. If Edgar hadn't listened at the door, all would be well. But, as we've already heard from the above attempted conversation, Catherine cannot talk Heathcliff into serving her interests because that would keep him from serving his own: revenge on Edgar; appropriation of his property. Further, we know from Nelly's narration of the scene that Edgar never listens at the door; he has made up his mind on how to act before he gets to the room and fairly charges in.

But between the strokes of Cathy's analysis of those around her, we hear her own fear repeated: that they all (not just herself and Heathcliff) should be separated, “driven asunder for nobody know how long.” The tone of her words betrays that she would rather die than go through that again. She believes if she breaks her heart, that will consequently break theirs “and that will be a prompt way of finishing all.” But of course it will not. After her death, Edgar refuses to see his sister, then tarnished by Heathcliff, and Heathcliff continues his tack of getting at Edgar and his land. Again in Brontë's dark irony, Catherine, who takes everything so personally, has no idea of either the Law-enforced rivalry that Heathcliff and Edgar have always worked from, nor especially what has

become the personalized hate going on between Edgar and Heathcliff that only uses her name as an excuse to perpetuate itself.²³

All that Cathy really knows from all that has gone on is that she is afraid that her space is once again in jeopardy, and that something is about to rupture her happiness in being with the people she loves. At just this moment when Cathy wants to escape to her room, Brontë puts Edgar in Cathy's path. In the only conversation we hear between these characters, Edgar calls up exactly what Cathy cannot hear, especially at this moment. Edgar demands a choice: me or him.²⁴

Edgar: Remain where you are, Catherine I shall not stay. I am neither come to wrangle, *nor to be reconciled*: but I wish just to learn whether, after this evening's events, you intend to continue your intimacy with –

Catherine: Oh for mercy's sake, (foot stamp) for mercy's sake, let us hear no more of it now! Your cold blood cannot be worked into a fever; your veins are full of ice water, but mine are boiling, and the sight of such chilliness makes them dance.

Edgar: To get rid of me answer my question. You *must* answer it; and that violence does not alarm me. I have found that you can be as stoical as anyone, when you please. *Will you give up Heathcliff hereafter, or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be my friend and his at the same time; and I absolutely require to know which you chose.*

Catherine: I require to be let alone! I demand it! Don't you see I can scarcely stand? Edgar, you – you leave me!
Reaches bell chord, breaks it with pulling; lays dashing her head against the arm of the chair and grinding her teeth.

(101-102, italics mine)

Cathy does not miss that, in this exchange, Edgar's concern is not for herself but for himself. His language relates to property interests. He demands to know who Cathy will *have*. He silences her speech by determining that he will have an answer to his question in his terms. But once again, Cathy puts a spoke in the wheel of such questions by refusing to address them. Rather, she attempts to draw Edgar's attention away from his words and to what they demonstrate: his dispassionate response to the situation, as if all he wants to know is where he stands in terms of a contractual obligation – at least that is how

²³See Derrida's *Autobiography*: the debt taken out on the name, the signature, that is unconnected to the signer.

²⁴I have framed the exchange as dramatic dialogue in order to highlight Edgar's tone in contrast to Cathy's.

Cathy reads it, and she cannot stand it. She can only stop Edgar by becoming inarticulate, by pulling away from words she attempts to communicate with.

In Cathy's following delirium, she begins to realize that she is alone; no one else shares her language or really wants to be with her as they once said they did. If they can live without her, she will not live without them. And so she seeks in the grave what she cannot get at the Grange. Death is not a positive life choice. As we shall see, though, Cathy frames death as an afterlife *space* that will finally allow her freedom.

“I shall be incomparably above and beyond you all”

Throughout the final phase of the Cathy-Heathcliff-Edgar portion of the narrative, Brontë foregrounds the importance of the role of communication by blocking it. Nelly as interloper keeps Cathy's messages from being delivered to Edgar, and similarly keeps knowledge of Catherine's condition from him until Cathy waxes delirious again. But by now, it is too late. Though Nelly portrays poor Edgar as waning away in his library waiting for Cathy to see him (98) she does nothing to alleviate his misery, even though she knows Cathy is equally waiting for him. But whether or not Nelly delays Edgar's discovery of Cathy's condition, Edgar still does not seek out Cathy. Despite Nelly's interpretation of Edgar waning selfless and Cathy waxing selfish, while she says they both expect the same thing, a visit, Edgar has told Cathy that he will come neither to “wrangle or reconcile.” Edgar goes to his room and his pride to find his consolation without her. Edgar gives up. And while Edgar pines over his imagined loss, Cathy has time to think about how she has been interpreting her world.

At the first idea of Edgar's assumed disregard, Cathy goes into shock. She cannot believe that Edgar cares more for position and ownership than he does for her. In a rambling passage where she tries to establish how Edgar is taking her illness she says, “Nelly, if it not be too late, as soon as I learn how he feels, I'll choose between these two: either to starve at once – that would be no punishment unless he had a heart – or to recover and leave the country” (104). If he does not respect her kind of fidelity to him, if he has no heart for her, she will leave him. It is important to note that she does not say she will leave with Heathcliff. If Edgar does have a heart, however, she will kill herself as the only way she can exert any form of her feelings about the whole situation. To kill herself is not, as we see further on, just to punish Edgar: it is her way of escaping “this shattered prison” of her body and what her life has become.

As Edgar's absence continues, she again reconsiders her world, the choices she has made, and the options available. In her delirious dream of the Heights and her own lifetime, she tells Nelly of how her life flashes before her eyes, all of which is related through her experiences of separation. Cathy goes "in a stroke" from recalling, after her father died, the misery of being separated for the first time from Heathcliff; she sees herself in her current role as the Lady of the Grange as one of exile. She describes her perception of herself as "the wife of a stranger, an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what then had been my world" (107). Through this dream recollection, Cathy sees that rather than making the choices to keep her with the people she loves, she has, in effect, only made ones that keep her further from any space to allow such a meeting.²⁵ But again, she does not see the larger legal structures that act against her: that no choice is available in the Law to maintain or to create those meeting spaces.

Before she dies, Cathy chastises both Edgar and Heathcliff for having their own space, for having without her what she desired with them: Edgar, she assumes from what she has been told, can find consolation in his books, and Heathcliff, she predicts, will have a loving family once she has gone. With reference to what she has heard in their recent exchanges, she has every reason to believe that they prefer status and possessions to flesh and blood connexion.

Consider that Edgar's initial response on seeing Catherine, in their first exchange after her illness and after hearing that she professes she will be dead by spring, is to ask "Catherine, what have you done?...Am I nothing to you, any more? Do you love that wretch, Heath—" Edgar still asks are you mine or are you Heathcliff's. Cathy *hears* Edgar far more clearly, and hears how his language relates to property law. Knowing this now to be Edgar's motivating concern, Cathy responds with his language: "What you touch at present, you may have; but my soul will be on that hilltop before you lay hands on me again. I don't want you, Edgar. I'm past wanting you. Return to your books. I'm glad you possess a consolation for all you had in me is gone" (109). She parrots his language, spitting it back at him. This is the only time she uses verbs of appropriation.²⁶ And she is

²⁵ Many critics, most notably Irene Taylor in *Holy Ghosts* argues that this scene, far from showing any adult realization on her part, represents Cathy's attempts to regress back into childhood, and that Cathy has yet to accept adult responsibility called for by marriage. What I hope this analysis shows is that that kind of growth is not healthy, but crippling. The desire for escape from such a dysfunctional scenario is legitimate.

²⁶ Derrida uses the term "appropriation" throughout *Spurs* to refer to the "propriative" practice of the Phallus, the range of taking actions signed by the I.

right: she does not want Edgar. What would she do with him in those terms?²⁷ It is equally true that what Edgar married Catherine for is also gone: she can no longer act as mistress of his house, she is physically wasted, and the peace which she had with him which allowed her to be company for him is lost as well.

Heathcliff reveals himself, too, in his last conversation with Cathy. His first brilliant remark is "Oh, Cathy! Oh, my life! how can I bear it?" (132). This, when she is the one dying! As if she has had enough of his self-pity, and before she can move to offer anything else, she responds to Heathcliff with "a suddenly clouded brow":

What now?.... You and Edgar have broken my heart, Heathcliff! And you both come to bewail the deed to me as if you were the people to be pitied! I shall not pity you, not I. You have killed me – and thriven on it, I think. How strong you are! How many years do you mean to live after I am gone? (132)

Cathy has seen that what both her closest fellows value are their own interests first, no matter what they do to jeopardize their togetherness, while Cathy wants more than anything else to be with as opposed to separated from. And so, after expressing her desire to hold Heathcliff forever, that he not forget her she attempts reconciliation. This is her language, based on her experience and interpretation of the world, where to be with is the priority. She offers a final space where they can meet:

I'm not wishing you greater torment than I have, Heathcliff! *I only wish us never to be parted – and should a word of mine distress you hereafter, think I feel the same underground, and for my own sake, forgive me!* Come here and kneel down again! You never harmed me in your life. Nay, if you nurse your anger, that will be worse to remember than my harsh words. *Won't you come here again? Do!* (133)

Again, Heathcliff does not hear Catherine. Indeed, he still accuses Cathy of being "cruel and false," of "despising" him (134). He is not listening; rather, as before, he takes this occasion once again to "speak a few words" of the Law. "You loved me—then what *right* had you to leave me? What right—answer me—for the poor fancy you felt for Linton?" (135) As we know if he had stayed around three years ago instead of leaving while she was speaking, he would know why Cathy married Edgar, why Cathy, too, felt she had "no business" marrying Edgar (72). Unlike Edgar, though, Heathcliff also speaks of

²⁷See, for instance, Irigaray's "When our Lips Speak Together" in *This Sex which is not One*: where she suggests that women cannot frame relationships in terms of having/exchange. As she asks, "What would I do with you, wrapped as a gift this way"?

separation, but he accuses Cathy of parting them, saying “Do I want to live? What kind of living will it be when you – oh , God! would you like to live with your soul in the grave?”

Rather than responding by telling Heathcliff if he had been around and listened none of this would have happened, Cathy attempts to move their exchange to a higher level – to a place with potential for real re-union. “If I’ve done wrong, I’m dying for it. It is enough! You left me too; but I won’t upbraid you! I forgive you! Forgive me!”(135). In this request, Cathy again offers the only space left to reconnect before she dies. Heathcliff refuses the offer by continuing to assert his sense of self and wrongs incurred. He refuses to forgive, to let go of his interests long enough to attend to what theirs might be together, little own simply Cathy’s. That would cost him too much of what he has worked for, or so he believes. Forgiveness is not so unconditional for him. So Brontë condemns him to pursue a version of Cathy’s fate: where she tried to move into spaces that would allow her the freedom and intimacy she desired, Heathcliff will now try to find his bliss, but more especially to find Cathy, in destroying other’s spaces, the very thing most sacred to her. He, too, Brontë’s text asserts, is just as doomed to failure as she was. The Law allows Heathcliff to carry out his plans, but just as ignorance of the Law destroys Cathy, using it to find happiness also destroys. Heathcliff is characterized at this point as determined to stay with the Law and its language of debt and property rights. Consequently, despite what we also see portrayed as his real desire for Catherine (and her desire for him), his allegiance to this language keeps him from hearing Catherine, and thereby keeps him from being with her.

In a final burst of energy, Cathy leaps into Heathcliff’s arms; and in another lie on Heathcliff’s part, he promises not to leave no matter what. Catherine falls unconscious after this, and Edgar returns to the scene. Of course Heathcliff leaves as soon as he hears Edgar’s boot on the stair. Nelly tells us what a good nurse maid he is, tending her like a mother would a sick child (137). The image is frighteningly reminiscent of Othello’s musings over Desdemona’s corpse. It is easy to be attentive to someone, to project all one’s sentiment when the other party cannot respond. Catherine again is silent/silenced.²⁸

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²⁸The mother/child analogy also rings up images of Kristeva’s pre-lingual, pre-symbolic terrifying/mesmerizing space of the enchant, in this case a regressive enclosure. Only in this sort of glass confined, necrophiliatic space do we see Edgar with Catherine, caring for her actively: when she is helpless and can do nothing to resist, from which only death can rest her.

Catherine dies shortly after this scene while giving birth to her daughter. Within her world she has been mis-heard and misunderstood while she, too, seems to have been just as incapable of comprehending how the people in her world, people whom she loved, could really be so possessed by a line that puts status and possession over being with – that everyone would rather not all get along together than let their animosity drive them apart. She has seen herself as the cohesive center of her world and believed that as long as she lived, that value system of togetherness would be respected. When she finds it is not, she attempts an escape, once again believing that the next space she enters will be more receptive to her non-appropriative value system.

Cathy moves from space to space, from the heights to the Grange and finally to the grave where she believes she will be “incomparably beyond and above you all” (134), not confined to imprisoning spaces, but roaming new ones with potential for inclusion, that value her values of be-ing with-ness. At least this is what she believes. But Catherine’s life has been a series of escapes from spaces that have separated her from those she loves, where each idealized new one has been a disappointment. Brontë of course allows us to believe what we will as to whether or not Catherine ever achieves a world that respects/hears her ideology. But because Catherine dies in ignorance of the Law and never sees that her antagonists are systemic, she dies without the vehicle to affect the spaces she inhabits. By taking her situation as a personal attack rather than as a systemic consequence, she is never able herself to *hear* Heathcliff and Edgar in terms of the ideologies that frame their response. I do not mean that it is her responsibility to change the world. After all, she does in fact try to heal some part of it by asking for Heathcliff’s forgiveness. Similarly, no one ever *asks* her what she means; they simply pronounce, as they are empowered by the Law to do so. Cathy is, however, the only character in the book so far to glimpse that there are at least two perspectives operating in her world, one caught up in ownership, the other in being-with.

In having Catherine die when she does, Brontë demonstrates how a woman who, in ignorance of the Law, can see the world as potentially inclusive rather than appropriative has no place in the world of the Law. She cannot maintain that perspective and live once her views are interpreted to be acting against the interests of the status quo.

Brontë’s text supports Catherine’s world view, her contribution to resisting the Law, by allowing the Law to run unchecked after her death. When Catherine dies, Edgar goes to pieces. He spends time with his books rather than his daughter. He wastes away without exerting energy to save his daughter from Heathcliff. His self-interest, his self-pity endangers his daughter.

Heathcliff, too, without Catherine's presence, uses all the devices the Law allows to wreak havoc on the Linton and Earnshaw clans. The consequences of both Edgar's and Heathcliff's legal, post-Cathy death experiences only destroy the world, because each is empowered by the Law not to hear another. Young Cathy may plead with her father for his time. He does not listen. Isabella will write to appeal to Edgar to let her back *into* their home. He will not listen to any words from her and excludes her from the family home. Heathcliff demands from Edgar what is his by Law, so Edgar must hear his demands, even though they will put a child at risk. Heathcliff will deny young Cathy's petition to visit her father on his death bed. Heathcliff refuses to listen to her because he can. She has no legal claim to be heard. The novel does not leave the narrative world in the Law's hands forever, though.

In the final movement of the novel, Brontë gives us another story in which another child/woman of the same name as the previous woman, unlike her mother, grows into a keen awareness of the Law but with a simultaneously acute resistance to it. With such knowledge, Brontë suggests, a woman can find a way to articulate herself and be heard, without necessarily dying for it.

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I've heard the mermaids singing

Throughout this chapter, I have focused on how Brontë presents Cathy's ideology as one of inclusion, at odds with the Law's principles of appropriation. Both terms reflect power - the power to be with; the power to have - but both reflect a different relation to power. One allows; the other excludes. Cathy's sense of inclusion allows movement within spaces and with people. Her attempt to redefine marriage as a vehicle for deliverance and freedom crashes against the Law's demand to have marriage create a choice and a restriction of movement.

Patriarchy depends on its ability to maintain hierarchies and exclusions from privilege. Cathy's voice must be shut down because it poses a threat to that order of exchange in which women, especially, are its commodities. Cathy's voice is shut down, or at least will not be heard and cannot be understood through the Law's interpretive filter of either/or. Consequently, Cathy spends her life energy struggling for freedom, feeling

checked at every turn, rather than being able to grow up. Though I have serious reservations with the psychoanalytic criticism of the novel that suggests Catherine attempts to regress to her childhood before she dies, the childhood image that recurs is crucial. Catherine was *happy* on the moors. From the moment her father dies, she spends her life doing everything she can to get back to them. To where she can be herself. The Heights is not a happy place to grow up. And if energy is constantly being fed into one's survival requirements, one hardly has the time to develop into an adult.

Catherine's subjectivity, her ability to express herself, is compromised by the Law's efforts to suppress her difference, her voice. Brontë gives Catherine a strong character, strong enough to resist the Law's efforts, in the forms of the socializing pressures around her, to break her voice. She retains her voice, but at the cost of her life: she simply will not live in a world, cannot comprehend a world so oppressive.

Cathy's subjectivity, her sense of self, is compromised by her difference to the Law. her voice's expression of difference. Brontë also demonstrates how the Law's voice compromises the subjectivity of those who speak that voice. They are manipulated by the official language allowed them. The languages available to Heathcliff, for instance, inspired by Old Testament discipline and romance novel plots are of "an eye for an eye." As he grows up in the Earnshaw house, he can look to that doctrine alone for justice. Equity through pain. Rather than reconcile and be close with Catherine, Heathcliff's entrapment in the language of the law keeps him from Catherine. He rejects reconciliation because he hasn't got what he came for yet. No one in the text except for Nelly suggests an alternative practice for justice. An eye for an eye; a heart for a heart – that is, if one has the power to achieve those ends. As Isabella says to Nelly on her escape from Heathcliff:

On only one condition can I hope to forgive Heathcliff. It is if I may take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; for every wrench of agony, return a wrench, reduce him to my level. As he was the first to injure, make him the first to implore pardon; and then –why then, Ellen. I might show you some generosity. *But it is utterly impossible I can ever be revenged, and therefore I cannot forgive him.*
(149)

So while Nelly the servant, may know all about a higher authority's rights to judge, those on the same upper rung of the social ladder see only the sign of the four hundred and ninety-first sin, the sin they need not bear. In the narrative, the lower classes, the servants, act as those who know the Law and its oppressive caste system, and who use religious law to rationalize it. In the novel, only those born outside that servant class suffer from the capriciousness of those with property, like Hindley's treatment of Heathcliff and Heathcliff's treatment of Hareton and young Cathy. The religious rationale that may salve

the stable (in terms of the narrative) working class's sense of their lot in life does not work for Cathy. Indeed, for the working class, leaving Justice to a higher power is good aristocratic advise to make sure the lower classes do not rise up to avenge themselves. The 491st sin, however, has more to speak to in the narrative's privileging of the language of inclusion than to hope for a better day.

Brontë frames her text with two dreams: Lockwood's dream of young Cathy trying to get in at the window of the Heights and Lockwood's dream of Jabe's sermon on the 491st sin. Inclusion and Forgiveness. Lockwood, the social dandy, rejects both. In a fright, he violently bars Cathy's entrance, and out of boredom he would have a preacher knocked to bits. Brontë, however, keeps these themes foregrounded throughout the novel, developing the progress of the story where both can be realized and where that soul destroying Law can be suspended.

In the last movement of the text, we heard how conversation, real meeting between even characters who care for each other, cannot take place when one is either ignorant of the law or only hears through it. In the final movement of the text Brontë narratively proposes the single possible place under the Law where real conversation, a meeting between persons, can exist: within the always avoided space of forgiveness.

Forgiveness provides a subversive toe hold into the Law. It is what deLauretis refers to as one of the wedges to be jammed into the patriarchal gears.²⁹ It is Religiously and Legally approved: one can, as Heathcliff demands of Cathy, forgive a debt. The person imploring pardon puts themselves at the mercy of another. That other may be in a higher or lower social position, but forgiveness nullifies those social borders. It is the active engagement of the other as subject. An aristocrat begging forgiveness of a servant puts themselves in the position of dependent to the other, making the other the empowered subject. A servant asking forgiveness of an aristocrat confirms the social order, with the exception that to ask for forgiveness also asks that the petitioner be heard. The subject, the forgiver, must also be the other, the *listener* to allow the penitent to be heard.

Forgiveness formalized into confession demands a listener. To forgive, one must know what is being asked to be forgiven. An exchange may be possible that both suspends social positioning and privilege such that the subject who says I forgive you, who asserts the I, must suspend for a moment the privilege of the I to allow the other to be the Subject, the speaker. Listening demands an exchange of subject positions, indeed makes subject /other positions difficult to situate. And it is in that flux that the Law is suspended, positions altered. Difference made possible.

²⁹See *Alice Doesn't*, chapter 5, on narrative desire.

To achieve such a moment, to allow difference to be heard and the Law to be suspended, Brontë presents us with Cathy's daughter, Catherine. Unlike Cathy, her daughter has a fairly pleasant childhood.³⁰ Unlike Cathy who loses her mother at birth and her father at six; young Catherine at least makes it to twelve before she goes through anything approximating Cathy's childhood experiences of loss and suppression. In both Cathys' lives, each child has an indulgent father spoiling them, allowing them to feel independent. Since Cathy does not lose the gentle (all be it negligent) father in her life till early adolescence, by that time, she has had the opportunity to become socialized. In other words, she develops an understanding of what is expected of her in her role as young lady, but she also knows what she has the right to expect from those around her.

She also develops a sense of mercy and justice. And is prepared to act on both of her own volition. Even though she knows she breaks one Law, her father's no less, to go see Linton while he is sick, she rationalizes her break as if answering to a higher order of what is fair. And Heathcliff plays upon her sense of what's right and proper when he manipulates her into continuing her visits to his son.

Catherine is then very much like her mother: she wants to roam and explore; she has a strong sense of justice. But she also has a strong sense of kindness. She both knows the Law but is also capable of breaking it knowingly when it inhibits her freedom or sense of justice and mercy. She has far more awareness of the Law as Law than her mother ever did. This sophistication will benefit her when her sheltered life is broken by Heathcliff's machinations with Linton. Before this period, she has had little or no experience of actual, deliberate cruelty or illegality. Thus, when she first confronts Heathcliff as a "bad man," she responds to him on the same personal level from which her mother viewed the world. As Cathy says to Heathcliff when he comes to take her back to the Heights to be with her new husband, Linton:

Linton is all I have left in the world, and, though you have done what you could to make him hateful to me, and me to him, you *cannot* make us hate each other! and I defy you to hurt him when I am by, and I defy you to frighten me. (228)

Though she is ready to believe in Heathcliff's evil, she refuses to allow it power over her to change herself or to change what she naively assumes to be Linton's goodness. After Linton dies, and she feels all in her world gone, her exchanges express an increasing

³⁰At another time, it would be interesting to take a look at the key times when Edgar progressively absents himself from his daughter's presence, as well as how he simply lets go of making any effort to stop Heathcliff's encroachment upon his family. He just washes his hands of the tough moments.

awareness of the Law. But consistent throughout her speech are the same references to the same values her mother fought to maintain: inclusion, and the freedom to move in such an inclusive space. From the above speech we hear that, for Cathy, hating becomes equivalent to erecting walls, separating one from another. And she refuses to be manipulated into being separated from her companion like she was when Heathcliff tricked her away from her father.

Further, Cathy's language is also oriented around forgiveness. She deliberately uses forgiveness as a tool to reinitiate any connexion that is at risk. This is especially evident in her dealings with Linton. When she fears she is out of his favour, and thus separated from his company, she responds immediately, willing to curb her offending behavior just to be within his circle again. She learns that this kind of supplication, however, does not always work. Indeed, after Heathcliff denies her access to her dying father, she becomes less willing to engage in such requests: her willingness to curb her own desire gets no respect.

Only when Linton dies, however, and all in the world that is left to her is gone does she allow her feelings towards Heathcliff to grow into hate. Only then does she build a wall around herself for her own sanity. In this dry period of bitterness, Cathy is unforgiving and cruel to anyone who attempts kindness. She no longer trusts anyone. When her mother grew shocked at the behavior of the people in her world, she had the privilege to retreat into her own room and mind. Cathy is not even allowed that: her mother was mistress of her household; young Cathy is a servant. When young Cathy does not have a moment to escape (like her father) into a book, she must carry her walls with her. In doing so she separates herself from Heathcliff's household. She will not willingly participate in its complicity with his corruption.

Also unlike her mother, Cathy does not die from shock in having Heathcliff's lack of kindness revealed to her. For one, she never knew him to be loving; for another she has a clearer sense of the legal wheels that turn that place her in her disempowered position. Her only power is her refusal to let Heathcliff break her spirit. Since she discovers that neither kindness nor begging work with Heathcliff to change his intent upon her, she learns to repel his attacks, blow for blow. In this way, though she remains his prisoner, she still frustrates his ability to get what he wants: to see her silenced, crushed before him. Brontë provides Catherine with one weapon to deflect Heathcliff's salvos: her voice. Rather than attempt any longer to persuade Heathcliff of alternative approaches to her, she learns to mirror back the language of the Law Heathcliff employs to keep the Heights her prison. As she says to Heathcliff:

“I’ll put my trash away , because you can make me, if I refuse,” answered the young lady, closing her book and throwing it on a chair. “But I’ll not do anything, though you should swear your tongue out, except what I please!” (34)

Similarly, with real feminist flair, she takes on the Law’s names of abuse and turns them into her protection. When Joseph says she is hell bound, like her mother before her, she responds by pushing the limits of Joseph’s words, and claiming direct allegiance with his worst nightmare: “I warn you, refrain from provoking me, or I’ll ask your abduction as a special favour. Stop, look here Joseph...I’ll show you how far I’ve progressed in the Black Art...” (22) When Joseph protests her words show her wickedness, praying deliverance, Catherine assures him he is already cast off. She knows how to use his language: a skill her mother never realized.

By giving her character this skill, Brontë demonstrates how the language of the Law, once recognized as such, can be used for some protection. But liberation, the novel implies, is not that way found. The more Cathy moves into this position of defense, the more she becomes self-repressed. The Law remains. And, as Brontë continually shows, using the Law to fight for oneself never gives one what one wants; what it does do is suffocate one’s self. And Cathy’s is a forced stand. As we’ve seen, her initial impulse is not to return a blow for a blow. She would rather maintain connexion – even with Heathcliff.

At her lowest and most uncharacteristic, she attacks Hareton for attempting to gain access to the same space in which she finds solace. She picks on his reading. We are told, like Catherine, “Hareton was often obliged to seek the kitchen also, when the master wanted to have the house to himself” (245). Catherine heretofore avoids or ignores him. This time, however, she initiates the scrap, comparing him to a dog, not talking to him, but talking about his reading blunders to Nelly. By the close of this brief clash, however, she leaves a book on the table for Hareton and leaves the space for Nelly to observe whether he will read it. At this point, Catherine’s plan could be to see if she can tease him further, assuming he is dumb enough to play with a bone she will pull back. When she discovers the next day that he has not picked it up, Nelly tells Lockwood, “I saw she was sorry” (247). In this moment, she attempts to rectify the hurt. But it is not easily done. For some time Hareton ignores both her and her efforts. She verges on the edge of her mother’s own response to her imprisoning world, a world not worth living in. She is described by Nelly as being at her wits end “at last recourse, cried and said she was tired of living, her life was useless.” (246) She may have jeopardized her one remaining chance at a companion.

Brontë sets the day of their eventual reconciliation at Easter Monday, the Christian season of a god's death for the forgiveness of sin. Cathy begins her sally into discovering a possible companion in her world by claiming kinship, something she once rejected. When Hareton does not answer, Cathy, for the first time anyone does so in the book actually asks if the other person is listening: "Hareton, Hareton, Hareton! do you hear?" (247). Unlike any other attempt at an exchange in the book, Cathy actually wants to know if Hareton has heard and understood her. She pulls the pipe out of his mouth when he tries to ignore her and cries, "You must listen to me, first; and I can't speak while those clouds are floating in my face" (247).

Catherine's next unique gesture is to make sure the words she uses are understood to mean the same thing to both parties. When Hareton asks if she will go to the devil and let him be, she responds directly:

"No," she persisted, "I won't – I can't tell what to do to make you talk to me, and you're determined not to understand. When I call you stupid, I don't mean anything – I don't mean that I despise you. Come you shall take notice of me Hareton – you are my cousin and you shall own me." (247)

When Hareton responds that he will not be told he owes Cathy anything or that he is responsible for her in any way, Cathy actually attempts to clarify her meaning, to respond again to Hareton to keep them talking with each other and *understanding* each other. In another Heights first, Nelly attempts to mediate an exchange, and to encourage Hareton to respond to Cathy's efforts to be friends, especially since, in the language of exchange, "it would make you another man to have her for a companion" (247).

It is this word, companion, that calls up an articulate response from Hareton: "A companion!" he cried; "when she hates me and does not think me fit to wipe her shoon!" He declines the offer. Cathy also responds directly to what Hareton just states: "'It is not I who hate you, its you who hate me!' wept Cathy, no longer disguising her trouble. 'You hate me as much as Mr. Heathcliff does, and more.'"

Hareton, engaging exactly what Cathy has just said, calls this an outright lie since he always takes her part with Heathcliff. And finally, we get the only moment in the text where, beyond responding directly to each other's word but remaining unchanged by them, we actually hear a shift in perspective. Cathy does not call Hareton a liar; rather, she says, "I didn't know you took my part" (248). Unlike anywhere else in the book or with any other characters, at this instance we hear a character deal with the information they are offered. By way of excuse, Cathy responds to Hareton and states "and I was miserable and bitter at everybody; but now I thank you and beg you to forgive me, what can I do

besides?"(248) Her request is genuine: she waits to hear if Hareton will absolve her and let her into his space or have him come into hers.

To demonstrate her sincerity, she kisses him, gives him a book and leaves, respecting his space to deal with her offer his own way, without her as an intrusion, waiting *his word* as law as to whether she stays in that shared space or goes. She offers a book and promises that, "if he'll take it, I'll come and teach him to read it right, and if he refuse it, I'll go upstairs, and never tease him again" (248). This is a promise to avoid his space entirely by voluntarily secluding herself in another. It is the hardest thing she could give up since it is the thing she desires most.

Significantly, in this moment of exchange Cathy insists on *hearing* Hareton's response. She demands an answer. He takes the book. Taking this as at least a symbolic attempt on his part to communicate and build a bridge back to her without losing face entirely, she makes good her word and goes to him. She then again seeks clarity on her interpretation of his taking the book: "Say you forgive me, Hareton, do! You can make me so happy by speaking that little word"(248). He mutters. Cathy continues "So you'll be my friend?" Hareton says Cathy will be ashamed of him every day of her life. "So you won't be my friend?" she asks. Every step in the exchange, Cathy makes sure that they understand each other. This is definitely not what Heathcliff wants between the two of them, but it is beyond his ability to anticipate it; it is outside his consideration and so, not prohibited. Forgiveness creates loopholes.

Forgiveness is a sort of consultation/negotiation under the Law but outside the terms of the Law in that Catherine proposes terms for an arrangement between themselves that has no accommodation in Heathcliff's thoughts and is not sanctioned or prohibited by Law; it is an agreement independent of the Law, of the kind that Heathcliff and Catherine used to have when she would request something and he would concur. Such unexpected moments/meetings are suspensions of the Law; bubbles in the brakelines of patriarchy. They are not on the margin, these moments, not etched on the side; they are the underwritten text, just like Jabes's sermon based on another text that is not re-iterated in it, only perverted by it. One is still within patriarchy, but in a different way. It is what makes, at least in this text, the prohibited, patriarchally threatening desire of with/within-ness possible. Heathcliff moves towards this inclusiveness himself when he finally lets go as Catherine asked him to years before and forgive. Heathcliff simply gives up on bringing the houses down. As soon as he does that, the narrative implies, he ends up walking the moors with Cathy.

