

Gynoconstruction; a Gyno-Space and a Gyno-Center of Her Own: Re-Viewing the Deconstructive Essence of Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism

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Abstract

This paper examines the controversial relationship between feminist literary criticism and deconstruction theory. While acknowledging feminist criticism's recent alliance with deconstruction --in order to share a position of theoretico-political prestige-- this study argues against the charge that the deconstructive essence of feminist criticism is evidence of its genuine indebtedness to deconstruction. The central aim of the study is to show that, rather than being a product of deconstruction, such a deconstructive nature is pre-Derridean and, like deconstruction, is rooted into earlier traditions that performed the radical reassessment of Western thought and philosophy. The analysis is based upon tracing a pre-Derridean deconstructive pattern in feminist criticism to show that, since the early stages of its development, feminist criticism recruited three major deconstructive steps for its aim of dismantling the sexist biases which govern a literary and a critical text: 1) identifying the hierarchical binaries (man/woman) it contains, where one term (man) is promoted at the expense of the other (woman), 2) locating the logocentric assumption of the hierarchy (man), and 3) reversing the hierarchy to displace the logocenter and replace it with the supplementary and marginal (woman). It turns out that feminist criticism aims at eradicating the male-center in masculine literary space to replace it with a 'gyno-center' in a genuinely recreated

'gyno-space', an attitude called 'gynoconstruction', to distinguish a positive, affirmative, (re-)constructive, and reformist feminist criticism from a negative, invalidating, non-affirmative, and detonating deconstruction.

Introduction

"I write only what I feel strongly about; and that, at the present, is the relation between men and women. After all, it is the problem of today, the establishment of new relation or the adjustment of the old one, between men and women." D. H. Lawrence (in Worthen, 50)

"The arrogance of believing ourselves at the center", Adrienne Rich (Rich 1984, 223)

When Adrienne Rich, a poet and a feminist critic considered a major opponent to deconstruction, presents the problem of women (authors) as that of *believing* themselves at the *center*, she brings to the surface the issue of the relation of both feminism and deconstruction. 'Belief' and 'center' are essential domains in deconstruction, pertaining to the authority of the mind and validity of 'truth', the so-called *logocentrism*. And since this statement represents women's recognition of logocentrism, implying a proposed change, it is therefore feminist. Rich's argument is recent. D. H. Lawrence, however, underlined such recognition many years earlier and, in a letter to D. Gurnett on 9 May 1913, presented the proposed change as that of the *establishment* of (a) new relation between men and women or the *adjustment* of the old one. It is the difference between establishing a new relation and adjusting the old one that distinguishes feminist criticism and deconstruction.

One of the main developments in the study of literature in the twentieth century has been the emergence of feminist criticism, which developed along with feminism, the woman's movement, which examines and challenges the social and ideological practices responsible for gender inequality against women who, consequently, occupy an inferior position in society. The basic criteria for feminism is that gender (cultural sexual identity), not sex (biological sexual identity), founded systematic and institutionalized injustice against women; the social may misinterpret/misuse the biological for different reasons, mainly matters of power and dominance in discourse and politics, a patriarchal culture that generously assigns spacious fields for men and suppresses and marginalizes the space for women and their creativity. Feminist criticism, a major tool of feminism, examines how those cultural practices are reflected in or shape literary and critical texts, and traces them within the domains of writing, reading, and evaluation. It targets the perception of gender (images of women) that a literary text offers, whose perception (man's or woman's) constructs these images, and how these texts are read and evaluated and by whom. In addition to re-viewing literary history to reexamine male representations of women and the social contexts of those presentations, a thematic reading of the 'images of women' in male-authored texts,¹ feminist

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Hence, this approach identified a number of stereotypes of women celebrated in male-authored texts: sexual object (Jouissance), physically weak, second sex, intellectually incompetent, uncompetitive, housekeeper, home girl, prisoner of man's dreams, receiver or provided, woman as angel, not maker of decisions, and man's server (Conklin; Broverman et al; Maccoby and Jacklin; Richardson and Taylor; Richardson)

criticism also attacks the exclusively masculine history of literature and calls for a more comprehensive literary history, which includes invisible, neglected, marginalized, and supplemented female authors.

Deconstruction, on the other hand, is a philosophical theory which originated in France in the late 1960s in the writings of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, its chief proponent. Deconstruction denotes a particular practice in reading and, thereby, a method of analytical inquiry which undermines the logic of binary opposition within texts. Deconstruction developed a method to challenge the explanatory value of these oppositions, in which one term is promoted at the expense of the other. The second term can be shown to constitute or signal the condition for the first. In other words, deconstruction paid attention to the marginal and that which supplements, arguing that, with hierarchized oppositions, the margin enables the rest. Therefore, the marginal or supplementary can be re-read as the controlling 'center'; the supplement re-centers that which it supplements, and having a supplement is a sign of inadequacy, partiality, and incompleteness (Culler). By bringing the supplementary and marginal to the surface, deconstruction has opened the way for radical studies of the politics of discourse, by which a text validates its assumptions and dominates, marginalizes, distorts, or vanishes 'other' assumptions. Deconstruction works according to three steps. First, it reveals the binary opposition and the hierarchy that governs it. Second, it reverses the hierarchy. Third, it displaces the controlling term of the opposition and replaces it with the marginal and supplementary. As Raman Selden puts it,

deconstructive reading “begins by noting the hierarchy, proceeds to reverse it, and finally resists the assertion of the new hierarchy by displacing the second term from a position of superiority too... Deconstruction can begin when we locate the moment when a text transgresses the laws it appears to set up for itself. At this point texts go to pieces, so to speak” (Selden, 90). So, deconstruction is *detonating*, annihilating, and, once started, it never stops.

But what is the relevance of deconstructive principles to feminist literary criticism? Deconstructing a male/masculine text means in part recovering the woman’s voice in it. Paying attention to the marginalization, projection, and abjection of women in the text is part of the resistance to its controlling discourse, the masculine voice. In the case of feminist criticism, the object of deconstructive reading is to dismantle the patriarchal processes that form and naturalize gendered opposition between male and female in society and culture, and which inevitably find their ways in literary and critical works. As Maggie Humm puts it, feminist deconstruction focuses “on those moments in books when such oppositions are seen to be in contradiction”, and demonstrates that these oppositions “are constructions – are not natural or innate to language and meaning ” and “appear true or natural only because their *process* of representation, their coming into language, is effaced and made invisible by culture” (Humm, 146). In fact, both deconstruction and feminist criticism share the attack against universal values that dominate discourse and share the attempt to “examine literary texts and social texts, not only in terms of what these texts *describe*, but in terms of what they do to *hide*

their own ideologies” (Humm, 135). So the deconstructive method is essential to feminist criticism. But the question is whether this method existed earlier than deconstruction, or whether feminists waited Derrida to develop it.

The relation between feminist literary theory and deconstruction started to occupy considerable space recently. Ellen T. Armour sums up what has already been done in that regard by, first, acknowledging a “a general debt to Derrida’s work”:

Feminist theorists willingly credit Derrida with acute exposure of the partiality of western metaphysics’ claim to universality. Similarly, they credit him with developing strategies to undercut its master ‘text’, strategies they want to appropriate for feminist projects.

And, second, she highlights the dispute between the two, asserting that feminists “argue that Derrida’s own explicit considerations of feminist issues... [and his] discussions of the place of feminism and its strategies on the contemporary political scene are dismissed as anti-feminist” and that Derrida’s “attempts to think or write from the place of woman are rejected as yet another instance of a man’s appropriation of women’s voices” (Armour 1997a, 193). The connection between feminism and deconstruction is marked by anti-feminist attitudes on the part of male deconstructionists. Peggy Kamuf argues that both movements “designate sites of... ongoing ‘theory wars’,” the result being that “a certain trivialization has worked to prevent an understanding of what is at stake between them”, asserting that it is a

matter of “politics of envy or jealousy” (Kamuf, 104-5). The relation between the two surfaced in a context of competition. Within the same endeavor, and in his discussion of how feminism attached itself to deconstruction, Bernard Duyfhuizen reveals male deconstruction critics’ sexist marginalizing of women’s place in a male-dominated deconstruction theory, when the need for a prestigious and powerful position made feminists turn to deconstruction more often than deconstructionists have turned to feminism (Duyfhuizen, 175; 181).

Gayatri Spivak, one of the most persuasive champions of a few feminists who criticized the generalization that feminism is indebted to deconstruction, once asked: “Can Derrida’s critique [of logocentrism, phallogocentrism, and phallogocentrism] provide us a network of concept metaphors that does not appropriate or displace the figure of woman?”; she acknowledged that “deconstruction is illuminating as a critique of phallogocentrism... is convincing as an argument against the... phallogocentric discourse”, finding however that “as a feminist practice itself, it is caught on the other side of sexual difference... *sexual difference is thought, sexual differential* between ‘man’ and ‘woman’ remains irreducible” (Spivak 170; 184). Hence, deconstruction is male. Jane Flax perceives feminism in the light of the larger context of the radical transformation that Western culture and philosophy underwent. Asserting that “psychoanalysis, feminist

theory, and postmodern philosophy” are the “three kinds of thinking that best present (and represent) our own time”, she claims that “these ways of thinking... offer ideas and insights that are only possible because of the breakdown of Enlightenment beliefs” as they reconsider “how to understand and (re-)constitute the self, gender, knowledge, social relations and culture” (Flax, 621-2). Flax brings feminist theory as an equal partner in the reshaping of modern thought, along with deconstruction and psychoanalysis. In fact, feminist criticism should be seen as a postmodern theory, on equal footage with deconstruction, both of which continue a line of thought based on a skeptic philosophical tradition that reassessed widely shared categories of social meaning in Western culture. Flax concentrates on the modern proponents of such change: Freud’s ideas about the anxieties of sexual difference, Marx’s ideas of the sexual division of labor, French feminists’ investigation of the chains of signification in language, and Michael Foucault’s investigation of the relation between sexuality, language, and power. However, this tradition might be traced back to older roots in Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Descartes, David Hume, Emanuel Kant, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Fredric Nietzsche, Carl Marx, and Sigmund Freud.²

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A skeptic tradition that questioned the validity of some universal cultural values and highlighted the binary structure of Western culture might be

This paper traces the deconstructive nature that permeates the development and establishment of feminist

= traced back to the seventeenth century. It possibly began with John Locke's realism, passed through Kant's idealism, Husserl's phenomenology, Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism, Heidegger's and Gadamar's hermeneutics, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and Derrida's deconstruction. This tradition is associated with the attempt to legitimize and justify a trend of chaos, reassessing meaning, causality, reason, and knowledge at large, hence refusing the taken-for-granted universal and unquestioned trustworthiness of the authority of reason in interpreting 'truth', 'being', and 'reality', an authority Derrida calls *logocentrism*. Thomas Hobbes, Locke and David Hume, the champions of 'empirical realism', started such doubt of logocentrism. Locke, in *Human Understanding* (1690), argued, long before Ferdinand de Saussure, that the relation between sounds (words) and meanings is arbitrary, otherwise there should have been one human language. Locke's concept of the 'tabula rasa' meant that the mind relies upon impressions, through the senses, which lack general organizing rules to govern the logic of those impressions.

Emanuel Kant also highlighted the 'contamination' that may affect 'truth', because of misconception and false judgments and which hence renders a mind that plays freely and individually, another case of unquestioned logocentrism. Nietzsche's interest in the etymology of words can also be seen as a precursor for Derrida's concept of delay (deferral), although in Nietzsche's case that was an attempt to stabilize and meaning, contrary to Derrida's aim of proving its dissemination. Edmund Husserl, the major proponent of hermeneutics, despite his extreme idealism, is also a philosopher of skepticism who differentiated between the 'mind' and the 'willing mind'. Hermeneutics asserted that 'being' precedes language, though 'being' can be only linguistically recognized. Heidegger, for example, believed that it is only in language (poetry) that things are firstly named; that is, 'being' can be actualized only after linguistic consciousness. Thus he deconstructed the universal idea that meaning precedes language, and hence provided the basis for Derrida's concepts of presence, absence, difference, deferral, and free-play. Heidegger also asserted that 'being' can only be recognized in language (the house of 'being'), and that only those who think in and create language are the owners of that house, a proposition that possibly provided Derrida with his idea of the death of the author, which is also related to the death of Nietzsche's god.

Such is a Western humanist tradition that places the individual at the center of any conception of reality and attacks the universality of all values, arguing that it is the individual's experience which determines reality (truth). And this humanist tradition culminates in Descartes' famous dictum 'I think therefore I am', and continues through Freud's deconstruction of the traditional notion of the self, his perception of the binary structure of the conscious/unconscious and his consideration of the 'deviant' an essential component in defining the 'normal'. The ultimatum comes in Derrida's attack against logocentrism: deconstruction (For fuller discussions see the following: Harrison; Stewart; Hofstadter and Kuhns; Bernet, Kern, and Marbach; Madsen; Riddel).

criticism since its early beginnings (as presented by Virginia Woolf) to show, meanwhile, that the feminist later use of deconstruction came to strengthen or to aid the earlier deconstructive method it developed in the context of the radical *zeitgeist* that attempted the genuine reassessment of Western thought and philosophy in the late nineteenth century and earlier. It rejects the proximity of feminist criticism to deconstruction, since many are those who took for granted that feminist criticism is indebted to Derridean strategies and insights and, therefore, distinguishes between deconstruction and having a deconstructive nature. It argues that feminist criticism is deconstructive in nature, meaning that it uses a deconstructive tripartite method which 1) identifies a hierarchical binary opposition, 2) locates the center of that hierarchy, and 3) attacks the illogic of the hierarchy to reverse it and replace its logocenter with the marginal and supplementary. But having a deconstructive nature does not mean that feminist criticism is a product of deconstruction. It started before deconstruction although it joined/used deconstruction when the latter became fashionable and influential, to gain strength and share theoretical/political prestige.

Gynoconstruction: the recognition of difference

At the beginning there was *a recognition of difference*. In 1929, Virginia Woolf, the founding mother of the modern feminist debate and inquiry, stood up and initiated a feminist speech different from man's. In her canonical *A Room of One's Own*, the first *modern* work of feminist literary criticism and, in her anecdotal essay "Shakespeare's Sister", a part and parcel of *A Room of*

One's Own, she spoke out so bluntly, responded to Shakespeare and the dominant masculine critical discourse, and laid the foundation for a witty, sarcastic, polite, and moral critique of such a patriarchal ideology. She began the 'recognition of difference'. In fact, *A Room of One's Own* is the basis of modern feminist literary and critical thought and is thus read in detail here.

Asked to lecture on 'women and fiction', Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own*. The recognition of difference begins as she first analyses what it means to talk about 'women and fiction': 1) "women and what they are like" in fiction, 2) "women and the fiction they write", 3) "women and the fiction that is written about them", or all three mixed together? (Woolf 1929, 3). From the onset, Woolf's deconstructive approach makes itself felt. She begins by highlighting bias:

When a subject is highly controversial-- and any question about sex is that-- *one* cannot hope to tell the truth. *One* can only show how *one* came to hold whatever opinion *one* does hold. *One* can only give *one's* audience the chance of drawing their conclusions as they observe the *limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies* of the speaker... I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence; Oxbridge is an invention; so is Fernham; 'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. (My Italics, Woolf 1929, 4).

She terminates the conventional masculine center of discourse by the use of the gender-free term ‘one’, and murders established phallic centers such as ‘Oxbridge’ and ‘Fernham’. The killing culminates in vanishing the pronoun ‘I’ and, thus, opens all existing discourses for a free play of interpretation and re-interpretation; call it revision or ‘deconstruction’, if you may. The difference to be recognized is identified:

Instantly a man’s figure rose to intercept me...
His face expressed horror and indignation... he
was a beadle; I was a woman... Only the Fellows
and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the
place for me...(Woolf 1929, 6).