Cathy, too, moves from defense, attempting to use the language of the Law against itself which gains her nothing, to meeting. Of course, Brontë provides her with someone to meet. The story of the girl who has no such companion potential goes untold here. But in that moment of allowing for the possibility that Hareton is other than she believed, a new space is created. A space within the Law, but out of its reach. A bubble. A security zone.

In its critique of women's place under the law, Brontë's text shows that this security is still gained within the same space/house that the Law built, and owns and lords over, and rents at a fee. The freedom Cathy maintains with her husband Hareton is still because he allows it as Lord of the Manor. But the bubble in the line that real conversation creates is about a (radical) revolution from within.³¹ Such a change, if nothing else, causes Oedipus to look with different eyes on his wife — to look at her less as chattel and more as partner, even though that status is given, not a legal right.

One critic suggests that Cathy simply becomes domineering to Hareton and leads the pure earth man into the path of perdition by taking him back to Thrush Cross Grange.³² Another critic insists it is bad for Cathy's soul, too, to return to her old ways once she has got a stronghold on Hareton, since they are classist, valuing a return to landed privilege where Cathy, who knows the rules there, will have the upper hand over the (ex)Worker. But such a view assumes that Hareton does not have a mind of his own and is not to be easily civilized or brought into submission. Instead a balance is established between them, where both partners have strength to ask for something or say so when they've had enough.

But this meeting, or partnership, comes out of forgiveness, re-enters socialized patriarchy from that space and the understandings found there. Cathy begs Hareton's forgiveness and offers him a book with a promise to teach him how to read. This is potentially dangerous for Cathy: literacy is empowerment for learning the law. It is a risk Cathy takes unwittingly, but, the text also seems to warn that it is not healthy to be in ignorance of patriarchy and the law's scope. That is where the problems come from, potentially if not actually, for both Cathys: just such a lack of awareness of its permeation.

As well, the patriarchy no longer exists as the only game in town. Cathy and Hareton, by hearing difference, by listening can create ruptures in the Law, temporary bubbles where anything can happen because voices can be heard and understanding and

³¹As I argue throughout this project, there is no "margin" or outside the law spaces. It is the patriarchy, as Barbara Christian points out, that decides who is in and who is marginal. It is a categorization I resist. It does feminist practise no good to see itself from this minimized, othered, illegal locality.

³² See Barbara Munson Goff "Between Natural Theology and Natural Selection: Breeding the Human Animal in *Wuthering Heights*." *Victorian Studies*. 27.4(1984 Summer): 508.

real communication becomes possible. This is what Silverman refers to as the potential to expand the Oedipal scene: hearing women's voices.³³

The emphasis here is on *temporary* and *momentary* spaces in the Law. As Judith Butler suggests in reference to gender, it is a struggle to change constructions of subjectivity, to inhabit different-from-orthodox ways of presenting one idea of self since one's subjectivity is hung round by the law. Such performances can only be momentary challenges to the pervasive norm of the Law.³⁴ Brontë's text reflects this awareness. The fear is not that Cathy may tame Hareton, but that moments of exchange like the one we've looked at are just that: moments. They must constantly be created; they depend on mutual participation, mutual willingness and a strong will to hang on to that moment. The Law does not support them and would destroy them if it could. The hope of Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, though, is that, contrary to the voice of the Law, such moments can be created. With enough bubbles (moments like these) in the brakeline, the bubbles merge, replacing the fluid with the expanded shell: the brakelines fail.

³³See Kaja Silverman's "The Fantasy of the Maternal Voice," *The Acoustic Mirror*.

³⁴See Judith Butler, "Gender is Burning" and "Critically Queer" in *Bodies that Matter*.

Inigaray's project is much more clearly politically [than Kristeva's] in so far as it is directed to providing an intellectual or discursive space in which women can explore, experiment with, and go beyond the experiences that distinguish them as oppressed in patriarchal culture. She wished to participate in the creation of a speaking position (or many), a conceptual perspective and discursive space where women can articulate their specific needs, desires and contributions. Clearly such a space does not yet exist, or, if it does, then this space exists now only as marginalized, a 'private space' outside the scope of publicly validated interactions. The possibility of carving out such a space depends on clearing away much of the domain of representation that men, who claim to be speaking universally, have constructed: 'the articulation of the reality of my sex is impossible in discourse, and for structural, dialectic reasons, my sex is removed, at least as the property of a subject, from the predicative mechanisms that assures discursive coherence'

In opposition to this prevailing conception of knowledge as a neutrally expressed body of information produced by a sexually indifferent subject from an unspecified perspective, Inigaray attempts to clear a space within language for another voice, body, pleasure, other forms of sexuality and desire, other forms of discourse, different forms of reason can be articulated. She demonstrates the violence to which masculinity resorts in appropriating discourse, meaning, sexuality and desire to itself. This violence is an unspoken feature of the persistent historical dominance of certain styles, modes and procedures of knowledge rather than the many others possible.

Grosz, Elizabeth, "Philosophy and the Body: Kristeva and Inigaray," *Feminist Interventions: Social and Political Theory*, 135 and 136.

Our politics does not aim at bettering society, but at freeing women and their choices—that is, freeing them from the obligation of justifying their difference, with all the forms of social servitude that obligation entails and which have been well illustrated throughout human history.

the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference*, 121

Chapter Four

Disparity among Women: Resisting the Semiotic in To the Lighthouse

In the last chapter, I presented a view of language's relation power, specifically as relations of access to power. I suggested that the Law acts to regulate what can be heard within the Law's domain and it controls what a sign signifies. That is, any word can be spoken, but the Law applies strict semantics to that word's interpretation. Only legal meanings are applicable. Difference, meanings that challenge the Law's, will simply not be heard even should anyone dare to speak them. Similarly, because such strict semantics apply, patriarchal power relations do not require listening in order to function. The sign=the legally signified. When Cathy says that she will marry Edgar, her narrative world hears her to say that she consents to be Edgar's and his alone, that she gives up claim to all previous attachments. As Cathy's conversation with Nelly demonstrates, this is not what Cathy means by marriage at all. She constructs marriage to mean, among other things, something that will allow her economic autonomy. Listening to another is shut down since these homonological¹ differences are not allowed to be heard.²

¹ I use the term *homonological* to describe alternate (illegal) meanings. The term is based on "homonym:" words that sound the same but have different meanings.

² This control over what meanings can be heard reminds me of high-level programming languages that have strictly defined syntax and semantics. Program code before being processed into a program is run through a

In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë demonstrates that women speak, but that they are silenced within the Law when they speak in terms outside legal meaning. Brontë's Cathys are both very vocal characters, very much speaking/acting with(in) language. Their speech-acts challenge the Law that silences difference, that uses silence as part of women's general socialization. In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf presents female characters who have a more problematic relationship to language than the Cathys of *Wuthering Heights*, in that the women of *To the Lighthouse* have been more socialized, more acclimatized to their role as silenced. They have not, as we shall see, become uncritically accepting of what the Law takes that silence to represent: complicity with its interests, acceptance of its dominance and definitions. On the contrary, these private spaces become scenes of difference, sites where the code is temporarily broken. The breaks of the code occur unheard or, as *To the Lighthouse* is framed, in silence, making that narrative's characters' radical questioning of the Law go unheard by others. This isolation, the novel suggests, keeps these brakes in the code from becoming sites for change beyond the personal level.³ The narrative of the text, however, privileges the reader with being the omniscient auditor of these voices. We can put together the patterns of these several voices' questions about the Law's effect on language, and its consequent effect on identity construction. The narrative structure challenges us thereby to ask what we will do with these questions when we can see the similarities among these female character's relations to language and the Law which they do not/cannot communicate among themselves.

The following discussion is, in part, an attempt to answer that challenge. To accomplish this, I present a discussion of how *To the Lighthouse* represents its characters' relation to language in terms of their relationships to the symbolic.⁴ We have seen in the

syntax checker. The syntax checker finds errors that will stop a program from compiling, from being turned into a working code that the computer itself can understand. Syntax checking catches things like a bracket () in the wrong place or no period where one is expected. If an error like this is found in the code, the system will not let the compile process occur. A syntax checker cannot catch semantic errors: statements that have all the correct forms, but when compiled actually cause the system to crash happen all the time. The Law works in much the same way but with far fewer systemic consequences. It can crush the obvious syntax errors, like blocking Cathy from seeing Heathcliff once she is married to Edgar. But semantics like the homonological different *marriage* make it through. This "bug" does crash the local system. Unfortunately it also destroys the program. This raises the possibility that feminism could construct itself more deliberately within this model, or perhaps within the computer virus model. A virus or worm works within the system. I have suggested there *is only within* the system. A virus can be functional code that rewrites part of the operating system. Radical feminism seeks to rewrite the operating system.

³ Woolf's text is not alone in problematizing the nature of women's restricted social relations. George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, for instance, 50 years before *To the Lighthouse* was written during the period when "the Woman Question" was before the British Parliament. In the novel, Eliot draws attention to women's socially enforced isolation and lack of education as root causes that make collective acts on women's parts, like organizing, very difficult if not often inconceivable by these women.

⁴ As defined above in Chapter Two.

previous chapter that language and exchanges which reflect the values of the symbolic are heard and privileged. In this scene, women may speak, but only so long as they reiterate the Law's definition of their world. Women's speech, so restrained, is hardly free speech since it denies one the ability to speak one's reality and have it heard. In *To the Lighthouse*, we are presented with an even more debilitating world for women, a world built by Lacan where women are not allowed to speak at all.⁵ It is this reading of woman as outside the symbolic (and of the Maternal, and therefore, presymbolically silent, for example, instead) that I will address in the following chapter, to suggest that Woolf's text postulates quite another way of reading women's relations to the symbolic, and those relations' effects on communication, especially relations among women within themselves and among each other.

I especially wish to present this text as a way to read how women in general and the female characters of this novel in particular *have* come to be read as aligned with the speechless rather than seeing their silence in the context of a political act, as a very symbolically located expression of agency. Under the conditions described above, for instance, silence hardly means either consent with the Law or a psychotic allegiance with the abyss of the semiotic beneath it.

I base my interpretation of this text especially on Irigaray's reading of women's relationship to the Symbolic and the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective's concept of the female Symbolic.⁶ I wish to present this novel as way of re-reading, re-presenting women's disparate relations to the phallogocentric symbolic and to thereby disrupt that Transcendental Signifier's presumed totalizing hold on meaning. This novel reflects the phallic Symbolic as deliberately constructed to silence women; it also articulates the costs of this enforced, silenced relation as it effects relations among women in particular.

The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective's work on disparity among women is also central to this reading. It presents an effective framework through which to read how the narrative constructs the costs to women of the phallic symbolic as Transcendental Signifier, the arbiter of meaning. I will consider in particular the representation of the relationship that Lily desires with Mrs. Ramsay. Listening to these voices, through

⁵ Even though Woolf wrote this text, it seems many critics (Spivak, Homans and Mitchell are the main perpetrators of such readings) are prepared to read it as if Lacan had, placing Mrs. Ramsay in particular firmly in the silent semiotic, and women in general entirely outside the Symbolic, somewhere within a "natural, representational" system of language. These readings are problematic not the least because they allow the symbolic to remain unquestionably phallogocentric and do not question, if women appear to be silent/semiotic, why they might be in that position to begin with.

⁶A nonphallogocentric symbolic that allows the mediation of signs through the mother rather than through the phallus in order to acknowledge the mother as source of signification.

Irigaray's work on the specificity of women's enforced relation to the symbolic and through the Collective's work on disparity, are steps towards rebuilding a symbolic practice that does not rely on phallic authorization.

But it won't be fine.

With this interjection, Mr. Ramsay signals the power dynamics Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* exposes.

Mrs. Ramsay has just told her son James that they will make a journey to the lighthouse tomorrow if the weather is fine. While she does not promise the trip unconditionally, she does hold out an imaginative possibility for her son: the possibility of going to the lighthouse. In this expression, Mrs. Ramsay creates an imaginative space that allows her son James to judge for himself whether on the morrow the condition for departure has been met. In other words, Mrs. Ramsay extends to her son the possibility of interpreting signs, and this is why Mr. Ramsay intervenes: the Mother has provided interpretive power in the symbolic without mediation through the father or deference to his Law. Mrs. Ramsay, therefore, has broken the Law, and so we hear "But it won't be fine"

In this single phrase, Mr. Ramsay asserts that language, the interpretation of signs (whether or not it will be fine tomorrow) is the province of the Father, not the Mother. By now, such an alignment of the Symbolic with the Father may seem a fairly pedestrian observation. How very Freudian, Lacanian and post-modern. ho hum. But in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf's text exposes how this view of Lacanian/Kristevian gendered relations to language is simply Mr. Ramsay's opinion, not Fact. Woolf shows, rather, that Mr. Ramsay can treat his opinion as indisputable Fact because the Law supports his claim. This is not the same as proof.

Still, women, so the Law of Ramsay, the Law of reaching R⁷ forcefully implies in this scene, are not to enter the symbolic; they are not to attain or pretend to *knowledge* and

⁷ From the novel: "It was a splendid mind. For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q. He reached Q. Very few people in the whole of England ever reach Q. Here, stopping for one moment by the stone urn which held the geraniums, he saw, but now far, far away, like children picking up shells, divinely innocent and occupied with little trifles at their feet and somehow entirely defenseless against a doom which he perceived, his wife and son, together, in the window. They needed his protection: he gave it them. But after Q? What comes next? After Q there are a number of letters the last of which is scarcely visible to mortal eyes, but glimmers red in the distance. Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still, if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q.

they are certainly not to express any knowledge or teaching of knowledge to others. This is Mrs. Ramsay's crime; this is her horrible presumption: to speculate on the weather:

There was not the slightest possible chance that they could go to the lighthouse tomorrow, Mr. Ramsay snapped out irascibly.

How did he know? she asked. The wind often changed.

The extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women's minds enraged him. He had ridden through the valley of death, been shattered and shivered; and now she flew in the face of facts, made his children hope what was utterly out of the question. In effect, told lies. He stamped his foot on the stone step. 'Dam you,' he said. But what had she said? Simply that it might be fine tomorrow. So it might.

Not with the barometer falling and the wind due west.

(37-38)

Mr. Ramsay speaks of barometers falling as proof against a woman, a *mother*, positing knowledge of the world. His negative rejoinder to her conditional "if it's fine tomorrow" has nothing to do with weather, and everything to do with property rights. After all, if the scene were about simple weather facts, Mrs. Ramsay's conditional statement "if it's fine tomorrow" is far more rational and appropriate regarding weather than Mr. Ramsay's ridiculous insistence on predicting the future of the weather as an absolute, no matter what the barometer may say. And, as Susan Reid observes in her short book on *To the Lighthouse*, the narrative never does reveal if it actually rains the next day or not. The *Time Passes* section intervenes (87).

In Mr. Ramsay's position as patriarch, Mrs. Ramsay's conditional "if it's fine tomorrow" becomes a "lie," a very gender specific entity in the text. Mrs. Ramsay's suggestion that it may be fine tomorrow constitutes an untruth because it fosters false hope in Ramsay's children. However, when in the next scene Mr. Ramsay comes looking for sympathy after leading his imaginary troops beyond R, *he* expects sympathy exactly because he has been "the leader of a forlorn hope"(42) . Clearly then, only one gender may mediate the Phenotext.

Disallowed from symbolic mediation, from offering an interpretive possibility, a point of view, women in the Lacanian world must reflect and defer all queries of knowledge to men. If they attempt to engage the symbolic with rationale prognostications about the weather, they can expect to be greeted by what we have seen from the patronymic

Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. If Q then is Q – R --. Here he knocked his pipe out, with two or three resonant taps on the handle of the urn, and proceeded. "Then R..." He braced himself. He clenched himself."

thus far: loud voices, foot stamping, cursing in front of children. After all, what is at stake is *who has the right to interpret signs, and for whom*⁸.

Indeed, Mr. Ramsay particularly accosts Mrs. Ramsay because she offers her opinion on the weather, not just for herself, but for her son, the soon to be sole surviving male heir, keeper of the Ramsay name, someday arbiter of the Law himself. It is all right when, later in the dinner scene, she speaks of her views on dairies, and reforms. Everyone laughs. Her opinions are contained as dinner chit chat which will not have any actual effect. It is just talk. But here, in this (private) exchange between mother and son, rather than say "ask your father if we're going to the lighthouse tomorrow" she would give her son herself an imaginative interpretive space, created independent of the father.

Mr. Ramsay's interjection into this space not only negates Mrs. Ramsay's access in/to the symbolic, he also vehemently curtails the pleasure this imaginative enterprise creates between mother and son. Before the interruption, James happily cuts up catalogue pictures, and Mrs. Ramsay happily knits. This happy temporal and emotional space has been created without the involvement or consent of the father and without any dependence on his special knowledge of times and tides. And worse, the condition engendering this space, and the implicit agency granted by it from Mrs. Ramsay to her son, is highly rational, Symbolic, rather than choric, encephalic, to use Kristeva's terms:⁹ will we go to the lighthouse tomorrow? Yes, if it's fine.

Indeed, Woolf's description of James's thoughts have him not longing for his mother, but dreaming of his own adventure, "To her son, these words [Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow'] conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled the expedition were bound to take place...James Ramsay, sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, endowed the picture of a refrigerator as his mother spoke with heavenly bliss. It was fringed with joy...all these were so colored and distinguished in his mind that he already had his private code, his secret language, though he appeared the image of stark uncompromising severity..."(5-6).

⁸ In the previous chapter, we saw that anyone can speak the Law, but only men can enact it. The Law in *Wuthering Heights* is also constructed as prefigured and rather directly acted upon by men. New definitions of the Law certainly cannot be considered. In *To the Lighthouse*, the question of interpreting texts comes into play. Here women, even if they repeat the Law, cannot be seen to be interacting with it directly. It must always be mediated for them by a born phallus holder. It is very Old Testament and very Derrida and Lacan: only men, ordained priests can enter the holy of holies. Only men may mediate the symbolic, make the Sign of the Word.

⁹ As discussed in Chapter Two above, the chora and encephalic are the non-symbolic spaces where women, aligned with the maternal commune with their son, very much outside language.

Mrs. Ramsay, too, has her own thoughts and occupations. "...his mother, watching him guide the scissors neatly around the refrigerator, imagined him all red and ermine on the Bench or directing a stern and momentous enterprise in some crisis of public affairs" (5-6). This is hardly an encephalic, semiotic mother longing for an inarticulate infant. On the contrary, Mrs. Ramsay and her son have created and share a linguistic, symbolic, indeed, multilingual space in this moment very much within the symbolic but without the authority of the patronymic. From the perspective of the Law, the Phenotext, this is Mrs. Ramsay's crime: she makes the Father unnecessary, even as she imagines her son as Lawgiver.

From the perspective of Woolf's text, however, we see that the real crime is Mr. Ramsay's as he violently disrupts the initial scene of the book, a tableau between Mother and Son. It is disrupted only because it is perceived by the Father to succeed without the Father. In other words, if the Mother can provide an effective experience for the Son in the symbolic, then the Father's value becomes suspect. (As we have seen with Lacan: the mother's job is not to show the Son the symbolic through herself, but to hand him over to the father, to abnegate herself as incapable in this regard). Mr. Ramsay demands that Mrs. Ramsay's omission of the Father, of reverence of the Father, of deferral to the Father, be punished and that the male Signifier be reenerated as sole arbiter of the Sign. Mrs. Ramsay complies:

He stood by her in silence. Very humbly, at length, he said that he would step over and ask the coast guard if she liked.

There was nobody whom she revered as she revered him.

She was quite ready to take his word for it, she said. Only then they need not cut sandwiches –that was all.

(38)

The male demands attention. He demands veneration. Mr. Ramsay initiates this demand when his claim to perpetual fame upon his audience is in danger of lasting only a scant two thousand years. And so, he pursues his right, as leader of a "forlorn hope" for "someone to tell the story of his suffering to at once. Who shall blame him?" (43). We see again and again throughout the novel that this is women's sole role within patriarchy: to reflect men, to give them sympathy. But Woolf's text also presents every woman in the text regularly questioning this role, subverting it, even while subject to it.

In the above scene between Mr. & Mrs. Ramsay, we are shown that what is said, the surface of words, is not the issue. It is who has power over these surfaces, to interpret them, that is at stake, that must be heard. This attention to meaning beneath the surface is especially demonstrated in the arid scimitar scene. We do not hear the exact words spoken by either side as Mr. Ramsay "demands sympathy." We are given to hear instead the intent

of Ramsay's words rather than the words themselves. Mrs. Ramsay deciphers the code of words and responds in the same code. Of course none of the following is *said* aloud, but Mrs. Ramsay clearly *hears* the following:

But he must have more than that. It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, calmed and soothed, to have his senses restored to him, his bareness made fertile...Charles Tansley thought him the greatest metaphysician of all time, she said. But he must have more than that. He must have sympathy. He must be assured too that he lived in the heart of life; was needed: not only here, but all over the world.
(45)

He depends upon Mrs. Ramsay to reflect his ego, it's value at far more than, as Woolf herself puts it in *A Room of One's Own*, "twice its natural size."¹⁰ But Mrs. Ramsay must hide her reflecting power in code, lest Ramsay's (unmasculine?) need be revealed. Thus, it is not with her words that she assuages Ramsay's anxiety, but "she assured him, beyond a shadow of a doubt, by her laugh, by her poise, by her competence (as a nurse carrying a light across a dark room assures a fractious child), that it was real"(45). He, on the other hand, is "Filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied, ...restored, renewed"(45). Is it not Mr. Ramsay demanding a return to the chora in which everything is his, the child's, the baby boy's? Her words, her repetitions re-create this infantile state of protection and appropriation. Irigaray demonstrates that the exact nature of heterosexual marriage itself is to maintain this economy of Wife as secret Mother. In this passage from "Any Theory of the Subject," Irigaray could be describing the scene Woolf has just presented:

And when will they cease to equate woman's sexuality with her reproductive organs, to claim that her sexuality has value only insofar as it gathers the heritage of her maternity? When will man give up the need or desire to drink deep in all security from his wife/mother in order to go and show off to his brothers and buddies the fine things he formed while suckling his nurse? And/or when will he renounce (reversing roles so as better to retain them) the wish to preserve his wife/child in her inability, as he sees it, to produce for the marketplace? With "marriage" turning out to be subtle dialectization of the nurturing relationship that aims to maintain, at the very least, the mother/child producer/consumer distinction and thereby perpetuate this economy?

("Any Theory of the "Subject" Has Always Been Appropriated by the 'Masculine'" *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 146)

¹⁰In this most familiar moment from *To The Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay does exactly this. Women's role as validator of male brilliance is certainly familiar to Woolf readers. Sally Cline and Dale Spender use this line from *A Room of One's Own* as the title of one of their books, *Reflecting Men: the Management of the Male Ego*. The complete quotation reads: "women possess the remarkable power of being able to reflect men at twice their natural size." Cline's and Spender's considers the consequences for women who either refuse to do this or whose reflection can never satisfy their consequently abusive partners.

Indeed, after Mr. Ramsay regains his consolation, he does go back to his troops and his visiting student. After his secret choric escape, he once again enters social interactions, confident, reassured and in denial that any such exchange ever took place. He is happy. His value as sole mediator of the Sign, his power as sole owner of rights to that Sign has (seemingly) been reinscribed through Mrs. Ramsay's reannointing of him as head of the family. Initially, Mrs. Ramsay, too, rejoices in the afterglow of this enceintic union: "Every throb of this pulse seemed, as he walked away, to enclose her and her husband, and to give to each that solace which two different notes, one high one low, struck together, seem to give each other as they combine" (46). Mrs. Ramsay experiences a sense of union between herself and her husband, as if they had connected equally. She feels "the rapture of successful creation" (46). The narrative challenges this rapture, however, through its representing the scene through James's eyes:

Standing between her knees, very stiff, James felt all her strength flaring up to be drunk and quenched by the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy.
(44-45)

This raping imagery certainly qualifies Mrs. Ramsay's sense of "rapture" here. Indeed, she herself feels it to be short-lived, ringing perhaps not as truly or as intimately as she initially felt, and indeed always feels, "(afterwards, not at the time, she always felt this)" (46). Ironically, what she most feels penetrating her experience of "successful creation" is

not being able to tell him the truth, being afraid, for instance, about the greenhouse roof and the expense it would be to mend it; and then about his books, to be afraid that he might guess, what she a little suspected, that his last book was not quite his best book (she gathered that from William Bankes); and then to hide small daily things, and the children seeing it, and the burden it laid on them – all this diminished the entire joy, the pure joy, of the two notes sounding together, and let the sound die on her ear now with a dismal flatness.
...it was painful to be reminded of the inadequacy of human relationships, that the most perfect was flawed, and could not bear the examination which, loving her husband, with her instinct for truth, she turned upon it; when it was painful to feel herself convicted of unworthiness, *and impeded her proper function* by these lies, these exaggerations...
(46-47)

These thoughts go unresolved as the scene segues to Mr. Carmichael, but the above thoughts give us an interesting glimpse into what constitutes truth for Mrs. Ramsay:

that she has to keep her husband propped up, and that she may have to do it by exaggerating the truth.

We see, too, that in his quest for sympathy, Mr. Ramsay asks for far more in the way of “lies” than Mrs. Ramsay ever offers James regarding the trip to the Lighthouse. Mr. Ramsay curses his wife supposedly for lying to his son, but then demands from his wife the very same thing for his benefit. But in his case, he demands a far more exaggerated, far less empirical extension of possible realities than Mrs. Ramsay offers James. So much for his love of truth, never lying, and indeed, his own course of work into the nature of subjects and objects and their reality. Again, we see that words and their meanings are not at issue: it is who has interpretive power over them. The Word is the Law, the Word made flesh. If Ramsay demands that Mrs. Ramsay tell him he will be needed by everyone forever then that is her *proper function*. To extend this hopeful space to her son, however, to give him an interpretive space for hope, is absolutely verboten: not to be spoken. And it is exactly *because* Mrs. Ramsay offers her son publicly what she can only offer secretly, in code to her husband, that she is attacked by her husband. That she can interpret signs cannot be allowed to be seen.

It is this very contradiction between what Ramsay demands and what he allows that causes the two notes to ring flatly to Mrs. Ramsay. Doubt creeps into the nature of her sense of proper function. That function, to Mrs. Ramsay, is to deal very actually with the realm of the real about which Mr. Ramsay only theorizes imaginary troop marches. R is for Ramsay but R is also for Real which, for all his knowledge of times and tides, he has very little hold of.

He is to be protected from knowledge that the roof will cost fifty pounds because that may threaten his image of himself as the great provider. Once again Mrs. Ramsay’s role is re-inscribed by these ritual demands upon her for sympathy. She is not to interpret the symbolic; she is only to reflect him; while she is also, invisibly, to manage the house and family without drawing attention to the fact that it is she who does it, for that may take away from the perception that the male head of the household provides for all and everything from his vast greatness.

This is not the portrait of a healthy relationship.

In these exchanges, Mrs. Ramsay’s sense of “proper function” is particularly disconcerting. The narrative represents her as conditioned to her role, which is to revere and serve the men who establish colonies. This sense of her proper function, is presented by the narrative’s representation of what Mrs. Ramsay actually does as a contradiction in itself. Mrs. Ramsay is to defer to and refer to Ramsay’s greatness and deny her own role in

its construction in order to be seen by him and be represented by him as a beauty *for* him. The narrative presents Mrs. Ramsay's sense of the inherent duplicity of this situation, yet she is also represented as feeling unloyal and stands "convicted of unworthiness" as she ponders the contradiction. We are told she "fretted ignobly" while she considers "these lies, these exaggerations" which she must tell her husband in order to keep him from suicide or tyranny. Her self-blame for what she says are lies rather than questioning her husband's contradictions and weaknesses is disconcerting.

Irigaray speaks to this condition within the woman who must disenfranchise herself from her own knowledge of the world and her non-role in it in order to validate male desire for power:

We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine." *When she submits to (such a) theory, woman fails to realize that she is renouncing her own specificity to the imaginary.* Subjecting herself to objectivization in discourse – by being "female." Re-objectivizing her own self whenever she claims to identify herself "as" a masculine subject. A "subject" that would re-search itself as lost (maternal-feminine) "object"?

Subjectivity denied to women: indisputably this provides the financial backing for every irreducible constitution as an object: of representation, of discourse, of desire. *Once imagine that woman imagines and the object loses its fixed, obsessional character. As a bench mark that is ultimately more crucial than the subject, for he can sustain himself only by bouncing back off some objectiveness, some objective.* If there is no more "earth" to press down/repress, to work, to represent, but also and always to desire (for one's own), no opaque matter which in theory does not know herself, then what pedestal remains for the ex-sistence of the "subject"? If the earth turned and more especially turned upon herself, the erection of the subject might thereby be disconcerted and risk losing its elevation and penetration. For what would there be to rise up from and exercises power over? And in? ("Any Theory of the "Subject" Has Always Been Appropriated by the 'Masculine'" *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 133, italics mine.)

We see then, that as Irigaray puts it, the power of Men, as it were, is dependent on women's imaginative possibility being denied even while that very ability to interpret the symbolic is demanded for the Husband/Master/Man's service. This is Mrs. Ramsay's proper function: to be formally disallowed from the symbolic, from interpretative operations of any kind, while being secretly exploited. She is to be available to the male to be his mirror, to tell him lies. She is not to speak to anyone except him; she is to defer everything to him; and hide everything else that would not enhance his view of himself.

But it won't be fine.

Women, then, are excluded from participation in the symbolic, not because they cannot move in the symbolic, but because their doing so, so Mr. Ramsay's responses imply, threatens the dominant male's sense of himself as Father figure. Women are forced into silence. They are to be objects of the eye, not the ear, and they are to be constantly accessible. As Irigaray puts it, the cost to the male Subject is far too great if the Other can be heard to speak, to move in the world he has claimed as his alone:

But what if the "object" started to speak? Which also means beginning to "see", etc. What disaggregation of the subject would that entail? Not only on the level of the split between him and his other, his variously specified alter ego. Or between him and the Other, who is always to some extent *his* other, even if he does not recognize himself in it, even if he is so overwhelmed by it as to bar himself out of it and into it so as to retain at the very least the power to promote his own forms...Where will the other spring up again? Where will the risk be situated which sublates the subject's passion for remaining ever and again the same, for affirming himself ever and again the same? In the *duplicity* of his speculation? A more or less conscious duplicity? Since he is only partially and marginally where he reflects/is reflected? where he knows (himself)?...*The Other, lapsed within, disquieting in its shadow and its rage, sustaining the organization of a universe eternally identical to the self.*

[...]

But if, by the exploits of her hand, women were to reopen paths into (once again) a/one logos that connotes her as castrated, especially as castrated from words, excluded from the work force except as prostitute to the interests of dominant ideology – that is of hom(m)osexuality and its struggles with the maternal – then a certain sense of history, will undergo unparalleled interrogation, revolution. But how is this to be done? Given that, once again, the "reasonable" words – to which in any case she has access only through mimicry—are powerless to translate all that pulses, clamors, and hangs hazily in the cryptic passages of hysterical suffering-latency. Then...turn everything upside down, inside out, back to front. *Rack it with radical convulsions*, carry back, reimport, those crises that her "body" suffers in her impotence to say what disturbs her. Insist also deliberately on those *blanks* in discourse which recall the places of her exclusion and which, by their silent plasticity, ensure the cohesion, the articulation, the coherent expansion of established forms.

("Any Theory of the "Subject" Has Always Been Appropriated by the 'Masculine'" *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 142)

The (male) Subject, as Irigaray points out above, is entirely dependent on its ability to oppress and to deny the Other subjectivity. The cost to the Other, to the woman, is the constant contradiction of Mrs. Ramsay: of knowing that she can speak "the 'reasonable' words" but that to do so condemns her; not to do so drives her towards "hysterical suffering-latency."