The opposition is between man and woman, the basis upon which men protected their position as ‘Fellows’ and ‘Scholars’, or centers of truth and power “for 300 hundred years in succession” and denied woman her chance for being a controlling center: “they had sent my little fish into hiding”. (Woolf 1929, 6). And the irony continues as her entry into the library means “[T]hat a famous library has been cursed by a woman”. (Woolf 1929, 8)

Having clarified the opposition and the center upon which its hierarchy is established, she goes on detailing the reasons and consequences of that bias. Their “reprehensible poverty”, she argues, is a major cause of women’s inferior place in society and a reason for which they had been denied access to education; had women learned the “art of making money”, they would have established fellowships and scholarships of their own and “the subject of our talk might have been archaeology,

botany, anthropology, physics, the nature of the atom, mathematics, astronomy, relativity, geography.” (Woolf 1929, 21) Women were denied access to the education men had. Still, however, the solution is not by including women into the masculine educational institution: “I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be *locked in*”. (My italics, Woolf 1929, 24). Women need to have a circle of their own, for they are locked out of men’s circle, and to be let in means being imprisoned ‘locked in’, for the structures of power and authority in men’s discourse have been strongly, perhaps permanently, founded. Women have been included in man’s circle only to maintain his superior position at the center: “Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.” (Woolf 1929, 35) And this image of vision is further developed, making visible Woolf’s idea that women should have their own independent circle; that is, not to be locked in, nor out. Women have been used as reflections for man’s criticism when men have secured themselves a place off that critical act and, therefore, if women were to practice criticism—for them an impossible activity—they will need to have man replace them in the mirror:

And it serves to explain how restless they are under her criticism; how impossible it is for her to say to them this book is bad, this picture is feeble, or whatever it may be, without giving far more pain and rousing far more anger than a man would do who gave the same criticism. For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-

glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished....
 The looking-glass vision is of supreme
 importance... Take it away and man may die.
 (My italics, Woolf 1929, 36).³

Clearly, Woolf is after eliminating man, the center of the masculine circle of literary and critical discourse.

This culminates in questioning man's control over literary discourse for she wonders why men in, for example, Shakespeare's time exclusively dominated the literary scene: "For it is a perennial puzzle why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet" (Woolf 1929, 43). Man had the say in that discourse when "women had no existence save in the fiction written by men" and, hence, "[I]maginatively, she is of the highest importance, practically, she is completely insignificant"; that is:

She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction... Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely

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The visionary imagery of glasses and mirrors is significantly repeated in Woolf's writings. She uses it in *To the Lighthouse* as a representation of the duality or binary opposition of the sexes: "[T]hat dream, then, of sharing, completing, finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but a surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath... The mirror was broken" (Woolf 1981, 125). And in *Between the Acts*, Woolf makes Miss La Trobe hold up a mirror on stage to reflect past history that is still influential in shaping present suppression of women (Woolf 1987, 136).

spell, and was the property of her husband.
(Woolf 1929, 45- 6).

She not only attacks man's representation of woman but also his denying her a chance to acquire a leading position in the republic of letters. The Bishop, a patriarchal symbol, says: "it was impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare... Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare." (Woolf 1929, 48). Woolf responds: "Let me imagine... what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith" who was "extraordinarily gifted" and "as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was". (Woolf 1929, 48; 49). Having a taste for the theater, like her brother, she would have wanted to act, and on going to theater "Men laughed in her face" and the manager, Nick Greene, belittled her saying "no woman... could possibly be an actress". (Woolf 1929, 50). The inevitable conclusion is that "any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage... half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at." (Woolf 1929, 50-1). Woolf here anticipates much of what later scholarship in the field of psychoanalysis and feminist literary study has uncovered, particularly regarding the effect of patriarchal oppression on women's images of themselves in their autobiographical fictional writing.

The lack of female authorial voices is not because of female biology. Rather, Woolf asserts, it is because of culture:

Yet a genius of a sort must have existed among women... But certainly it never got itself on to paper. When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Bronte. (Woolf 1929, 50-1)

Woolf closes by addressing women saying that they must get "rooms of our own" and that they must *act* and develop: "the habit of freedom and courage to *write* exactly what we *think*"; and she promises us "then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often put down." (My italics, Woolf 1929, 117-8). Here Woolf might be alluding to Shakespeare who once wrote: "Do You Know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak" (*As You Like It*, III, ii, 250-1). Shakespeare's proposition is overloaded with serious questions which need be deconstructed. It is not clear whether he is defending women or justifying his superior position as a male, for he gives himself the right to speak on behalf of women and while it seems that he asserts women's ability to think and therefore speak, his statement seems to suggest that unlike women's speaking as a result of their thinking, men's thinking leads to action (writing), thereby playing on the cultural distinction between deeds and words; woman (speech) turns out to be inferior to man (deeds, writing). To push the argument

a little further, Shakespeare seems to be arguing that women never thought and never wrote as manifested by the lack of a woman's text up to his time. In fact Woolf's deconstruction of Shakespeare may serve to introduce the relation between feminist criticism and deconstruction. It is taken here as an entry into what Peggy Kamuf considered "the all-too-bewildering and perhaps monstrous topic of 'deconstruction and feminism'" (Kamuf, p. 104). Shakespeare's 'do you know I'm a woman?' is pretty ironic here because any woman can safely say 'I know you are not'. Nonetheless, Shakespeare's interrogative entails that there could be a counter interrogative: 'do you know I'm a man?' However, this last one seems redundant because it is celebrated as the norm while the first is the exception. In addition, it is also ironic that, to defend her, a man assumes the position of a woman and speaks on her behalf, being the leader of the argument of both man and woman. Shakespeare's statement that 'I am a woman, when I *think* I must *speak*' has been validated by Woolf, since it is uttered by a woman, and the ambiguity in Shakespeare's text is neutralized as 'to speak' is identified with 'to write' and 'writing' as 'action'; Woolf has thus deconstructed Shakespeare, since "deconstructive reading tries to bring out the logic of the text's language as opposed to the logic of the author's claims. It will tease out the text's implied presuppositions and point out the (inevitable) contradictions in them" (Jefferson and Robey, 118).⁴

⁴ To the best of my knowledge, this aspect about Woolf's deconstruction of Shakespeare in "Shakespeare's Sister" has not yet received critics' attention.

Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and its provocative essay "Shakespeare's Sister" adopt essential feminist questions. The main concern, however, is why women have never had a/the say (a/the considerable space) in the literary scene. It is definitely not creative, intellectual, or biological inferiority. Rather, it is the lack of space in a male dominated sphere. The word 'room' in the title is overloaded with sense. It suggests a place, a space, a location, and a position. It is not a *house* but a private domain in or a *center* of the house; self-protected and contained, secure, and dependent --though imprisoning, secluded, and isolated. Those who understated the work and the title of Woolf, such as A.J. Moody and the Leavises, surely misunderstood the poetics of such idea of space and location, which inspired many discussions by later feminists.⁵ In fact, Woolf managed to initiate a clearly well-defined feminist reading strategy which questions marginalization and neglect of female authors in masculine literary history, attacks the sexist presentations of women in literary and critical texts, and celebrates the merits of women's texts and the distinctions of their style. Long before the establishment of Derrida's deconstruction, Woolf developed a deconstructive approach which basically highlights the hierarchical binary opposition of man and woman in literature and criticism, identifies the logocenter of that

⁵ A. J. Moody, Mary Eagleton argues, "is in the minority when he objects that 'the title has enjoyed a fame rather beyond the intrinsic merits of the work' (Woolf's most conspicuous antagonists, the Leavises, found *Room* too flimsy to warrant their close attention)" Eagleton 1991, 26). Eagleton refers also to Stubbs's study of the nineteenth-century novel (Stubbs).

opposition, and reveals and attacks its partiality and illogic, hence opening the way for the silenced voice of the female to come to the fore. Important in this deconstructive approach is Woolf's notions of space, location and positionality, which have become major domains for the feminist critics who followed her.

Following the tradition set by Woolf, and earlier than Jacques Derrida, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) continued the deconstructive process. Galloping across culture, history, and sociology and using biological, Marxist, psychological, and literary approaches, she explains why women are considered 'the second sex', a self-explanatory title, showing how 'woman' has always been *second*, and hence *secondary*, to 'man'. Highlighting the binary structure of the relation between the sexes and placing 'woman' as the 'other', she argues that 'man' has always had a positive nature as the norm for humanity while 'woman' had a negative nature as the second/ary and the *other* to the norm (Beauvoir, 16). Defined in relation to 'man', 'woman' is what 'man' is not, for, de Beauvoir asserts, men project on the feminine whatever their identity needs for its construction and, consequently, woman as represented by men: "has a double and deceptive image... She incarnates all moral values from good to evil, and their opposites... he projects upon her what he desires and what he fears, what he loves and what he hates" (Beauvoir, 229). This is not unlike Woolf's sentiment (Woolf, 1929, 50-1) quoted above. Woman becomes the imagery location of male dreams, idealizations, and fears: nature, beauty, purity, goodness, evil, corruption and death, and woman gets infected with such social ailments

and consequently “accepts being defined as the Other” (Beauvoir, 187; 254).⁶ De Beauvoir’s literary criticism shows up in a short chapter in *The Second Sex*, dealing with ‘the myth of woman in five authors’, where she reveals how, in their works, Claudel, Lawrence, and Breton describe certain collective myths of women as Flesh, Nature, and Muse, arguing that women in literature act as “compensation myths” that are rooted in the “*general view*” of biology-bound cultural perceptions of women (Beauvoir, 229). It is important to notice here that de Beauvoir’s method relies on, among many, Marxism and psychoanalysis and not on Derrida’s deconstruction, which was not yet established.⁷ She questions the sexist logocentric perceptions of the society and argues that the hierarchy of the opposition is not innate or natural but rather culturally made when cultural identity is based on attributing to the identified qualities that are essentially the opposite of the attributes of the ‘other’. That is, ‘woman’ is the marginal and the supplement upon which the identity of ‘man’ relies and the universal truth that ‘man’ is superior and ‘woman’ inferior does not validate itself. In fact this reveals a deconstructive method because de Beauvoir’s argument

⁶ De Beauvoir paid the price for her genuinely pungent feminist criticism; the English Department at Barnard refused to renew her contract, and hence the combination of being intellectually talented and institutionally marginal is one characteristic of the history of women.

⁷ De Beauvoir gathers facts and myths from psychology, history, biology, and literature including man-made myths from prehistory to the suffrage, in which women are passive. She bases her study on psychoanalysis and Marxism, arguing that Freud’s models are deterministic and Fredric Engel’s analysis of capitalism and the economic oppression of women is lacking.

pinpoints a hierarchical binary opposition between ‘man’ and ‘woman’, which is basic for the positive identity and the superiority of the *first sex* (and negative identity and inferiority of the *second*). She argues that the relations between men and women are power relations and that sexuality enforces men’s social power. But how can this power of sexuality be overcome?

Betty Friedan, a journalist and a pioneer of American feminism who founded the National Organization of Women (NOW), has responded to de Beauvoir’s question in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), ‘the problem that has no name’. The solution she offers women is “to postpone present pleasure for future goals” (Friedan, 214). This “asexuality”, Humm argues, is a lacking answer for that problem which has no name (Humm, 42). But it is important to see that Friedan here is trying to neutralize women’s sexual relationship with men, a relationship she finds responsible for women’s subordinate roles in masculine culture, an act that recalls de Beauvoir’s argument on the relation between power and sexuality. She aims at abolishing gender difference: “she must learn to compete, then, not as a woman, but as a human being” (Friedan, 328). In other words, she wants to eradicate the male-center from a woman’s life. Hence she offers another partner saying that a woman’s ideal role is “a life-long commitment to an art” (Friedan, 302). Unlike man, whose identity is based upon neutralizing hers and to whom she has to belong, art opens the way for her to prove her identity; it belongs to her and the more committed to it she is, the more it will support her identity. She will be the center of that relation, rather than its supplement or margin. Trying to identify the

mystique, Mary Ellmann, in *Thinking About Women* (1968), reviews the politics of gendered image-making in the works of Matthew Arnold, James Joyce, Sigmund Freud, and Norman Mailer, who commonly ascribe images of instability, spirituality, and passivity only to women, by building on the power of sexuality, an attitude she, like Woolf, detects also in masculine criticism: "books by women are treated as though they themselves are women, and criticism embarks... upon an intellectual measuring of busts and hips" (in Taylor, 40). She calls this kind of criticism -- in which male critics work hardest to deny, ignore, or marginalize women's artistic achievement -- "phallic" and describes it saying: "The working rule: blame something written by a woman as *shrill*, praise something as not shrill" (Ellmann, 27-54). In fact, Ellmann's distinction between 'shrill' and 'not shrill' underlines the difference between the normal (male writing) and the abnormal (woman's writing), a distinction that is similar to de Beauvoir's idea of the 'second sex' and to Woolf's earlier criticism of male critics' anti-feminist readings of female writing. Nonetheless, the deconstructive trace is evident in Ellmann's attention to the binary opposition that governs the relation between man's and woman's writing, a trace which links her with Woolf, rather than Derrida.

Based on de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, the ultimate realization of the role sexist literary representation of women played in empowering masculine ideology comes in Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), a revealing title that alludes to the role power structures in society and culture play in validating the ideology of the ruling master of discourse, hence opening the way for the

marginal, supplementary, and oppressed to be accounted for. Millett attacks highly esteemed male writers and highlights their obsessively misogynistic literary representations of women as whores or virgins, chaste or licentious, images that function to justify men's sexual authority and distort female characters while associating deviance with 'femininity' (Millett, 45). Highlighting point of view, she asserts that the narrative structures of fiction represent the structures of masculine culture, and that male characters represent authorial 'surrogate' voices (Millett, 16). Millett largely discusses Freud as the proponent of a reactionary theory of sexuality that aims at sustaining masculine dominance and naturalizing women's inferiority.⁸ She finds the condition for feminism to be in "true reeducation", which reveals her deconstructive approach that aims at killing male-centered educational institutions to reestablish them gender-free, a proposition that reminds of Woolf's visit to the university and the library in *A Room of One's Own* (Millett, 363).

To sum up, de Beauvoir, Millet, Friedan, and Ellmann compare images of women with actual social conditions, the female as culturally fabricated by man. The titles of their books are all about sex: how woman's social status is sexually determined, a matter they illustrate with literary examples that make misogyny attractive and male values the valid human condition. These writers have created a new form of feminist criticism, mixing

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For more on the fame Millett generated through her attack against Freud, see (Mitchell, xv).

biological, psychological, historical, and literary examples, altering hence the very experience of reading. Deconstructive mechanisms lie at the heart of their argument. Their review of *phallic* writing represents a "break with the fathers" (Humm, 9), which reopens masculine representations of women to a process of 're-reading', a deconstruction of phallogocentric thinking. And being a reaction against highly esteemed male authors, they represent a revolution against the male-center, thereby invalidating the false hierarchy of male authorship that inferiorizes the 'other' to *superiorize* the self. In addition, by including ignored issues in such texts and previously unacknowledged (marginal, supplementary) women authors, they have recreated criticism anew with a substitute female center, a female critic. Trained in fields other than literature -- the backgrounds of de Beauvoir and Millett being in education and philosophy and Friedan's in journalism -- they have left to other feminist critics the task of literary study proper, though this reveals the comprehensiveness of their feminist criticism and its being rooted into the (pre-)nineteenth-century radical *zeitgeist* by which all disciplines underwent a wave of reassessment.