I will come back to the later point, since it challenges Kristeva's interpretation of this state, of women's silence. Kristeva reads women as often slipping into madness when

they slip out of the symbolic.¹¹ Neither Kristeva nor readings inspired by her work, like Spivak's¹² or Su Reid's interpretation of *To the Lighthouse* consider that women are forced into silence not out of the symbolic. Reid's interpretation of Mrs. Ramsay reads her as moving in an easy relation between the semiotic and symbolic spaces; that she could but never does fall into the madness Kristeva predicts from such an association.¹³ In her reading of *To the Lighthouse*, Spivak suggests that such a state moves a woman to hysteria and eventual death, (thus Mrs. Ramsay dies) but she suggests that that is the nature of the semiotic space: that one loses themselves there in a Kristevan Genotext. Spivak's reading does not consider what Woolf's text and Irigaray's commentary points to: that it is women's enforced silence, and life within the contradiction of being able to speak and being condemned for it while secretly used by it that would drive a woman mad.

It is not a woman's choice, therefore, to play within the semiotic, like some modernist male poet, for whom such excursions are play. For women, as Irigaray points to, it is an enforced position. We see Ramsay maintain Mrs. Ramsay within that position through his constant surveillance of her, reiterating the implicit Law that women are to be seen and not heard.

In their next scene together, Mr. Ramsay, listening momentarily to Mrs. Ramsay, condemns her for her pessimism, but, as Mrs. Ramsay observes, he simultaneously takes a peculiar pleasure in the pathos of other things. Again, it is all right for Mr. Ramsay to become morose; if Mrs. Ramsay does, that is a sign that her attention wanders from total attention to him. Intriguingly, her response to how he uses words to create truly depressing images is that "She'd blow her head off" if she said or thought or did things with words that he did.

Similarly, what he calls her pessimism of course has nothing to do with what may or may not be her own feeling at the moment. It is only that her sense of reality may again shake his own sense of powerfulness to rule the world. After all, her so called pessimism treads on his territory:

She says: "Slowly it came into her head, why is it that one wants people to marry? What was the value, the meaning of things?"

And Ramsay responds:

[H]e was beginning now that her thoughts took a turn he disliked – towards this "pessimism" as he called it – to fidget, though he said nothing, raising his hand to his forehead, twisting a lock of hair, letting it fall again.

¹¹ See Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language" in *The Kristeva Reader*.

¹² "Unmaking and Making in *To the Lighthouse*." In *Other Worlds*.

¹³ Su Reid. *To the Lighthouse*, 85-93.

‘You won’t finish that stocking tonight,’ he said, pointing to her stocking. That was what she wanted – the asperity of his voice reproving her. If he says it’s wrong to be pessimistic, probably it’s wrong, she thought; the marriage will turn out all right...And what then? For she felt he was looking at her, but that his look had changed. He wanted something, wanted the thing she always found so difficult to give him; wanted her to tell him that she loved him.
(141-142)

The pattern is always the same: her interpretation of the world – her questions of subject and object and social relations in the real, not his abstract realm – threaten his sense of himself. He then reproves her; she is relieved that Father must know best, since this allows her to avoid confronting the contradiction, the knowledge that he depends on her to be himself; then he demands his reflection be restored to him from her, unqualified, unshaken. This is how they go on. He will reduce her thoughts, her questions of social, intellectual currency into a “womanish” emotional experience of “pessimism” or “hope.” She is denied intellect, meaning, in favor of emotionalism and sock knitting (mothering). As soon as Ramsay has effectively converted Mrs. Ramsay in this manner, however, he proceeds like clock work to have an emotional episode of his own. Tell me you love me. Or else.

In the social economy *To the Lighthouse* portrays, Mrs. Ramsay’s role, the role of any women in patriarchy, is not to interpret signs in the symbolic but to be available to assuage the very covert longing of the male for the encephalic while denying that such exchange takes place. Woolf’s text clearly demonstrates that the mother must very much be in the symbolic in order to make these distinctions between what can be seen/shown and what must stay in code. She must be in the Symbolic in this covert way if only to know how to make herself invisible to it. She must collaborate in the symbolic to interpret what the man as baby wants, to manage everything in the world that would keep his mirror from smashing.

Mrs. Ramsay’s unwitting consolation may be that she seems able to satisfy Ramsay’s needs within the framework of his dish throwing, footstamping abusiveness. As Dale Spender and Sally Cline point out in *Reflecting Men: the Management of the Male Ego*, many women do not succeed no matter what they do to create that reflection; should they be perceived to stop trying, the abuse can only increase. Culturally, as Woolf’s text portrays, Mrs. Ramsay must constantly submit; she has become a believer in that submission, despite nagging doubts, which she attributes to her own inadequacy rather than to cultural degeneracy. Woolf’s text very precisely portrays Irigaray’s creation of the male symbolic from the tissue of the woman’s own body, all within the site of language, of voices and yet, where is conversation?

Women cannot participate in conversation if their role is to be available, to reflect. Mr. Ramsay does not go to Mrs. Ramsay for conversation.¹⁴ He goes to her for consolation. He ensures her cooperation by continually surveiling her and repositioning any thoughts that may be independent of him: he silences her attempts at interpretation with “but it won’t be fine”; he interrupts her efforts at observation, refocussing her on her role and her failure at it with “you won’t finish that sock tonight.”

Mr. Ramsay goes to Mrs. Ramsay for the non-verbal enclytic assurances of complete appropriation. But as we have seen, for a woman to provide the enclytic to a male already in the symbolic (since the idea of the enclytic is there for a woman and an infant - a son preferably) she herself must be fully aware of the symbolic in order to navigate him back to his sense of himself there.

She is the enforced keeper of the conversation (a covert operating system). She cannot reveal, must keep hidden this exchange. This is her fear: that he be seen as dependent; that she feels finer; that she tells lies; that she does in fact re-invent the symbolic reality for him. This is the significant difference between the maternal choratic exchange between mother and child and this abusive power dynamic enforced between Man/Woman. In the chora, there is only the indistinguishable hum of reassuring rhythms between the mother and child. There is no effort in this scene to rupture the union between mother and child, to force the child into the symbolic. In the scene between Man and Woman, the woman must wear the mask of the inarticulate, semiotic maternal, all the while rebuilding the man’s already, pre-existing link with the Symbolic. True, the words themselves used in the exchange between Man and Woman are not important, the experience must be of the woman to rebuild the I, the symbolic, imaginary self from the tissue of herself. This I is certainly not called for in the original enclytic space between pre-verbal mother and child (were such a thing to exist). There the whole exchange is semiotic, without ego distinction between self and other. Here, as Irigaray points out, the scene is strictly dependent on Mrs. Ramsay functioning “*As a bench mark that is ultimately more crucial than the subject, for he can sustain himself only by bouncing back off some objectiveness, some objective.*” If there is no more “earth” to press down/repress, to work, to represent, but also and always to desire (for one’s own), no opaque matter which in theory does not know herself, then what pedestal remains for the existence of the “subject”? What may be in one case the

¹⁴ We have already seen women used as levers for male interests in the previous chapter. In *Wuthering Heights* Hinton thinks to use Cathy’s marriage to Edgar for the extension of his lands. Heathcliff uses Isabella and young Cathy for the reappropriation of those territories. Women only have one line in these otherwise silent parts: I do. *To the Lighthouse* presents a refinement on this point. Women are used, as Irigaray repeatedly suggests, as the sign of the transaction. They are the perpetual witness, through their own (our own) debasement (lack) to male power and completeness.

willingness of the Mother to communicate in the semiotic for the sake of the semiotically aware child becomes mocked, force-faked in this scene between Man-Woman of Power Over.

*

Mrs. Ramsay is clearly aware of her role, her proper function: that it can be generalized beyond serving for her husband alone. Indeed, she has no compunction over offering to any man a slice of the symbolically re-establishing semblance of power she seems to have. Thus, she dismisses the actual words that men use to create themselves. She knows words like “dissertation” and “fellowship” and “firsts” are important to men, that the men depend on these things for their special economy. These words, however, are not the site of her connexion with them.

The men, on the other hand, are not aware of her exclusion. They think she is simply not interested in them since she never reads the books given to her, dedicated to her. But she is interested in Men, all men, as her duty, her proper function. She also knows the truth of their condition not in the words, but in the deciphering of those words’ intent. The code of their conversations is only decipherable when, the rhythms, the Morse code of the context that the words imply and demand is taken into account. Mrs. Ramsay is an exceptional cryptographer. It is her main but secret proper function to all men: to decode their messages and give them what they always want: sympathy, reflection of themselves enlarged:

When she looked in the glass and saw her hair gray, her cheek sunk, at fifty, she thought, possibly she might have managed things better – her husband; money; his books. But for her own part she would never for a second regret her decision, evade difficulties or slur over duties. (9)

These duties are exclusive and exhausting. They demand complete alignment with her husband. She must remain the site of his support at the cost of her erasure. Her role in the symbolic must be to manage everything for his credit. Like a loan that she repays, that he pays out without consideration of the bank, how the debt is deposited¹⁵, he and the whole of his sex maintains a right to perpetual withdrawal.

Indeed, she had the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valor, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude

¹⁵See Derrida, *Autobiography*, “The Otopograph Sign of the State” for the loan taken out in the name of the man which the mother must repay. In the novel, we see Mrs. Ramsay must manage this debt practically, too, for the maintenance of the house, and keep the signs of the transaction (“the roof will cost twelve pounds”) from Ramsay.

towards herself which no woman could fail to feel or find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential; which an old woman could take from a young man without loss of dignity, and woe betide the girl – pray heaven it was none of her daughters! – who did not feel the worth of it, and all that it implied, to the marrow of her bones. (8)

She feels this charge of the male sex to be her power. But while she is aware of Men's Power Over, of Conquest, she remains unaware that the same exercise of their power over land is equally exercised over her, an extension of territory. She is unaware or unable to resolve the contradiction that what she feels duty bound as her Power to give is always, actually compelled from her in, for instance, Ramsay's constant circumscription of her. Woolf's text allows some possibility of hope for resistance in presenting Mrs. Ramsay's daughters as at least beginning to question the Rights of Men. Her girls demonstrate

“infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers; in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other; for there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire, of ringed fingers and lace.”(9)

However, Woolf's narrative presents singularly little evidence of resistance beyond Mrs. Ramsay's acute awareness of a subtle shift in perspective. The text instead, in the Charles Tansley scene for instance, demonstrates how Mrs. Ramsay could so mistakenly come to see herself as powerful in men's worlds. Mrs. Ramsay is the desired mirror. She has value. Her reflection (not her opinion) counts, not the least of all because she, at fifty, is still beautiful.

In the Charles Tansley scene, Charles's desire is to have Mrs. Ramsay witness his ascension into the realm of male authority: to see and reflect him: “He would like her to see him, gowned and hooded, walking in a procession...but what was she looking at? At a man pasting a bill”(14). This is a little hard on Charles who would like to unburden himself to Mrs. Ramsay. And so, apparently, he does go on about his father the chemist, his own hard work, his hopes and aspirations, but the text presents Charles's speech not from the literal, but again from the contextual. We hear these words as Mrs. Ramsay does (as she is expected to): through ellipses in the text, the Morse code of the context:

Mrs. Ramsay did not quite catch the meaning, only the words, here and there...dissertation ...fellowship...readership...lectureship. She could not follow the ugly academic jargon, that rattled itself off so glibly, but said to herself that she saw now why going to the circus had knocked him off his perch, poor little man, and why he came out instantly with all that about his

father and mother and brother and sisters,...still he went on talking, about settlements and teaching and working men, and helping our own class, and lectures, *till she gathered that he had got back entire self-confidence,*" (16)

And we know from what Charles Tansley reports that it is from being seen in town carrying the bag of a beautiful woman, speaking at Mrs. Ramsay the beautiful (for obviously Mrs. Ramsay says nothing to him, indeed comments on everything but what he is saying) that alleviates his momentary loss of ego. His projections onto Mrs. Ramsay as "With stars in her eyes and veils in her hair"(17), and that this amazing woman is with him allows him to regain himself:

Charles Tansley felt an extraordinary pride: a man digging in a drain stopped digging and looked at her: let his arm go down and looked at her; Charles Tansley felt an extraordinary pride; he felt the wind and the cyclamen and the violets *for he was walking with a beautiful woman for the first time in his life. He had hold of her bag.*" (18)

Vicarious association. Any woman will do to make a man feel proud, feel self-confident, capable of anything, but Mrs. Ramsay is the Super Woman. She is the woman to HAVE on one's arm¹⁶. Mrs. Ramsay becomes temporary credit extended to Charles, a short term loan to re-establish himself in the eyes of his fellow *men*. This is her role, her proper function in having "under her protection the entire other sex."

And how she finds her function is what many critics mistakenly take as her move into the semiotic. As if by listening to the rhythm of Charles Tansley's or Mr. Ramsay's words she is less in the symbolic. On the contrary, the rhythm (the awareness of context) is like a sixth sense, an antennae keeping track of all things she must manage. Situation reflects meaning.

It is not as if Mrs. Ramsay does not understand the "ugly, academic jargon" she dismisses. She is simply not called upon to listen at that superficial level. She must put the words in context. And that interpretation of coded context bespeaks Mrs. Ramsay's very keen awareness of the current state of a man's emotional relation to the symbolic at any given moment. That is her proper function: to manage, to merge, to make sure the men are sailing along, happily connected to their illusion of themselves in the symbolic. It is the

¹⁶Irigaray's, "Women on the Market" and "Commodities among Themselves" in *This Sex which is not One*, speaks of the role of women as exchange commodities in the homoerotic economy of exchange among men.

secret Morse code wrapped around the message. She listens for the *m'aide*,¹⁷ the secret SOS of the man who must appear to be waving, not drowning.¹⁸

The sounds of the context: “The gruff murmur, irregularly broken by the taking out of pipes and the putting in of pipes had kept on assuring her, though she could not hear what was said (as she sat in the window), that the men were happily talking.”

When Mrs. Ramsay hears the Morse code context tappings, she is reassured by them. When she actually listens to the words, though, when she momentarily separates them from their coded wrappers, she thinks them nonsense, making matters worse in the theoretical spaces such words create when, as she suggests, there are problems enough in the real. But these critiques of the things men do are for her private moments when she slips her managerial “proper function.”

For the most part, she must continually monitor the happy or distressed sounds of her context. It is in these environmental sounds that she can detect subtle shifts in conversational tones, the code sounds that cue demands for sympathy, for her service, but not for her conversation. In the Charles Tansley scene, for instance, she really says nothing to Tansley; she does not need to: he projects his words onto her; he objectifies her into the great simulacrum, the embodied simile of male desire. So he puts words in her mouth: “*as if she asked the very thing he wanted to reply to*” (14, italics mine). As if all these men relate to women as if they were in the enceinte. They behave in their characterizations as if they were in the mother and child demand for enclosure within the semiotic totality, while they are also aware of the symbolic fragmentation of ownership, of otherness, of *not theirs*. Similarly, they feel no obligation to the woman/signifier they use so regularly. Indeed, if the woman they supposedly venerate is seen to act outside her proper function, the men band together against her: Tansley for all his presumed pride and admiration of being with Mrs. Ramsay has no problem discrediting her to side with her husband saying “no landing at the lighthouse tomorrow.” They shut down any space for her to be heard. She is not to speak outside reference to them. Similarly, the competition among males for the focus of the Woman is intense.

Ramsay competes with his son for his wife’s attention. Indeed, we have seen Ramsay behave like James: to fidget when he does not like how Mrs. Ramsay’s thoughts are turned. That is, away from him. After all, how does he like his women? Not clever.

But she was becoming conscious of her husband looking at her. He was smiling at her, quizzically, as if he were ridiculing her for being asleep in

¹⁷ The cry *m'aide m'aide*, help me, tapped out, dit dot as SOS

¹⁸Stevie Smith, “waving, not drowning”, *Collected Poems*.

broad daylight, but at the same time, he was thinking, Go on reading. You don't look sad now, he thought. And he wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful. Her beauty seemed to him, if that were possible, to increase. (139-140)

The phallic, propriative gaze feels in control, superior. His sense of himself depends first on seeing her as less clever than she may be and next, of keeping her so. Indeed, when she seems sad, that is not reflecting perfect happiness in him and his domain, he is troubled; she is not to be allowed with her own thoughts, which demonstrate a sense of independence from him. Indeed his thoughts are represented as monotonously repeating that she is helpless, she is sad, he cannot help her, she is sad. He is represented as aggrandizing both his imaginary construction of her and his relation to her, redramatizing a quite pedestrian scene into something that once again, must reflect him:

It saddened him, and her remoteness pained him, and he felt, as he passed, that he could not protect her, and, when he reached the hedge, he was sad. He could do nothing to help her. He must stand by and watch her.

[And a moment later, he reflects] He turned and saw her. Ah! She was lovely, lovelier now than ever he thought. But he could not interrupt her. He wanted urgently to speak to her now that James was gone and she was alone at last. But he resolved, no: he would not interrupt her. She was aloof from him now in her beauty, in her sadness. He would let her be, and he passed her without a word, though it hurt him that she could look so distant, and he could not reach her, he could do nothing to help her. And again he would have passed her without a word had she not, given him of her own free will what she knew he would never ask, and called to him and taken the green shawl from the picture frame, and gone to him. For he wished, she knew, to protect her. (76)

Here, Mr. Ramsay reflects Mrs. Ramsay, momentarily amid her own thoughts, as sad. The irony is she is not sad; she is almost in a state of bliss.¹⁹ Mr. Ramsay projects his own sadness at her remoteness onto her: he must assume that she is sad when she is not focused on him. He must assume that she is her most beautiful when seeming least accessible. And above, it is Mr. Ramsay who thinks she gives of her own free will what he thinks he would never ask. That he is represented as believing that he would never interrupt his wife without her consent only further underlines how he misrepresents himself to his

¹⁹She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like that light. It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself. There rose, and she looked and looked with her needles suspended, there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover.

own imagination of himself. We have seen him demand sympathy when she is with her son: we have seen him demand that she say she love him. We have seen him demand exaggeration when he says he pursues only the truth. Here, similarly, he must have her full attention, complete access to her even though he tries to assert that he is not asking for it, when he in fact, tells lies. Indeed, he protests that he would let her be. What a gift! But surely it is his risk if he does interrupt her and finds that she is (as she is; as we know her to be) quite happy without him.

It is debatable whether the narrator, Mr. Ramsay or Mrs. Ramsay thinks “for he wished, she knew, to protect her.” It could be all of them. And if that thought does include Mrs. Ramsay, knowing, interpreting as always what her husband wants, and giving into that desire, we see nothing new: we see again that she understands her “proper function” as reflecting her husband. Her beauty, her sacrificing her own space is part of that function.

For it is her own space, her own thoughts that become sacrificed to that function, in the service of the Law of the Household, the law of Reaching R. While she will do anything to protect Mr. Ramsay’s privacy, such that “He was safe, he was restored to his privacy” (39), she must relinquish her own. Mr. Ramsay’s privacy is where he builds his. His privacy is to be protected. Similarly, when Ramsay careens into Lily and William Bankes with “someone had blundered,” Lily and Mr. Bankes look away, as if they had seen something they should not, as if they had trespassed, as if he had exposed himself in a way not to be seen in public. His imaginative space is to be protected. He can smash his son’s thought, because it was not based on the Law but on the Mother. But his internal space is no less based on the Woman/Mother; the power dynamic is all that is different.

Mr. Ramsay’s imaginative space is private, privileged, like all private property. Mrs. Ramsay’s privacy, any woman’s privacy is a *non sequitor* in patriarchy. There is no private property, ownership rights for women, where women are exchange commodities²⁰ and therefore a woman may make no claim to personal space either. This lack of personal property rights is underlined by the expectation that women are readily available to men. We will see this with the expectation on Lily to alleviate Charles Tansley’s need. We have seen it already with Mr. Ramsay interrupting Mrs. Ramsay’s momentary reprieve away from expectation. Mrs. Ramsay’s response to Mr. Ramsay’s interruption, after all, is that “Always, Mrs. Ramsay felt, one helped oneself out of solitude reluctantly” (75). And why not, when the solitude is such a relief from expectation?

²⁰ Irigaray, “Women on the Market,” *This Sex which is not One*.

This space of Mrs. Ramsay's solitude is critical to the text. It is often used to portray Mrs. Ramsay as sinking out of the symbolic and into that dangerous pre-symbolic, semiotic space because she says:

Not as oneself did one ever find rest, in her experience (she accomplished here something dexterous with her needles), but as a wedge of darkness. Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; their rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity.
(73)

The large assumption about this passage is that "losing personality" must mean losing ego, losing a hold on the symbolic understanding of difference.

But the above is qualified by everything she has said prior to this moment such that we must consider that "losing personality" means temporarily suspending *her* personality, also known as her "proper function." Far from becoming a thoughtless, wordless, mantra-chanting pulse of the pre-symbolic, Mrs. Ramsay wishes to pursue in the Symbolic, actively, those things that in her "proper function" in her *personality* she is denied. Just above this passage, she thinks,

Her horizon seemed to her limitless. There were all the places she had not seen; the Indian plains; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome. This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability.
(73)

The language of the passage speaks of exhilaration: freedom, exultation, stability, "They could not stop it." "Freedom" from what? The text leads us to ask *who* could not stop *what*? I would suggest that by entering this private space, sinking beneath the surface of proper function, slipping the surly bonds of that role, Mrs. Ramsay is free to explore the imaginative symbolic, is free to fulfill her own desire that she expresses to herself. It is very much within this private, imaginative space that she makes the very rationale critique of Tansley and her husband and reflects that "[Charles Tansley and Mr. Ramsay] talked such nonsense...It seemed to her such nonsense – inventing differences, when people, heaven knows, were different enough without that" (11). She goes on, pondering life in the Real,

but more profoundly, she ruminated the other problem, of rich and poor, and the things she saw with her own eyes, weekly, daily, here or in London, when she visited this widow, or that struggling wife in person

with a bag on her arm, and a note-book and pencil with which she wrote down in columns carefully ruled for the purpose, the wages and spendings, employment and unemployment, in the hope that thus she would cease to be the private woman whose charity was half a sop to her own indignation, half a relief to her own curiosity, and become, what with her untrained mind she greatly admired, an investigator, elucidating the social problem.
(12)

Mrs. Ramsay wants to be active and visible in the Symbolic: she wants to investigate and explore, to find out why things in the world around here are the way they are: why the dairy milk is dirty; why people are out of work. She wants to pull back the curtain and see what makes things go. She does not want simply to ask her husband, and she to God through Him.²¹ Her desire is no less real, no less symbolic than Mr. Ramsay's. Hers is more concerned with the subject/object reality indeed than Mr. Ramsay's in his abstract pursuit of the abstract nature of subject/object. He only laughs at the real predicament of Hume stuck in a bog, or later, during the dinner scene, laughs at Mrs. Ramsay's concern for the state of milk in the dairies.

Mrs. Ramsay wants to explore that real. She is disallowed from doing so by her "proper function." However, she takes around a notebook, modeled on "what her untrained mind greatly admired" and takes notes on what she sees, attempting to model those observations into the lines and columns of her note book, emulating practices she has observed. But to whom will she submit her research? When at the evening's dinner she speaks of wanting to establish a model dairy and hospital, she is laughed at for going off on her *thing*. She is thought quaint. Uneducated. Harmless. But why, other than that a woman/mother who has such notions puts patriarchy at risk, since it is the role of patriarchy to find her incapable.

And so Mrs. Ramsay slips into an unseen core of darkness at those rare moments of escape and exploration – and exhilaration. Again, the irony of Mr. Ramsay interpreting her aloofness as "sadness" is underlined, for far from it, she feels,

she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight fades, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!
(75-76)

Mrs. Ramsay's desire is the same as her husbands: to explore the world. But her desire is also different than her husband's: in being an elucidator of the social problem, there is no sense that she is after establishing her own fame for two thousand years; rather,

²¹ Milton. *Paradise Lost*.

even in these moments she thinks of doing battle with the light, with Life: to protect her children; raise her family, ensure their immediate and long term well being. She wants to make things better. And if her approach is naive, how could it be otherwise for her “untrained mind.” And yet, based on her ability to manage the household, it may not remain so very uninformed. But as we have now repeatedly seen, Mrs. Ramsay in the symbolic, where she moves and breathes and has her being, cannot be seen to pursue her desire, to be an elucidator of the social condition. Simply put, Mrs. Ramsay in the symbolic cannot be seen to be in the symbolic. On the contrary, in that place, she can only act as the reflective other of Mr. Ramsay. Her privacy is an affront to him, a rebuke to him, a reflection of impotency that “he cannot protect her.”

And so her illegal, illicit, temporary slip into darkness, into privacy. She is keenly aware, too, of how her efforts into the symbolic are circumscribed. Why else would she say that “no one can stop her”? If what she attempts were not illegal, outside her proper function, no one would want to stop her.

Here is the contradiction of Mrs. Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay is at once a woman who wants to encounter the world around her, to know it and participate in it actively (to cure its ills) but who simultaneously believes in the empire and men ruling it, who supports her own subordination, who acts the available acoustic mirror to the point of compromising herself, her desires. Critics have been lead to speculate what kills Mrs. Ramsay. I would suggest that she dies of much the same disease as most of the female heroes of fictions: no longer being able to abide the contradiction between self and desire without imploding, perhaps seeking release in that dark core that can slip behind the curtain.

Appropriately, Mr. Ramsay after her death, seeks her too late in dark corridors:

[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]

*

As I have suggested, Kristevan inspired readings of *To the Lighthouse*²² try to kill off Mrs. Ramsay through reading the above scenes as evidence of her descent out of the symbolic and into the personality-less, signifier-less semiotic. As I have attempted to show, the text of the novel does not support this reading: Mrs. Ramsay is very much of the symbolic in these private moments.

²² Spivak, *The Post- colonial Critic*.

While I resist any reading of Mrs. Ramsay as slipping into any extra-symbolic spaces, at least Su Reid's Kristevan reading resists sacrificing Mrs. Ramsay as a character too into the semiotic and not enough into the symbolic. She suggests that Mrs. Ramsay's knowledge of the Kristevan "preverbal consciousness" may be a sign that femininity means instability, that women's lapse into that frame of mind shows perhaps our lack of certified access to the symbolic. Reid is not clear on this point. Margaret Homans is. She suggests that the semiotic is very much part of Mrs. Ramsay's communicative structure, and that, in particular, Mrs. Ramsay enters the semiotic when she communicates with her daughters.²³ Homans's reading is this simple: when Mrs. Ramsay speaks with her son to soothe him, she is in the rational, symbolic; when she speaks with her daughter to soothe her, she is in the semiotic, re-embodying the choric space. To communicate with a girl, it seems, one needs to shift out of the rational. This movement between the two spaces is apparently demonstrated by the way Mrs. Ramsay puts Cam and James to bed.

In that scene, Cam is upset by the shadows a boar's skull casts into her room. At first Mrs. Ramsay tries to get Cam to think of it as just what it is: "It's only a pig," said Mrs. Ramsay, "'a nice black pig like the pigs at the farm.' But Cam thought it was a horrid thing, branching at her all over the room" (132). And I would, too. There's little consolation in imagining a pig, and a nice pig at that, nailed to one's wall.

And so Mrs. Ramsay reinvents the pig's head, covering it with her shawl, and talking Cam into seeing it as a "a mountain, a bird's nest, a garden, and there were little antelopes" (132). Within this, "Mrs. Ramsay went on saying still more monotonously, and more rhythmically and more nonsensically, how she must shut her eyes and go to sleep and dream of mountains and valleys and stars falling and parrots and antelopes and gardens, and everything lovely, she said, raising her head very slowly, and speaking more and more mechanically until she sat upright and saw Cam was asleep" (132).

This is supposed to be the site of an encephalic reunion because the words, Homans asserts are "nonsense words." Homans does not defend why they are of no sense unless she believes that Mrs. Ramsay's provision of a variety of visual images, ways of reinterpreting the object in the room (a pig head) as something other than the thing itself (a verdant shawl-made landscape) is nonsensical. Then so, too, is the nature of art and representation: that a mass here and another there can represent a mother and her son and not do them disrespect, as Charles Bankes says of Lily's painting. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay gives her daughter the power of agency to resignify which, we will see later in this chapter, she uses to cope with pressure from the Law of the Father. The rhythms of Mrs. Ramsay's

²³ Homans, *Bearing the Word*, 277-286.

voice could be described as hypnotic, relaxing, but even in hypnosis, the words used there must have very symbolic resonances to help the subject achieve whatever is the goal. Indeed, words, knowing the meaning of words, play an essential role in imagination, hypnosis and art.

However, when Mrs. Ramsay turns to James, she is supposed to be back in the symbolic because she assures him of the presence of the thing itself: "James must go to sleep, too, for see, she said, the boar's skull was still there; they had not touched it; they had done just what he wanted; it was there quite unhurt. He made sure that the skull was still there under the shawl" (132-3).

So it is.

Mrs. Ramsay provides the imaginative space that allows both her children to sleep. She provides ways of seeing that allow both children to have what they want. Again, the Mother (illegally) mediates the symbolic for her children. James's assurance is no less mediated by his mother than Cam's: the skull is not "still there" as it was originally, uncovered. And on the contrary, though Mrs. Ramsay states "they had not touched it; they had done just what he wanted," she has indeed touched it, covered it, hidden it, made it something other than a skull nailed to the wall. In James's case, it is represented as present when in fact it is veiled; in Cam's case, it is represented as veiled and other when it is present. Both children accept the re-presentation of the object in the symbolic. James, though we are not told exactly how, goes so far as to check the veracity of its presence, "He made sure that the skull was still there under the shawl" and so assured, allows the re-presentation to stand. The Mother mediates the symbolic. Indeed, she continues to do so. When James asks just following the above "Would they go to the Lighthouse tomorrow?" Mrs. Ramsay responds, "No, not tomorrow, she said, but soon, she promised him; the next fine day" (133).

In exactly the same way as the story starts, Mrs. Ramsay re-iterates the exact conditions she at first proposes for going to the lighthouse: if it's fine, we'll go. She promises.

Ironically, as soon as she has said this, but without any awareness, it seems, of having repeated her crime, she thinks to herself, "she felt angry with Charles Tansley, with her husband, and with herself, for she had raised his hopes"(133). Once again, she offers action in her name, thereby creating the condition of a debt which, according to the Law and Mr. Ramsay, she has no right to make and no ability to pay because she does not sign

this condition in the name of the father, with “if your father thinks so,” or “on the next fine day your father approves of.”

In this one line of self-recrimination, Mrs. Ramsay reflects how she has absorbed her husband’s perspective, that she, according to him, “made her children hope what was utterly out of the question” (37). She now *realizes* that as Mr. Ramsay has said of her, in that initial scene with her son, “She had raised his hopes” (133). Yet, surely she has just done so again since she does not make her condition of “the next fine day” conditional on the Father’s approval. So on what does she base her sense that she raised his hopes inappropriately then, but not now, if she just did the same thing here?

This elision in the text suggests that Mrs. Ramsay does not really believe that what she did was an error in proposing such conditions to her son; perhaps, more chilling, she simply takes Ramsay’s word for it and internalizes that “she had raised his hopes” without connecting this to specific practices. There is support for such an interpretation from earlier in the text.

After Ramsay says he will ask the coast guard for a forecast, Mrs. Ramsay thinks, “Then he said, Damn you. He said, It must rain. He said, It won’t rain; and instantly a heaven of security opened before her. There was nobody she revered more. She was not good enough to tie his shoe strings, she felt” (38).

In this moment’s reflection, we see Mrs. Ramsay of being completely capable of accepting whatever her husband says, of a certain willingness to rely on his interpretation of the world over her own. As we have seen, her own interpretation tends towards that feeling that makes their two notes ring flat: a feeling that she is misrepresenting what she knows to be true in order to support his view of reality. A view of reality which ultimately and regularly oppresses her. “She had raised his hopes” becomes another moment in which self-recrimination is easier than to consider and react to the possibility that her husband was wrong; that it is she who must constantly raise his hopes.