The deconstructive feminist process continued in the seventies, invalidating particular centers, with more concern about theory. Feminist critics have revolted against patriarchal myth criticism -- as presented by William Empson, Northrop Frye, and Harold Bloom --, and sought to reveal male authors' sexist mythical adaptations and establish a feminine mythology drawn from female writers and a corresponding feminist myth criticism, matters they found ignored in masculine myth

criticism (for example Morris, 118-20). They have identified a relationship between women's writing and certain myths and highlighted the sexist mythical representations of women in male-authored literary texts as well as the sexism in myth criticism that ignores women's distinctive adaptations and use of mythology. In *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (1973), Mary Daly argues that women in mythology are well documented but generally from male perspectives (Daly 1973, 44-68). Daly also asserts that myth criticism is oppressive to women:

It should be noted that the god Method is in fact a subordinate deity, serving Higher Powers. These are social and cultural institutions whose survival depends on the classification of disruptive and disturbing information as nondata. Under patriarchy, Method has wiped out women's questions so totally that even women have not been able to hear and formulate our own questions to meet our own experiences. Women have been unable even to experience our own experience (Daly 1973, 11-2).

Since critical theory is male, it only serves a male god, and stigmatizes the 'other'; therefore, women's 'disruptive and disturbing' questions and perceptions regarding theory are taken as blasphemous revolutions against deity. In *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), Daly tries to clean the field from woman-hating mythology. She asks for replacing patriarchal myths with feminist revisions since the language, symbols, and concepts of Christian myths and other world religions are masculine and, in order to

break with this masculine world, women will need to name their own myths. She finds that literary symbols often make provocative disclosures of the writer's psychological conditions and that these psychological conditions take certain regular archetypal symbolic forms, as in the case of the myth of motherhood in female creativity; mythical mother-daughter bonds are ways of organizing female reality, a new women's ecology which is capable of taking control of a woman-friendly environment. Daly's and her fellow female myth critics' mission has been to attack sexist myths and myth criticism as fields of masculine oppression of women, and to offer an alternative feminist tradition of myth and myth criticism. They have thus shown concern with psychological images of mother-daughter relations and related fertility goddesses myths.⁹ In other words, the matter in feminist myth criticism is that of space and the female's position in that space; that is, the need to liberate female authors and critics from a male-dominated mythology and myth criticism. No wonder then that Daly's main concern is "the place we govern" (Daly

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A successful attempt to be acknowledged in this regard is Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, which explores the ways in which masculine and feminine identities of children are built in connection with the mother figure and in the light of patriarchal myths. While the son is to be brought up in a way that evades his becoming like his mother, the daughter is to emulate her mother, as in the myths of Medusa and Archane and, hence, the psychological oppression of women in literary works is enhanced by adopting oppressed mythical women, that which Chodorow calls the 'reproduction of mothering'. Another example is C. Davidson and E. M. Broner edited book *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*.

1978, 15). Once again, it is evident that Woolf's conception of a space of women's own paved the way for her followers, such as Daly and Adrienne Rich.

Rich's main feminist ideal centers around her idea of the 'politics of location', a reconsideration of the location and position of the female in male-dominated space, and an invention of a space of *her* own, a rewriting or deconstruction of patriarchal culture which she calls 'Re-vision':

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – it is for women more than a chapter of cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we have been drenched we cannot know ourselves (Rich 1971, 35).

This is a very clear message about women's need to recognize their difference.¹⁰ She asserts that mothers have been the main victims of patriarchal repression. As she explains in "Notes Towards the Politics of Location" (1984), women should reject "the sentences that began 'Women have always had an instinct for mothering' or 'Women have always and everywhere been in subjugation to men'" because "'always' blots out what we really need to know: When, where, and under what conditions has the statement been true" (Rich 1984, 214). Hence she attacks the taken-for-granted and universal

¹⁰ These issues are also central in her *On Lies, Secrets, Silence; Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose*; "Notes Towards the Politics of Location"; and earlier in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*.

anti-woman generalizations which constituted the logocenter of male chauvinism, and she, instead, asks for questioning the contexts that generate sexist myth-making against women, to deprive those generalizations of the validity and liability they won over time. By so doing, she opens the way for the substituting feminist argument to replace the logocentric masculine one. In fact, Rich wittily focuses on 'Re-vision' and 'location' as essential domains for feminist criticism. The essence of women's troubles, she claims, is "the arrogance of believing ourselves at the center" (Rich 1984, 223). A better understanding of location, Rich might be suggesting, helps women to achieve a major position in literary and critical discourse: to attack the arrogance of the male who colonized that center, or, indeed, women's need to dominate (be) the center rather than arrogantly believing so. A recognition of the difference between the two states is essential:

I discovered that the woman poet most admired at the time (by men)... was maidenly, elegant, intellectual, discrete. But even in reading these women I was looking in them for the same things I had found in the poetry of men, because I wanted women poets to be the equals of men, and to be equal was still confused with sounding the same... Looking back at poems I wrote before I was twenty-one, I'm startled because beneath the conscious craft are glimpses of the split I even then experienced between the girl who wrote poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationships with men (Rich 1971, 39-40).

This is not unlike Woolf's sentiment that women have been always appreciated as long as and only if they appealed to men, and Woolf's assertion on women's need to recognize the distinctions of their own writing. In other words, this seems a positive response to Woolf's call for women to have a space of their own, to redefine their position. Hence, Rich re-views her own location, maintaining the significance of recognizing the difference, 'to be equal was still confused with sounding the same'. Once carried out, such re-vision, as exemplified in her 'looking back at poems I wrote before I was twenty-one', enables a recognition of the difference that location makes. There are a few locations to be differentiated here: first, whether equality means similarity or, indeed, being equally recognized as different without any pejorative sense; that is, positive distinction; second, living in a male-centered space or in her (woman's/women's) own; third, her place as a woman socially defined in relation to man or one defined in terms of the artistic space she creates and the position she takes in that space. Thus, women must take upon their shoulders the mission of defining themselves in a space they create, a literary and a critical one and which, once established, will rival male-centered spaces.

Reading Adrienne Rich's poem "Frame", Harriet Davidson presents the essence of feminist criticism and writing as that of questioning location and position(ality). Rich provides Davidson with examples of the female's need for defining her space and time with which to associate the self, an act she considers a feminist tendency towards self-assertion. In this regard, Davidson adopts Derrida's concept of 'spacing' and argues that

“[L]ocation entails being some place, not only at the locus of different discourses, but spatially and temporally there” (Davidson, 255). To the contrary, what one finds in feminist theory-- and in Rich’s “Frame” -- is the female’s need for destroying masculine fences that keep her in a male-made *frame*, a deconstructive attitude that aims at freeing the subject from a temporally determined space and, hence, meaning. This initial deconstruction of space and time is essential for overcoming established patriarchal hierarchical locations of women before achieving self-assertion in a genuinely reconstructed gynospace. For example, Rich’s vision of her space in “Frame” implies negative location: “I say I am there”; she refuses to be *here*. She realizes that the condition for her self-assertion is that of getting out of the position and location masculine culture assigned for her. In this case she might be recalling Woolf’s assertion that “as a woman I have no country” (in Rich 1986, 210). Rejecting masculine negative placing of herself has been the essence of the feminist’s reassessment of her location in culture, literature, and literary theory, a prerequisite for re-situating, re-locating, and repositioning herself in these domains.

Similarly, Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* stresses women’s need to create their own space where they would be able to present their own visions of themselves, visions that are not contaminated by the sexism of men’s texts: “that naming our own experience after our own fashion (as well as rejecting whatever does not seem to suit) is the least we can do – and in this society may well be our only tangible sign of personal freedom” (Walker 1984, 82). Walker practices this

utmost freedom as she names and renames. She enlarges definitions of art to include quilt-making, baking, and gardening, and extends the meaning of ‘mother’, whom she defines in terms that transcend the biological mother to other female relatives, neighbors, and women of strength and significance from whom she learned much, particularly from their stories:

Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother’s stories. Only recently did I fully realize this: that through years of listening to my mother’s stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories - like her life – must be recorded (Walker 1984, 240).

The recognition of difference Walker achieves is that her mother’s stories are to be understood along with ‘the manner in which she spoke’, a proposition for recognizing the distinctive style of women’s fiction, which is rooted in the distinctive mothers’ lives, echoing hence Rich’s assertion about the significance of the context in the evaluation of women’s writing.¹¹ And she

¹¹ In fact, Walker’s idea about the distinction between the ways women and men write occupied considerable research. Researchers in linguistics, from Robin Lackoff’s *Language and Woman’s Place* onwards, have examined the assumption that there are sex-related writing strategies and pointed out that men and women do use language in different ways. They argue that representation is based on the ability to represent ourselves (our experience) in language which is inherent within a system of social values. The matter is carried further in relation to literature and literary theory. In *Man Made Language*, Dale Spender describes how the growing body of research on women and language has broadened knowledge about women’s literary

also recognizes that women's fiction and lives are to be recorded to form the potential heritage, tradition, and aesthetic ideal for women's creativity; women would have then established their own space and identified its center: "And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see; or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read" (Walker 1996, 2320). Feminist critics are asked to

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- = representation, and thus aided feminism to understand the way in which sexual power shapes language, in order to describe new potential relationships between gender, language and literature and establish a feminist literary tradition. The title of her book implies a duality in language: that man is the one who made language and is hence the one who controlled it and/or that there is a man-made language and hence there could be woman-made language. This last one has become a central issue for French feminists' attempt to distinguish a feminine text (*écriture féminine*). Nonetheless, Michael Foucault's contribution to this issue is essential. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976) he deals with the progressive effect of language on repressive power, arguing that, since the eighteenth century, sciences have put the human body within observational structures which reinforce past sexual repression and that the revolution that has taken place in the twentieth century does not change those structures but enables people to talk about them openly: "if sex is repressed, that is condemned to prohibition, nonexistence and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression... we are conscious of defying established power, our tone of voice shows that we know that we are being subversive" (Foucault 1976, vol. 1, 6). Hence, the so-called modern freedom to talk about sex is no more than a continuum of traditional "discourse about sex" (Ibid., 23); the case is that: "sex has driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive life... surely no other type of society has ever accumulated – and in such a relatively short span of time – a similar quantity of discourses concerned with sex". (Ibid., 33). In other words, there was no change in the perception of sex but a change in the way we deal with that taboo subject by brining it to the surface and opening the way for discussing its being pejorative, as a "problem of truth" and by which Western society has "become a singularly confessing society." (Ibid., 56; 59). That is a freedom of speech (to speak the truth) and not a freedom of sex.

develop such proposition, established earlier by Woolf, regarding the need to recognize the distinction of a female literary experience and literary tradition --the relationship between women's texts-- which, unlike men's rivalry fathering of texts and anxiety of influence, is a matter of passionate mothering.

In *Literary Women* (1976), Ellen Moers brings to light an ignored tradition of women's creativity, emphasizing the influence of women writers on each other, the interaction between women's texts. Considering a number of female writers she argues:

Each of these gifted writers had her distinctive style; none imitated the others. But their sense of encountering in another woman's voice what they believed was the sound of their own is, I think, something special to literary women"¹²
(Moers, 66).

Moers recognizes the value of the literary intimacy in women's writing as she highlights the warmth with which each regards the other, and which establishes a space/domain the center of which is female experience, to avoid being mystified in the margin of male-centered space. Nonetheless, Moers argues that women's writing incorporates a certain knowledge about repressed and unconscious features of their lives; that is, a location of their gender identity, a matter which Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar address so tactfully in *The Madwoman in*

¹² Among the cases of supportive literary interrelationships, Moers considered those between George Eliot and Harriet Beacher Stowe, Emily Dickinson and Elizabeth Barrett.

the Attic (1979) and *No Man's Land* (1988), both titles of which emphasize notions of space and location, essential domains in feminist criticism. Gilbert and Gubar's main questions are:

Where, then, does the female poet fit in? Does she want to annihilate a 'forefather' or a 'foremother'? What if she can find no models, no precursors? Does she have a muse and what is its sex? (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 47).

As they proceed to answer these questions it turns out that the female poet *fits in* a female tradition; she wants to annihilate a forefather and celebrate a foremother whom she finds a model, a precursor, and a muse. Gilbert and Gubar develop Moers's model and emphasize that women's writing incorporates techniques of evasion, enclosure, disease, madness, and concealment, a proposition made earlier by Woolf, when her discussion of the fate of Judith revealed that because of the tyranny of antifeminist criticism of the sixteenth century, woman *got crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in a lonely cottage*. As Gilbert and Gubar put it:

women writers obsessively create fiercely independent characters who seek to destroy all patriarchal structures... [B]y projecting their rebellious impulses not into their heroines but into mad or monstrous women..., female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the structures of patriarchal society and to reject them (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 77-8).

Elsewhere, they oppose women writers' rebellion and madness to men's rivalry and anxiety of influence, arguing that "the love women writers send forward into the past is, in patriarchal culture, inexorably contaminated by mingled feelings of rivalry and anxiety" (Gilbert and Gubar 1988, 195). While asserting female author's anxiety against a forefather's influence, feminists present the relation between a female author and her foremother, though still in terms of Freud's and Bloom's conception of parentage, as a positive, intimate, and nurturing one, hence maintaining its difference from the male's (Bloomian, Freudian, Oedipal).

The ultimate realization of such approach comes in Elaine Showalter's development of Woolf's interest in a tradition of woman authors -- in connection with notions of space and location --, by recognizing the need for a female critic and a feminist literary theory with its own established tools. She revolts against "a long apprenticeship to the male theoretician", arguing that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Showalter 1986, 130).¹³ In other words, theory represents a privileged space and location. In "Women's Time, Women's Space: Writing the History of Feminist Criticism" she distinguishes between two groups of "pioneering practitioners" of feminist study; first, a group that has "been driven to ask theoretical questions and to accept the modern idea that there can be no practice without theory", and, second, a group that considered the

¹³ Showalter's perception of masculine theory in the poetic space of a house recalls Woolf's 'room', seen earlier as the center of the female's needed house or the domain with which to replace the male-center.

feminist “a little drummer girl who plays go-between in male critical quarrels” (Showalter 1987, 36-7). Showalter’s call for the separation of male and female criticism makes itself felt. She attempts to get the female out of masculine critical space and create a new feminine ‘gynospace’ with an independent female-center. She wittily unites the ideas of time and space, as in the title of her essay, emphasizing that women’s time comes once they have their own space, otherwise they will continue to live in man’s space and time, since (whose) time is determined by (whose) space. In “Towards Feminist Poetics” (1979), she calls for exploring female literary “subcultures”, a practice she calls “gynocriticism”, which would reveal a tradition of women’s authors, since the gynocritic focuses on female author and character and develops tools and methods for study based on female experience, which becomes the authority and the judge; that is, the center of critical discourse (Showalter1986, 131; 118). Nonetheless, for her, ‘gynocriticism’ opposes the negative *traditional* ‘feminist critique’ of male-authored texts, because that critique attacked men’s presentations of women and delayed the recognition of a female literary tradition, that which Woolf called for earlier (Showalter1986, 131). In *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), a title which echoes Woolf’s *A Room of ones Own*, Showalter traces the development of a tradition of women’s fiction from the early nineteenth century to the 1960s and highlights a rich pattern of distinctive female experience in female writers “who were the links in the chain that bound one generation to the next... the continuities in women’s writing”, through their consciousness of their own distinctive craft of fiction

(Showalter 1977/1978, 7). She, nonetheless, documents cases of masculine critical bias against the literature of female authors who are labeled “women first, artists second”, and claims that essentialist pejorative views of female biology generate negative male criticism of women’s writing: “when the Victorians thought of the woman writer, they immediately thought of the female body” (Showalter 1977/1978, 73; 76).