Similarly, she may also decline Ramsay’s offer to go see the port master about the weather out of fear, rather than out of real acceptance of his superior knowledge about the weather. What if he were wrong and another Male of Authority were to show him up as wrong, and worse, Mrs. Ramsay as right, that it might be fine tomorrow? The cost would mean more extending of sympathy. Mrs. Ramsay would have to pay a higher price emotionally to restore Ramsay from such a blow, and she would have to pay psychically to rationalize his jealous reaction with his imperfect knowledge. It is too high a price to pay for the “no man she worshipped more.”

These moments of surrender, surrender of her own knowledge to that of her husband's, surrender of her own perception of truth to her husband's, along with her constant availability, are what drive her to seek her private moments where the contradictions of her verbal existence relax as she enters a private place. Almost in the same words as Brontë's Catherine's "Incomparably above and beyond you all," when that character gives up on trying to ask the world to hear her meaning, Mrs. Ramsay wonders about continuing in a world where it takes so much energy to be responsible for constantly remaking it and everyone else in it. Catherine opts for death when she realizes she cannot be heard and that she cannot create a space in which she can. Mrs. Ramsay reflects despair almost at the necessity of having to create spaces that are not particularly for her use anyway. The spaces she would enjoy are the ones we have seen she imagines where she sees behind the curtain, and yet, these are not the ones she may create. She does not critique this contradiction, but she does respond to its effect on her as she reflects at the start of the dinner party,

But what have I done with my life? thought Mrs. Ramsay...At the far end[of the table], was her husband, sitting down. all in a heap, frowning. She did not mind. She could not understand how she had ever felt any emotion or any affection for him. She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything, as she helped the soup, as if there was an eddy – there– and one could be in it, or one could be out of it, and she was out of it. It's all come to an end, she thought...But this is not a thing, she thought, ladling out the soup, that one says.

Raising her eyebrows at the discrepancy – that was what she was thinking, this was what she was doing – ladling out soup – she felt, more and more strongly, outside that eddy; or as if a shade had fallen, and, robbed of colour, she saw things truly. The room (she looked around it) was very shabby. There was no beauty anywhere. She forebore to look at Mr. Tansley. Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her. Again she felt, as a fact without hostility, the sterility of men, for if she did not do it nobody would do it, and so, giving herself the little shake that one gives a watch that has stopped, the old familiar pulse began beating, as the watch begins ticking - one, two, three, one, two, three. And so on and so on, she repeated, listening to it, sheltering and fostering the still feeble pulse as one might guard a weak flame with a newspaper. And so then, she concluded, addressing herself by bending silently in his direction to William Bankes - poor man! who had no wife and no children, and dined alone in lodgings except for tonight; and in pity for him, life being now strong enough to bear her on again, she began all this business, as a sailor not without weariness sees the wind fill his sail and yet hardly wants to be off again and thinks how, had the ship sunk, he would have whirled round and round and found rest on the floor of the sea.

(96-97)

It is this pity that Lily does not understand when she criticizes Mrs. Ramsay for pitying William Banks: that if she did not have pity, and the whole of the male sex thereby under her protection, why would she bother to return to the eddy?

In the dinner scene, Mrs. Ramsay again stands outside herself, outside her "proper function" while performing it. She never physically leaves it. In those previous moments before going to Mr. Ramsay, she knits; here she ladles soup. She never completely separates herself from that function. But this time, that step outside as always questions the usual relations to herself, her role in the Law: "what have I done with my life." From here, in this place outside the role, affection for her husband deteriorates. She sees things truly, she feels, and the first part of the observation ends with the understanding that everything rests on her. And then, "Again she felt, as a fact without hostility, the sterility of men, for if she did not do it nobody would do it." Once again, her awareness of the situation, her role in it, calls her away from any critique of why things are the way they are, why things rest on her. She thinks without hostility of the sterility of men. But, and this will be the segue of the chapter, what if she did not fulfill her proper function?

But it would be impossible for Mrs. Ramsay to answer this question. She is far too much a believer in the superiority of men. In this scene, she is only aware of men in the room as if there were only her and the men, and she must create the merger. Mrs. Ramsay's own thoughts are pollutedly sexist. She does not consider other women as part of her concern. Even in her moments of escape, she imagines herself alone against Life for the sake of her children. She does not imagine female peers, only children and men.

No wonder from such a perception she could wish to have "whirled round and round and found rest on the bottom of the sea" (97).

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The symbolic is very much Mrs. Ramsay's domain; it is the Law's regulation of her participation in it that is very much crazy-making: men demand that she provide the enclytic illusion for them while recanting her rationality (if it's fine) as emotionality, as lying, while simultaneously demanding themselves to be lied to. There is a questioning from time to time of these contradictions, but that is always interrupted by a call to arms, to action, to ladle the soup. There are also enough internalized censors in place to make sure that any questioning of the Law is quickly terminated. As above, Mrs. Ramsay fears that if she does not do it, no one else will. She thinks ill of any woman who does not fulfill their proper function: she thinks angrily of Mr. Carmichael's wife who, rather than support him,

berated him.²⁴ She is aware of the two notes ringing flat, aware of why this might be, but she does not critique her own condition, her own oppression and censorship, even while she desires escape from it.

In so representing Mrs. Ramsay as self-censoring, but still suffering under the duplicity of life as reflector of male desire, economy and exchange, Woolf's text presents a compelling representation of women absorbed by and made sexist by the ideology that oppresses them. Despite Mrs. Ramsay's nagging sense that something is not right; that despite protestations to the contrary, she may not be happy; she may not be happy with what she has done with her life, nor with her husband for his expectation that she inhabit these contradictions. She cannot move past this entrapment of her "proper function" nor of her perception that the world holds only herself and men. Women are just as peripheral to her as they are to men. This is not uncommon, that we absorb the bigotry of our oppressors. But what tools does Mrs. Ramsay have to move beyond this perception?

None, since she excludes the company of women.

Again, as in the previous chapter, we see that there is no legal room for conversation between men and women. The forms of communication are defined to exclude the need for what conversation demands: listening to another. Women remain excluded from these exchanges with men. As Woolf's text demonstrates in its characterization of Lily and her relationship to Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf is also keenly aware of how conversation is blocked among women, too.

"Nothing happened! Nothing! Nothing!"

Lily is very distinct, almost unique as a fictional character: she is female and she looks towards another woman for connexion, mentorship, rather than to a father or husband figure. This is perhaps the most critical attribute of Woolf's characterization of Lily. It presents a character whose very questions about her role within her society creates in those questions a site of at least temporary resistance. She is in many respects the complement to Mrs. Ramsay. Lily observes Mrs. Ramsay's intelligence and managerial skills and wishes to appreciate them in their own right rather than see them only in how they serve men. She bears witness to what she sees as Mr. Ramsay's abuse of Mrs. Ramsay. Says Lily of Mr. Ramsay, "He is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoiled; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death"(76). Similarly, she notices Ramsay's attempted

²⁴ Mrs. Ramsay does not reflect upon the fitness of the constantly stoned Mr. Carmichael as a life partner. However, considering his inertness throughout the novel, perhaps he would be easier for Mrs. Ramsay to maintain than Mr. Ramsay.

concealment of his own neediness. She and William Bankes both recall how Mr. Ramsay minimizes his accomplishments as “talking nonsense” and conclude,

It was a disguise; it was the refuge of a man afraid to own his own feelings, who could not say, This is what I like – this is what I am; and rather pitiable and distasteful to William Bankes and Lily Briscoe, who wondered why such concealments should be necessary; why he needed always praise; why so brave a man in thought should be so timid in life: how strangely he was venerable and laughable at one and the same time.

The narrative demonstrates through the internal monologues of Mrs. Ramsay’s we have considered that Mrs. Ramsay must play the part of the concealing agent who absorbs Mr. Ramsay’s anxieties about his worth to allow him to head off to reach R.

Lily’s relationship to the Ramsay’s creates a tangential line of scrutiny of both Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay’s complicity with him, as she abnegates her attributes to enhance his. Lily extends a judgement of Mr. Ramsay that Mrs. Ramsay will not make explicit. That Ramsay is a tyrant. And while we have seen Mrs. Ramsay believe herself to be very special to Mr. Ramsay, and indeed to all men, Lily, as a single woman, unattached to any man, demonstrates that in the patriarchal economy of exchange, any woman will do to play the part of reflecting mirror.

We see through her characterization that Lily is just as called upon as Mrs. Ramsay to perform these acts and functions. Just as Mrs. Ramsay has been called upon by her husband and then by Charles Tansley to assuage their anxieties, to reinflate their sagging egos, during the dinner scene, Lily is asked to double for Mrs. Ramsay with Charles Tansley, but as a woman who does not particularly desire to be socially normalized, she affords us a more explicit critique of those functions than does Mrs. Ramsay.

There is a code of behaviour she knew, whose seventh article (it may be) says that on occasions of this sort it behoves the woman, whatever her own occupation, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself; as indeed it is their duty, she reflected, in her old maidenly fairness, to help us, suppose the Tube were to burst into flames. Then, she thought, I should certainly expect Mr. Tansley to get me out. But how would it be, she thought, if neither of us did either of these things? So she sat there smiling.

[But then Lily does help him,]”and she felt Mrs. Ramsay’s gratitude (for Mrs. Ramsay was free now to talk for a moment herself) ah, she thought, but what haven’t I paid to get it for you? She had not been sincere.

She had done the usual trick – been nice. She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst (if it had not been for Mr. Bankes) were between men and women.

(105 & 107)

Charles Tansley is appeased; male need has been satisfied. A woman has served in her proper function. Lily acknowledges the cost of this: she, like Mrs. Ramsay previously with Mr. Ramsay, when the two notes sound flat, has not been sincere with Charles Tansley. Consequently, "She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that" What Lily's perception of this lack of sincerity does not acknowledge is that Human Relations between men and women are specifically constructed "like that." Not for sincere exchange: Charles Tansley has no desire to know Lily Briscoe; Mr. Ramsay has no desire to know Mrs. Ramsay (we recall he likes to believe his women are not smart). They are constructed for male need to be served. Both men clearly get what they want in these exchanges. Only Mrs. Ramsay in her own World, and Lily in hers acknowledge that they do not get satisfaction from these exchanges, that there is something false to them. Without sincerity, Lily implies, there is no intimacy.

After Mrs. Ramsay's death, we again see that any woman will do for any man's desire to relieve his exposed thigh bone. When the narrative returns to the Lighthouse after the "Time Passes" section, the always short tempered, always ready to display acts of violence from door slamming to plate throwing (to, of course, verbal abuse) to get his way Mr. Ramsay winds up for his Demanding Sympathy routine. En route to the Lighthouse, waiting for the children to join him, Mr. Ramsay "bears down" on Lily, again disrupting her painting, giving primacy to his own need:

And then, and then – this was one of those moments when an enormous need urged him, without being conscious what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy.
(171)

Lily resists giving in to him; sees him as dramatizing himself for sympathy. She knows that she is supposed to extend sympathy to him, be available to him but cannot. And Ramsay cannot believe it:

[T]here issued from him such a groan that any other woman in the whole world would have done something, said something – all except myself, thought Lily, girding at herself bitterly, who am not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid, presumably.

Mr. Ramsay sighed to the full. He waited. Was she not going to say anything? Did she not see what he wanted from her?
(172)

As Mr. Ramsay remarks, any other woman in the world would have given him what he desired at that moment. Any woman would do to relieve himself. He desires

women only as emotional prostitutes, to be discarded just as readily when the act of relief through sympathy is accomplished.

Lily, with a mix of repulsion and desire for escape can only eventually say “What lovely boots.” What to her is the most inappropriate comment imaginable in the face of such need is to him just the lever, the fetish he needs to represent himself, to himself: a man of action in his own ingenuity in designing his own boots and his own knots. Total mastery of the Foot. Ironically, she feels sympathy for him when he, the great man, bends to show her how to tie his version of a proper knot. But he does not stay to see if she has anything to say to that account. For him, Lily’s seeming acknowledgment of his brilliance is enough to relieve his need for sympathy and of course to relieve himself of any sense of intimacy or connection with Lily.

For she felt a sudden emptiness; a frustration. Her feeling had come too late; there it was ready; but he no longer needed it. He had become a very distinguished, elderly man, who had no need of her whatsoever. She felt snubbed.

Lily’s own need now to give her emotional support to Mr. Ramsay is forced to go unexpressed. Mr. Ramsay, reinvented as the grand old man, leads his children off like little soldiers to the Lighthouse boat trip. The Male’s need has been served; there is no need to reflect upon the desires of the servant, the woman.

And any woman will do. Even a child, a daughter.

*

Cam

On route to the Lighthouse, while Lily continues to emit sympathetic waves towards Mr. Ramsay, while she reinvents imaginatively her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay, we see the process of social normalization being played out within the next generation. Cam, the youngest girl whom Mr. Bankes once characterized as “wild,” is used as canon fodder between the archetypal battle of father and son for the Mother. Within this battle, the Father would claim the daughter as surrogate Female Sympathy, as a reflection of his vision of himself as Father, Patriarch. It is a battle that leaves out any consideration of what the young woman may herself feel or think. She is merely objectified between the two males. Only the narrative demonstrates how she perceives her transitory position within the exchange between men.

Initially James claims Cam’s allegiance to Fight the Tyrant, their father, not to give in to him, to fight tyranny to the death, to align herself with his resentment of the Father as the Black Winged thing that takes from him his pleasure, his primacy in the Mother’s

attention. But just as Mr. Ramsay has demanded sympathy from his wife, from Lily, from “any woman,” he now turns to get what he wants from his daughter:

I will make her smile at me, he thought. She looks frightened. She was so silent. He clutched his fingers, and determined that his voice and his face and all the quick expressive gestures which had been at his command making people pity him and praise him all these years should subdue themselves. He would make her smile at him. He would find some simple easy thing to say to her. But what? For, wrapped up in his work as he was, he forgot the sort of thing one said. There was a puppy. They had a puppy. Who was looking after the puppy today? he asked.

Ramsay does not seek to engage his daughter, ask for her thoughts as they sail, but only wants to gain a response he would control, “I will make her smile at me.” His will is temporarily bent upon achieving this goal. When he seems to fail, he simply gives up. If she will not give him what he wants, he will return to his book: “Well, if Cam would not answer him, he would not bother her Mr. Ramsay decided, feeling in his pocket for a book.”²⁵

Thus Cam, as the only woman on the boat, is forced to cope with her father’s emotional demands. James does not feel this pressure, does not understand it. He only perceives what he believes will be his sister’s immanent betrayal of their compact: “now she will give way. I shall be left to fight the tyrant alone. The compact would be left to him to carry out. Cam would never resist tyranny to the death, he thought” (190).

But what is the basis of this compact? James is figuralized throughout the narrative as Justice. In the early scenes of the novel, his mother imagines him as a Judge. On the boat, Cam sees James as Justice itself. But that Justice is of the Company of Men and in Men’s interests; it has no interests in the women who act as its currency. The narrative demonstrates that James’s desire to fight the Tyrant to the death, to have Justice, to stab the Father through the heart with any sharp object at hand (or not, since he once did have scissors in his hands while feeling this way and did not use them) is reduced to the desire for the law’s (the father’s) approval.

While James receives no praise (“his father never praised him” James thought), he would stab the Tyrant through the heart, because the Tyrant is competition, signified by the Mother’s sympathy and attention. Indeed, the teenage James of course recalls the early scene of how the Tyrant gains his mother’s sympathy and how she thus, seemingly, abandons the Son for the Father:

²⁵ In this moment, narratively he is similar to Edgar who finds solace in books when his wife is unavailable to him. After her death he goes to books rather than spending time with his daughter. Here, if cursory attempts do not work with Cam, Mr. Ramsay is equally capable of finding amusement in a book.

She had gone stiff all over, and then, her arm slackening, so that he felt she listened to him [James] no longer, she had risen somehow and gone away and left him there, impotent, ridiculous, sitting on the floor grasping a pair of scissors.
(212)

Tyranny for James, then, is the Father's ability to appropriate a woman's sympathy that had heretofore been his. James would claim the right to total sympathy and attention which his father has the privilege as Father to usurp from the Son. The mother is simply the Sign of Approval and Primacy which is the Father's first, owed the Father first. By claiming and then receiving the Mother's sympathy, the Father demonstrates that he is the Primary male; not the son. Though, for as long as the Father lives, the Father's Word can extend temporary Primacy to the Son without the Mother having anything to do with that Signing. And James wants his father's approval, to have that Primary Status. He will despise his Father as a Tyrant until he is crowned in the moment himself. As soon as he has that, Cam knows, she is the one left without support. The desire to fight Tyranny to the Death has nothing to do with its effect on the trodden down, gendered masses, but only upon Rites of Inheritance.

Then having lighted his pipe he took out his watch. He looked at it attentively; he made, perhaps, some mathematical calculation. At last he said, triumphantly: "Well done!" James had steered them like a born sailor.

There! Cam thought, addressing herself silently to James. You've got it at last. For she knew that this was what James had been wanting, and she knew that now he had got it he was so pleased that he would not look at her or at his father or at any one. There he sat with his hand on the tiller sitting bolt upright, looking rather sulky and frowning slightly. He was so pleased that he was not going to let anybody share a grain of his pleasure. His father had praised him. They must think that he was perfectly indifferent. But you've got it now, Cam thought.
(234)

James savors his praise to the exclusion even of his ally, his sister. He has what he wants. She is excluded from his success, as she well perceives. And as the narrative demonstrates, James does not know what he asks in his demand for allegiance from his sister. Her experience of the Tyranny of the Father is entirely different from her brother's. *She is not, however, in competition with the Father for Primacy.* Cam would seek love and protection from her father: she admires him while simultaneously resenting his demands for service:

For no one attracted her more; his hands were beautiful, and his feet, and his voice, and his words, and his haste, and his temper, and his oddity, and his passion, and his saying straight out before every one, we perish, each alone, and his remoteness. (He had opened his book.) But what remained

intolerable, she thought, sitting upright, and watching Macalister's boy tug the hook out of the gills of another fish, was that crass blindness and tyranny of his which had poisoned her childhood and raised bitter storms, so that even now she woke in the night trembling with rage and remembered some command of his; some insolence: "Do this," "Do that," his dominance: his "Submit to me."
(193)

James resents what his father seemingly takes from him, appropriates from him; Cam resents his demand that she fulfill the "proper function." James does not question his father's act of appropriation – what it may have cost his mother, and how it now costs his sister. He only sees that his Mother's attention was riven from him, that his sister may now betray him. He has felt betrayed as well by the mother who left him, ridiculous, with a pair of scissors in his hand. He has no thought, or understanding for the women who must serve. As Irigaray states, women are the exchange commodity for transactions among men. Interestingly, "The Lighthouse" section of the novel is situated after World War One, and therefore after (most) women won the franchise. Woolf was involved in that struggle for the vote, yet her novel, the background of which is the war, makes no mention of this post War act that is supposed to give women a voice and a hearing in the affairs of men. Instead, her novel represents the Oedipal scene, re-enacted once again on a small boat en route to the lighthouse where a small girl once again can either be Antigone of *Oedipus* or of *Antigone*: she can either serve the father or the brother, but no one much cares for what she might consider without reference to either patriarch or patriarch-to-be. By its ignoring of the vote and replacing it with this traditional, near archetypal scene, Woolf's text speaks volumes about what effect the vote for women is likely to have on women's relations to power.

Meanwhile, within the narrative, Cam's description of the elements she admires in her father speaks to a desire for some kind of relationship, of intimate exchange with him. This desire is regularly corrupted by his demands for Service, for sympathy. It is this desire for communion with the father and his demands within it that causes Cam to feel so torn in her understanding of her relationship to her father.

for she thought, as she sat looking at James who kept his eyes dispassionately on the sail, or glanced now and then for a second at the horizon, you're not exposed to it, to this pressure and division of feeling, this extraordinary temptation.

It is the temptation to reinvent her Father as only a good man without trace of tyranny, a temptation she succumbs to towards the end of their trip to the Lighthouse:

And watching her father as he wrote in his study, she thought (now sitting in the boat) he was not vain, nor a tyrant and did not wish to make you pity him. Indeed, if he saw she was there, reading a book, he would ask her, as gently as any one could, Was there nothing he could give her?

Lest this should be wrong, she looked at him reading the little book with the shiny cover mottled like a plover's egg. No; it was right. Look at him now, she wanted to say aloud to James. (But James had his eye on the sail.) He is a sarcastic brute, James would say. He brings the talk round to himself and his books, James would say. He is intolerably egotistical. Worst of all, he is a tyrant. But look! she said, looking at him. Look at him now.

But as Cam realizes, James knows nothing of these mixed urges to erase a Father's tyranny in favor of the image of a kind man who wants to know if there was nothing he could give her. On the contrary, James's experience of the world, the experience of Sons, is entirely different from the experience of Daughters. James is not interested in knowing either his mother or his sister's reality. One is to give him attention; the other is to support his cause. Just like his father. The meaning of the word "tyranny" for children, therefore, is entirely different and that difference is entirely constituted within their gendered identity in relation to the Law. We see this quite explicitly: where Cam understands at least in part that what James really desires is his father's approval, James has no similarly sympathetic understanding of his sister. She will either keep the compact or betray it. Similarly, where Cam reaches out to exculpate her father's tyranny, to understand him as a person who is kind and brave, Mr. Ramsay only seeks to manipulate a response from his daughter, or at best, fob off her attention with some object or other - was there nothing he could give her? This is not intimacy. The Law has no place for intimacy between men and women or women and women. It only values the exchange of status *Mano est Mano*.

*

To the Lighthouse questions the costs to those the Law devalues as only commodities. It presents three generations of women, abused by the same Patriarch (seemingly eternal: "they both rose to follow him as he sprang, lightly like a young man, holding his parcel, on to the rock" (236)). It demonstrates how each generation is treated with the same expectation under the Law, embodied by men's demands. Women provide support, reflection for the man. In each of those generations of women, there is some resistance or at least some momentary questioning of the Law's expectation: Mrs. Ramsay is momentarily uneasy about the two notes sounding flat; Cam names her father's demands as tyrannical; Lily questions what would happen if a woman was not nice to a man. All of these moments of resistance, are just that: moments. There is tremendous pressure put

upon them to reabsorb them back into the status quo, and so to erase them. Woolf's text presents this pressure of reabsorption in what Cam calls the temptation: the temptation to give into the Father, to be nice to the young man, to give up painting. Understandably so. The pressure for capitulation is intense. But Woolf's text suggests that capitulation occurs because there is no community of women in the novel to resist it. Though these women share these common questions about the status quo and their relation to it, we see that their isolation disempowers them from being able to sustain these moments of resistance, often even for themselves.²⁶

*

Lily

Though their forms of resistance are limited, Cam and Lily, who survive into the enfranchised world of women and the vote use other than direct political action to challenge the patriarchal order's effect at least on a temporary level. While Cam has no living Mother figure in her world, she at least partially interprets the world around her through the Mother, through *her* mother. On the boat trip to the lighthouse, when her father chides her for not knowing her compass directions, for not being able to locate the real location of their island home, Cam does not turn to pick up a compass and work out coordinates. Rather, she creates a narrative space about the island as it disappears from view.

So she said nothing, but looked doggedly and sadly at the shore, wrapped in its mantle of peace; as if the people there had fallen asleep, she thought; were free like smoke, were free to come and go like ghosts. They have no suffering there, she thought.
(193)

Mrs. Ramsay created these same types of narrative spaces to soothe her daughter when she was a child: she recreated the boor's head, wrapped in a shawl as a verdant landscape, making it safe for her daughter to sleep. Cam now recreates the island in the same narrative way, for her own solace. She does not attribute this knowledge to her mother. Her mother is almost erased from her experience, but for these narrative traces. What we will come back to momentarily is the potential problem with inheriting only imaginative structures. However, this is the site of Cam's resistance to the tyranny of the Compass, her Father's way of ordering the world and everything and one else in it.

²⁶ I return to the notions of bubbles in the brakeline. One makes very little difference. Several can start to cause problems. Indeed, the repeated pressure on the pedal to force the system to work actually pushes isolated bubbles closer together, forming larger cells that eventually cause the system to fail.

In a far more explicit manner, the narrative characterizes Lily as looking specifically to Mrs. Ramsay, to the Mother to mediate the symbolic:

for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee.
(101)

Lily does not turn to William Bankes or to Mr. Ramsay to gain knowledge of the world. Though she asks Andrew Ramsay to explain what his father does for a living, which is to explore the nature of Subject and Object, she does not turn to him for an interpretation of those relations. As she has said, she feels that something is taken away from her when Mr. Ramsay looks at her paintings. He appropriates, detracts, and she is looking for intimacy, for knowledge. Thus, she looks to the Mother to Mediate the Symbolic, which is against the law and which therefore cannot be heard and is not heard by Mrs. Ramsay when Lily presses her head to Mrs. Ramsay's knee anticipating some connexion between them.

Nothing happened! Nothing! Nothing! as she leant her head against Mrs. Ramsay's knee. And yet, she knew knowledge and wisdom were stored up in Mrs. Ramsay's heart. How, then, she had asked herself, did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were? Only like a bee, drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air intangible to touch or taste, one haunted the dome-shaped hive, ranged the wastes of the air over the countries of the world alone, and then haunted the hives with their murmurs and their stirrings; the hives, which were people.
(101)

Lily's desire for intimacy is not returned, not because, as she postulates, it cannot happen, that people are sealed, but because Mrs. Ramsay does not perceive intimacy with a woman as possible. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay may not perceive intimacy with anyone as possible since this may threaten the proper function between mate and spouse. Even here, intimacy is not exact since, as Mrs. Ramsay notes, the two notes ring flat. As we have also seen, Mrs. Ramsay imagines herself, sword in hand, alone, protecting her family. She cannot imagine herself as part of a community of men or women. And so, Lily's touch goes unacknowledged.

The problem associated with this lack of acknowledgment (no acceptance of the debt; no receipt for reimbursement) on Mrs. Ramsay's side is that, without it, Lily lacks acknowledgment of her own desire and sense of self. As the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective writes in *Sexual Difference*,

Attributing authority and value to another woman with regard to the world was the means of giving authority and value to oneself, to one's own experience, to one's own desires...Even in a society where all the measures of value are male and where the wealth of female experience often circulates under a neutral sign, women among themselves, though they lack measures, do not fail to feel that what they desire for themselves is so much the more desirable and convenient when they see it realized in a woman.
(*Sexual Difference*, 112)

Lily's own desires in the real receives back no such recognition. Though she critiques Mrs. Ramsay's seeming ready capitulation, Lily still admires and desires in Mrs. Ramsay her way of being in the world, the knowledge she must have gained. But Mrs. Ramsay does not acknowledge Lily's payment of respects. I have stated above that Mrs. Ramsay does not acknowledge Lily's request for intimacy because she does not conceive of the existence of such a request or the possibility of such an exchange. The best Mrs. Ramsay can do is to imagine herself fighting Life alone; she cannot render up a reality that includes the company of women. There is a reason for this, of course: it is not in the interests of Fathers and Sons to allow the commodity of exchange, their Mothers and Daughters, to evolve an independent economy within the Symbolic. The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective describes the Lily/Mrs. Ramsay-like rapports within these terms of the woman who wants (Lily) and the woman who knows (Mrs. Ramsay):

The absence of exchange between these two moments of female humanity, between the woman who wants and the woman who knows, is not something whose cause should be searched for in female psychology: the cause is in the symbolic order that underlies the system of social relations. The alliance of old women with young women frightens men. Many of us may remember having been courted in our youth by men whose primary aim was to keep us from frequenting "older" women—older in either a literal or a figurative sense; women, that is, who were more aware.
(*Sexual Difference*, 140)

The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective goes on to describe the relation between young and old as at times mixed within the same woman. We can see this plainly in Lily's characterization:

The relation of entrustment is this kind of alliance, where by old is meant having the consciousness that comes with the experience of defeat, and by young is meant having one's claims intact, the one and the other entering into communication to empower each other in the face of the world. In fact, it sometimes happens that both things coexist in the same woman, who thus finds herself both old and young at the same time: though young, she is already warned that her difference has no worth in social intercourse; and however old, she is still attached to the wish to count for something in the

world. This coexistence does not yet constitute a social relation, but it does prefigure it. If that relation is established between two women, a new combination enters the system of social relations which modifies its symbolic order.

(*Sexual Difference*, 142)

In *To the Lighthouse* the relation that Lily desires is not established in the real, in the symbolic between Mrs. Ramsay and herself, but Lily does embody this young/old knowledge: early on, we see that Lily is regularly warned that her difference, her being a woman, “has no worth in social intercourse.” She is regularly reminded by Charles Tansley that women “can’t write; can’t paint” and must constantly work to resist this. Even Mrs. Ramsay, who thinks of Lily’s independence and admires it, reflects that, “one could not take her painting very seriously.” On another occasion, Mrs. Ramsay tells Lily directly, “there could be no disputing this: an unmarried woman (she lightly took her [Lily’s] hand for a moment), an unmarried woman has missed the best of life.”

Despite this unsupportive environment, Lily does not give in entirely. The Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective speaks of the consequence for women of not having the symbolic mediated by the female, of lacking the kind of entrustment between women that Lily seeks with Mrs. Ramsay. I wish to present this concept of a female symbolic as a critical backdrop against which we can consider Lily’s imaginative recreation/representation of the desire for her relationship with Mrs. Ramsay:

Female fantasies are a way of sustaining the difference in being a woman when she discovers that, socially, she is a loser. Then the task begins, the task of making up—in her mother and father’s love, in adults’ esteem, in her peer’s consideration, and so forth—for that peculiar disadvantage which is not having been born a man. It is then, too, that fantasies begin. Claims diminish: sometimes they completely disappear, and fantasies take their place, fantasies which no longer measure themselves against anything.

The first measure which disappears, the true measure of every woman, is her belonging to the female gender. The woman who fantasizes does not know how great a need, and what kind of need, she has of her kind. From this point of view, there is no great difference between the young woman who watches soap operas and the intellectual woman who models her life on the projects of male thought. Both avoid turning to their like in order to find out what to think of themselves and of the world. Both use fantasy to feel like protagonists in a world where, in fact, they act with moderation and respect for the sexual hierarchy.

(*Sexual Difference*, 123)

It is tempting to read Lily’s painting as the above type of fantastic escape into a belief that “however old, she [a woman] is still attached to the wish to count for

something in the world” (*Sexual Difference*, 123). After all, because of her unrealized contact with Mrs. Ramsay, Lily’s vision quest, her expressionist painting may be seen to engage in “projects of male thought,” like the modernist project of abstract representation. But on the contrary, the above description of fantasy is far more in keeping with Mrs. Ramsay’s imaginary retreats into the Dark Core. In that place, Mrs. Ramsay feels she can “go anywhere; no one can stop her.” And from that place, she imagines herself, pen and notebook in hand, taking notes in the manner she has seen modeled by male heroes, projects of male thought. In those imaginary escapes and in her excursions to the poor, she can “feel like a protagonist” in a world where she does indeed, “act with moderation and respect for the sexual hierarchy.” This slippage into fantasy again has nothing to do with being incapable of speaking, acting, interpreting in the Symbolic. On the contrary, it is the result of specific social relations, where a woman’s claims diminish. And what is the first measure lost but “belonging to the female gender. The woman who fantasizes does not know how great a need, and what kind of need, she has of her kind” (*Sexual Difference*, 134).

Mrs. Ramsay never imagines herself as a gendered being in her fantasies. Nor does she at all know “how great a need, and what kind of need, she has of her kind.” She has been entirely conditioned out of thinking of any relation of herself to any but the men she cares for, the whole male species. The only trace of her awareness as a woman comes from this secondary evidence: that she does fantasize.