The female body has recovered its positive significance in French feminist theory’s linking of female language and biology. Julia Kristiva, Helen Cixous, Alice Jardine, and Luce Irigaray, who are considered to have allied feminist criticism and deconstruction theory, argue that the structures of understanding are coded in and by language and that the systems of language are structures of power built on internal contradictions which can be sought out and deconstructed. Kristiva attests that conventional meaning is based on the structure of the symbolic order that underlies all human social and cultural institutions, and, hence, revolutionary writing, like sexual politics, is based upon defying that very symbolic order from the inside, a break with and a disruption of the patriarchal symbolic order of language. Kristiva finds that abrupt shifts, ellipsis, breaks, and lack of logical construction in writing represent a break with conventional structures of meaning, a fragmentation of the masculine symbolic order of patriarchal language materialized by a unity between the unconscious and the rhythms of the female body.¹⁴ She draws attention to the

¹⁴ For more on this, see (Kristiva 1977/1980a), see for example, p. 238. See also (Kristiva 1986a, 92). A fuller argument can be found in (Kristiva 1977/1980b)

inability of patriarchal language to suit women's needs and, therefore, to an essential difference in the language of women. Taking a detour from what she considers traditional feminist criticism which adopts women's demand for equal cultural identity and which motivates women to revolt against a hierarchical cultural opposition and attack its masculine logocenter to replace it with a feminine one, Kristiva considers the matter a language issue, where women should ask for equal recognition of their symbolic order (their language), revolt against the male symbolic order, and replace it with their own. Kristiva, then, aimed at restructuring language, the earliest domain and origin of cultural identity. She wants "to detach women from" dominant patriarchal language systems "experienced as foreign... frustrating, mutilating, sacrificial" (Kristiva1986b, 202). In fact, the argument of Kristiva, a student of Roland Barthes, repeats the deconstructive pattern of preceding feminist criticism, as it is underlined by the assertion recognizing the female and feminine in an exclusively masculine-biased language and culture. Her main concern is female identity and feminine language, which, she asserts, can be achieved once the female is freed from the male-oriented symbolic order (language). Clearly, Kristiva's feminist propositions regarding language are influenced by deconstruction.

Nonetheless, the deconstructive nature of feminist criticism meant that feminist critics also attacked deconstruction as a masculine center and replaced it with *gynoconstruction*; and when the two allied, feminist criticism maintained its difference. Alice Jardine's interest in describing feminine language is accompanied

by an essential consideration of the idea of space, for she believes that woman represents a mysterious place in men's knowledge, a place defined as "this other-than-themselves" and which "is almost always a 'space' of some kind... and this space has been coded as *feminine* as *woman*" (Jardine 1985, 15). Jardine calls feminine language *gynesis*, which she defines as "the putting into discourse of 'woman' the valorization of the feminine, woman, and her obligatory, that is historical connotations, as somehow intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing, speaking" (Jardine 1985, 15). For Jardine 'woman' is not a person but a 'writing-effect'; a matter that Toril Moi considered as the textuality of sex - -as reflected in discourse and its structure-- and not the sexuality of the text -- as rendered in misogynistic representations (Moi).¹⁵ However, Jardine remarks that, concerning theory, "[T]he major new directions... over the past two decades" have been "articulated by both men and women" and "Feminism, as a concept, is inherited from the humanist and rationalist eighteenth century... [and] is traditionally about a group of human beings in a

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Nonetheless, this emphasis on a distinctive feminine text is the essence of what French feminists called '*écriture féminine*', meaning feminine writing, a term signifying a particular kind of writing --poetic, non-realist -- which undermines the logic, truths, and definitions of the dominant order; a writing that remains in contact with a feminine libidinal energy and hence opposes the repressive phallic order of social meaning: the symbolic order. However, feminists associated with '*écriture féminine*' have always remained reluctant to give clear definition of it. In this regard, Shoshana Felman asked: "Is it enough to *be* a woman in order to speak as a woman? Is speaking 'as a woman' a fact determined by some biological *condition* or by a strategic, theoretical *position*, by anatomy or by culture? What if 'speaking as a woman' were not a simple 'natural' fact, could not be taken for granted?" (Felman, 3).

history whose identity is defined by the history's representation of sexual decidability" (Jardine 1985, 20-1). Rather than attempting to unite both deconstruction and feminist criticism, as most critics think of her, Jardine is to be understood as trying to achieve recognition for women's distinctive deconstructive achievements. First, she asserts that it is not just men, but also women who articulated new critical directions. Second, she insists that feminism is, rather than a product of deconstruction, a continuity of the eighteenth century rational humanist tradition. Then, the alliance between feminist criticism and deconstruction is to be accounted for from a different angle. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck relate alliance between the feminist criticism and deconstruction to feminist criticism's need for deconstruction's privilege of having 'institutional prestige' (Brodzki and Schenck, 195-6).¹⁶ Feminist criticism right from its evolution and, indeed, before deconstruction, realized and attacked the hierarchical binary opposition which generated gender inequality and sexism in culture, literature, and literary theory and came to celebrate deconstruction only at a later stage, when deconstruction became fashionable and prestigious, to further the validity of its own assumptions and share deconstruction's power.

Irigary, a student of Lacan, focuses on revealing how language, the symbolic system of meaning, is dominated by masculine ideology and attempts to describe a feminine language capable of producing a positive

¹⁶ Brodzki and Schenck refer to the following feminist critics' dialogues with deconstruction: Frances Bartkowski, Peggy Kamuf, Nancy Miller, Christie McDonald, Gayat Spivak, Barbra Johnson, Mary Jacobus, and Alice Jardine.

feminine sexual identity. Attacking Freud's idea of 'penis-envy' -- that "the clitoris is... an atrophied penis" -- by which deficiency is attributed to the female whose sexual development is considered to be determined "by her lack of, and thus by her longing for... the male organ", and who consequently is monopolized by the male, Irigaray asserts that "women's sexual evolution" can be "characterized with reference to the female sex itself", and hence "all Freud's statements describing feminine sexuality overlook the fact that the female sex might possibly have its own 'specificity'" (Irigaray 1977, 69). She keeps emphasizing that Western thought is based on utter negation of the other (woman), an inability to tolerate difference: "this domination of the philosophical logos stems in large from its power to *reduce all others to the economy of the same* ... from its power to *eradicate the difference between the sexes* in systems that are self-representative of a 'masculine subject'" (Irigaray 1977, 74). This negation of difference is inherent in patriarchal language that has no place for woman: "for to speak *of* or *about* woman may always boil down to, or be understood as, a recuperation of the feminine within the logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, nonrecognition" (Irigaray 1975, 78). Encountered with such impossibility for women to speak within masculine language, she proposes that women should "find our body's language... never settle. Let's leave definitiveness to the undecided; we don't need it. Our body, right here, right now, gives us a very different certainty" (Irigaray 1975, 105). The female body is reinstated as the center of feminine discourse. The biological is brought back, without the pejorative sense though; a celebration of women's

biological distinction. Irigary attests that the only way out is by women's gaining their own space, just like men: "I will never be in a man's place, a man will never be in mine. whatever the possible identifications, one will never exactly occupy the place of the other – they are irreducible the one to the other" (Irigary 1984, 19-20). So, she emphasizes the need for maintaining a recognition of the difference, though leaving that distinction between female and male writing unrecognized. Irigary's emphasis on 'difference' is partially due to the influence of Derrida on her. E. Armour rightly argues that the question of feminism's indebtedness to deconstruction is a recent phenomenon which is mainly associated with Luce Irigary, since "interpreters of Irigary willingly acknowledge the influence of Derridean strategies and insights on irigary's work", though others differentiate between the two in terms of "the content given to 'woman' in each figure's thinking, their evaluations of feminism as a whole, and their proposals for a way out of current rigid sexual structures" (Armour 1997b, 63). In fact, the relation between Irigary and Derrida does not provide a solid basis for approximating feminism to deconstruction. In addition, Irigary's intimacy is controversially viewed, since her use of deconstruction is motivated by pure feminist concerns which highlight the distinctions between male and female as well as their different theoretical propositions and stands; to use Irigary's concepts, *a feminist deconstructionist will never be in a male deconstructionist's place.*

Helen Cixous joins Kristiva and Irigary in describing feminine language as a translation of the female body and sensation:

Let's look not at syntax but at fantasy, at the unconscious: all feminine texts... [are] very close to the flesh of language, much more so than masculine texts... are straightway at the threshold of feeling... the movement of the text[,] doesn't trace a straight line. I see it as an outpouring... which can appear in primitive or elementary texts as a fantasy of blood, of menstrual flow, etc., but which I prefer to see as vomiting, as 'throwing up', 'disgorging' (Cixous 1981, 54).