Lily Briscoe, on the other hand, is characterized as being very much aware of her female specificity, that it is being a woman that acts against her being a success in the world. Indeed, she uses her painting to acknowledge her debt and gratitude to the Mother. This deliberate remembering of the value of the Elder woman, the one who has gone before is a crucial part of establishing relations among women and of moving the acknowledgment of those relations into the symbolic. As the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective writes:

Simple gratitude in the relation between women is what female freedom is practically founded on. Everything else, in theory as in practice, is either a consequence of that or has nothing to do with freedom. One woman who is grateful to another for giving her something is worth more for the liberation of the female sex than a group or a whole feminist movement in which this kind of gratitude is missing.

By acknowledging the good received—life and sex, love, friendship, solidarity, knowledge, encouragements—woman learns the way toward relating to the female source of her value. By taking on an obligation toward those women who have given her something, she puts an end to a furtive relationship. Maternal superiority will then no longer seem crushing to her, and her plus will become something which she can appropriate for herself to

use in the world as she sees fit. The lack of gratitude between women impoverishes the individual and all women more than sexist domination does. Moreover, if we move to that symbolic level which underlies social relations, it is easy to see that the two causes of poverty coincide. Men cannot make a woman's riches his when she knows their female origin and displays them with the sign of their origin. Moving to the symbolic level which structures social relations is also necessary in order to give gratitude its proper weight.

(*Sexual Difference*, 139)

This is the place of loss for Lily: that her gratitude to Mrs. Ramsay does not extend itself beyond the personal into the symbolic. That is always the site of struggle for women's expressions of self, desire and this gratitude to the Mother. To move into the symbolic is always already challenged by the construction of the symbolic itself. Similarly, when moving towards social intercourse, Lily does not always remember her project's and her identity's highly socialized, gendered construction. Sometimes Lily's project escapes into useless generalizations that leave her feeling unable to speak, because she from time to time lapses in her awareness of her specific condition as a woman within social relations. The following passage demonstrates both Lily's lapse from experience of her specificity as a woman and the welling up of her desire which leads her back to the Mother. As the passage begins, Lily would turn to the stoned Mr. Carmichael for authorization of her expression. In doing so, she comes, mistakenly, to the general conclusion that "one can say nothing to nobody."

She wanted to go straight up to him and say, "Mr. Carmichael!" Then he would look up benevolently as always, from his smoky vague green eyes. But one only woke people if one knew what one wanted to say to them. And she wanted to say not one thing, but everything. Little words that broke up the thought and dismembered it said nothing. "About life, about death; about Mrs. Ramsay" – no, she thought, one could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low. Then one gave it up; then the idea sunk back again; then one became like most middle-aged people, cautious, furtive, with wrinkles between the eyes and a look of perpetual apprehension.

(202)

A woman's mediation of the symbolic fails, however, in the general case, where the female "circulates under a neutral sign," as the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective suggests. A woman may not be able to speak to a man; her conversation with another woman may also be censored. That "one could say nothing to nobody" is only a pretense at speaking in terms of male projects within the symbolic, excluding the specificity of one's own experience.

But Lily's soliloquy does come back to the body, if not yet specifically to her body. And in that specificity of the desire to be a winner, she returns to the source, to the Mother, and calls out for that desire to be fulfilled by the Mother:

For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? (She was looking at the drawing-room steps; they looked extraordinarily empty.) It was one's body feeling, not one's mind. The physical sensations that went with the bare look of the steps had become suddenly extremely unpleasant. To want and not to have, sent all up her body a hardness, a hollowness, a strain. And then to want and not to have – to want and want – how that wrung the heart, and wrung it again and again! Oh, Mrs. Ramsay!

Even as Lily calls out for the Mother, throughout her imaginary quest after Mrs. Ramsay, she regularly returns to Mr. Carmichael to authorize her thoughts and feelings about Mrs. Ramsay:

She addressed old Mr. Carmichael again. What was it then? What did it mean? Could things thrust their hands up and grip one; could the blade cut; the fist grasp? Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle, and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air? Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life? – startling, unexpected, unknown? For one moment she felt that if they both got up, here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence, as two fully equipped human beings from whom nothing should be hid might speak, then, beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return. "Mrs. Ramsay!" she said aloud, "Mrs. Ramsay!" The tears ran down her face.

[...]

"Mrs. Ramsay!" Lily cried, "Mrs. Ramsay!" But nothing happened. The pain increased. That anguish could reduce one to such a pitch of imbecility, she thought! Anyhow the old man had not heard her. He remained benignant, calm – if one chose to think it, sublime. Heaven be praised, no one had heard her cry that ignominious cry, stop pain, stop! She had not obviously taken leave of her senses. No one had seen her step off her strip of board into the waters of annihilation. She remained a skimpy old maid, holding a paint-brush.
(202, 204-205)

In the above passage, Lily desires the Mother, turns to a male to authorize her interpretation, and failing to receive that, regards herself indeed as a loser. Why does she, throughout her desire to recover Mrs. Ramsay, turn for this authority to Mr. Carmichael? We may consider another passage from *Sexual Difference*:

We must investigate this passage which we call inevitable, but which proves to be so difficult for women: it is to give oneself the authority to decide for

oneself what to think, and what to want. A woman who has this authority makes the female difference visible and significant. Clearly, we do not think that to give oneself authority is an individual act. Authority is received originally from another human being who is in a position to give it, who has the authority to give it. But she cannot have it if the person who needs to receive it does not acknowledge it in her.
(*Sexual Difference*, 126)

Lily has attempted both actually and imaginatively to connect intimately with Mrs. Ramsay, to acknowledge the Mother and to seek some fulfillment there. In each case, Lily has felt that “Nothing happened! Nothing! Nothing!” She does not have the strength to give herself her own authority. In the ten years since the Time Passes section of the novel, Lily has not sought this authority from any other older or wiser woman. Further, despite Lily’s obvious ability to take care of herself as an independent woman and artist, she does not extend authority to herself. And so, she turns to the only authority figure in her surroundings, the male Mr. Carmichael, and seeks his benediction for her right to express and interpret her own desire.

Throughout her effort to acknowledge the Mother, and after she has assimilated her desire for Mrs. Ramsay as part of her now everyday life, she turns to Carmichael. Before her final stroke that completes her painting, she gives him the credit of consecration, not the Mother: “Now he has crowned the occasion, she thought, when his hand slowly fell, as if she had seen him let fall from his great height a wreath of violets and asphodels which, fluttering slowly, lay at length upon the earth.”

After this, she puts the completing brush stroke to her canvass and claims that

It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again.... With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.

Lily expresses fatigue, not exhilaration, in having her vision. It is a vision, blessed by the romanticized gesticulation of a old man high on opium, which is very much in code: abstract lines that may or may not, as William Bankes once queried, represent the bond of a mother and child, which may or may not and likely not enter into social discourse (“it will be hung in the attic”) to give credit to the female mediation of the symbolic. The consequences of this lack of acknowledged credit may be personally devastating. As stated in *Sexual Difference*:

But among women, perhaps because a woman finds little correspondence between her feelings and social rules, it often happens that gratitude is reduced to an inner feeling or to private behavior. A woman can be full of

gratitude toward a fellow woman, but when she enters into social intercourse, she is likely to feel confronted by a game where there is no way to signify gratitude. In that case, her gratitude remains without any consequences, and everything unravels again-inside/outside, subjective/objective, etc. splitting the female mind in two and driving it back into its insecurity about the world.
(*Sexual Difference* 142)

This is perhaps why, as Susan B. Reid comments that, despite Lily's efforts to make her mark, her so called vision is less that satisfying (Reid, 49). In her effort to translate her relation to Mrs. Ramsay into a personal code of abstract lines on an unseen canvass, Lily's momentary resistances to the sexual hierarchy and momentary visions of gratitude to the Mother, always seem to fall back into an "insecurity about the world" that allows her to presume some ontological, modernist fact that one can never know another, rather than that social relations are constructed to ensure the exclusion of women from the company of men and from each other, from validating their own differences among each other.

The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective asserts that it is exactly because of this self-silencing and gender neutralizing that,

we say that the relation of female entrustment is a social relation, and we make it the content of a political project. The symbolic debt toward the mother must be paid in a visible, public, social manner before the eyes of everyone, women and men.

And this because:

Our politics does not aim at bettering society, but at freeing women and their choices-that is, freeing them from the obligation of justifying their difference, with all the forms of social servitude that obligation entails and which have been well illustrated throughout human history.

Woolf's novel provides a way of thinking through to the mother, not as a utopian vision, but as a way towards finding voice. By presenting characters who question the primacy of the phallus as the sole arbiter of mediation, of who can speak, Woolf's text asks, what would happen if a woman was not nice to a man. Her text's representation of the potential for relations among women may provide many steps towards the answer. Create relations among women that validate our own very disparate relations to each other. From this, a female symbolic that does not circulate women's specificity under a neutral sign will of necessity allow our voices to be heard, and conversations to occur among ourselves first. After this we may return to the question of what would happen if.

There are far more numerous, diverse and incisive arguments on the side of the debate that says cultural appropriation is an issue than on the side that says it does not exist or that cultural work, literary work or the 'imagination' should be exempt from such criticism. **Cultural appropriation is not an accusation, it is a critical category.** It looks at the location of the text, and the author, in the world at specific historical moments: moments that give rise to gender-, race-, class-making, 'othering'; moments rooted in colonial conquest, in slavery and in economic exploitation. It investigates the positioning of the author within and apart from the text, and within the interaction of the text with colonial discourse, sexist discourse and racial discourse. It challenges the author's anonymity; it questions the author's 'interests' in the text; it argues that the author is not 'innocent' of the relations of race, gender, sexuality and class. And it locates the production of the text and the production of the author within practices that give rise to gender, race, class subordination and colonial subjugation. It proposes that imagery, images, the imagination and representation are deeply ideological in that they suggest ways of thinking about people and the world. This critique goes beyond the mere notion of 'good' and 'bad' representation; it is more concerned with how we see, enact and re-enact, make, define and redefine, vision how we lived and how we are going to live.

So Neil Bissoondath may write in any voice he pleases. What I suggest however, is that we have a right to look at his texts through this critical analysis. We might want to say that his attempt to write in the voice of a young Japanese woman fails. His portrayal gives us no sense of her interior life, her own sense of her life, of her female body, given the particular set of historical, social, personal and emotional circumstances under which she lived. Bissoondath only revalidates the myth of the 'Oriental' woman in Euro-centric discourse. He draws only the stereotype so helpful in white domination. The authorial voice is intrusive and manipulative in the story, so it is difficult to gauge the character in terms of her agency or lack of it. The author never examines the Japanese in the white imagination or the woman in the male imagination with the care he ought to for his prose to lift itself above the normalized, racialised stereotype. And if I say that Bissoondath's young Black man in his story 'Guerrillas' only mimics the well-worn American film stereotype and the Hegelian representation of the 'clumsy', 'ignorant', 'primitive' African and that his story inscribes racial inferiority as a feature of blackness and inscribes blackness as intellectual inferiority and mocks the great Civil Rights Movement of the sixties as inept and misguided-if I say all this, which is not even all that I could say of Bissoondath's woman voice and his Black voice which are therefore not their voices at all but his through the Euro-centric screen of racist, sexist discourse I might also say that he does himself no good here for these discourses seep into places, into corners where he, too, lives in his racialised self.

Which brings me to Neil Bissoondath's role in the Canadian debate on cultural appropriation. It is interesting that he has appeared quite often contesting the notion that voice can be appropriated. This is noticeable precisely because he is a person of colour and because those positing cultural appropriation as a critique of Canadian literature are people of colour. His testimony is more important than the testimony of any white writer on the subject because supposedly we cannot claim that his opinions are textured by his race alignment. We assume that he is cognizant of colonial history, racism and so on, and so does his audience, which makes his disagreement supposedly all the more potent. And this is precisely his cachet for those on the other side of the debate who are largely white and vested in the colonial representation of race. In producing a Neil Bissoondath to denounce the cultural appropriation critique, the white cultural establishment produces a dark face to dismiss and discredit all the other dark faces and simultaneously to confirm and reinscribe that colonial representation so essential to racial domination.

(Dionne Brand, *Bread out of Stone*, 163-166)

Chapter Five

Digital Women

In the past three chapters, we have seen how women's voices are blocked from being heard both by each other and of course, especially, by the phallically privileged inheritors and upholders of the law¹ for a series of variations on the single theme: that the phallogocentric symbolic will not allow alterity to be heard among its members lest what is heard challenges the status quo. And yet within the dominant theoretical framework of postmodernism, we also see that alterity itself is claimed by those privileged enough to shuck off the so called essentialist Subject position². Besides continued erasure (as if that's not enough), what are the implications of this grab out for the Other for those regularly situated as Other?

I wish to situate the terms of this question within the discourse, online and off, of the internet, specifically women's construction of ourselves within the Cyberian net event horizon. Cyberia³ is the scene of the new literacy; it is the publishing medium *de jour*, and despite the emphasis on multimedia content, for the rest of the millennium, it will remain a largely textual media for the exchange of information, the publication of ideas. As more emphasis is placed on Net Literacy, we will find more (and less) of our discourses

¹ Edgar, Heathcliff, Mr. Ramsay, etc.

²I do not wish to imply that this appropriation of another's voice/identity is strictly a postmodern practice. It is simply the current dominant voice of imperialist hegemony.

³I prefer the term Cyberia to Cyberspace because of what the term implies based on its homonological compliment: Siberia is a particular place on a map (not unlike Manitoba, weather wise) with a particular culture. The name seems more grounded, than an amorphous ether of "cyberspace."

translated there. What this means for how and what this new-ish means of representation will reproduce in terms of identity is clearly a feminist question. Cyberia is also a crucial place to situate this question of the appropriation of alterity, of Voice, because it is there a daily experience: from the moment we log on, we begin to define ourselves more rigorously and often more narrowly than in any other aspect of our "Real Life" (RL)⁴ selves, as in the situation Brand describes above.

In that passage from *Bread and Stone*, Dionne Brand refers to the published fiction of Neil Bissoondath and to his rationalization for its appropriation of others' voices and his right to appropriate them, to claim their voices for his fiction. As Brand suggests, Bissoondath's fiction forms part of an ongoing debate surrounding the issue of "cultural appropriation," at least in the areas of cultural production to which Brand refers: the National Ballet, Canada Council, the various national grants and arts interests. The cultural practices in Canada which foster this perpetuation of cultural imperialism, of racism, however, takes place on an often unseen subtle level of white men and white interests on *in camera* grants boards.⁵ That is, the cultural debate on cultural appropriation, while it at least takes place, does so in a restricted zone of exchange. Brand's critique of cultural appropriation, however, can also be applied to the more public cultural appropriation being practiced in the burgeoning zone of the internet.⁶

In Cyberia, the same appropriation of voice practiced by Bissoondath has become simply the way of being on-line. It is taken for granted, for instance, that "gender-bending" is part of the fabric of many online fora. As Amy Bruckman states regarding her research into MUDs and MOOs:⁷

Without makeup, special clothing, or risk of social stigma, gender becomes malleable in MUDs. When gender becomes a property that can be reset with a line of code, one bit in a data structure, it becomes an "object to think with" to use Seymour Papert's terminology⁸ In public forums like *rec.games.mud*, people reflect the values that our society attaches to gender.

⁴RL: real life. A frequently used acronym in the cyber community to make the distinction between online lives and offline, real life (RL).

⁵Much the same could be said of what research SSHRC funds where there is currently, for instance, in its Academic categories for grant application, no site for Women's Studies research.

⁶I use the term "burgeoning" with caution. While thousands of web pages are added to the Net each month, recent North American stats (Canadian Librarian Association, 1996) show that only 7% of the population use the Internet. Of that 7%, approximately a third of that online population is women.

⁷MUD stands for multi user dungeon and MOO stands for MUD Object Oriented. MUDs developed as online versions of role playing games like Dungeons and Dragons. MOOs may be considered more environment oriented, though the line between the two, and other hybrids, like MUCKs, MUSEs, MUX and MUSHs is thinning. All such terms describe online fora for real time multi-user interaction. Currently, most of this interaction takes place through keyboard-typed exchanges.

⁸From S. Papert. *Mindstorms: Children, Computers, and Powerful Ideas*. New York: Basic Books, 1980.

In private experiences, people can explore the impact of gender on their lives and their construction of themselves.
 ("Gender Swapping on the Internet," From *Proceedings of INet '93*)

Bruckman sees this online fora as an "identity workshop"(13). And intense work it is, according to Sherry Turkle in *Life on the Screen* . Playing at another gender is an energy intensive exercise that demands attention to a variety of details: speech mannerisms, interpretation of experience. There is also anxiety about whether or not one is successfully passing (Turkle, 212) as the Other. But when this energy plays out in a relatively safe atmosphere (one will not get arrested for cross dressing online), it is a source of the kind of identity workshop exploration Bruckman considers it to be. As Turkle states:

William James said "Philosophy is the art of imagining alternatives." MUDs are proving grounds for an action-based philosophical practice that can serve as a form of consciousness raising about gender issues. [For example:] When men playing females on MUDs are plied with unrequested offers of help on MUDs, they often remark that such chivalries communicate belief in female incompetence. When women play males on MUDs and realize that they are no longer being offered help, some reflect that those offers of help may well have led them to believe they needed it.

Indeed, in the literature exploring so called online gender bending or gender swapping, the oft cited markers of gender that men notice is that: women sure do get hit on a lot; when they get offers of help, it is usually in expectation of exchange for some kind of favor(tiny sex⁹ usually) and women notice...women notice that they receive less help when they present as men. Surely an oversimplification of gender, or an understanding thereof.¹⁰

Both Turkle and Bruckman (as well as other researchers in this area) believe that, based on such stellar observations, life on the screen does indeed provide the opportunity to explore gender issues by embodying online personae of the opposite gender. It becomes a "vehicle of self-reflection" (Turkle 219). But to what end? Does the man who gets hit on, online, become a more caring and sensitive man in Real Life (RL)? In one of Turkle's interviews, she speaks with a man who says he goes online as a woman to "know more about women's experience...I wanted to see what the difference felt like...I wanted to be collaborative and helpful, and I thought it would be easier as a female" (216). Turkle notes that Garret as an online female "could be collaborative without being stigmatized." While

⁹Tiny sex refers to online real time text based sex "acts" by typing.

¹⁰Though some do not share this view. Dale Spender sites Sadie Plant's interview in *geekgirl* (geekgirl 1, 1994) on Cyberfemism where Plant suggests that with so many men playing women on line, the status of being female has gone up: men are becoming redundant. Where Spender suggests that if dubious in her conclusion, the suggestion of women's status going up is a plus, I suggest that it is not women's status that is increasing, but a stereotype becoming more pervasive in yet another territory as can be seen by reading the character descriptions of many men going online as women. See *Wired Women* for samples of such descriptions.

Turkle talks about Garret's RL history, however, she never mentions that Garret in RL tried to be collaborative as himself with other men, or even what "being collaborative" means to him.¹¹ How these men presume to construct gender goes unproblematicized. In the only other case that Turkle gives much consideration to she sums up another male's (Case's) take on why he gender bends as follows: "[F]or Case, if you are a sensitive man, it is coded as 'being a bastard.' If you are assertive as a woman, it is coded as "modern and together"(Turkle 216). In whose universe? Turkle does not comment on Case's incredibly reversed perception of gender attributes. As has been recited over the past thirty years, if women are assertive they are bitches; if men are aggressive they are confident. Further, women aren't praised for being caring and sharing; they are simply punished if they are not. Men on the other hand are praised for any turn of seeming sensitivity.¹² One wonders if it is simply not easier to play at being a stereotypical woman, to move as such within the company of women, rather than to attempt to challenge male identity patterns?

Turkle's presentation of this mode of gender bending as self-reflection also does not consider that the person who has been evolving himself through stereotypical role play for his own ends in a "safe space"- safe for him - has been contributing to the propagation of a gender stereotype.

For this is what online gender appropriation assumes: that playing at stereotypes of gender is actually exploring gender rather than redrawing again and again the stereotypes so helpful to male domination. Turkle herself insists that these online personae are "serious play" and have RL repercussions. She points to a singularly reiterated occurrence of online rape, one man's take on it,¹³ anyway, to raise the "question of accountability for the actions of virtual personae who have only words at their command" (254). Accountability, however, takes the shape of what can be done if one's virtual robot dog is appropriated and returned dismembered to the MUD. No concern seems to be given to the *laissez faire* way in which gender and identity is presented as an appropriatable commodity. But those who view gender as such a transferable commodity do not consider the logical conclusion to be drawn from this for race and other specific sites of agency.

A man who wants to present as caring and sharing, Turkle notes, finds it natural to present as a "woman." Would someone wanting to appear evil go online as small bodied and Austrian? Would someone wanting to be seen as musical or athletic go online as African American? I know of only one popularly documented case of racial appropriation

¹¹ In work/play relations with men, collaboration for women is *not* the normal practice.

¹²The sensitive man has become a media imperative, from films like *Sleepless in Seattle* to top ten sitcoms like *Friends*.

¹³Julian Dibble, "A Rape in Cyberspace."

online. At the end of 1995 *Wired* ran an article by Glen Martin entitled, "Indian Wars on the Internet." The point of the article seems to be that the pretense of a white man claiming to be a Native American shaman spurred a group of Native Americans into developing a Native telecommunications network. While the argument that the fakery of a white man was the genesis of the idea to kick off an all Native net seems spurious, what the article does point to is the issue of cultural appropriation online. The writer of the article asks that in a culture (online) where all information can be translated as zeros and ones, can anything be sacred? "How do you upload holiness"? In other words, because a technology enables the appropriation of all things that can be digitized, then everything is available for the taking by anybody. To deny this is to be a narrow-minded fundamentalist.

The author of the article suggests that the ability to wear multiple identities is liberating to wired natives. It is supposedly threatening to traditionalists. The author never quotes or otherwise identifies any natives who espouse that it is okay for a white man to claim he's a native shaman practicing native ritual. Of course, by calling those natives traditionalists who find such practices to be cultural appropriation, he discredits them from having anything meaningful to say in a supposedly nontraditional, online world. The article gives the last word to the white man, too, saying all he wanted was for more natives to be communicating online.

The Native Americans quoted in the piece, however, state that to be spoken for, for a white man to claim as his the little left to a people from which white men have already taken so much, is too much to bear. They resent the stereotyping and misrepresentation of their practices as well. They also referred to the act as fraud: the man was claiming to practice actual native spiritual rights; he wasn't. AOL (America On Line), the company hosting the man was making money from the exploitation. But despite numerous tribal councils protests to AOL to have the man's platform pulled because of the damage they stated such appropriation does their cultures, AOL stalled. As Susan Miller, one of the Native women involved in the efforts to block the fake, states in the article:

But anger [on the part of the Native Americans], says Miller, was the dominant emotion – especially when [Native] protests were repeatedly stonewalled by AOL. "I was e-mailing a Sioux friend about it, and we came to the conclusion that the company didn't want us disturbing the fantasy," said Miller. "It doesn't want real Indians - we're not 'Indian' enough. It wants the buckskin fringes and the feathers."

Similarly, the multiple but actual identities of all women online are also blocked from virtual acceptance in preference of male fantasy and its perpetuation of female stereotypes. No organized women's groups, however, have petitioned AOL or other Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to stop the appropriation and misrepresentation of

women's voices online. It has already become too much a part of Net culture to question what passes as "gender bending" as cultural appropriation. One may suggest that the group "women," in any case, is far more heterogeneous than Native Americans and therefore has no particular identity to be threatened, misappropriated or lost by such virtual cross dressing. First, that assumes that women want to protect some imaginary homogenous identity and second, that there are so many voices also marked as "women" is exactly the point. There are a multiplicity of women's voices. For some time, those voices have asserted the basic feminist challenge to stop reading women in terms of stereotypes (from earth mother to nymphomaniac)¹⁴ which only subjugate the real differences of women's identities. But the dominant Net culture is about as interested in the actual voices and experiences of any women as it is in actual Native Americans.

Despite claims that the Net is the embodiment of the postmodern *differance* (Turtle 202) the Wild Wild Web, the male dominated state which produces MUDs and MOOs is, as Dale Spender quotes from Margie Wylie, "male territory. Considering its roots are sunk deep in academia and the military-industrial complex, that's hardly surprising." (Wylie, *Digital Media*, January 95, 4.8). Spender continues this theme in her discussion of the maleness of computer culture on and off line:

Margie Wylie, editor of *Digital Media*, states that 'far from offering a millennial new world of democracy and equal opportunity, the coming web of information systems could turn the clock back 50 years for women'* I think she is optimistic; it could take much longer unless women claim their place very soon.

We see this denial of women's presence online in these pseudo gender appropriations Turtle and Bruckman describe which disallow women's presence as more and other than domestic caretakers or sex objects. Yet Turtle, who has done research specifically on women's reluctance to engage computers in part because of the machine's macho image,¹⁵ makes no comment about the propagation of these very stereotypes in the supposed gender liberating explorations her research subjects enact (for their own self-reflection) and that she seemingly extols.

The result of this ready acceptance of stereotypes that passes as meaningful, "self-reflective" "gender bending" is the continued silencing of women, a reiteration in this brave

¹⁴Sheila Ruth, "Talking Back: Feminist Responses to Sexist Stereotypes". *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to Women's Studies*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990.

* Wylie, "No Place for Women," 3.

¹⁵ "Computational Reticence: Why Women Fear the Intimate Machine." *Technology and Women's Voices: Keeping In Touch*. Cheris Kramarae, ed.. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988: 41-61.

new world of the same old same old. Indeed the very old. As Karen Coyle points out in her article "How Hard Can It Be," the majority of computer ads equate the machine to have with power: if women are present at all, they are either on the sidelines cheerleading male prowess as measured in MIPS or MHz or they are very obviously replaced by the Tower of Power as the preferred sex object.¹⁶

But ads are not the only place Coyle points to where computers are equated with heroic brawn and brain. So is the history of computing. Coyle deftly describes how both *Wired* author Stephen Levy and influential futurist of the Discovery Institute George Gilder, with little consideration of the facts, effectively erase women from the annals of computing heroics, both going so far as to suggest women don't hack and don't "compete"¹⁷ with men in computation because we're not genetically up to it.¹⁸ As Coyle points out, Levy's celebration of the early days of MIT male hackerdom misses alternative implementation possibilities that cite other causes for women's supposed absence.

[Levy] never considers relevant that this hacking took place in a campus building between midnight and dawn in a world where women who are mugged at 2 a.m. returning from a friend's house are told: "What did you expect, being out at that hour?" Nor does he consider that this hacking began at a time when MIT had few women students. And though he describes his male hackers as socially inept, he doesn't inquire into their attitudes toward women and how those attitudes would shape the composition of the hacking "club."

But most of all, he never considers the possibility that among the bright women attending MIT at that time, none were truly interested in hacking. What if the thousands of hours of graveyard shift amateur hacking weren't really the best way to get the job done? That would be unthinkable.

With this frame of mind that the computer and computer jock must be heroic, it's no surprise that Levy and most other writers of Computer history erase the significant and substantial contributions of women (like the notion, design and implementation of the first

¹⁶ See Appendix 2. The web software ad (from March 95) ran in *WIRED* for months. Though the advertiser seems to have missed the dominant metaphor of the web as surfing rather than cruising, the intent is clear: the trace of the stereotypical woman passenger, indicated by the airborne red high heels (not exactly appropriate footwear for motorcycle riding) is blown off the bike without a thought. She was only a passenger on the cruiser's ride, anyway. The second ad features a muscled arm brandishing awards won by a scanner. Use this scanner and have obviously male brute force at your disposal? The third ad pictures a woman on her knees sensually embracing a monitor. What's that? The object that gives men sexual prowess is a sexual turn on that wilts anorexic females? I have chosen figures from *WIRED* specifically since it has become the preeminent rag where technolust and techno fetish and all the associated freedom of speech type arguments are manifest in North America.

¹⁷ Very reminiscent of Charles Tansley's women "can't write, can't paint."

¹⁸Coyle, "How Hard can it Be." *Wired Women*, 44.

computer programming language) to computer science.¹⁹ Coyle speaks to the disparate social status of computation versus women as yet another reason for excluding women's voices from computer science. "The assumption in our society is that men's activities are difficult, and that is why women can't or don't engage in them. Women's activities are, of course, inferior, which is why men don't engage in them" (Coyle 45). Not until the computer is reduced to the level of appliance, like a refrigerator, will it be acceptable for women to be visibly involved in computing (again).

But it is doubtful we will be able to demote the computer to appliance status in the near future. The inevitable march toward the development of the "information superhighway" means that we are depending on the power and mystique of computers to provide new markets for our economy for the foreseeable future. And a machine with all the fascination of a toaster won't motivate the consumer market.
(Coyle, 54)

Basely ignorant presumption of non-genetic data is used to erase the real achievements of women in computing; presumption about the masculinity of the computer erases us from constructing the marketplace of "serious" computer users,²⁰ online fora appropriate and stereotype the only allowable version of women online. The scene is grim for would be female participants in the great information revolution. It gets worse (!) when actual women resist this erasure.

Any criticism of activities practiced on MUDs, MOOs and chat rooms is often dismissed by their participants with the response, "it's just a game." This response acts as a *carte blanche* excuse for a range of behaviors from cross dressing to virtual rape. Indeed, Rapp, the man faking Shaman status on AOL has the typical chauvinist response to criticism from a subordinate group. He is described as

somewhat bemused by all the heat and bile generated by his online persona. "Basically, what we did was done in fun," he observes. "We certainly didn't intend any disrespect."

It was a joke; I didn't mean it. Of course these very familiar rationalizations once expressed do not modify the behavior critiqued. They become the rationale for its perpetuation: because it is a game I can do what I want. Even if one were to accept that rationality for chat-room like online fora, there are other places online where these same

¹⁹Women put the numeric keypad on the keyboard; a woman came up with the idea of programming memories and textual program representation (i.e. programming languages) over wires plugs and dials to make programming more manageable. (Article by Thomas Petzinger, Jr., Wall Street Journal, No. 96)

²⁰According to a 1997 USA Today Survey, women are the majority buyers of the household/family computers.

behaviors take place and do not have the excuse of being “just a game.” These are online newsgroups and mailing lists.

When speaking about offline conversational exchanges in her book *The Writing or the Sex*, Dale Spender noted that if women go over more than 30% of the exchanges in an exchange, they are considered to be dominating the exchange.²¹ Retaliation, often aggressive, ensues to reclaim the over the 30% margin, with arguments that, for example, freedom of speech has been impinged. The same statistics have been reaffirmed in online newsgroups and mailing lists – even those with titles such as “alt.feminism” and SWIP-L (Society for Women in Philosophy list).²² In her extensive research in the area of CMC (computer mediated communication) Susan Herring notes regular use by men of aggressive online behaviors such as flaming and personal insult. She notes that this behavior is validated by “netiquette” as codified by published texts like *Towards an Ethics and Etiquette for Electronic Mail* by Norm Shapiro and Robert Anderson who advise, “Do not insult or criticize third parties without giving them a chance to respond.” In other words, flame away, as long as the attackee has a chance to flame back. The flames themselves, when directed at women, (something Shapiro and Anderson do not consider) more often than not, are framed as rape threats, descriptions of the attackee being raped, sometimes mailed not only to the attackee but the rest of the list, or other forms of power over and humiliation.²³ Unfortunately, threats like these that would otherwise be grounds for legal action are regularly practiced online where arrest is difficult: someone across the provincial or national border making a threat is hard to arrest from another jurisdiction, were the threat to be taken seriously in the first place, rather than just a reflection of “the way the net is.”

Stephanie Brail discovered women in particular are the victims of retaliation that goes beyond the caustic flame. She cites email harassment of a graphic and threatening nature, and system administrators unsympathetic to pulling the online privileges of the perpetrator. Pornographic writings were posted across various newsgroups and attributed

²¹Spender, *The Writing or the Sex*.

²²In the early 80s (Net prehistory) and the very early days of Usenet newsgroups, I have been told by computer scientists (who were there) that one of the fiercest flame wars to break out across the Net was over the establishment of “comp.women,” a newsgroup to discuss women’s issues pertaining to computer science. There are clear rules for establishing new newsgroups, based mostly on demonstrating demand. The request to see if there was demand went out, and was flamed immediately by those who claimed all the comp.whatever groups had something to do with computer science. Comp.women plainly did not. And if you look today, you will not see comp.women. You can find comp.society and five subgroups, though, like comp.society.folklore.

²³In many sources, like Dibble’s “A Rape in Cyberspace” this kind abusive language/pornographic narrative supposedly describes “sexual acts” or “unwanted sex.” Sex has nothing to do with it. Sex is not a crime. Rape, or the threat of a man using his penis as part of the humiliation or overpowering of a woman is an assertion of dominance, not sex.

to her. Another woman was harassed at work and nearly lost her job as a result of false accusations made about her to her boss by men rubbed the wrong way by her challenging them – politely – online.²⁴

Netta “grayarea” Gilboa relates similar offline terrors as the result of online questions or challenges leveled at her when she inadvertently upset certain hackers on an Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channel. She found her phone number changed regularly; her phone calls monitored and broken into; various confidential data accessed and published online.²⁵ All acts over which it is very hard to exercise any control.

Ironically, Herring’s CMC research found that men dislike flaming and related behaviors as much as women do (150). Despite men’s stated dislike for these practices, they still perpetrate them and dominate online exchanges. Women do not; women frequently leave, either turned off or forced off by the climate of flame or silence . Both are the normal, abusive responses to women’s postings: be flamed or be ignored.²⁶ Herring insists that we do not read this scene as simply two different cultural approaches to conversation not getting along. As she states:

[T]hese cultures are not “separate but equal” as recent popular writing on gender differences in communication has claimed. Rather the norms and practices of masculine net culture, codified in netiquette rules, conflict with those of the female culture in ways that render cyberspace - or at least many “neighborhoods” in cyberspace - inhospitable to women. The result is an imbalance whereby men control a disproportionate share of the communication that takes place via computer networks.
(151)

This violent chauvinism of the online world is not restricted to online exchanges. Coyle raises the question of how off-putting it might have been for an MIT female student to engage with the nerd culture of the early hackers. Spender takes this question further in her description of computer labs where men regularly outnumber women; where activity from networked war games to shared pornography to macho conversation can poison the working atmosphere for women.

The net (and the RL environment which fosters it from research and undergrad computer labs²⁷ to *WIRED* magazine) is not a gender neutral space. Communication may be disembodied, but it is not disengendered nor politically neutral.

²⁴ Stephanie Brail, “The Price of Admission: Harassment and Free Speech in the Wild, Wild West” *Wired Women*: 141-157.

²⁵ “Elites, Lamers, Narcs and Whores: Exploring the Computer Underground” *Wired Women*: 98-113.

²⁶ Kremarae on response to women online.

²⁷ I was recently asked to comment on an argument among one of the faculty and her grad students regarding the naming of a new networked printer that the faculty member had purchased for her lab. She had asked for suggestions from the (predominantly male) research group for the printer’s network name. Failing

This is why research so involved with images of gender, like Turkle's and Bruckman's is so frustratingly naive. Far from making a space for women's voices their uncritical acceptance of these stereotypical reenactments of gender only further enables the erasure of women's agency online.

What is more distressing in this ready acceptance of the appropriation of gender online is its misrepresentation and conflation of political and philosophical positions to support it. Turkle, for example, points to Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto"'s founding principle of irony to support what she sees as the multiple identities, not readily resolvable into a single I, ego sum, that are the way of being in Life on the Screen. What passes for online gender bending is just one more way of articulating that multiple postmodern self. What Turkle fails to consider in her seeming postmodern ecstasy is that Haraway contextualizes that irony of the cyborg not as the play time exploits of a group of mostly white male individuals privileged to have both computer and online access who can play at being a stereotype of a woman for "self reflexive" self serving ends. On the contrary, Haraway's cyborg entirely resists just this type of presumption around patriarchally defined categories of gender (woman=nurturing). In fact, her cyborg specifically exists to resist any attempts to situate a "woman" category or any identity that does not recognize the layers of *political and social* construction, the standpoint of that cyborg identity's²⁸ articulation. Turkle's men who play at their assumptions of being women are very much removed from Haraway's demand to take the politics of complex identity structures into consideration, especially those identities that are constructed "negatively," like "woman of color." Indeed, from Haraway's cyborg position, MOO/MUD gender bending – the presumption that this naming of oneself as a woman is actually bending gender – is only the reified erasure of real specificity, difference, of alterity that threatens the comfortable assumptions of such privileged "serious play."

But then Turkle's celebration of the sign=the signified (if I am a man and I call myself a woman, I must be a woman, because I say I am) is very reminiscent of another

to receive any, she and the only woman grad student in the group called the printer Daisy. Then the men in the group reacted, saying they wouldn't use a printer named "Daisy." One said quite loudly his colleague had said he would never approve of such a name. What did they think he was? Gay? This is when I was asked for a possible solution. I suggested that since the prof. bought it with her research money she could call it anything she wanted, and if the male students wouldn't use it, it was their loss. "Use your power to name the thing. Quit letting Adam do it."

"But I want to be democratic". Some democracy. Sometimes it may be appropriate for a woman to lead. The example may seem small, but I was surprised to see that sexism was alive and well at such a high level of scholarly work and at such a trivial level of exchange: even the name of a printer could be an affront to a grad student's masculinity.

²⁸ Donna Haraway, "Cyborg Manifesto" *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the Reinvention of Nature*.

egoiste, Bahktin. Bahktin uses the construction of the Listener as an imaginary sounding board for a character's personal, spiritual exploration. In Bahktin's analysis of Dostoyevski, he celebrates the novelist's characters' imaginative creations of what they *assume* some imagined listener might say about their thoughts. This imagined other impacts the subject's construction of *himself*. In the modernist world of Bahktin, the other is imagined. In the postmodern world of Turkle's *Life on the Screen*, other-ness is just as imagined by the subject for his own benefit. Real alterity need not apply.

Net culture, then, like dominant RL culture actively resists alterity when that alterity seeks to name itself and the terms of its difference in ways that challenge the Net's racist sexist status quo. It is little wonder that many women go online with gender ambiguous or male pseudonyms. These women do so not to "explore" another gender but to protect themselves at least somewhat from the various forms of online harassment women regularly experience when they identify themselves as themselves, as women. We also do so for the reason Spender points to in historic women's writing. Maryanne Lewes (George Eliot), Charlotte and Emily Brontë, to name a few, all published under male names, not only in order to be published to begin with, but simply to be heard. To be taken seriously with less fear of reprisal.²⁹

But such camouflage is only temporarily and situationally feasible and is clearly no answer to making it possible for women to be safe to speak online as our various selves for more than 30% of the bandwidth, and to do so in our own voices.

Many possible solutions have been put forward to facilitate women's communication online: learn the tools of the net. To that end, a whole new publishing niche is forming: online guides specifically geared to women by women, with the provocative titles of *Surfer Grrls* and *Net Chick* with the hope that knowing a little UNIX can make a gal feel pretty empowered, and that finding like minded chicks is even more empowering. Predating these publications, online strategies in mailing lists have been to form women's only lists that, though not impervious to impostors, still attempt to construct a safe space for women³⁰ to network or communicate specific concerns of women in these groups. On women-centered lists where men do post, there's a growing strategy to identify and name the behaviors of dominance to the rest of the group, where the group can and will (usually) pull the plug on them.

²⁹Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1980.

³⁰There are legion of unfortunate examples of men crashing women's lists claiming that to be excluded is bigoted or violates their rights to freedom of speech (see Spender, *Nattering on the Net* or L. Jean Camp "We Are Geeks, and We Are Not Guys: The Sisters Mailing List." 114-125).

While these groups can be and often are as ethnocentric as mixed lists, there is a higher likelihood of these attitudes being identified and dealt with in some manner, rather than any questioning of the lists own status quo resulting in the poster being flamed out of existence there.

Outside as inside these specific net neighborhoods, however, as in RL, it is simply a continual risk to be a non status quo woman online (if you're not a woman, please, don't try this at home). The same sexism, homophobia, racism prevails on the Wild Wild Web as in RL, but is allowed a more liberal hand to express itself unchallenged by any net sheriff. But while the price of naming one's alterity to male white heterosexist discourse online is a continual risk, even within so called safe, or the rare women's only lists, what is the price of not naming one's alterity online? Several years ago, Audre Lorde spoke out to academic women at an MLA conference to say "Your silence won't protect you." This is a point worth remembering in online discourse as well. Do we silence our selves and our sisters if we do not risk speaking as ourselves? As attorney and Arapaho Native American Tamera Crites Shanker states, "If we don't define who we are on the Net, other people will do it for us,...And when that happens, part of who we are disappears."³¹ But in our silence, part of who we are does not simply disappear; it is erased.

It is not in the interests of those in power ever to acknowledge alterity. It will not be in the interests of patriarchy³² to allow women to speak as ourselves online. Perhaps part of the radical solution to halting the fixed erasure of alterity from the net is in increasing the number of net neighborhoods where alterity, the specific agency of a woman's identity is valued and encouraged. No doubt as in RL these neighborhoods will be small and temporary. But if there are enough of these spaces or at least these precious exchanges are frequent enough, like increasing the tiny air bubbles in a brakeline, the results on the entire system can be significant.

In the next part of this project, I propose a possible structure for some of those bubbles: please stay tuned for intensional texts, online.

³¹ Glen Martin. "Indian War on the Internet" *WIRED* 3.12(1995).

³² Read especially in this case as white, middle-class, heterosexual middle-aged males, the dominant group currently in Cyberia.

Textual Realities as Relations of Ruling

Textual realities are the ground of our contemporary consciousness of the world beyond the immediately known. As such they are integral to the coordination of activities among different levels of organization, within organizations, and in the society at large. At the surfaces where social scientists read or where we read or watch news, such realities may appear simply as informative data speaking of the world beyond. This is misleading. Depths and complexities of the social organization of ruling interpose between local actualities and textual surfaces. Still, textual realities are not fictions or falsehoods; they are normal, integral, and indeed essential features of the relations and apparatuses of ruling—state administrative apparatuses, management, professional organizations, the discourses of social science and other academic discourses, the mass media, and so forth. Such methodologies of organization are enforced: the registration of a birth is legally required; a kid in trouble is subject to the law governing juvenile offenders; trade unions have no voice in the frameworks governing how strikes are reported; the lives of the Vietnamese people were in pawn to the production of the textual realities of the U.S. military; the relations between psychiatrist, social worker, and patient are organized by the patient's case history. These relations underlie the textual surfaces that present themselves for social scientists' reading. Such textual surfaces presuppose an organization of power as the concerting of people's activities and the uses of organization to enforce processes producing a version of the world that is peculiarly one-sided, that is known only from within the modes of ruling, and that defines the objects of its power. The subjects entered into these virtual realities are displaced as speakers both at the point of inscription, where lived actualities are entered "into the record" and as the characteristic hierarchies of organization set up a self-sealing division of labor in the making of objectified knowledge

Factual social organization is foundational to the relations of ruling. Characteristically whether as "bodies of knowledge" vested in professions or as "corporations" (inserting via the Latin origin of the term a metaphor also of bodies) government "agencies" or "bodies of law" the relations of ruling are organized as supra- or extrapersonal. Corporations and agencies act through their employees; their employee's concerted actions become the acts of the corporation or agency. Objectified bodies of knowledge embedded in discursive organization are known by the members of the relevant discourse; through processes of controlled training those members bear a body of knowledge externalized in texts; they become its knowers. Textual realities are essential constituents of these social relations and their organization, which depend upon objectified forms of knowledge independent of particular subjectivities, appearing in rationally standardized forms invariant as to time, place, and the particular perspectives, interests and will of participants. Textual realities constitute shared, identical, and perspectiveless objects and environments locked into decision processes through the schemata, categories, and concepts that organize them.

[T]he underlying relations of ruling determine the factual surfaces of textual realities [through, for example] the mediation of demographic data by the organized practices of state, medicine, and hospitals; the institution of the case history; the ideological circle generated by the hierarchical structuring of official information, and, finally, the discounting of women as authoritative speakers in public, textually mediated discourse.

The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge
Dorothy E. Smith (83-84)

Chapter 6

ConTexts

The following chapter describes the rationale for and implementation design of a *dialogic text* prototype, using Intensional HTML.

What I call a dialogic text is one that (seemingly) forms itself interactively to a user's requests of it. It is this interaction with the material that approximates a dialogue-like exchange with the material: the user engages the *dialogic text* of a particular topic by setting options within that text for how its information will be presented. Examples of such settings might be *point of view* or *amount of detail*. The same text source could present an overview of its subject or tremendous detail on one point. The text's settings are also dynamic, so that at any point in engaging the text, one can adjust the detail - for instance, to a higher or lower degree. It is this dynamic exchange in the presentation of its material that creates the appearance of a dialogic exchange. We will come back to a more detailed look at an implementation of such a text.

The implementation of dialogic texts is a preliminary step towards what I call *conversational texts*, a higher order of interactive text. In terms of the way we have considered *real conversation* throughout this project, in which conversation represents a demonstrable exchange between two participants, where one participant actually hears and responds to another, Dialogic texts are more Bahktinian¹ than conversational. That is, the interactive text-as-listener "hears" the user's information request and provides material on the user's terms; the user takes what it wants from the material presented (any information or new insights derived from this exchange) but the system that produced the texts remains

¹See the theoretical introduction to this project, in Chapter Two, above.

unchanged by the exchange. The system gains no new derived input from the exchange. Its only value is in its representation of output. Conversational texts would incorporate programming allowing the system to become involved in the exchange with the user, to process input and create dynamic content which may be the result of that exchange with the user and which the system can draw on in the future. We will return to a more detailed view of conversational texts in a moment, but before we look at the *what* of conversational and dialogic texts, let us consider the *why*.

We can approach that *why*, in terms of this project, from two related perspectives: an historical understanding of texts and textual production, prior to their becoming wired, and specifically, how issues surrounding texts and textual production are feminist questions, just like questions of textual construction and interpretation.

There are increasingly fewer women-run presses in operation today than there were ten years ago. While dynamic presses like Spinifex and Press Gang still survive, they do not have the distribution power of a conglomerate press subsidiary like Prentice Hall. Book production costs for small presses are high. Without distribution channels, production costs cannot be met and presses close. One of the most grievous losses for the publication of women's writing was the closing of Pandora Press, a press that reprinted eighteenth century women's fiction. The impact of Pandora on literary studies was immediate and impressive. Suddenly, albeit far too briefly, there were texts of women's novels that could be ordered and taught in English courses that heretofore had been able to represent the written production of the 18th century as exclusively male. No more excuses:² the books could be purchased at a local bookstore and read for their own excellent qualities. Pandora press blew the lid off the canonical notion that there was nothing worth reading by women except for the few authorized exceptions that only proved the rule.³

With these books in play, women from around the world took new interest in the textual productions, historical, biographical, anthropological, fictional, that clearly demonstrated women's erased involvement in the discoveries and exchanges of the day.⁴

Of course, with these texts' discoveries came both the anger at their erasure for so long from our horizon and the depression at their regular reaffirmation of women's voices

²See Dale Spender's *The Writing or the Sex* for the list of reasons for not reading writing by women.

³At the University of Victoria, the year after Pandora Press went into production, with texts based largely on the press's offerings, Dr. Patricia Köster developed and had imbedded into the graduate curriculum a course solely on 18th C women's writing. Some of these books even made their way into the undergraduate curriculum!

⁴I am thinking especially of the 18th C women's writings conference that started at the University of Oregon in 1991 and has become an annual event.

being silenced. After Pandora Press closed, Oxford Press did a few scholarly editions of some of the better known authors from the collection⁵ but many more have once again receded into the unpublished realm.

E-texts and the Gutenberg Project (which makes public domain texts available online free) become a possible way of resurrecting these texts, but these too pose limitations for classroom use, for instance, rather than for more singular scholarship. Access to electronic texts presupposes access to the technology that makes them available: Internet connections, and the machines to read the bits and bytes. Even the most ancient, cheapest second hand computer capable of online connection is more expensive than a second hand copy of a novel, or the library loan of the same. The electronic version also requires a paid-up electric bill and telephone access. There is a significant number of entire reservations in the United States that do not have phone wiring.⁶ Many more homes throughout North America do not or cannot maintain a phone line. These people (which could be any of us depending on economic winds) cannot access the information available online. The New Literacy demanded by the rush to Cyberia as the library / book store of the future demands that feminists consider this medium of delivery seriously in terms of its implications not only for access to its growing stores of data but also to the methods of that data's delivery.

As Dale Spender points out in *Nattering on the Net*, it seems that just as women begin to create women's presses, a means for distributing women's new or previously erased voices, the place for Text changes. Many futurists have predicted the death of the book.⁷ That hasn't happened. Paper-based distribution is still the medium of choice for traditionally print-based media, but there are fewer and fewer papers, magazines or publishers without some internet presence in the form of a web page or entire web version of their endeavor. Some Government publications in Canada are now only available online.⁸ Techno-hip magazines like *WIRED* run entirely distinct parallel online entities to their paper based cousins. In the online community, the *San Jose Mercury News* online paper is internationally famous, while its print version is relatively unknown. Every movie and almost every TV show now has a companion promotional web page address tagged

⁵Patricia Köster and Jean Butler Cleary prepared an edition of Frances Burney's *Evelina*. for instance, in 1993.

⁶Glen Martin, "Indian War on the Internet" *WIRED* 3.12(1995).

⁷See Frank Ogden's *The Last Book You'll Ever Read and Other Lessons from the Future*. New York: MacFarlane, Walter & Ross, 1994.

⁸According to the 1997 Librarians of Canada study, an increasing amount of government information is made available exclusively online. Super for those who can jack into the Net. Great for cutting costs for document distribution. More exclusion for information for the majority of citizens who do not or cannot access the technology to get at the information.

onto its ads. Every news channel – including CNN and MSNBC (the Microsoft/NBC hybrid cable news channel) has a web site that maintains parallel content. The CBC broadcasts simultaneously on Real Audio (internet software that allows audio signals to be broadcast on the web).⁹

It is difficult to rationalize the ubiquity of parallel-to-print online delivery when one considers the number of people actually on line. In North America, only 7% of households use the internet. Of those online, only 33% are women. Lack of time to “surf the web”¹⁰ may be one of the factors that accounts for the significantly lower female population online as opposed to our population in Real Life. But cost is also a significant factor: cost of a machine, cost of connection, and cost of a phone line all contribute against a larger ratio of women to men, since women are statistically paid 64 cents on the Male Dollar. There are also far more women below the poverty line than men, far more single mothers than single fathers. For women who can afford the equipment and the connection time, there is still women’s culturally ingrained ambivalence around use of the machine, which usually presents as fear of hurting the machine, inhibiting women’s access to what is on the other side of the technology.¹¹ For that 33% of the 7% of the North American population that actually do make the trip to Cyberia, as we saw in the last chapter, the obstacles to expression, to articulation of identity women face online are substantial.

Therefore, this largely white male moneyed class between the ages of forty-two and fifty¹² is determining the means of information access for the rest of the population. It is this means of distribution that discriminates against women in general and poor minorities most especially. The production of texts is indissolubly a feminist question since the production of text undeniably determines not only who can be heard, but also how far, how long, and by whom. In this chapter, I deliberately focus on textual production as opposed to other media (radio, television) because online data is still overwhelmingly text based and will continue to be so for the discernible future.

⁹As one pundit put it, Real Audio is where you spend forty dollars on software to make your two thousand dollar computer sound like a ten dollar radio.

¹⁰A man must have invented this phrase, since as Deborah Tannen points out in “Gender Gap in Cyberspace,” and Spender points out in *Nattering on the Net*, men use computers often as leisure toys; women as tools they just want to work and do not have time to use in any other capacity.

¹¹Sherry Turkle. “Computational Reticence: Why Women Fear the Intimate Machine.” in *Technology and Women’s Voices*.

¹²Latest web demographic for user access. These stats are used specifically by online publications like *WIRED* to sell ads to these target markets. They are always included when *WIRED* sends out their rate cards to prospective advertisers.

In the same way that cyberspace (as constructed by its financial interests¹³) promises to be gender, class and race neutral, so too does the Net promise to be the liberal and free means of data flow to all, despite the limitations to access described above. Nicholas Negroponte, futurist of MIT, promises the bounty and benefits of being digital, of bits over atoms for the delivery of services that will eventually become as ubiquitous as toasters and just as affordable.¹⁴ Bits can be easily and immediately copied and transmitted cheaply from one site to another. Also, new software and hardware means that more people will be able to be more wired yet will need to know less about the appliances that deliver the information to them as a near steady stream of current data. But of course this Netopia is not today. Today, the learning curve for online access is still steep. And today, significantly less than the 7% that simply access the online world make decisions about which bits will fly, to whom, and for how much. It is the members of this Info elite group - from software engineers to government bureaucrats - who shape the Net today for its future transparency. This is a cadre of decision makers¹⁵ seriously biased against the heterogeneous input of women's voices. It is because women are so discriminated against, in terms of access to current information and the creation of new online information, that textual production in the New Literacy¹⁶ is a feminist issue.

Text, of course, is not just the words on the page or screen. Text generation is often highly dependent on its delivery media. Egyptologists tell us that in ancient Egypt, for instance, labor intensive hieroglyphic carvings were reserved for often very public accounts of Royal history or worship. More private wall paintings of the same signs were reserved for religious tomb writings, and everyday accounting was recorded in ink on papyrus scrolls in a more cursive, easily writable reduced lexicon of signs.¹⁷ More recently, the development of the printing press gives us one of the best illustrations of the relationship between means of production and resulting textual generation. The printing press facilitated new means of distribution of texts in a variety of non pre-press forms, from broadsheets, newspapers, advertisements to, of course, books in all shapes and sizes. With the press, the book was no longer for the rich or the monastic only. The shape of the book, its decreasing cost and increased distribution raised literacy and created a variety of new

¹³Commercials for MCI and AOL.

¹⁴Negroponte, *Being Digital*.

¹⁵These decision makers and systems designers are often products of computer science departments where usually 80% or more of the faculty are male and where this stat is actually defended as more or less achieved gender parity, since it reflects the 16% ratio of women Ph.D. students in computer science programs in Canada.

¹⁶So far I am the only person I know of to use the term New Literacy to refer to all the elements involved with gaining access to and navigating online data. Perhaps I've coined it.

¹⁷Bob Brier, *The Great Egyptians*. The Learning Channel Productions, 1996.

audiences. The medium of the press allowed previously oral texts to be archived and carried further with greater consistency than was possible with either messengers or hand-written bills. Exclusive tomes of knowledge also became more accessible through traveling libraries and book sellers (another new industry wrought by the press). The main unique forms evolved by the printing press are arguably the novel and the newspaper, forms generated by / made possible by the medium of text delivery. The newspaper would especially have been inconceivable without the engine that produced it, though its generation is situated within an oral tradition of messenger, town crier, balladeer and political dissident. The novel has similarly been described as the genre of the evolving middle class whose rise is parallel with the press's own.

In the case of both the newspaper and the novel, the means of textual production generated new forms of delivering news and story. News and Story had existed prior to the press, of course, but the medium certainly shaped the message. We are on the verge of another significant medium evolution. This time, the means of production is not the inanimate press, but the computer, the Almost Thinking Machine. Text delivered online can do things that static text cannot. By tapping into the mind of the machine and its networked resources, the text of this medium will also produce new genres only possible through the new means of production. In fact, the delivery engine may well become as inseparable from the means of production as the signal from the radio station. New media forms of the past hundred years have rarely entirely erased their predecessor, but they often eclipsed them. The telephone quickly replaced the telegraph.¹⁸ While Radio did not erase newsprint and TV did not eliminate radio, the evolution of each new medium has had effects upon its predecessors. Radio no longer provides on-air drama as a regular component; TV has taken over that role. TV did not replace Film, but Hollywood now sees its largest revenues in home video (i.e., made for TV) rentals, rather than in box-office sales. With traditional media already racing to produce online content, the internet is poised to have a tremendous impact on the production and dissemination of texts.

In the remaining sections, I wish to postulate some of the sites where online text production, and conversational texts as I have designed them, may eclipse current methods of textual production and distribution. I also wish to point out that these designs are based on the feminist research into identity construction through conversation, as described throughout this project. In other words, the following discussion of possible, new online texts, and the discussion of a current implementation, is the result of a deliberately feminist

¹⁸In 1984, Apple used the telegraph/telephone parallel to say its new computer would have the same effect on what it saw as its competition, the IBM PC.

approach to technological implementation. This is not to say that either the production or use of a specific type of engine will necessarily create a feminist-informed world, but it may produce a less patriarchal structure for production.

Examples of such possible impacts on patriarchal technological structures can already be seen in the Artificial Intelligence community. In thinking about Intelligent agents, and about the effects of gender on agent development, I suggested that rather than online agents necessarily presenting as male or female in their interactions with their users, marks of women's interests or ways of knowing may be more manifest in the qualities and behaviors embedded in the agents. For instance, in the Carnegie Mellon project on distributed agents, led by Katia Sycara, the development of protocols for interagent communication and information sharing is crucial for their system. Information sharing is also a crucial aspect of systems like Firefly developed by Pattie Maes's group out of MIT. Firefly assists users in making music purchases by asking the users some questions, and providing lists of records based on the preferences of other users that have similar tastes. Information sharing and effective pattern matching of that shared information is crucial to Firefly's success. One of the side effects of Firefly's information sharing is its ability to match otherwise disparate people with similar musical tastes. It is based on the premise that one would trust the recommendation of someone else who exhibits similar musical tastes. But based on these tastes, users of Firefly can make real connections with the other contributors. Firefly's structure of information sharing promotes the possibility of community through communication, initially mediated by information sharing agents. Daniela Rus's Agent-Client-Server model also depends upon developing methods for distributed information sharing. These are all problems that will be addressed by computer science algorithms and a host of graduate student engineering labor. In other words, these are "legitimate" engineering problems. But it is noteworthy that these questions have been raised and are being addressed by AI groups headed by women. In the proceeding from the ACM Autonomous Agents 97 conference,¹⁹ the vast majority of agent collaboration models proposed by any of the groups are led by women. *Such a blatant example of what Blenky et al. refer to as "women's ways of knowing"*²⁰ is rarely so demonstrable in the sciences. But these are the ways, as Sandra Harding suggests in *The Science Question in Feminism*, that women's traces may be seen in scientific practice, through the questions women may choose to investigate, through the components we choose to privilege. Hence my

¹⁹*Proceedings of the First International Conference on Autonomous Agents.*

²⁰What has since been rightly critiqued and resituated as "middleclass euro-american white women's ways of knowing"

privileging, in my investigation of online texts, the possibility of implementing models that approach real conversation.

Let me start this description of future interactive texts by suggesting what they are not. They are not the current semi-multimedia encrusted texts delivered on the web. Not yet, since most texts on the web are shovelware: previously existing material that has been posted (“shoveled”) onto the web for online access and/or archival purposes. Some of these texts have graphics, sound files or movies embedded in them. These add-ons are often information surplus to the prefabricated text itself.

Most web texts similarly have embedded hyperlinks - parts of text that can be selected by a pointing device and, when activated, take one to another location in the current text or to an entirely other shoveled text possibly somewhere else on the planet. The greatest feature of hyperlinked texts is their non-linearity. A hypertext link can allow one to get to whichever component of related information one wishes to access at any time. One can navigate a document in a more random or associative manner, rather than in a fixed linear way.

Hypernavigation is not dissimilar to what is more commonly know as “flipping through a manual” (i.e., “browsing” in the original sense of the word). One can pick up a textbook or coffee table book and access its parts randomly. However, one’s flipping is limited to the one local site, to the book in one’s hands. One can flip through hypertexts to a variety of sources in a variety of locations as seamlessly as one can page through a stand-alone text. Hypertext therefore has definite advantages for navigating multiple sites of knowledge. What one accesses through this navigation, however, is still prefabricated material: static documents dynamically linked. This does not leverage much of the power of the computer beyond its ability to randomly access data address locations very quickly. A computer can do more and could make textual interaction and generation far more dynamic for the user/reader by being far more responsive to the user’s requests of the document. This brings us to *conversational texts*.

In the previous chapters, I defined *real* conversation in opposition to dialogue. In real conversation there are at least two participants: a listener and a speaker (an other and a subject). For *real conversation* to take place, the speaker and listener positions will exchange during the conversation, so that the listener speaks *and is heard* and the previous speaker *listens*. In this *real conversation* some evidence that the listener responds to the speaker, that the speaker engages the listener, takes place. An exchange (or exchanges) occurs between both parties, as with young Cathy’s interaction with Harenton: Cathy

wants to know Harenton has heard her. She engages directly with Harenton's speech, and then he with hers.²¹

If we translate this concept of conversational as opposed to dialogic²² to text, we can say a *real conversational text* needs to be able to respond to user requests for information. It performs the functions of an active listener,²³ and responds with the appropriate information. This is half the conversational transaction: one party has been heard and responded to. The user has been heard and an appropriate text found and delivered (or possibly created) for the user. The other half of the exchange, where the listener becomes the speaker, is as crucial for real conversational texts as it is for real conversation among humans. The exchange without that second half, where the listener becomes speaker, becomes what I think of as oracular rather than conversational. We have many examples of oracular text divination online. The current state of most web search engines is Oracular and is regularly frustrating and unsatisfying in its results.

Like coming to Oracles, we bring our queries to databases on the web like Altavista and InfoSeek and anxiously sift through the leaves of dynamically spewed lists of possible pages to find the message we seek. We take the findings seriously. The Oracle has saved us at least some manual labor and yielded readily copiable data that we can incorporate without trace of origin into our own systems, should we so choose. But this oracular exchange is entirely one sided. The limited oracle does not consider the data of the request, but merely matches it against a table of sources that have those words in them. This in itself is no small feat, considering the volume of pages that must be processed by the search engine. But the search is not particularly context sensitive, nor is it therefore intelligently aware of the data passed to it. So, we go to online net searches like we go to telephone books. We do not go to Altavista to have the search engine challenge us with a Zen koan or to ask about the search patterns we may be attempting. So the exchange is unary, one way. Take, take, take. In an ideal conversational text, this paradigm would shift.

In a conversational text system, the exchange may start with a user query, with results being produced for the user's further selection. Meanwhile, the system serving up this information in the exchange ought to be able to incorporate something from the exchange into its system. In other words, it would *know* about the data being requested of it and have some sense of what's being done with that data on the user side (and it could

²¹ See Chapter Three above.

²² Two people speak but there's no evidence that either party has heard the other.

²³ An active listener is a term from psychology/therapy in which a listener is a flexible role. The listener reflects back to the speaker what she has heard, what she understands the speaker to be saying, and can make counseling suggestions based on that understanding or can ask questions of the speaker to further understand the speaker's position, and help the speaker clarify what she wants as well.

garner this information through the user's requests) so that it can refine its response to the user and refine its own system of knowledge, too. The ideal conversational text, then, would be able to create new data based on user interaction, new data that may take both the user and the system on useful tangents or simply into deeper knowledge of the particular topic, again either through the presentation of preexisting texts it can access or through inferences that combine available texts with user queries and the system's own previous exchanges.