She, however, admits inability to define feminine writing:

It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility which will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system... It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms (Cixous 1976, 253).

Nonetheless, Cixous, a deconstructionist who believes that the 'inferior' in the binary opposition supports and maintains the authority of the 'superior', remains devoted to the fact that "[T]here has to be some 'other -- no master without a slave, no economico-political power without exploitation... If there were no other, one would

invent it" (in Eagleton 1996, 153).¹⁷ Like Kristiva and Irigary, Cixous finds theory oppressive to women: "theory is impersonal, public, objective, male; experience is personal, private, subjective, female."¹⁸ Despite her allegiance to deconstruction, Cixous remains attached to her concern about the distinctions of femininity and female writing/language. She even asserts that theory is 'male' which makes it difficult for the female to theorize, an act which entails a critique of the masculinity of criticism including Derrida's deconstruction. What she does in her analysis of the distinction of feminine language is nothing but a linkage between female experience and theory when, at the same time, she finds theory and experience opposed, the earlier being male and the latter being female. In other words, her feminist concerns are not approximated by her intimate relation with deconstruction theory. Rather, her feminist concerns are given a distinctive deconstructive touch.

In fact, these feminist critics (Kristiva, Cixous, Jardine, and Irigary), who are usually considered to have

¹⁷ The idea of deconstructing binary opposition appealed to Cixous's own identity (a woman, Algerian (Arab), Jew, and living in France), she said: "But I was born in Algeria, and my ancestors lived in Spain, Morocco, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Germany; my brothers by birth are Arab. So where are we in history? I am (not) an Arab. Who am I? I am 'doing' French history. I am a Jewish woman. In which ghetto was I penned up during your wars and your revolutions? I want to fight. What is my name? I want to change life. Who is this 'I'? Where is my place? I am looking. I search everywhere. I read, I ask. I begin to speak. Which language is mine? French? German? Arabic?" (Cixous 1986, 71).

¹⁸ These are the words of Mary Eagleton (Eagleton 1996, 6); originally the idea is in (Cixous 1986).

allied feminist criticism to deconstruction, maintain a firm position regarding the distinction of their feminist aim from that of deconstruction. Therefore, feminist criticism's recent alliance with deconstruction is, indeed, motivated by a need for sharing deconstruction's position of theoretical/political prestige and does not, hence, constitute a solid bases to affirm a general indebtedness of feminist criticism to deconstruction. Such alliance has been facilitated by an original pre-Derridean deconstructive nature feminism adopted in the context of the nineteenth century radical *zeitgeist* which continued the humanist traditions that had, since the seventeenth century, performed a genuine reassessment of established central notions of knowledge in Western thought and philosophy; such a radical line of thought provided also the roots for Derrida's deconstruction. Feminist criticism has been deconstructive in nature since the early stages of its development and long before the evolution of Derrida's deconstructive methods and insights; therefore, feminist criticism should not be approximated to deconstruction. It has been shown that feminist criticism from Virginia Woolf onward has evidently used a deconstructive method of reading literary and critical texts to identify a hierarchical binary opposition between 'man' and 'woman', which promotes 'man' at the expense of the 'other' (woman), and to attack the illogic of the hierarchy, reverse it, and replace its masculine logocenter with the marginal and supplementary (woman), within genuine investigations of notions of space and location. Such a deconstructive pattern has remained at the essence of feminist literary criticism which has, since Woolf, aimed at eradicating the male-

center in masculine literary space to replace it with a 'gyno-center' in a female-oriented reconstructed 'gyno-space', an attitude distinguished from deconstruction as 'gynoconstruction'. Unlike deconstruction's aim of dismantling the literary text to assert the dissemination of its meaning, feminist criticism dismantles the literary and critical text to identify its masculine logocentric assumptions and then reconstructs that text (or replaces it with another) non-biased and non-sexist; that is, it aims at ridding literature, criticism, and literary history from sexism. Hence, the term 'gynoconstruction', which this study coins, distinguishes a positive, affirmative, (re-)constructive, feminist criticism from an invalidating, non-affirmative, and detonating deconstruction.

التفكيك النسوي، حيّز نسوي بمركز أنثوي: إعادة النظر في الجوهر التفكيكي في حركة النقد الأدبي النسوي

الملخص

تناقش هذه الدراسة العلاقة الجدلية بين حركة النقد الأدبي النسوي والنظرية التفكيكية التي أسسها الفيلسوف الفرنسي 'جاك دريدا'. وفي الوقت الذي تؤكد فيه الدراسة على الاتحاد الذي جمع الحركتين في مراحل متأخرة، لأسباب سياسية وايدولوجية، إلا أنها ترفض التهمة التي تعتبر أن حركة النقد النسوي هي نتاج للنظرية التفكيكية. وتعزي الدراسة حركة النقد النسوي إلى جذور فلسفية فكرية أقدم من الحركة التفكيكية، وتربطها

بالحركات التي قامت بتشكيل الفكر الراديكالي والذي أعاد تقييم وبناء الفلسفة الغربية منذ أواخر القرن التاسع عشر.

تتبع هذه الدراسة نموذجاً تفكيكياً متأصلاً في حركة النقد النسوي وسابقاً لظهور نظرية 'دريدا' التفكيكية. ثم تفرق بين الفكر التفكيكي في الحركتين. بحيث تظهر الحركة التفكيكية على أنها فكر سلبي، مطلق الرفض، والنقض، والتحطيم بينما يتبين أن حركة النقد النسوي تعتمد على منهج تفكيكي إيجابي، وإصلاحي، رفضه يهدف إلى التأكيد، وتحطيمه يسعى لإعادة البناء بشكل يتجنب سلبية الفكر الذكوري الغربي الراض للمرأة. ولذا تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى نحت مصطلح جديد (Gynoconstruction) 'التفكيك النسوي'، لتمييز المنهج التفكيكي في الحركة النسوية عن ذلك المنهج في النظرية التفكيكية.

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It looks into what makes her feminist criticism best and most importantly characterized, and her literary framework for the analysis of women's literature. Elaine Showalter, an American feminist, retired recently from faculty position in Princeton University in 2003. She developed the concept of "gynocritics" and practised it through her life career. She, being a specialist in Victorian literature, wrote on pre-victorian, Victorian, and modern female writers observing their social, cultural, religious and financial status in their own periods. The present essay is an attempt to explain In Memory of Her: A Feminist has been added to your Cart. Add a gift receipt with prices hidden. Buy used Fulfillment by Amazon (FBA) is a service we offer sellers that lets them store their products in Amazon's fulfillment centers, and we directly pack, ship, and provide customer service for these products. Something we hope you'll especially enjoy: FBA items qualify for FREE Shipping and Amazon Prime. If you're a seller, Fulfillment by Amazon can help you grow your business. All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal to change the world by prompting gender equality. Gender issues play a part in every aspect of human production and experience, including the production and experience of literature, whether we are consciously aware of these issues or not. Feminist criticism has, in many ways, followed what some theorists call the three waves of feminism: First Wave Feminism - late 1700s-early 1900's: writers like Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792) highlight the inequalities between Feminist Literary Theory book. Read 5 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Radically revised and expanded from its original format, th... Start your review of *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. Write a review. Aug 30, 2014 Mark Bowles rated it it was amazing. A. Introduction 1. This book attempts to understand feminist literary theory since 1970 (The year when Millet's *Sexual Politics* was published). It is utopian they believe to look for an experiential, non-theoretical space. 3. Woolf/Showalter/Moi. This debate between the pro and anti theorists provides a way to understand the debate over Woolf by Showalter and Moi. Showalter takes more the anti-theoretical stance.