Many systems respond to the user in this refined manner already, though we rarely think of such exchanges as conversations. A calculator, for instance, takes in a couple of numbers, performs a calculation upon them and produces new results. A spreadsheet stores and manipulates data regularly to create new results for changing input. A spreadsheet can create this new data because it *knows* about very well defined data types (like integers and real numbers) and well defined operations that can be performed on those types (addition or multiplication, for instance). Calculations to derive new information from conversational/textual exchanges are more complex to construct. This is the problem of natural language generation for which the syntax, semantics and pragmatics are more difficult to define than for say first order predicate calculus or operations on real numbers. In other words, currently it is hard to have a conversation with a computer. Hence, perhaps, one of the traditional tests for certifying a computer as intelligent is the Turing Test: can one talk with a computer and be lead to believe one is speaking with a person. The first computer program to do that will win the prize.

A real conversational text would therefore be able to search through its database of relevant material, based on a user query, and either present the appropriate information from that source or develop new data on its own. It would be able to engage with the querier to qualify its search. It may wonder about the relationship the querier sees between documents it has created for the querier and may try to derive a pattern. It may use this pattern to ask the user better questions so that it may learn something new from what the user has contributed. The ideal conversational text, in other words, would be an *agent*²⁴ in the discourse, in order to know about the conversation and participate in the exchange.

²⁴In AI, an agent usually refers to any person, program or device capable of reasoning and decision making (see Dean, Allen and Aloimonds, *Artificial Intelligence, Theory and Practice*, 273). Often agents are further understood to be "rational" as opposed to omniscient, in which case the agent makes decisions based on what it can perceive of available information. An agent may believe it is safe to cross the street if it perceives no traffic in either direction. It may not have perceived that piece of jumbo jet falling from the sky into the middle of the road. (See Russell and Norvig, 64).

Such a concept of the system's involvement with the production of new textual material is different from one of its closest approximations, the Xanadu project.²⁵ In that contributive hypermedia project, the goal was to allow people to link in with static preexisting data and add comments to it. The networks of that system would collectively provide for the storage and access of annotations. The system, in other words, maintains the information but adds nothing to it, itself. It does not process the input in any way but to store it. Real conversational texts would feature an active dynamic component involved with user input.

Eliza and Julia are systems that simulate a kind of awareness (within a limited domain) of user input, one that results in appropriate data being retrieved. Eliza was an online psychologist software program of the late 70s, invented by Joseph Weizenbaum, that gave the impression of having a conversation with a "patient" by simulating a type of exchange in which the system always asked the user questions based on the user's last statement. For instance, the user might type, "You are not friendly" and the program will respond with "Why do you say that I am not friendly?" Michael Mauldin's "Julia," a recent contestant in the Turing Test, is another program that seems to engage in conversation. Like Eliza, it keeps track of key words and sentence types (e.g. question or statement) and responds according to the type of statement and the keywords in it (example and URL). Both these programs are limited, neither knows the meanings of the words they use, but their pattern matching and heuristics²⁶ allows them to simulate conversational exchanges that are beneficial for the user.

Julia, for instance, can be located at Lamdamoo. Julia is a software bot that seemingly wanders this particular MOO and performs services, such as helping participants navigate the environment, providing information about the environment and its other participants, and sharing online gossip - things that have recently been said publicly in the MOO. Interaction with Julia is natural language oriented - one can frame questions to Julia like "where is Epcot Center". As a result, users often claim to feel more comfortable in

²⁵See Gary Wolf's article "The Curse of Xanadu" *WIRED* 3.6 (1995):
<http://www.wired.com/wired/3.06/features/xanadu.html>

²⁶Pattern matching is a fundamental attribute of certain kinds of data processing. Voice recognition fits into this category: the system matches the voice pattern of a word against its database of such patterns. When it finds a match, it performs the task associated with the match, like the voice pattern for "computer: lights!" matches to the processes to turn on room lighting. Heuristics on the other hand are rules of thumb in a given context that provide guidance for decision making. Heuristics don't always produce the desired goal, but they usually help. For instance: standing in the shortest line at the supermarket may not always result in the fastest exit from the store, but it's a good first check towards that goal.

engaging with Julia. Others who do not know that Julia is a robot often form very interesting views about `her' state of mind and mental ability.²⁷

Julia is in large part a navigational aid whose big plus is that it interacts with a user through natural language queries and responds in kind with what many describe as a definite personality. There is currently much research into developing user interfaces that are Julia-like: that allow natural language interaction and that exhibit personality. Microsoft's Office 97 provides limited examples of these interfaces in its characterizable help agents. These agents can answer natural language queries like "How do I get on the internet." Something missing from both Julia and the Office 97 agent that is integral to *real conversational text*, however, is the ability to formulate new texts rather than serve up canned data. The closest approximation of this attribute in Julia is the software's ability to add new maps to its database of new users on the MOO as they create new rooms. Julia can also do sums on request. Julia is extremely useful in its context of accessing user information and adding new maps to its database. In this respect, Julia is an agent, aware of its surroundings, capable of limited decision making. What Julia does not do is create new information based on its exchanges with users. It does not "learn" from its users. Again, this is not a criticism of the Julia project; it is simply an observation of limitations that need to be addressed for conversational texts to work as described.

Learning, therefore, is a critical component of conversational texts. Consider our own understanding of real conversational processes: we can recall and retell previously stored and requested information; postulate new texts based on questions about recalled material; learn something new from the interaction; and store that new knowledge, including new ways of seeing previous patterns²⁸ so that these new patterns may be reapplicable in different yet similar contexts. In the case of such texts, the medium becomes an essential and integrated part of the dynamic text's construction.

It may sound like what I have presented as conversational texts could more accurately be described as conversational systems. The generated information is not necessarily reproduced static data and seems more dependent on access to small chunks of a database rather than to the reproduction of texts. To some extent, this observation is accurate. However, I choose to highlight the term text for now, because these systems will be dependent on authors' initial contributions to what will be processed and represented to a user by the system.

²⁷Leonard Foner, "Entertaining Agents: A Sociological Case Study."

²⁸This type of pattern recognition is often associated with neural net research in the Artificial Intelligence community where systems learn by having positive matches reinforced in their network and negative matches generally not reinforced.

Where expert systems already serve up synthesized analyses of user input, the expert system's analysis is largely dependent on the quality of the knowledge base, and the rules that apply to the construction of inferences from that knowledge base. Conversational texts are similarly based on using specified bits of data, but in this case the data can be a variety of types of texts (what I describe below as *chunks*) for these systems to operate with. In other words, I am describing texts with intelligent assistance built into them. One could also describe such texts as Smart Books. I wish to focus on the term *conversational* however, in order to highlight the interactive dynamic proposed.

There is little fear that conversational texts or AI systems will replace writers, first because we are some way from developing such sophisticated systems, but second, because people still want to write and record their own experiences. The goal of a conversational text would be to facilitate the interactions with those texts, to allow us to interact with those presentations in the dynamic ways described above. Conversational texts can become active tutors customized for particular audiences, for instance, rather than passive textbooks written for one generic audience. Conversational text(book)s respond to their user's puzzlement or anxiety, and they can do so at any time: they don't need sleep, never get bored, are infinitely patient and can work relentlessly on call 24 hours a day.

The distinction between conversational texts and real conversations is not to be forgotten. A key element of RL real conversation is the desire for intimacy, the desire to be heard by the other or to hear the other in terms of intimacy. We might go to the computer for help with a question about which used car to buy, and have agents work together to pour over used car data to make a suggestion, but we are unlikely to seek out a database to bond with it.²⁹ This may change with advances in AI and Artificial Life. For the time being, we come to networks seeking information that may lead to knowledge.

The term "text" in *conversational text* also acknowledges that most legacy data and the majority of information being stored now is textual in nature. Despite multimedia promises, we still retrieve and create more data textually than in any other form. Conversational texts propose another paradigm for accessing (and eventually interacting with and adding to) that textually stored information. And, as the Socratic method shows, engaging with even pre-existing data through question and answer (refined querying) can be a powerful tool for the knowledge seeker.

*

²⁹True, people do log long hours on MUDS and MOOS for instance (see Turkle, *Life on the Screen*) but this is ostensibly using the networks a space for interaction with other humans rather than with artificial systems.

The following sections present a pragmatic approach to implementing a reduced set version of a conversational text, the dialogic text described at the start of this chapter. Unlike conversational texts, the dialogic text, implemented in Intensional HTML, knows nothing of the user's query (knows nothing of the users input) but can present the information in many different ways, depending on the user-selected viewpoint(s).

Background:

The Problem:

Texts as they currently exist are usually constructed as static documents. Whether we think of articles published in journals or on web sites, documents are usually static. Even on the Web dynamic requests still serve up prefabricated, pre-existing whole texts. The problem of what I call Whole Document Retrieval shows up especially when trying to do an effective search through web databases. The *Oracular Effect* produces the following scenario: a user does a search engine request; they find a dynamically created list of documents that may or may not be appropriate. No one document necessarily holds the key information. Even in the best match document, surplus and redundant information regularly accompanies the required details.

The problems with search engine query responses is also a result of the fact that few search engines are context aware. For instance, if I type into Altavista "fish food jobs" am I looking for jobs in the fish food industry, fish for human diet and any related work or statistics on discarded employees?

Search engines like Excite and Altavista are currently developing approximations to context searching, rather than simple keyword matching. But even when they retrieve articles that suite the appropriate context, they reflect no account of what I refer to as *depth*. Depth can refer to level of expertise required to read the document retrieved or amount of information to produce. As long as document creation remains static rather than demand driven, getting information from online sources will continue to be an arduous exercise, no matter how effective the context matching becomes, since such searches will always retrieve whole documents.

Consider the problem of lack of depth in searching just the Netscape site for information on how to create frames in web pages, a process Netscape invented. This is a fairly narrow band, local search. However, even if the search engine retrieves only the "how to build frames" related documents (excluding all the press releases of same) there is no discrimination for *depth*. This means the retrieved articles may be pitched too high for my level of expertise, in which case I am on my own to find other articles to produce the

required information that may eventually allow me to make sense of the frames article. The converse may also be true: the retrieved articles may be too basic to answer my more specific questions, and again I am on my own and must spend time trying to nail down other sources. That is, there is no way I can (yet) request the search engine to retrieve the *kind* of information I want. I cannot request a qualified search like

```
topic: how to build frames
level: expert level
detail: minimum
```

I cannot, because document construction is not dynamic: it is static. Data can be dynamic: we can, for instance, retrieve the latest stock quote for Apple. We can embed a link in a larger document so that the quoted stock price is always current, but the rest of the document does not react to this one dynamic bit. Therefore, at the whole document level, as a reader, I am at the mercy of assumptions about the audience for the text retrieved.

Similar examples may be found in course texts or training manuals. If a text for a course or manual is not set at a level for a member of its often enforced audience to understand, the user is in trouble.

The Solution (for now): Dialogic Texts

Imagine what would happen if the text could respond to a user's needs so that depths could be set within queries, or within the retrieved documents themselves, so that any document can respond interactively to the user's queries, based on what they happen to be considering in the text at that moment. Imagine a first year calculus student studying derivatives. The text delivering these concepts goes into a discussion of the sine of an angle and the student feels lost because they don't remember much about the unit circle from their grade twelve algebra.

In a conversational text, the student could set the depth dimension of the current expertise level down a notch, and the depth level of detail up a few notches on the sine concept, and generate a gentle review of the unit circle. As confidence with the material increases, expertise and detail can be adjusted accordingly. The instructor (or the text itself) could suggest the expertise level the student should achieve by course end.

In the case of a journal article, perhaps the only depth level that one would want available is detail where the reader would like to hear more about a particular point. Or less, for that matter. The depth can be raised and detail can be increased.³⁰

³⁰Hypertext documents have provided the first steps towards these types of dynamic documents: click on a highlighted word and go to more information about that point, but often these links, while valuable, are glorified footnotes in that they are fixed. A convenient appendix or glossary of terms. These attributes have

In these texts, the user determines the interaction with the material based on the adjustment options embedded in the text site. It is this interaction that approximates conversation. The text provides some information; the user wishes to question a point; the text provides a response. Hence, *dialogic texts*.

With the growth of the internet, and therefore the increased presentation of information online, along with the development of intelligent agent searches, such texts could draw not only on local texts for information sources, but eventually, from across the web as well. One could always have “related information” at one’s fingertips, from a variety of voices. Conversations among many.³¹ Rather than having to sift through dozens of pages, the appropriate bits from each text could be aggregated for a single presentation.

Construction and Implications

Terms

Dialogic texts allow for many versions of themselves to be constructed dynamically, depending on user requests. Depth is a critical ingredient in the request mix. Beyond expertise and detail depth levels, dialogic texts’ depths may take into consideration a variety of audience needs, such as cultural or linguistic factors. The way directions are given to a local resident will be different for how they are given to a traveler, for whom “Right at Loci’s boat” may make no sense.

Writers on a text site project would therefore write not a variety of *monolithic* essays on a theme, but components of a *polyolithic* text architecture. In conversational texts, I call these components *chunks* and *liths*. Depending on the user request, the appropriate *chunks* from the available *liths* are dynamically assembled which result in the appearance of a single text. For instance, I might request a text on `topic:Frames` at user `_level:expert` with `detail:brief`. I would receive as output a text based on all the chunks that suited my criteria. I would get one version of all the possible versions of a text that could be created from all the chunks that exist on the topic of Frames creation. All the versions may have certain features in common, like header and footer information (all at the text site may have similar headers with descriptive titles and footers with navigational links). Each version may also start with a working definition of what a frame is, but beyond that, the main text of each version would differ across the settings (dimensions)

tremendous value for making access to additional information convenient and efficient, but the information beneath the link can be disappointing. Because the linked material is not dynamic, wysiwyg!

³¹The problem of other sources’ credibility to be connected with such a site will be dealt with below.

we've described of topic, expertise and degree of detail. One could possibly create a thousand documents on the topic of frames creation depending on the number of dimensions and the number of coordinates in each dimension.

This *versioning* of texts according to qualified/parametrized requests can be well situated and described within intensional logic programming and demand driven data flow models. Intensional logic provides a framework and semantics for describing versions in terms of a version space of "possible worlds" (and where dimensions are not unlike the *Twilight Zone*).

Star Trek on Location: Possible Worlds as Parallel Universes

There may not be truth in the postmodern world but there certainly is in possible worlds. In our discussion of conversational texts, a possible world is derived from all the chunks from the version space that satisfy the conditions specified. The attributes that determine request specifications are the dimensions. For our frames example, the site designer might set four dimensions: topic, language, level, detail. Each dimension has a defined set of possible choices:

```
topic: make_frames, set_links, set_colors
language: english, french
level: pro, novitiate, novice
detail: everything_you_have, median, as_little_as_possible.
```

In the dimension detail, the attribute `everything_you_got` may include elements that would also belong to `as_little_as_possible`, while elements from `pro` may skip any references to the novice chunks.

Everytime a text is created by making a set of dimensional choices, a "possible world" is created in which certain attributes hold true in that world but perhaps not in others. The number of possible worlds in any site is directly related to the number of dimensions and the number of options within those dimensions.

A site with 2 dimensions and 3 attributes per dimension would only have a maximum of 9 possible worlds (3x3). A site with four dimensions, with ten attributes per dimension, would be capable of rendering ten thousand versions/possible worlds of the site text (10x10x10x10).

The idea of possible worlds is the key concept which allows intensional logic to give semantics to natural language statements. The complement to an intensional statement

is an extensional one. We can get at the meaning of both terms through Richard Montague's oft-cited example "the temperature is rising." The problem is how to define the noun phrase *temperature*. One can say the temperature is 30 degrees, but to say "30 degrees is rising" makes no sense. There are therefore two meanings for temperature: an extensional one, that refers to temperature as a specific reading at a particular location and moment in time; and an *intensional* reading, that defines temperature as a function that takes a time and a place and yields a value. The predicate *is rising* is true for such a function at a particular time and place if the value at that point is less than its value at the immediately subsequent points.

Simply put, *intensional references point to functions and extensional references point to values*. Intensional operators allow for a range of possible worlds to be involved whereas extensional operators will only point to specific instances. Hyperlinks within web documents are often extensional operators: they point to specific, prefabricated pages at particular locations. The dialogic text implementation we will consider momentarily relies more on intensional operators that allow links in texts to point to a range of possible worlds, dependent on the version of a site in which they are located.

The phrase "possible worlds" is standard terminology in intensional logic but sometime the idea is better conveyed by the notion of "parallel universes" – as portrayed, for example, in the "Mirror Mirror" episode of the old Star Trek series. In this particular episode, a boarding party is sent to a parallel universe in which all the same characters exist, as in their universe, even in the same jobs, but in the other universe, all the characters are Evil instead of Good. In the case of the parallel universe episode, the alternate universe is the result of changing only one dimension, the *moral* dimension. Agents (namely, the boarding party) from one universe can cross into the other universe and vice-versa (thanks, needless to say, to a convenient transporter malfunction). These agents can still operate in the alternate universe because *most* of their knowledge of the one universe is still true in the other (e.g. the ship's captain is named Kirk). In other words, each universe is a *variant* of the other, a member of the same family.

Imagine a fax machine suddenly landing in Emily Brontë's 1850's England universe. The fax machine per se is not an agent since it has no self-awareness, but its inability to operate in a world that has no phone systems makes its operations useless. The systems that need to be true for it to exist do not. It cannot function.

In the case of dialogic texts we are less concerned with what cannot exist than the multiplicity of versions that can. Indeed, John Plaice and Bill Wadge have variously

described the Web as a giant demand driven dataflow network,³² capable of sustaining billions and billions of parallel universes simply by virtue of hyperlinks as described above and “context switching operators” like the back and forward buttons that already make the web a very intensional place.³³ Indeed, it is the Plaice/Wadge Intensional view of the web that underlines Taner Yildirim’s development of Intensional HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), the web authoring language used to implement my prototype dialogic text.

I have chosen IHTML for *dialogic text* implementations for several reasons. First, it allows versions of texts to be delivered through standard web browsers, which means no special software is needed to view dialogic texts. Second, IHTML operates in a network environment, which means that access to *dialogic texts* is available across the internet. Third, IHTML is based on HTML tags, which means text preparation is about as complex as current web page documents. Fourth, it allows both IHTML (intensional) and HTML (extensional) links to be incorporated into the pages it processes.

HTML, Hypertext Markup Language, provides a set of tags that determine how a page of text will be interpreted and then displayed by the page viewing software (the browser, like Netscape) that presents that text to the viewer. An example of using standard HTML tag to make a word appear **bold faced** in a browser’s window is `bold faced`. When looking at the HTML document itself, the words “bold faced” appear exactly as they do above, between the two tags ``. The browser reads those tags, however, and uses bold type facing for those words when they appear in the browser window. The crucial tag for HTML, the one that gives it its hypertext, extensional referencing capability, is the anchor tag: `my web page`. When the browser sees an anchor tag like the above, it presents the text surrounded by those tags as a hypertext link, which when activated by the user, will display the text referenced by that link in the browser window.

This anchor tag/hypertext link represents especially the demand-driven dataflow model of the web described by Plaice and Wadge.³⁴ Any page in the viewer has a series of links in it which the user can choose to activate, pulling in that data and only that data that the user has specifically selected. The opposite and more common model of data

³²For a complete description of Intensional HTML, see Yildirim’s MA Thesis, from the University of Victoria, 1997.

³³An intensional place is an ironic construct: an intension is a function, a series of values therefore it cannot be a place, but that’s what the web is: a series of possible instances of intensionally derived versions of itself.

³⁴See John Plaice and Joey Paquet, “Introduction to Intensional Programming” (1-14), Bill Wadge and Alan Yoder, “The Possible World Wide Web” (207-213) and Bill Wadge, “Possible WOOrlds” (56-61), all found in *Intensional Programming I*.

distribution is data driven. An example is a stock ticker: all stock values are pushed through on a TV channel for instance as a single stream. The user has no way to demand only one one element from that stream. Indeed, current web search engines are very data driven: the user may have a request for documents about "Apple's buyout of Next" but has virtually no control over how much data is pushed back: whether there will be four links pulled up from the search engine database, or forty-thousand (I am not exaggerating). *Dialogic Texts* would make text retrieval far more demand driven since they would, through adjustable dimensions, facilitate the refinement of requests and allow the user to have a finer control over kind and amount of information retrieved.

One of the strengths of Intensional HTML over standard HTML is that it assumes, and provides for, the creation of multiple versions of any document whether it is a single page, an entire site, or (eventually) a network of sites. The core tag of IHTML is not the traditional ``, which is an extensional reference to an existing page, but the `<#include>` tag. The include tag in standard HTML allows web authors to write one HTML file and refer to it in many documents. If all the pages on a web site, for instance, have the same footer information such as navigational links and contact information, it is extremely useful to be able to put all this information into one file and simply write `<!-- #include= "footer.html"-->` in all the web pages that need to present the information. It is also very easy to change information in one place rather than having to change the information in what may be hundreds of web pages. In standard HTML, then, the include tag allows many pages to reference one static document.

In Intensional HTML, one include tag acts as a portal through which the appropriate versions of that tag include file flow. IHTML allows web authors to create document templates, or document structures with generic references (includes) that can reference the appropriate text chunks depending on the current version (dimensional settings) requested. Document templates are far more flexible than in standard HTML, which creates static documents with static extensional references. Intensional HTML makes site growth and version development feasible. I chose IHTML for dialogic texts because IHTML allows for the construction of dynamic texts, in particular, dynamic texts that accommodate depths, like expert level, or detail view. In fact I proposed an extension to IHTML to facilitate the use of quantitative (sliding-scale) dimensions like depth.

In Yildirim's initial presentation of IHTML, one of the amazing features of the demonstration (at <http://lucy.uvic.ca/~taner/cgi-bin/scan.cgi>) was the user's ability to click on a choice of background colors and have that choice permeate the site. That is, after the background color choice had been made, every other page the user navigated to (clicked

on) would have that chosen color for its background, unless and until the user made another background color choice. Then every page in the site, including the ones seemingly just visited, would now have the new background.

In traditional HTML, to achieve the same effect, one would have to clone the entire site – all the pages in the site – and change only the back ground color tag to achieve the same effect. In practical terms, if the site had ten pages, and the site author wanted the user to be able to change between four background colors, the author would have to create four copies of the site's ten pages and then change the background color in each set. Similarly the writer would have to incorporate an entire set of links into EACH of the forty new pages to allow the user to jump between the different color sets, the different versions of the site.

For instance, if there were Red, Green, Blue, and Yellow versions, of the site, and each of the ten pages of the set had links that would allow the user to move to any of the other ten pages, each page would now have to have forty links instead of ten. Page one of the site would need to include links to page two red, page two blue, page two yellow, page two green. The result is an unwieldy, ugly mess. Creating versions of sites in standard HTML is an ugly, unsubtle business. Yildirim's implementation of IHTML facilitates selecting options of page attributes like color through a single options page. The user clicks "options", sets the color to the one they want and they are taken back the page they were just at with the new color implemented. Similarly, on Yildirim's site, one could change language and have the language change permeate through the rest of the site. One could move between language versions of the same page at any time by clicking the link at the bottom of a page that, if one was in the Turkish language version of a page read "English version" and if in the English version, read "Turkish version link."

Yildirim refers to links that are pointed to by intensional hypertext anchors links as "transversional." Attributes of a text page that are called through include tags rather than pointed to by intensional links are referenced through Yildirim's *option page structure*. In Yildirim's implementation, Language is called through a transversional link that leads to an entire replica of the page one was just at, except all the text presented has been translated into the new language. In other words, the transversional link takes one to an entirely new IHTML page. Versions of a page called through the options page structure do not point to new pages; new data is simply passed through the effected tag in the old page. For background color, for instance, the intensional tag would look like `<#include bgcolor=bgcolor file>`. Whatever color value is typed into the bgcolor file for the chosen version from the options page, that file will be referenced/used by that version of

the page one was just looking at. For instance, if the user is on site page One which currently has a gray background, the user can choose the “options page” and be taken to the options page which has a variety of background color sources. The user can choose any of these colors as the new background color for the site. In this case, let us say the user chooses white as the new background color from the options page. As soon as the “white” link is chosen, the IHTML program will find the file that has the single line “#000000” in it, which is the HTML code used for white, and will use that file as the value for the bgcolor tag. When the page is processed by the browser, it will not see “<bgcolor=#include background file>”, it will see “<bgcolor=#000000>”.

As stated above, the Intensional HTML tag is the power house of Intensional HTML. I prefer it to the transversional link, the href that points to another complete version of the same page of a site. Transversional links seem redundant to intensional includes and do not leverage the power of template creation. For instance, Yildirim’s site uses transversional links to go from the English version of the site to the Turkish version,³⁵ to go from one complete IHTML source page to another. The structure of both pages is identical. Since there are no structural changes from the English pages to the Turkish pages, the Turkish chunks could just as easily have leveraged the same template source file that the English version starts from, have the language choices moved to the options pages and have the Turkish chunks of text be called through the <include> tags of that single source template file. To do so means less data duplication; it means that a structure for a site can be defined in one series of templates, and writers for intensional sites need only concern themselves with writing the appropriate text chunks for the defined templates.

No matter whether the intensional site writer uses includes or transversional links or some combination of the two, the result is a multiversed site, a series of parallel universes. That is, the red backgrounded English version of Yildirim’s site is a complete universe on its own apart from the blue backgrounded English version of the site. In only one universe of the site is it true that all the data is in English and all the backgrounds are red. Similarly, the version of the site that has all red backgrounds but the language is Turkish and has graphics is entirely distinct from the red, Turkish site with no graphics. In intensional logic, each dimension is an axis. Every element of a dimension is a point on that dimension’s axis. Each choice of an element within each dimension generates a unique point inside the entire possible version space, as defined by those dimensional axes.

³⁵I say English to Turkish because English is the default value of the intensional site. Every time users comes to the site, they start in the English version.

For instance, consider the simple two dimensional space of color and language. The y axis is language, the x axis is background color. Let us say there are two language choices and four color choices. The point on the grid at y_2, x_4 is an entirely unique point from y_1, x_4 . The two versions of the text associated with these points are similar - are parallel versions of the same text - but are also distinct. Each point (the dot on the graph), therefore represents an entire possible world, which can be a huge world, in which certain conditions exist that distinguish it from all other possible worlds.

Possible world semantics and IHTML allow for worlds within worlds through subversions of a world. That is, one point on those two main dimensional axes may contain entire other parallel universes. These worlds within worlds are achieved by subversions, refinements of larger versions. Wadge refers to subversion refinements in software version control. For instance, there may exist software such that `language:French+ OS:mac`, ostensibly a French version of the software that will run on Macs. But there may exist a subversion, a refinement of this software such that `language:French+OS:mac&PPC` (the `%` indicates a subversion of the main dimensional attribute chosen). In this case, there is a French language version of the Mac software optimized for Power PC hardware. The Power PC version of the software would be a discrete version of the French/Mac version of the software, but would exist within the more narrowly defined French/Mac version space of the larger Language/OS space dimensional space. Similarly, Yildirim's site implements subversions of background color, `bgcolor&graphic`, in which a background color loads and then a background image file is layered on top of that. If the user picks a mother-of-pearl background pattern, the subversion call would load `"#000000"` [for the background color] `background="pearl.gif"` [for the pattern].

Such versioning functionality available in IHTML and as demonstrated in Yildirim's site is impressive in itself, making the simultaneous creation of "text only" versus graphics-rich sites, for instance, a far less labor intensive process than formally when all content would need to be cloned and each clone edited by hand for the specific attribute that needed to be added or excised. Versioning handles the inclusions of these attributes as dimensional settings.

In Yildirim's implementation so far, however, the data itself is treated as constant. The textual input for each page is translated into a different language and is static in each page; with graphics or not: blue background or yellow, the text is constant. Fortunately, Yildirim's IHTML provides the tools for constructing dynamic texts, as described above,

that can also appear to respond to the users request for more or less detail, greater or lesser expertise and so on. The current version of Intensional HTML can accommodate these types of depth dimensions in two ways. In working with Yildirim for an initial implementation of a conversational text prototype, we evolved the notion of *recursive includes* and, with the input of Bill Wadge, evolved *aggregate inclusion* as well. Both types of includes are used for different kinds of depth dimension inclusion. I will explain both types through the following explanation of a dialogic text prototype.

A Thousand Dissertations

The dialogic text site model under construction is a (prototype) intensional version of the above chapter on language and the law as read through *Wuthering Heights*. The dialogic text has the following main dimensions: character, character combinations, issue, global depth. These dimensions allow a reader to pick a character and an issue in the text or a character in relation to another character in terms of a given issue, at a particular degree of detail. I refer to depth as global because the depth setting currently affects the level of detail for all other dimensions. So if one chooses Cathy and the Law at the highest depth setting (say, [3]), one will receive the highest amount of material available on both Cathy and the Law.³⁶

Similarly, one can call up a text that presents a detailed analysis (depth dimension) of Cathy (character in character dimension) and the Law (an issue in the issue dimension). One could call up a quick overview (lowest depth dimension value) of Edgar's relation to Heathcliff (a character dimension subversion, Edgar&Heathcliff, which appears to the user's selections simply as "Edgar and Heathcliff") in terms of Language (an issue). For some versions, the material will be very similar to other versions (Cathy and the Law at a high level of detail will have much in common with Cathy and Language at a high level of detail simply because of the nature of the material in this case). In terms of processing data, the written chunks of material are stored as separate files in discrete directories. Those directories are determined by the page in which the material will be called. Each file has a code number that the IHTML software generates to label which chunk belongs to which version. Content, in IHTML is deeply related to Form.

³⁶So far, a seeming local change on depth effects the site globally. Depth 3 for Cathy means that all pages will be Depth 3 for Cathy, rather than just the page a user may make or remake at that setting. It may be appropriate at times to have more locally effective settings. For instance, a user may wish a single definition expanded, rather than an entire discussion.

We have considered what material may be called forth, based on which dimensional elements are chosen, but we have not considered how the material will be structured in order to be represented. In the prototype for *Wuthering Heights*, each page of the site has an associated series of directories that correspond directly to the intensional elements (the include tags) of the page's source/template file. The *Wuthering Heights* site has six pages that relate to two versions of the site structure. *Version One* is a two page site that results when the global depth chosen for any *character/issue* combination is set to its lowest depth. The two page structure presents a brief overview of the *character/issue* chosen on page one and the essential critical/theoretical texts in page 2, the bibliography. *Structure Version 2* has five main pages: *intro*, *detail*, *detail2*, *conclusion*, *bibliography*. This version structure of the site is called whenever the global depth is over 0. Site structure, therefore, becomes a dependent dimension, determined by the independent (user adjustable) depth dimension.

A structural change like the `Depth:0` triggered in the *Wuthering Heights* site indicates a prime opportunity for transversional links if the IHTML author wants to foreground the distinction of that version from the other and make it readily accessible at any time.

When the five-page version structure of the site is called, each page is represented by a directory named for the page (these users cannot access or even view these behind-the-scenes structures). Inside each directory is the template/source file for each page. There are a series of directories that refer to each include tag in the main source page. The most significant directory within the main page directory is the body directory. The collection of files in the body directory hold all the chunks for each possible version of the main text (the body text) for that page. There would be an introductory chunk about each character and each issue at each depth dimension available for each of those combinations. The IHTML software generates a table of codes that represent the combinations of dimensions, so any chunk that has the attributes `char:cathy+issue:law+depth:2` may have the associated number "8". In the *intro* directory, the file `body.8.html` would be the name of the file used for the body text, called through the `<include=body >` tag, of the *intro* page that had the version sum `char:cathy+issue:law+depth:2` in the site that schraefel built.

Another strength of IHTML that draws on its intensional heritage is the ability to use the best approximate existing dimensional value for an include or transversional link. Suppose a user requests `char:edgar+issue:law+depth:3`. Suppose this version sum only exists at `depth:2`. Then that is the version that will be brought in at the `<include>`

tag. This best approximation of versioning insures that the closest match available to the user's specified criteria can always be returned, rather than returning an empty page.

Being Deep instead of Just Macho

We now have a solid overview of IHTML features that can effect site structure and text inclusion. How depth works within these structures needs further comment. For any dimensional combination of the *Wuthering Heights* site where depth is set higher than one, we have seen that the structure of the site is set at five pages. The amount of detail in each page of the site, however, will vary depending on depth chosen above one. In the case of this site, global Depth, one dimension, has a unique effect on two types of represented data: textual data (the chunks) and bibliographic data (the books and articles collected for the site). Textual depth (detail of discussion in this case) is handled by recursive includes. Bibliographic depth is processed through aggregate includes.

When the global depth is set to 5 (maximum detail) , it made sense in this case to assume that a chunk at `Depth:5` would include detail from the material for `Depth:4` which itself includes material from `Depth:3` and so on, to `Depth:1` Each chunk of a particular depth will begin with its own include tag so that it will call the chunk before it, then add its own material to that chunk when presented in the browser window. This is a neat solution for a fixed and unchanging number of chunks in a given site. However, there may be cases when such a recursively linear approach may not be appropriate and one simply wants to collect and present a collection of all the best finds for the given dimensional attribute request. Such is the case with the bibliography pages, and perhaps represents one of the most immediately valuable offshoots of this implementation.

When depth is applied to the generation of a bibliography, depth ranges from minimal, which also means show only the most essential titles to maximal which means show all the related material available. Each title in the bibliography is stored as a separate file (chunk). In the bibliography case, establishing a recursive association among book titles is possible but brittle. It may be true that for a list of books that includes only a set number of titles then recursive calls can work: the maximal list generated from `Depth:5` will definitely include the members of the minimal list from `Depth:1`. But what if a book is added or subtracted? How does one insert a new title without disrupting the alphabetical order of the books called? In this case, chunks for the bibliography are placed into a directory marked to be preprocessed through aggregation.

In the regular include case, files all have the same names except for version sum number, like `body.8.html`, `body.56.html`, `body.7.html`. There will only be one body.

file with version sum number 8; only one with 7; only one with 56, and so on. In the case of the bibliography set, there may be many files with the same associated version sum number, but the name part of the file will be unique, based on Last Name initial First Name Initial, and Publication year. So LT67a.8.html, LT67b.8.html, AB94.8.html, TE92.8.html, BR92.7.html, GH91.6.html would all be legitimate file names for chunks in a directory to be aggregated where the intent is to gather not one file that suites a particular criteria, but all the files that are associated with a particular version sum. All the best matches for a particular issue/depth/character version are collected into a temporary file. Sorting an aggregated list is a fairly straight forward calculation: the file name before the version sum number is used for this purpose. Before the files are printed to screen, a small executable (program) runs through the temporary file and sorts the books by author/year in either ascending or descending order. Order of sort is a choice given to the user in the options page. The result is a highly practical bibliography in which books and articles are selected in number and kind based on their value to the chosen dimensional mix. Aggregation has the advantage of being able to add a relatively unlimited number of books to any dimensional mix at any time, or remove books from the directory without effecting IHTML engine's ability to process the files. The naming convention provides a meaningful criteria for organizing accumulated chunks for any one dimensional presentation.

As the number of participants contributing chunks to a project over time evolves, aggregation and ordering may entirely replace recursive includes. Recursive includes do not lend themselves readily to managing a changing array of data. Depending where it is in a chain of recursive includes, a potentially large number of files would have to have the name of the file they are calling edited. The benefit of recursive includes is that they manage the order in which a text will be printed to screen: the first chunk is placed before the second, which is placed before the third and so on. Aggregation alone does not do any sort processing. For bibliographies, using a program to sort a temporary file by file name makes sense. The same can not be said of distinctive text chunks. How is this ordering to be established among a group of chunks of the same depth level where an alphabetical or numerical cue is not readily available? Starting with the chunk named A.8.html may make no logical sense to come before the text chunk named G.8.html. Trying to apply the traditional paradigm of essay writing to intensionally called text chunks may be an incorrect approach, not the least because it is more trouble than it is worth. This problem, however, may pose the grains of a new genre derived from the medium of delivery.

As stated above, most online content at this moment is some form or other of shovelware. More material is being created specifically for the media of delivery. Movie clips embedded in text would be difficult to recreate in current paper/ink productions, but these so called multimedia texts look and read very much like paper based pamphlets. In the early days of television, TV did radio with pictures. It brought the radio drama audience into the studio and filmed it, so people could watch Amos and Andy reading from scripts instead of just listening to them. It took till the Vietnam war for television to find its unique quality: it could get up very close to detail that had been very far away and put it right into someone's inner sanctum, the home living room. Pictures got to tell stories in ways that words, radio did not. TV finally separated itself from radio. This is still early days for multimedia online. Right now the web is more like newspapers and a bit of radio and TV thrown in than whatever it will become to set the Net apart as a medium from the conglomeration of media it so far still imitates. I believe that Intensional HTML and, more generally, conversational texts are part of what it will make the web a distinct media with distinct genres of representation. Intensional aggregation of text chunks has a role to play in that development.

It is awkward or possibly pointless to force aggregated text chunks to replicate the essay form. One possible solution for the display of these chunks is to leverage the effect writing chunks actually has on the writer's conception of the given project. Text chunks are readily displayable as independent but associated aphorisms. That's what aphorisms are: one or several paragraphs on a thought, a topic. Ordering of the aphorisms within a related group becomes largely incidental. While this may sound like a somewhat mystical approach to writing, this form of representation was consistently practiced by a very unmystical philosopher, Frederick Nietzsche. Nietzsche's writings consist of just these types of aphorisms and positively lend themselves to intensional delivery. As a paper-based implementation of such intensional versioning, in the appendix of my master's thesis I pulled all Nietzsche's aphorisms from all his works on the subject of Women. The result was a new Nietzsche text, *Nietzsche on Women*.³⁷ The read was fascinating when so assembled. Revolting, but fascinating. The effect of the collection is a cohesive read, although the aphorisms were pulled together from a variety of sources. The generation of the text was only possible because Nietzsche wrote in a way to facilitate just such versioning. With aphoristic chunk aggregation as its foundation, intensional, dynamic dialogic texts could be the first net-specific genre to emerge. *Conversational Texts* which would combine intensional versioning with AI systems could be the next.

³⁷ See m.c. schraefel, *Elle-même*.

The advantages of conversational texts over traditional static documents are many, as we have seen. They afford new opportunities for readers and they provide very new opportunities for writers. On the readership/user side, they allow one source site to effectively serve many audiences. On the text creation side, they can readily facilitate collaborative authorship where various authors can be assigned a set of chunks/aphorisms to construct that may be called together in ways they did not anticipate to create new texts and new knowledge, through AI assisted interaction and pattern matching.

In many respects the above description suggests approaching writing projects as if they were object oriented software: constructing components that can be reused, that can inherit, that can be extended for a variety of instances. This is very true, not the least because the engine that drives these intensional, versional demands, IHTML, is clearly Object-oriented in its adoption of inheritance in particular. Another metaphor that may serve for the development of the New Literacy's New Genre derives from Dale Spender's consideration of what writing online implies for authorship. She sees writing becoming increasingly like film making. In a single film, there are many, many contributors to the final product. However, one of the things that Spender does not comment on is that the nature of film making is changing itself, through the same tools that enable the web. Powerful software and hardware costing tens of thousands less than it once did allows more people access to a media that has heretofore been cost prohibitive with anyone whose aspirations went beyond 8mm. The new tools also reduce the number of people necessary to complete a project. This reduced personnel effect happened more than a decade ago in music, with the development of the MIDI standard and FM/Digital synthesis. A musician with a multi-instrument synth and a sequencer³⁸ could create rich arrangements through one box without the expense of recording studios, many instruments and sometimes, many musicians. While some musicians complained that the sequencer and MIDI put musicians out of work, it gave other musicians a great deal of work. Some musicians could never afford access to large studios or the fees to hire a quartet. These tools gave those musicians the opportunity to approach that mark through simulation – sometimes that would lead to the gig to allow someone else to pay for the quartet to re-record the piece. The music of new Wave and the 80s is inspired by synthesized sounds and sequences. Liberation.

In the late 90's the same transfer of technological power in the world of film and video is being put into more people's hands. Not everyone's hands, but more people's. Schools that could not afford a full real-time digital editing suite may be able to get their

³⁸A device used to allow a musician to record a track (a sequence), play it back and record another track of another instrument voice and so on.

hands on an Audio/Video Mac that comes with the software to make films on the computer. And while the technology allows an individual to do many more roles than previously, where they might have filled one or zero, the same technology indeed points back to Spender's analogy for web writing: it can facilitate collaborative group projects and not just in film digital recreation, but in these new online genres. In a world of intensional, conversational texts, I can contribute valuable chunks to a variety of projects rather than develop one single, monolithic tome. In another instance, I may have one project idea and seek chunk collaborators. I may act as chunk editor on one project; on another, graphic chunk coordinator; on another template architecture designer.

One of the other potentially empowering attributes of project collaboration around *conversational texts* is that not every participant needs to have the latest and greatest system to participate. I am writing this chapter on what feels like by now an ancient (slow!) Mac Powerbook 160 laptop, but its grayscale screen is clear and bright and comfortable as I recline on the couch desperately trying to get these last words in the can before I collapse. In other words, it is the right tool for the job. It is in fact, an overabundance for what I am doing: typing. When I construct the VRML (three dimensional) interface for the implementation of the *Wuthering Heights* site, I will type up those files here, too, log on through this very slow 24MHz Mac to *Ren*, the super duper Silicon Graphics workstation in the Laboratory for Extended Media at University's Fine Arts faculty, upload my small, boring looking VRML³⁹ text files, and look at them later on a browser on a computer at the university with a very fast ethernet connection to the Web. An entire IHTML site, which I propose as the first new genre for the 21st century distributed earth, can be entirely constructed from this lap top and modem with a connection to a university owned research computer in my supervisor's office, which effectively makes this limited but faithful Powerbook even more limited: when connected this way, my Powerbook 160 laptop simply provides a portal to the computer at the other end of the line.

I own very little of the technology (I lust for most of it) but what I do have is access. Lots and lots of access. In the late 90s, for a late generation Xer, this is bourgeois privilege of the most decadent kind. As someone raised Catholic, the notion of sin and seduction associated with such seeming decadence comes to mind. This is my *aporia* that I express or confess at the end of this dissertation. I am the most wired woman I know. I know what to be afraid of here. I am amazed.

³⁹ Virtual Reality Modelling Language.

Miranda:

Oh brave new world,
that hath such people in't!

Prospero:

'Tis new to thee.¹

Shakespeare, *the Tempest*, 5.1.185-187.

¹ Recently, I spoke with Heather Menzies about her book on women and technology, *Who's Brave New World is It, Anyway*. I asked her if she was thinking about how Miranda in *The Tempest* got it wrong: that she was not going to a Brave New World with her father, but a very well known bureaucracy, the same one that had shipwrecked him a life time before. Menzies said no, she didn't know the reference and had been thinking about Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*. For women, and our half cheerleading, half dubious relationship to the Net in particular, I find the Shakespeare reference more apt.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusions, Connexions and Contributions

Recently, I was interviewed for the “feminist perspective” about a group of women who play as a clan (a team) against any other clans in a shoot-em-up networked game called Quake. The group calls itself PMS: Psycho Men Slayers. Their group web page proclaims “Under every floral print dress lies a lady wearing black garters, carrying a big f*cking gun!”¹ Members’ individual pages list iconography from male fantasy comic books of stiletto healed women with big guns. I read an interview with one of the PMS members published in *HotWired*, which quotes the PMS founder saying, “It’s always going to be boys versus girls. It’s something that’s been with us since grammar school.” Indeed, both members of PMS and the only other all female clan, Crack Whore, complain about the sexist treatment of women in that environment: “The fact that we are mostly girls just seems to pile on the sexism. Everyone wants to play us, and wants to either talk sex or give us shit.” Playing well, they claim, has a certain mitigating factor on the sexism: “When you get to the top of the scoreboard and they’re at minus-one, suddenly they show a lot of respect.”² In the interview, I was asked to speak about what was positive for women in what these women were doing and what was not so positive.

¹ <http://www.underramp.com/~pms/>. See also the other main women’s only Quake Clan page, <http://www.crackwhore.com/>, for Crack Whore. Much of the same female femme fatale imagery applies.

² <http://www.wired.com/news/story/1885.html>

There is nothing new in these young women finding solace in seemingly beating men at their own game and seemingly gaining respect for this. Many of these women go to university where they learn every day how to do male-stream thought, how to write male-stream essays, how to compete with men, how to deny they are being harassed while doing so.

There is nothing new in the imagery these women use to dress up their competition: the *femme fatale*. The stereotype comes prefabricated with what Freud referred to as castration anxiety: the dangerous fear of and attraction to the seductress who of course only wants to cut off a man's balls.³ This misogynist icon runs the gamut of historical pop culture from Medusa to Nikita.

There is no surprise that both clans reported encountering online what they called sexual harassment until they "proved" they were the male players' equals or betters. They note that many women who do play do not identify themselves as women because of this harassment. The PMS group put out an invitation for all women players to join their clan but did not receive many replies. They put this down to the harassment, too. But maybe the lack of response is because not all woman who play Quake identify with these women's version of what it is to be constructed as a woman who plays Quake.

I don't. But I do not put any energy into constructing an online identity of myself in terms of a violent networked game. I would rather learn Java. I would rather write a tune. That is me. On occasion, I do not mind a blood thirsty game.⁴ Sometimes it is good to turn on a computer arcade game and shoot things. But it is less good to believe that as a woman, one can gain respect in the virtual world because one can act like a man, i.e. can shoot a virtual gun, i.e. can pound a keyboard very quickly. What if one is a woman in Cyberia without a gun or without a dress? As these online jocks attest, the harassment is palpable. It is hard to be a woman in Cyberia.

*

³There's nothing new in a woman's actions regularly being taken to be *about* a man rather than *for* herself.

⁴ My closest equivalent to a regular gaming experience was with the first "real digital sound" game for the Mac, called *Airborne!*. One has a gun and shoots at descending paratroopers and their transports. These were hardly more than black and white stick figures moving across the screen. Still, the last time I played for any length of time, I had nightmares of invasion for days afterwards. I played less frequently after that. What I remember as the most fun part of the experience was using the game to show a friend that computers could be fun. She had heretofore only used her computer for typing letters and her thesis. Half that pleasure of our limited gaming was in watching each other learn to play, which, along with *Airborne!* included playing more tame things like virtual golf and a mystery called *Deja Vu*. Generally, however, my fun with computers does not come from computer games, but from computer based design.

I was recently asked to join a new Virtual Community.⁵ The promotional email said that I could build a virtual house and interact with virtual neighbors to build this new neighborhood. It sounded very promising. When I got to the web page, I was presented with a description of a man who had just been killed and was virtually bleeding on the sidewalk in front of me. I was dared to look around the site. I looked at the next page that described more of the community for newcomers. There were two images on the page. One was of a 1950s playboy bunny style cocktail waitress and the other was of a stack of chips and playing cards. I was addressed as “buddy.” Somehow, I doubted I would be moving in here. Again, the images of women were stereotypes and the atmosphere was TV style violence; the mall, however, was extensive. This is the frame of the space constructed on the brave new net frontier where anyone can supposedly be anyone and where all voices can be heard. The reality of the case, of course, is that voices can be heard or represented only as long as they all say the same thing. I emailed the company that I would not be coming back to their site: that this was not a “neighborhood” I would choose to move into.⁶ The company has not written back.

*

Throughout this dissertation, I have presented women’s relationship to the Law in terms of our relations to language: that we move within very deliberate frameworks of what can be said, what can be heard and who can speak. The overall conclusion is that from the writings by women we have considered, it is not safe to be a woman and to speak, online or off. As Audrey Lorde states, we must take the risk and speak anyway. Our silence won’t protect us.⁷

By foregrounding conversation both as an issue specific to women’s writing,⁸ and as a site of desire and resistance particular to women’s writing, I have provided a new site for pedagogical and critical considerations of writing by women. Women’s writing demonstrates repeatedly that women can never presume a listener. It foregrounds the desire for, and absence of, a listener. Our texts reflect this desire because we are not heard by those privileged by patriarchy in whose interests it is to keep these voices from being heard even, and perhaps especially, by and among ourselves. This desire for a listener/to be heard is a value unknown in the standard patriarchally privileged forms of critical and

⁵ <http://www.fortunecity.com>

⁶ See Appendix I.

⁷ Audrey Lorde, “Transformation of Silence into Action,” *Sister Outsider*.

⁸ In this dissertation, while I have only presented the fiction of white middle class women, and the theory of some African American and women of color, in my reading since starting the project, I have seen that the same use of conversation as a site of desire and resistance is present in fiction by, for instance, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

pedagogical approaches to the interpretation of texts. Recognize this desire to be heard, and its consequent effects on the construction of identity though, and see what readings evolve. If readings privilege the desire to be heard rather than the privileged Oedipal narrative desire to have it all, our readings will have another paradigm for analysis.

By foregrounding conversation both as an issue specific to women's writing, and as a narrative structure particular to women's writing, this work provides a new site for pedagogical and critical consideration of writing by women. The new readings of *Wuthering Heights* and *To the Lighthouse* presented in this dissertation result from reading these novels from that site.

This project also provides an historical context and feminist perspective through which to read women's relation to the Net: women historically have been deliberately erased from our contributions to computing. The same is happening again as more of us come to the Net. As Woolf's narrative demonstrates, and as the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective asserts, it is only when women recognize each other, speak with each other through the mediation of our (fore)mothers that we can resist this erasure. The Net is only one site of attempted erasure, but the stakes are high in Cyberia and the effects may prove to be very long term. There is an urgency to engage and critique this event scene now.

One way to engage the scene, as this project demonstrates, is to bring feminist thought to bear on systems design for online representation. This project presents one such implementation informed by feminist theory.

Throughout, this project has focused on the hearing of women's voices, to point to the variety of women's voices as constructions of subjectivity.⁹ My hope is that projects such as these which combine feminist theory with practical approaches to the systems we design will contribute to our development of far more enriched environments in which to represent our identities, in which we can connect with each other.

Towards that end, further research on women's identity construction in online texts needs to be done. Since text creation online is far more live and group oriented than offline writing, and since women's identities are so demonstrably shunned in live and immediate responses to those constructions/texts, how we will develop and interact with this media is

⁹ The PMS clan represents a resistant subjectivity only insofar as women using computers for gaming rather than work is largely an anomaly in statistical gendered patterns of computer use. This usage pattern shift may prove to be a more interesting place to consider PMS's contribution to women and computing rather than their constructions of male-defined identities within that space. See, for instance, Deborah Tannen, "Gender Gap in Cyberspace," *Cyber Reader*, as well as Dale Spender, "Women, Power, Cyberspace," *Nattering on the Net*, for gender patterns in types of computer use. Tannen suggests that "Men want to force computers to submit. Women just want computers to work." Spender's work shows the ways in which these attitudes affect a range of concerns for women's computer use, from access to safety.

no small question. Related to this user concern, more women need to be able to consider computer science as part of their education. That cannot be done without research into pedagogical models that support, as Mary Field Belenky might put it, “women’s ways of knowing” with computers and technology. That knowledge can continue to be channeled into AI agent development, where online autonomous agents will increasingly act *in our name*. While I have cited above that women-led AI groups seem more interested in collaborative agent technologies than men-led groups, this observation has not been articulated within the developer community itself. Foregrounding women’s contributions to AI and highlighting where these may well be specifically “women’s” contributions to the field will help demonstrate that women’s relations to science can be interpreted through the specificity of women’s agencies.

This dissertation presents one example of feminist perspectives being brought to engineering practices, resulting in the constructions of new things. Revising the presentation of texts as polyolithic rather than monolithic is an insight located in this dissertation, derived from feminist study of conversation as an issue within women’s writings. The derivation of the class of texts that would be considered “conversational” is a new concept brought forward in this work. The proposal of a new genre – aphoristic conversational texts (what we are calling ConTexts) – is also a unique contribution of this thesis, with implications for the arts and for industry document delivery. More specifically, the use of recursive and aggregate includes and their application to text chunks is a design extension I have proposed for IHTML, as is treating text as *chunks* themselves.

That conversation *is* a formative issue in writing by women is also a unique contribution of this dissertation to feminist literary practice and is the founding principle of this dissertation. Outside this dissertation, the concern for conversation and the listener’s position within text is not considered as a site for theorizing subjectivity or for textual analysis. That *real* conversation is only an issue in women’s writings is the primary insight of this dissertation. Very much related to this concept is that *real* conversation occurs only under duress, when forgiveness is desired. We see this with Cathy and Hareton’s successful conversation at the end of *Wuthering Heights*; we see the seeds of this in Cathy’s attempts to solicit Heathcliff’s forgiveness of her before she dies as an attempt at reunion. We see this as well in Lily’s imagining of Mrs. Ramsay and her desire to reconnect with her even if only imaginatively. Forgiveness (of debt) as the catalyst for real conversation is a viable place for investigation of the effects on the construction of subjectivity in particular. As this dissertation has shown, *real* conversation necessitates the shifting of subject/other positions. Forgiveness as narrative structure foregrounds these

relational dynamics. Based on wide ranging readings both within and without the literary canon, it is plain that the implementation of confessional moments as catalysts to *real* conversation is specific to women's writing.

*

This dissertation presents the blending of feminist theory with feminist engineering practice. Its observations and implementation designs point to potentially new directions in text reading and creating practices. But they also point in a cautionary way to our involvement not only with the soon-to-be but with the now of the very new and very old text related horizons. We need to consider with well informed minds what technologies we may wish to refuse, resituate or reinvent. Each of these three R's are very hard for feminists to effect if feminists are not part of the initial construction of these new systems. As for the systems that are well established, like books, and for genres like novels, by reading through issues like conversation are ways in which we can actively discern and create what the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective describes as the female symbolic. The consequences that stem from a willingness to engage our own agencies and identities as they circulate, not neutrally, but under a female sign, are many, not the least of which may be our own connexions, our own collaborations to fight the Power.

We must read with vigor and implement with fervor to hear each other think.

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Appendix I. Exchanges

Date: Sat, 5 Apr 1997 11:55:51 +0100 (BST)
From: julie@fortunecity.com
Subject: Building a virtual city on the Web
Apparently-To: <mschrae@gulf.csc.UVic.CA>
Status: RO

We're building a free city on the Web.
Just like any other city it has houses, apartments, shops,
parks, a radio station, corrupt city bosses and more. It's
called FortuneCity and you can find us at:

<http://www.fortunecity.com>

We need genuine pioneers - people to move into our free
homes (2 MB of web space) and help enrich the cultural
and social life of what is fast becoming the most vibrant,
cosmopolitan metropolis on the Web. Any community
is only as great as the people who build it, and we
need people with vision and creativity to help make this
city great.

Come and join in the excitement. I'll be happy to meet you
and introduce you to some of our more colourful residents!

See you soon,

Julie Turmill
Tourism Development Officer
FortuneCity Mayor's Office

Date: Sat, 5 Apr 1997 15:59:19 -0700
To: julie@fortunecity.com
From: "m.c. schraefel" <mschrae@uvvm.uvic.ca>
Subject: Re:Building a virtual city on the Web
Cc:
Bcc:
X-Attachments:

i was intrigued by the possibility of an online community, julie, but was surprised by the violent description that was the first thing i saw when i got to your main page.

"he must have been dead
the second he stepped out of the car.

The gun, a .38,
was lying next to Firelli's head, as if
the killer had thrown it at him for good
measure. It shone silver, crisply outlined
in the dark blood that glided along the pavement
to spill into the gutter, soaking the dry leaves gathered
at the curb.

Firelli must have taken a slug

straight to the

heart."

that's really not inviting.

then, on the second page, i'm referred to as "buddy" and the only graphic is of a playboy bunny-esque cigarette girl and gambling chips.

as a woman coming to this page, who or what am i supposed to identify with here?

sorry, i don't want to look any further if what i've seen is more male fantasy.

your unsolicited promo talks of houses and communities.

well, i don't want to move into an environment where you think female stereotypes and violence are a great place to be.

no sale.

m.c. schraefel

Figure A2.2: Scanner advertisement featuring male body builder's arm cradling awards scanner has won.

POWERLOOK out-powers the competition!



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March 1, 1995 - June 30, 1995
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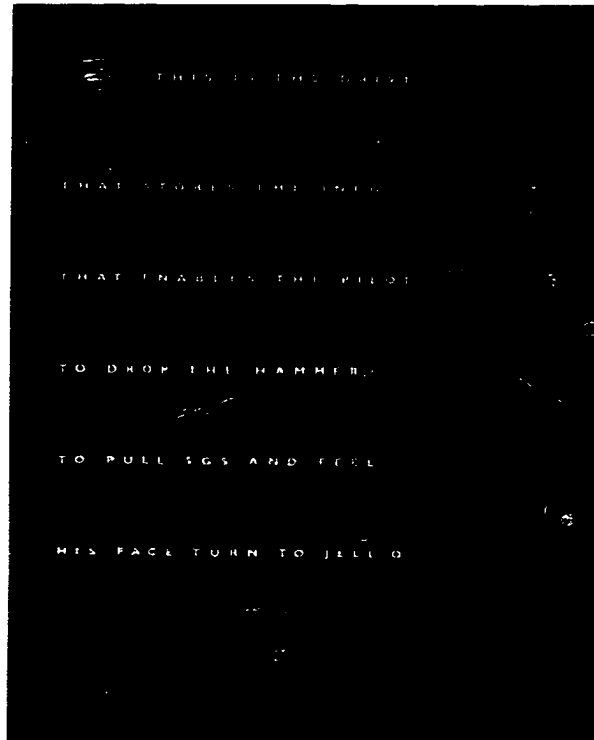
WIRED magazine, July, 1995

Figure A2.3: Monitor advertisement featuring (seemingly) nude female model embracing reflection of herself in monitor



WIRED Magazine, January 1996

Figure A2.4: Hard drive advertisement featuring fighter pilot in inverted dive.



Byte Magazine, January, 1997.

The text in the ad reads:

"This is the drive that stores the info
that enables the pilot to drop the
hammer, to pull 5gs and feel his face
turn to Jell-O"

One of Quantum's main hard drive rivals is
FWB Hammer drives.

VITA

Surname: schraefel Given Names: m.c.

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Winnipeg	1981-1985
University of Victoria	1985-1997

Degrees Awarded:

B.A.(Hons)	University of Winnipeg	1986
M.A.	University of Victoria	1989

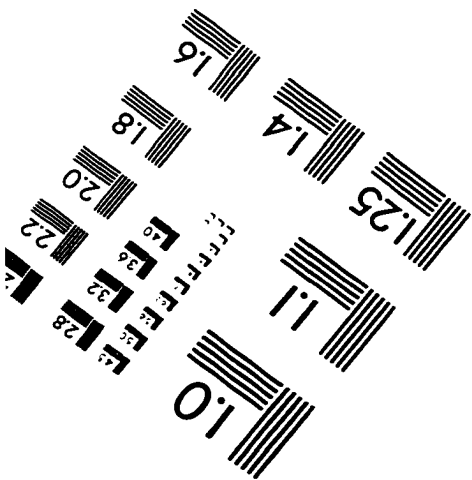
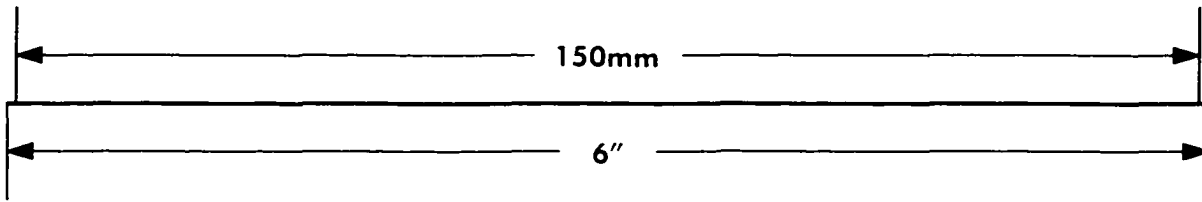
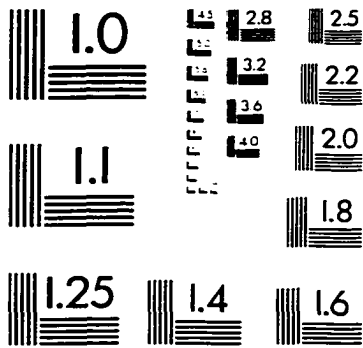
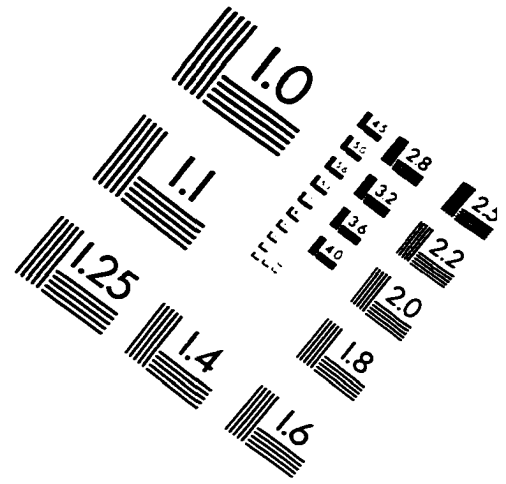
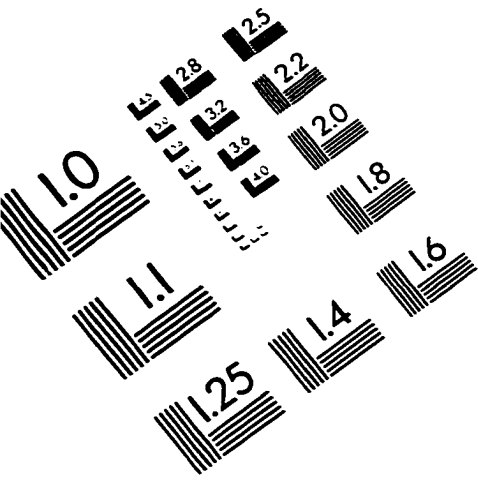
Honors and Awards:

Wighton Fellowship in Laboratory Studies	1997
University of Victoria Research Travel Grants	1996-97
Graduate Dean's Scholarship	1994-95
University of Victoria Women's Changing Images Conference Recognition Award	1993
FACTOR (Foundation for the Assistance of Canadian Talent on Record) Independent Artist Recording Grant	1992
Rocktoria III Concert and Recording Award, CKKQ Victoria.	1991
University of Victoria Ph.D. Teaching Assistantship	1989-92
University of Victoria M.A. Teaching Assistantship	1985-86

Publications:

- "ConTexts: Intensional Document Creation, Retrieval and Distribution," *Proceedings of the 1997 IEEE Pacific Rim Conference on Communications, Computers and Signal Processing (PACRIM '97)*. Victoria, B.C., August 20-22, 1997.
- "A Thousand Papers for ISLIP 97," *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual International Symposium on Languages for Intensional Programming*. Victoria, B.C., May 15-17, 1997.
- "Talking with Antigone or What to do When Hearing Voices in Women's Writing," *Conference Proceedings Free Exchange '93*, University of Calgary, pp. 46-61, March 8-10, 1993.
- "Let it be hid: the Effect of Dancing with the Alien in Shakespeare's *Othello*," *Conference Proceedings Free Exchange '92*, University of Calgary, pp. 34-51, March 12-14, 1992.
- "Which Way to the Women's room: Space in the Writings of Virginia Woolf," *Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Conference 1989*, University of British Columbia, pp. 13-24, February 3-5, 1989.
- Elle-même: the Place of Woman in the Discourse of Jacques Derrida*. (MA Thesis) Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, c1988.

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